

Can You Rebuild a Castle?

Nigel Harkness finds a couple inspired by Edwin Lutyens.

Francis Shaw rediscovered Hellifield Peel, a 14th century stone tower house, on English Heritage's 'buildings at risk' register. He was looking for a new home for his family and the Peel seemed perfect - well it would be when it was "sorted out".

Usually when you look at a ruin, a grade 1 listed ruin, it's almost impossible to imagine that anyone would have the vision to transform an overgrown, dilapidated pile of crumbling stones into a place you'd want to stay in; most people would walk on by. Not Francis and Karen Shaw - they have been able to make their dream come true. Although it has not been easy, they had the vision.

Francis Shaw says: "I first

saw Hellifield Peel when I was in my teens on holiday going north to Scotland. This was my family's 'British Isles Tour' before we emigrated to the U.A.E. I saw many tower houses and ruins on this holiday until my parents revolted, refusing to see "any more knackered old buildings". I think this was a forming point in my life although I didn't appreciate it at the time. I had already decided I wanted to be an architect and I believed that my job would be to restore buildings like these.

I have related the above because I think it is important to understand the background of the kind of loonies that would wantonly wish to take on a pile of picturesque hardcore and nearly bankrupt themselves into the bargain, not to mention having it filmed on TV's Grand Designs."

Before Karen and Francis came to the Peel's rescue, sixty years of neglect had taken its toll. This once majestic house had become an eye sore in the eye catching surrounding countryside. While looking for inspiration on how to return this ruin to its former glory, Francis and Karen looked to Lindisfarne Castle.

Built in the early 1600s, it towers over the North Sea on the Northumbrian coast and conjured up the kind of drama and romance that Francis was adamant he wanted to recreate when he started his restoration.

Lindisfarne Castle

"A hundred years ago, Edward Hudson, the owner of Country Life magazine, wanted to convert the ancient Lindisfarne Castle into a lavish holiday home for his family. He turned to renowned architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, to take on the job. Lutyens managed to transform the functional fort into a kind of hybrid - half family home, half medieval fantasy.

Dramatically perched on a rocky crag and accessible over



The Chapel Bedroom

a causeway at low tide only, the island castle was originally a Tudor fort, converted into a private house in 1903 by the young Ed-

Lutyens, was a regular guest at Peel in the period of Sir William Nicholson's ownership. This small fact re-kindled Francis's

"I wanted to be an architect and I believed that my job would be to restore buildings like these."

win Lutyens for his friend Edward Hudson. The small rooms are full of intimate decoration and design, with windows looking down upon the charming walled garden planned by Gertrude Jekyll. The property also has several extremely well-preserved 19th-century lime kilns."

The architect, Sir Edwin

student passion for his work. You can read the full history of the castle on the web site.

So, you may be asking, "what is Peel like to stay in?" Well it is amazing; the quality and detailing in the refurbishment are perfection in themselves. Each room has a DVD featuring the Grand Designs show, which documented the rebuild - watching this is a 'must' during your stay. Even though I have watched the programme 5 times now, I still want to marvel and what Francis and Karen have achieved. I suggest therefore you light the fire, relax, pour yourself a drink, and enjoy the complimentary chocolates whilst letting yourself become truly absorbed in the magnificent history of your surrounds.

The castle was full and I was sleeping in the SQUARE BEDROOM on the second floor - this is a large double bedroom (19ft x 19ft) with Victorian king



The Square Bedroom



The Old Bedroom

sized 4 poster bed, warming log fire and a seating area with television and DVD player. You have views onto open countryside.

The bathroom has a deep black granite bath (I suggest you start running it when you start watching the DVD as it does take some time to fill!)

There is also a separate double shower, a little light on pressure for my liking, however, still acceptable. The bath is very deep and may not be suitable for less mobile guests. This room is very airy with views over the front of the castle.

Also check out the fabulous OLD BEDROOM, with its

marvellous turreted wet room, or the ATTIC SUITE - let on a self catering or bed and breakfast basis, with what must be the best view in the Yorkshire Dales.

Peel Castle is conveniently located seven miles north of the market town of Skipton and six miles south of Settle, and just one hour's drive from the urban centres of Leeds and Manchester. Hellifield Peel is set down a private, tree lined drive and is surrounded by parkland on the border of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. There has been a manor house on the site for over 1000 years and the main part of the house was built by one of the last Templar Knights, Sir John Harcourt.

If you are looking for a great castle stay, you would not go far wrong with a stay at Peel... you will be back there again soon!
www.celticcastles.com/castles/peel-castle



The contemporary Attic Suite