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THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR BURGH ISLAND

ENTREPRENEUR GILES FUCHS
IS STRIVING TO MAKE BURGH
ISLAND HOME TO THE BEST
HOTEL WEST OF THE RITZ
ONCE AGAIN



TALK GILES FUCHS

Burgh Island is home to the hotel, a cottage and a pub, all owned by Giles Fuchs and Duncan Gray.

GILES FUCHS / TALK



Entrepreneur, Giles Fuchs co-owns Office Space in Town with his sister Nikki.

SOME OF THE BATHROOM SUITES ARE WORTH £20,000 BECAUSE THEY ARE ORIGINAL ART DECO BATHROOM SUITES"

THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR BURGH ISLAND

DESPITE 'NOT BEING A HOTEL IER' BY HIS OWN ADMISSION, ENTREPRENEUR GILES FUCHS IS STRIVING TO MAKE BURGH ISLAND HOME TO THE BEST HOTEL WEST OF THE RITZ. ONCE AGAIN, RESTORING ITS REPUTATION, SERVICE EXCELLENCE AND BUSINESS LEVELS BACK TO THOSE OF ITS AGATHA CHRISTIE HOLIDAY WE SAID DOWN WITH GILLS TO UNDERSTAND HOW HE INTENDS TO BRING HIS PLAN TO LIFE.

Despite narrowly missing out on the title of Entrepreneur of the Year at the recent 2019 Property Week Awards, Giles Fuchs was a clear winner in our eyes, after topping off a busy 12 months with the acquisition of his first hotel business.

Fuchs runs Office Space in Town, (OSIT), a collection of boutique serviced offices, co-working spaces and meeting rooms in London, Cardiff,

Northampton and Edinburgh. He co-founded the business with his sister Nikki in 2010 and together they have built up a well-established portfolio of flexible workplace spaces across the country.

Much like hotels, Fuchs relies heavily on the staff working at each site to ensure its success. Service is the core of the operation with each general manager looking after a business with a turnover in excess of £2.5m. Employees are recruited for their attitude and

life skills and many of the staff hired by Fuchs on day one are still with the company today.

In April 2018, Fuchs' latest investment hit the headlines. He had become the new co-owner of Burgh Island Hotel, a 1930's Art Deco property with bags of history - formerly the old stamperground for the likes of Agatha Christie - sitting atop its own tidal island off the south coast of Dartmoor National Park.



All the bedrooms are Art Deco and aim to transport guests back to that era.



The 24-acre island, its cottage, pub and hotel, built in 1929 and extended in 1932, is cut off from the mainland twice a day, with guests transported to and from the island via a special sea tractor. When approached with the proposition by friend, Duncan Gray, Fuchs was intrigued.

"During a coffee with a friend of mine who had been one of my clients for a project in Liverpool Street, he told me he was buying hotels," Fuchs tells BH.

"I asked which one and he said Burgh Island Hotel. Well, I'd never heard of it. Then he shows me this 24-acre island, beautiful Art Deco hotel, cottage and pub where Agatha Christie had written books, which was for sale. He tells me the price and I asked to invest and he says no! Luckily a week later he asked if I was still interested as his funding had fallen through - perhaps he was fishing me in but I was more than happy to go with it!" From then on, Fuchs said he 'fell in

love' with the iconic property. Initially the plan was for Burgh Island to become a holiday home for Fuchs and his family, as well as provide an extra perk for OSIT's clients in London. After a 'mystery shop' Fuchs visited the hotel in October 2017 and admits it was 'quite shabby' - assessing the financials and whether they could make the business work, he took the plunge. Now he owns 70% of the ordinary shares of the company.

"It was busy before," says Fuchs, "it was making very good profit at 50% occupancy. So I thought all we have to do is improve the fabric - that's just money - we know about that because we know how to make beautiful buildings, and service. We are currently in serviced offices so we are kind of like hotels which is why it was such a natural fit for me. We are running operational buildings and really it's about staff."

