



PROPERTY OF THE WEEK
with Justin Ryan & Colin McAllister



The former chapel

3-BEDROOM PENTHOUSE, MIDDLESBROUGH, £295,000

THE AGENT SAYS: Park View penthouse is in the tower and upper floors of a former Methodist chapel. Stairs from the marble-floored communal hall lead to a 32ft sitting room with timber floor, living room, dining room and breakfast kitchen.

The tower has two floors, linked by a spiral staircase, with 360 degree views.

✓ **UPS:** A lot of space in an unusual design.

✗ **DOWN:** A lot of stairs.

● Jackson-Stops & Staff 01904 625033.

An answer to your prayers

THE BOYS SAY: OK, so let's get the grim news out of the way BEFORE we concentrate on the positives. Here goes with one word - Middlesbrough. Voted as the worst place to live in the UK in a recent survey for a Channel 4 show, the city has taken some serious slack over time. However, we feel we have to leap to its defence. We have friends who live in the area and, over the years, we've noticed how friendly it seems and how the shopping and "feel" have really started to improve. The city boasts top-class restaurants, improved travel links and renewed confidence. Yup, as far as we're concerned, Middlesbrough simply ain't that bad...

As we step off the fence, let's look at the details which make this penthouse an interesting prospect. Carved out from the upper floors and tower of a chapel (and with views of Albert Park) this apartment sits half a mile from the town centre. OK, so it's five grand short of £300K but with the Government's pledge to plough serious cash into upgrading this North-East town, this unusual home



The spacious living area

could prove to be a shrewd long-term buy. What's more, as far as first impressions go, it doesn't come much better than this. There's gorgeous marble flooring in the entrance hall from where stairs (lots of them!) lead up to the penthouse. And it just gets better. A 32ft living room/office has impressive ceiling heights, and another staircase leads to a further lounge area (which has original beams), the dining room and a 17ft by 12ft modern fitted kitchen.

One of the three bedrooms has en suite facilities, plus there's a shower room and great décor throughout. The tower is arranged over two levels and has fantastic views from the octagonal-shaped "look-out" to the Cleveland hills and the coast. Outside are communal gardens and private parking and, although this property sits on a busy street, it's fairly quiet.

We'll let you be the judge as to whether Middlesbrough deserves its less than perfect reputation, but we reckon this is a city on the up. Yup, all the way... from pavement to penthouse. Or is that penthouse on pavement? Go find out for yourself!

HOW TO RUN.. a successful B&B

By KAREN ROCKETT

RUNNING your own B&B is a dream many of us have as a way to escape the grind of our daily working lives. So Homes and Holidays went to Blackpool to find out the good and the bad points involved in running one...

Britain's favourite seaside resort has 1,700 hotels and B&Bs, but following a poor summer season and dreadful weather a whopping 220 of them - or 12 per cent - are on sale, according to Caterer and Hotel Magazine.

It means there's a glut of B&Bs available to snap up if you're thinking of making your dream a reality.

But it also shows that running a B&B isn't without risk.

"The hotel market, as with other property markets, is slowing down which is good news for buyers," says David Nolan, at Blackpool commercial property agent Kay's.

And it's not just Blackpool that has been affected. Jacqui Morris, from the tourism body Stay Blackpool, says: "A lot of other seaside resorts have gone through the same process."

Blackpool has some great character properties of all shapes and sizes for sale and you can certainly get plenty of rooms for your money.

The only problem is you can't convert these properties into private dwellings as the local council insists they remain as commercial businesses to protect the town's tourist industry.

So if you do decide to buy one you will have to run it as a business as well as living there, although according to Visit Britain "the rewards of running a B&B outweigh the disadvantages".

Most B&Bs have private accommodation within the premises so you can have your own home attached to your business, and you can choose to let out as many rooms as you want.

If you get it right you can make a decent living from your property that will also cover your maintenance costs, and you can choose to open to suit yourself.

You are also your own boss and you don't have to travel to work, which many older couples appreciate as do couples with young children.

But you will have to get used to sharing your home with strangers, and most hoteliers say it is important to keep your own rooms separate so you still have your own home and privacy.

We talked to two families who have positive and negative experiences of running a B&B. One couple love sharing their home with new people, while the other couple have decided to sell up.

Abysmal weather and a poor summer season mean that there are 220 B&Bs up for sale in Blackpool alone at the moment

Running your business from your own home can be rewarding but you'll have to get used to sharing the space with strangers

We preferred fixing up B&B to running it

KEVIN and Corinne Lanchester bought Branston Lodge in Blackpool's South Shore three years ago. They live in a self-contained flat at the back.

But after just two seasons of trading as a B&B the couple have put the 16-room property on the market and are giving up on the hotel business.

Kevin, 54, a joiner by trade, and Corinne, 50, who used to work in personnel, bought their B&B when it was virtually derelict in 2005 for £40,000. The couple, originally from Burton-on-Trent, spent a further £60,000 refurbishing the double-fronted late Victorian property.

Business for their first two seasons was brisk and the couple made a good living but have now decided running a B&B is not for them.

