



AND THE WINNER IS...

An invitation to view the winning Most Instagrammable Cottage in the UK can't be turned down. **Kate Cranwell** headed to Marine Villa, the Art Deco House, in Shanklin

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANDY SCOTT PHOTOGRAPHY**

‘You must come and see it for yourself,” implored the owners, Laurence Smith and Sharon Boyse-Smith. “We want to hear how many times you say ‘wow!’”

So, on a beautifully bright December morning, I turned up on the doorstep of Marine Villa, in Littlestairs Road.

Before I'd even rung the bell, this charming property had already astounded me with its gleaming ceramic tiled roof in an eye-catching shade of green.

This explains why it was originally named Greentiles – a magnificent villa commissioned by the Cater family in the late 1920s.

It was beautifully designed by local architect Ernest L. Smith to take advantage



of the superb vistas across Sandown Bay, towards Culver, and was completed in 1929 when elegant Art Deco style was the height of fashion.

Shortly after, in 1933, Mrs Clara Cater passed away and the house was sold.

It was renamed Villa Judapa while under the ownership of colourful local characters Horace Terry Wood and his wife Sadie, who lived and partied there for many years from the mid-1930s.

The moniker Marine Villa was probably acquired some time in the early 1980s and, when it fell into the safe hands of Laurence and Sharon in 2014, there was little trace of its glamorous history reflected in the interior decor.

Remarkably, this was not a planned purchase but came about as the result of a

rainy day whim. “We bought the house by accident,” said Sharon, with a smile.

“I was on the Island for a break with my friend and we were stuck indoors because of the weather. I started looking at property websites and Marine Villa caught my eye. I immediately loved it and, when Laurence saw it, he too felt it was an opportunity we couldn’t miss. It was full of Ikea furniture at the time and being rented out as a party house for big groups.”

With the help of a mortgage and borrowing from Laurence’s three grown-up children, the couple fulfilled their dreams of owning Marine Villa – which is set to become their home when they eventually retire.

For now, the impressive Art Deco villa functions as their one and only lettings property and enables them to plough the

rental money back into the house to restore it to its former glory.

Laurence said: “We bought Marine Villa because we love it. We didn’t realise we both loved the Art Deco era but we love the architecture and we love the design.

“Each year we introduce more and more 1930s features, sourcing more Art Deco furniture and artwork.

“Our goal over the next few years is to continually upgrade Marine Villa and make it one of the leading Art Deco houses in the UK. This is our home, but we are delighted to let guests borrow it for a unique holiday or to hire it as a location for a period film set or photography.”

This is how Marine Villa has wound up as winner of Snaptrip’s Most Instagrammable Cottage in the UK – and you can see why it

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pipped the other finalists at the post.

Sharon and Laurence were not wrong about the ‘wow’ factor, which hits you as soon as you step inside the wood-panelled entrance hall of spotless parquet flooring.

Although they are new to the hospitality trade – Laurence is an IT consultant and Sharon is in the music industry – they know what guests expect when they hire the house. Imagine the sounds of Glenn Miller playing on the state-of-the-art sound system as you arrive, transporting you back to an era of the Great Gatsby and opulent parties.

The six large bedrooms comfortably accommodate 14 adults, plus five children, which makes Marine Villa especially popular for multi-generational gatherings for milestone birthdays and wedding anniversaries.

You can start your celebrations with cocktails in the upstairs sunroom, where the windows fold back to reveal open-air panoramic views of the English Channel and Culver Down. There are three cookers in the kitchen to ease the burden of catering for a

large group and the stunningly restored wood-panelled dining room will seat 22 guests for a memorable meal.

There is even an accessible bedroom downstairs, thoughtfully kitted out for guests with a wheelchair or limited mobility.

“That’s the only en suite bedroom in the house,” said Laurence. “We like en suites, but we didn’t want to ruin the upstairs by converting it – the three bathrooms all remain off the landing.”

It’s this sympathetic approach to their project that means Marine Villa retains an enchanting atmosphere.

The master suite is Laurence and Sharon’s favourite room in the house, with large stained-glass windows (which have been painstakingly restored by Island glass specialists Southern Lights) and unbelievable views out to sea. “When we stay here, we never close the curtains as this room has the most amazing sunrises,” said Laurence.

Three of the bedrooms overlook the landscaped gardens, which are a far cry from how they looked when Laurence and Sharon

bought the house. “They were a tangle of weeds and brambles,” said Laurence. “We had tonnes of debris removed before we even found the paths at the bottom.”

It is thought the villa was under the tenure of Horace Terry Wood when a brick patio was installed, facing the sea, alongside two statues of two Great Dane dogs.

Though there was no trace of those, in 2015 Sharon found two Great Dane statues on the mainland and, hoping they might be something like the originals, installed them by the ponds.

Taking the house back in time like this is a labour of love for Sharon and Laurence and one they will eventually reap the benefit of themselves when they move in.

To experience this remarkable location before they do just that, please contact them. Prices start at £2,000 for a weekend outside peak season, while summer bookings are £5,600 for a week. **L**

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