

# Boutique B&B makes break from tradition

By LIZ PHILLIPS

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**BREAKING** the mould of traditional B&Bs has earned a gold award for delighted owners John and Tess Harris at the Brookside guesthouse in Brixham.

Now the Tardis-like chalet bungalow can boast a top-flight classification which is shared by only four or five establishments in Torbay.

It's also a first from the VisitBritain and Quality in Tourism organisations for the busy port of Brixham.

Stepping inside their immaculate home-and-business in New Road is like walking into a temple of contemporary Italian design, with meticulous attention to detail.

And there was no chance of last-minute titivating, because the inspections are always random and secret, with an annual anonymous check to see whether standards are slipping.

John, a man whose chequered career has spanned everything from trawlerman and publican to meat inspector at the old Harris bacon factory at Totnes, says they were aiming for a cut above when they took over Brookside.

"We want to break the mould and create a small boutique-style guesthouse. My wife Tess and I are very interested in interior design, garden design and giving guests that bit extra.

"It's what we look for ourselves when we stay anywhere else. We're very critical! Brookside gets a lot of return business, and of course new visitors from word-of-mouth recommendations"

Detail means everything from organic sauces at breakfast and wi-fi internet access in each room to architectural overtones in the relaxing garden and space-saving bespoke furniture.

The award has well repaid the £30,000 upgrade after they took over more than 18 months ago and there's another £6,000 worth of improvements in the pipeline including flat screen TVs in their five letting rooms.

Tess added: "We appeal a lot to 'empty nesters.' There are no children's facilities here so it's an adult environment. It's a little bit of luxury



■ **BREAKING THE MOULD: John and Tess Harris with their gold award**  
PHOTO: Andy Styles. HE190307\_AS02\_01

for a short break or for people visiting relatives in the area.

"They like our floral displays and local produce. People are sophisticated travellers these days, they look up reviews on the internet like Trip Advisor in advance, especially if they come from the Continent or further afield like Canada, the USA or Australia.

"Three-quarters of our bookings are generated by our website, which has rippling brook sound-effects to attract people to the stream in the garden."

A gourmet breakfast menu with generous portions is another treat with everything from freshly-ground coffee and English muffins to kippers and speciality teas.

John added: "We both really like people and we can talk to anyone. The comments in the guestbook say how welcoming it is, and we pick up guests from Paignton or Totnes railway stations at no extra charge. It's personal service. That's what people remember."

## Firefighters beat blaze

**FIREFIGHTERS** were called to extinguish a patch of burning gorse near Buckfastleigh on Monday night.

One crew was called to Rocky Lane just before 9pm where a small area of gorse was burning.

Led by watch commander John Harler, the team used beaters to put out the blaze.

## FREE Spring Alpine plants



The Herald Express has teamed up with Plants Galore to offer readers six free Spring Alpine plants.

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## Queen of crime honoured

A **CROWD** gathered to see a new monument being unveiled in honour of the Bay's favourite crime writer.

Agatha Christie is the latest to be honoured with a blue plaque set in granite.

The monument is situated at her former home, Ashfield House on Barton Road, Torquay.

Sponsored by Torbay Civic Society, it commemorates her birthplace and her first home.

Grandson Matthew Pritchard, unveiled the stone at a small ceremony.

He said: "It is a great pleasure to be here today. I think it's very nice for Torbay to have a plaque that celebrates the first few years of her life and where her great career started. She would have liked to have been remembered in Torquay because she was always very happy here."



■ **PLEASURE: Matthew Pritchard and his wife Lucy, with the blue plaque, inset**  
PHOTO: Paul Levie

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Chairman of Torbay Civic society, Ian Handford said: "We are absolutely delighted to be putting in this place this final monument to honour Agatha's memory which is at last at her birth place."



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