Corinne said: "We chose Blackpool because it tends to have an extended holiday season. "But it took me a while to get used to having strangers staying in what I saw as my house, tramping their muddy shoes up my clean stairs. "At the time, neither our son or daughter were married but, three years on, they both are with



Kevin and Corinne, and above, laying the tables for breakfast

children. We've decided to move nearer to them so we don't miss the little ones growing up.

"We have enjoyed renovating a B&B, but preferred renovating the property more. We'd like to buy another wreck and do it up. "But it's been worth the hard work as Branston Lodge has been valued at £245,000."

● For a viewing of Lodge Guest House visit www.kaysestates.co.uk or phone 01253 623486.

We love it.. but you must offer something special to guests

CLAIRE and Mark Smith opened their award-winning boutique B&B Number One Blackpool three and half years ago. They bought the property in the town's South Shore for £275,000 and spent a further £180,000 on refurbishments.

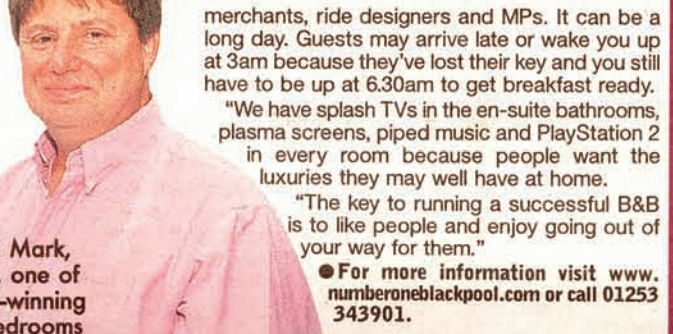
The couple have been in the business for much of their working lives. This year Claire, 44, and Mark, 47, won Visit Britain's B&B of the Year and Mark has just opened a hotel in the town called Number One South Beach.

Claire said: "Running a B&B is very competitive, which is why some hoteliers are selling up. You have to offer something special and it is hard work but it is a wonderful life. You meet so many interesting people and they keep coming back year after year.

"Our son Ben is 19 but he grew up in B&Bs. I was able to go to all his school events and always pick him up because once breakfast is over your day is pretty straightforward.

"As we only have three bedrooms we let out, we do everything ourselves. Six guests are manageable. My jobs are the design, decor and cleaning and Mark looks after the paperwork, the bookings, emails and answers the phone.

"In the summer we get holidaymakers and in the winter it's salemen, wine



Claire and Mark, and above, one of their award-winning luxurious bedrooms

merchants, ride designers and MPs. It can be a long day. Guests may arrive late or wake you up at 3am because they've lost their key and you still have to be up at 6.30am to get breakfast ready.

"We have splash TVs in the en-suite bathrooms, plasma screens, piped music and PlayStation 2 in every room because people want the luxuries they may well have at home.

"The key to running a successful B&B is to like people and enjoy going out of your way for them."

● For more information visit www.numberoneblackpool.com or call 01253 343901.



THORBURY, SOUTH SHORE, BLACKPOOL £144,950
Three-storey end of terrace with six en suite rooms and 20-guest capacity, close to attractions and prom. Owners retiring after 17 years. Details: www.kaysestates.co.uk, 01253 623486



CHESTERFIELD HOTEL, BLACKPOOL £229,950
FOUR-storey, semi-detached, 11 en suite rooms, 28-guest capacity. Between Central and South Piers with dining room and bar lounge and owners' flat. Details: www.kaysestates.co.uk, 01253 623486



HIGHLEA HOTEL, WESTON-SUPER-MARE £450,000 Well established and recently refurbished 12-bedroom hotel with private flat, dining room, lounge and bar, just off the sea front near marina lake. Details: www.stephenand.co.uk, 01934 621101

Their top 10 tips

- MARK AND CLAIRE REVEAL HOW TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL B&B**
- 1 BUY GOOD BEDS:** If guests don't get a good sleep they won't come back. We have king-size beds and £80 goose down pillows.
 - 2 MAKE TASTY BREAKFASTS:** Offer plenty of choice and good quality produce, including healthy options and a full English.
 - 3. GO BEYOND CALL OF DUTY:** Guests will remember your efforts and come back.
 - 4. CREATE TEMPTING WEBSITE:** This is how most people find somewhere to stay. They need to see exactly what they're paying for.
 - 5. HAVE STRONG LOCAL KNOWLEDGE:** We see all the shows and try the restaurants so we know what to recommend to people.
 - 6. CUT WASTE:** Ask guests what they would like for breakfast the night before. That way you are not throwing away mountains of food.
 - 7. GO GREEN:** Guests expect this. My washing machine is environmentally friendly, I recycle and I have an eco-friendly towels policy.
 - 8. JOIN A PROFESSIONAL BODY:** We belong to the Blackpool Tourist Board and Stay Blackpool. They keep you abreast of legislation and what's going on in the resort.
 - 9. START SMALL:** Unless you have lots of experience, a small B&B is easier to run.
 - 10. ENJOY THE WORK:** Be a good cleaner and organiser and enjoy talking to people.