

eco-elegance

HOLIDAY IN GREEN STYLE AT ROSEHILL LODGES IN PORTHTOWAN

Words by **Pete Cross**, photographs by **Sam Morgan Moore**



There's no doubt that the visitor to Cornwall these days has more options than ever before. In days gone by the 'bucket and spade' brigade had the choice between draughty wooden chalets or a room in a forboding B&B with a bathroom at the end of the hall. Those with a bit more cash to spend might have opted for a crumbling Victorian Newquay hotel. And visiting surfers? There weren't any. Only the locals surfed.

All that's changed. Now there are luxury tipi camps, adventure sports centres and a good range of world class hotels to suit every taste, with restaurants to match. Young, upwardly mobile types can always snap up a "micro unit for the urban surfer". It all depends on your individual needs.

The most recent trend has been the proliferation of

timber lodges appearing on the scene. As the awful chalet camps of our youth slowly disappear, attractive new timber structures are becoming the norm. One only has to look at a development like Portreath's ambitious and controversial Gwel an Mor estate to see its potential.

There's little doubt that timber is the building material of the day, so it stands to reason that people are increasingly drawn to a natural, cosy wooden building when booking their Cornish holiday retreat. They seem to fit in with the landscape. Timber construction, however, can be nothing more than a façade, giving the occupant the sensation of being inside something natural just because the building's external walls are made of a material that was once a tree, regardless of how sustainably it was sourced. →

MAIN PIC: ROSEHILL LODGES, PORTHTOWAN CORNWALL INSET FROM LEFT: FUEL FOR THE WOODBURNER, TIMBER CLADDING AND SOLAR PANELS



But if timber construction is done well, it can be the most environmentally responsible way to build. And nowhere is the timber zeitgeist better represented than at Rosehill Lodges, situated a five minute walk from the Blue Flag beach at Porthtowan. This small development of self-catering units has just opened for business, and the owners' eco-friendly approach, combined with a practical grounding in tourism, make it a leader in its field.

John and Pauline Barrow acquired the site in 1997 and ran it for almost 10 years as a campsite to escape the drudgery of their previous lives in computing and the civil service. But the day-to-day running of a successful but basic tourist facility also lost its shine over the years. "We'd left one rat race only to join another," says Pauline. They took a year off from running the campsite and reached an ambitious decision, to develop the site to provide a high-end holiday experience.

Their philosophy seems well thought through. There are the obvious things, like full recycling facilities for each individual lodge, the birdboxes and the grass roofs. But very little here is actually done for show.

Indeed, many of Rosehill's green credentials are not obvious at all. The lodges themselves were designed and built by

Pioneer, an environmental building company based less than a mile away in Porthtowan. Pioneer's Tim Stirrup is proud of what they've achieved: "You've got to take pride in what you do. These lodges have a fantastically high spec; they'll be here long after you and I have moved on!"

Other local businesses have been used wherever possible. Cladding is larch from FSC approved Cornish woodland, sawn at Truro sawmills, and there's no need to slap preservative on it every few years. Paper and lava rock insulation is used in the walls and floor.

All timber, right down to the chairs on the decking, is FSC approved. All sorts of materials have been recycled for the landscaping, like the external lighting posts being former roadside bollards. Logs for the log burners are from sustainable Cornish woodland. All employees walk to work.

None of this is for show. You could stay here and not even notice. It reflects an earnest, heartfelt commitment to a very 21st century way of thinking. This was reflected at the Tower of London in June when David Bellamy presented Rosehill Lodges with a gold Green Apple Award for the Built Environment, followed by a Green Champions Award for the South West.

Although they have much to be proud of, crucially at Rosehill it isn't rammed down your throat. Paying guests are not expected to milk their own goat or sit on a composting toilet. "You want a bit of pampering when you're on holiday," says Pauline.

"We think we've got the balance just right. You're staying in a stunning location in luxury, but it's also a sustainably-built structure, with solar panels, low energy light bulbs, grass roofs. It's up to you whether you use the composting facilities or order the local organic veg box. We're not going to make you. We're not here to 'greenwash' people."

This is a key point. The most important requirement for this type of tourist facility is that it's a seriously nice place to stay, which is why VisitBritain's National Quality Assurance Scheme has awarded it five stars. Nestled in a little sheltered wooded valley, which is quite unusual this close to the exposed north coast, the site is enchanting. Each lodge has a hot tub, wet suit wash, barbecue and broadband access. The finish has been considered to the finest detail; standing in the bathroom you could be in a top hotel anywhere in the world.

The Barrows would be the first to admit that a hot tub is not the greenest of facilities. No matter how you heat it, a

pool full of hot water outside is not environmentally friendly. But there has to be a little give and take. The sort of paying guest who looks for these facilities might not be ready to sit on a composting toilet, but by being led there gently, someday soon they might be.

"We know we aren't perfect," says John, "but we are working hard at improving our environmental credentials while aiming to combine luxury with sustainability. Our customers demand the highest quality accommodation. What we have done is to combine this with a sensible approach to eco principles in the building of the lodges and in the way our business is run."

This is surely the realistic way to introduce green living to people. We live in relatively enlightened times, but violently forcing people into a greener way of life will never work. It has to happen gradually, so that sustainability becomes genuinely viable for people. "Eco-elegance" might sound like the latest advertising executive's catchphrase, but at Rosehill it makes a lot of sense. 🌱

Rosehill Lodges, Porthtowan. Tel. 0845 0731088 or 01209 891920. www.rosehilllodges.com

ABOVE: THE ECO LODGES NESTLED IN A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

ABOVE: JOHN AND PAULINE BARROW; THE COMFORTABLE LODGE INTERIOR, INCLUDING A SOLAR SHOWER