A multi-million renovation process followed, with the hotel closed for two months while a refurbishment was carried out across the hotel's bedrooms, public spaces and F&B facilities.

Behind the scenes, the lift was mended and the kitchen rearranged to ensure a better working environment for the staff and workflow for the operation.



The iconic bar and ballroom are still very much set in the 1930's.



The island's pub, which was established in 1336, launched first with a new café installed below serving fish and chips called Pilchards Inn.

The hotel reopened at the end of February and within the first month, hit its budget. "It was 60% more than the business had ever done on the launch before," adds Fuchs.

The Nettleford seafood destination

restaurant is a completely new addition at the site. With chef Tim Hall at the helm, the eatery is designed to serve as a more casual alternative to the ballroom, where everyone must wear black tie.

The hall room restaurant itself has been made accessible to both residents and non residents as part of a change in strategy and the pub opened up to become a completely public bar to

encourage those not staying at the hotel to still visit.

History

Burgh Island Hotel was built in 1929 by Archie Nettleford, who was the son of a wealthy industrialist who made screws. Stationed in London, he thought it apt to have a nice holiday home to take his friends so bought the island and went on the build the house. When his friends started to come for "months at a time", he decided to charge them for the privilege.

"It seems like I'm following that theme," admits Fuchs, "I bought it for my family and friends, to have fun and obviously it's a hotel."

Tony Porter, who is described as 'Burgh Island royalty' by Fuchs, rescued the building from dereliction in 1986 and invested in restoring the hotel into a functioning business. He sold it to Deborah Clark and Tony Orchard in 2001.

Porter and his wife Bea have a suite named after them at the hotel, while other rooms pay homage to the building's Agatha Christie past.

The Art Deco design of the building is still very much at the heart of the business today and Fuchs admits that during the renovation he had to "walk a thin line between making it grand and luxurious and as Nettleford made it originally".

"We have almost 1,000 people who return every year; they are so engaged with the island and its history that you have to be so careful with what you do with it.

"So there is a very fine line between making it exotic and sumptuous and comfortable and keeping it Art Deco. We consulted the locals and regulars all the way."

Retaining that sense of history means there are no TVs in the bedrooms - "it's a bone of contention for some" admits Fuchs - and rooms are a heady mix of antique pieces and modern touches.

"Some of the bathroom suites are worth £20,000 because they are original Art Deco bathroom suites," he says.

More to come

The project is almost complete, but Fuchs isn't about to rest on his laurels.

He realises that to encourage the long-stay guest, there needs to be facilities to keep people entertained, so subject to planning, a number of options will be explored to join the island' tennis courts, heliport and 'Mermaid pool' the natural sea water bathing pool.

"We want to put in a spa in 2020 and people are keen on doing yoga retreats, shark fishing tours, that sort of thing. We're also going to talk to Bigbury golf course on the mainland to hopefully tie up a deal to offer our guests golf during their stay too."

Service and positioning

Despite his lack of experience running



The hotel officially reopened in February

hotels, Fuchs is very clear how he wants to position the new-look Burgh Island Hotel. He doesn't want to be tied in to a specific star rating, just wants it to become a place 'everyone knows about and wants to go'. Service, he says, will be impeccable. "A lot of our staff have been up at Mousmans to get that level of training and quality service knowledge," Fuchs says.

Hospitality management company, Inn-telligence supports the hotel operationally, with Penny Brown, Angela Germain, Karen McInlyre, Matt Ward, Kumudu Wesarasinghe providing expertise in human resources, F&I, sales & marketing, business research and financial management.

Fuchs says all staff were retained following the takeover; 'Gary' the barman has been there for the past 26 years.

Driving business now

Now for Burgh Island Hotel it's about driving business, increasing occupancy and spreading the word about this iconic property and its offering. Previously the business was listed on one booking site - Mr and Mrs Smith - and will soon be reinstated now the full hotel is operational. Fuchs says this will end once occupancy rises and business levels become more self-sustainable.

