

The cool hotel guide

Duke House, Cambridge

The former owners of the building housing this stylish new four-room B&B just north of Parker's Piece in Cambridge have included a carpenter, a plumber, a computer-chip designer and the current Duke of Gloucester — hence the name. The Duke had yet to inherit his title when he bought the distinguished 1840s house on a terrace in the late 1970s, when he was studying architecture at Cambridge University.

I learnt all of this from Liz and Rob Cameron, the current owners. Liz, a former primary school teacher and employee of a graphic design business, runs the show while Rob, until recently the chief executive of Fairtrade International, "helps with maintenance at the weekend". Not many B&Bs can boast a handyman who once ran a global fair wages group (he is now involved with the SustainAbility think-tank).

Liz said she had "got exhausted" by her primary school job and wanted a change.



Rooms at Duke House have an understated English elegance

We were talking in the tasteful downstairs lounge, decorated in muted colours with comfortable beige sofas and pale grey walls. An aromatherapy candle flickered next to a fine old clock and two oriental bowls on a mantelpiece. An arty chandelier made of twisted wire and old buttons hung over a table stacked with interior design magazines.

"I wanted to make it very English," Liz said of the style. The couple bought the property last October and have since had the house rewired, insulated and totally

redecorated. All the rooms are named after Dukes (mine after the one representing Cambridge). It came with a bathroom that had a huge old tub with a circular Victorian shower cubicle in the middle (you pulled the curtains round) and a big porcelain sink. The bedroom was in an A-shaped loft with pink-flowered wallpaper at one end and a door leading to a wooden deck balcony overlooking higgledy-piggledy rooftops. Sea-grass matting covered the floor and there was a little antechamber between the bedroom

and the bathroom with an elegant white armchair. It was restrained and delicate — shunning anything brash or overly modern.

Duke House is in a charming neighbourhood of terraced houses, popular with professors and university students. I ate a venison and redcurrant pie at the down-to-earth Free Press pub (freepresspub.com), and stopped for an ale at the Elm Tree (theelmtreecambridge.co.uk), tucked away on a corner, followed by another at the Clarendon Arms (clarendoncambridge.com). All are recommended — it's a good place to stay for cosy little nearby pubs. Breakfast consisted of first-rate smoked salmon and scrambled eggs with good filter coffee and brown toast with jam, overlooking a tiny courtyard with a statue of a Buddha. Cambridge has a great new little B&B. **Tom Chesshyre**

Need to know

Duke House (01223 314773, dukehousecambridge.co.uk), 1 Victoria Street, Cambridge CB1 1UP. B&B doubles from £120.

Room 8.5, Service 9, Food 9, Value 8, Cool factor 9, Score 8.7

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