"We are going to keep spending the profit on it to make it as good as it can possibly be," explains Fuchs, "it was once known as the best hotel west of The Ritz, so that's where we are going." ■

Burgh Island's stance on sustainability

- 80% OF INGREDIENTS ARE SOURCED WITHIN A 30 MILE RADIUS OF THE ISLAND.
- TEAS AND COFFEES ARE FAIR TRADE, SOIL ASSOCIATION CERTIFIED AND ORGANIC.
- LOCAL COMMERCIAL RECYCLING TO PROCESS ALL PAPER, PLASTIC AND GLASS.
- FSC CERTIFIED PAPER IN ALL DAILY PRINTING, INCLUDING MENUS.
- CONTROLLED EXTERNAL LIGHT POLLUTION BY TIMERS.
- ALL STAFF ARE TRAINED IN ENERGY AWARENESS.
- WORK WITH THE CARBON TRUST TO AUDIT AND CONTROL ENERGY NEEDS.
- POLYTUNNEL TO GROW NATIVE SEEDLINGS FOR THE ISLAND PLANTING AND HERBS FOR KITCHEN.
- OWN BOREHOLE ON THE ISLAND USED FOR CLEANING WATER AND IRRIGATION.
- DOUBLE GLAZING ON THE HOTEL'S ORIGINAL CRITTAL WINDOW.
- RESTORATION OF THE HUER'S HUT TO ENHANCE LOCAL HISTORICAL COASTAL LANDMARKS.
- A WEATHER STATION ON THE HOTEL ROOF FEEDING DATA FOR STAFF AND GUESTS TO REVIEW IN RECEPTION.
- A SOLAR ARRAY ON DISUSED TENNIS COURT.
- PLANNING CONSENT FOR A NEW ECO-BUILD ON THE ISLAND... THE POOL HOUSE.
- TESLA CHARGING STATIONS IN MAINLAND GARAGES.
- TWO MODERN, ENERGY EFFICIENT BOILERS.

Get to know Giles Fuchs

What's it like working with your sister?

It's fantastic - she's not going to run off with the family jewels because they are half hers as well!

We are very different - she's MD of OSIT and looks after the business and runs it daily, and is a charismatic leader, and I am CEO and I do strategy, rising money and have clever ideas. It works brilliantly.

Our family motto and our business motto is confer and triumph, so very much about collaboration.

How do you split your time?

I'm mostly in London in our centres because that's our business and the hotel was for love really; we had some money and we wanted to invest it outside of London. I go there once a week just to check everything's ok, because of Inn-telligence I don't have to worry too much.

What's your favourite hotel in the UK?

We love Rosewood - the design, it's just amazing. Cliveden we love and Gleneagles.

Would you look to acquire another hotel?

I'm not really a hotelier - it would have to be something as great as Burgh Island. I'd never say no but it's not really a business strategy, it was the opportunity and the iconic island that appealed.

THE BIG INTERVIEW: Giles Fuchs, co-owner of Burgh Island on smashing target within one month of launch

◇ INDUSTRY / INTERVIEWS & ANALYSIS / OWNERS & OPERATORS by ZOE MONK on MAY 17, 2019

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Despite 'not being a hotelier' by his own admission, entrepreneur Giles Fuchs is striving to make Burgh Island Hotel to best hotel west of The Ritz once again, restoring its reputation, service excellence and business levels back to those of its heyday. We sat down with Giles to understand how he intends to put his plan in motion.

Fuchs runs Office Space in Town, (OSiT), a collection of boutique serviced offices, co-working spaces and meeting rooms in London, Cardiff, Northampton and Edinburgh. He co-founded the business with his sister Niki in 2010 and together they have built up a well-established portfolio of flexible workplace solutions across the country.

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More to come

The project is almost complete with just a handful of bedrooms and corridors still to be given a refresh, but Fuchs isn't about to rest on his laurels. He realises that to encourage the long-stay guest, there needs to be facilities to keep people entertained, so subject to planning, a number of options will be explored to join the island' tennis courts, heliport and 'Mermaid pool' the natural sea water bathing pool.

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