

# The University Arms

Cambridge, UK

In the Summer of 2018, this noted 19th century Cambridge hotel underwent an £80m transformation. Hospitality Interiors' Gemma Ralph visited to find out more ...

If restoring Cambridge's first hotel to its former glory wasn't sufficiently steeped in expectation, the news that two world-class design names were leading the project added to its gravitas yet further.

The inimitable Martin Brudnizki and esteemed classic architect, John Simpson, have worked their magic to realise The University Arms' true potential as the jewel in Cambridge's hospitality crown.

First commissioned as a hotel in 1834, the property occupies a prime position overlooking Parker's Piece. It was extended in 1891, 1900, 1925 and finally in the 1960s, when the original Regency section along Regent Street was demolished and replaced with a discordant element typical of the period.

In the initial stages, then, John Simpson had to rationalise the building's form following two centuries of disjointed development. Mindful of the many fine examples of Regency buildings within the surrounding streets, Simpson sought to maintain this design language. The property's design, and its harmonious elevations, thus reference the existing 1920s facades and lost features, reconnecting it with its locality.











Simpson also made the crucial decision to demolish the existing 1960s structure on Regent Street, replacing it with a new building set back from the road. This allowed for the addition of a handsome *Porte Cochere*, modelled on the property's original portico from 1901.

As well as demarcating the hotel entrance and creating an off-street drop-off point, this key architectural ornament also enriches a busy route into the city centre, creating a smooth transition from the smaller scale domestic and retail buildings on Regent Street to the larger civic and university buildings to the north.

As for the interiors, Martin Brudnizki has crafted an environment redolent of school days past and lazy afternoons spent on the banks of the River Cam.

The literary and academic spirit of

Cambridge threads throughout Brudnizki's design in a refined, thoughtful manner. From the wonderful timber-panelled library, to curated book selections within the guest rooms, he has captured the scholastic allure for which Cambridge is so beloved.

This feel is established from the moment guests enter the elegant entrance lobby; its grand, high ceilings and green patterned marble floor immediately conveying substance and solidity.

Cambridge blue timber panelling softens the space, while a fabric-fronted reception desk, surrounded by a selection of bespoke and antique furniture, ensures guests feel right at home.

Picture-lined corridors lead to the lifts, transporting guests to The University Arms'

192 well-appointed rooms and suites. With views over the spire-filled Cambridge cityscape, or over the green splendour of Parker's Piece, the guest accommodation offers a relaxed, eclectic feel.

Hints of Cambridge Blue, yellow and red enliven each space, with varying selections of bespoke furniture and statement chandelier lighting. Some rooms feature a traditional bookcase divider, others leather-padded writing desks, private balconies or even classic bathrooms located inside the original domed turrets.

For me, the private library curated by Mayfair bookshop, Heywood Hill, was a truly special touch. These in-room collections centre around the city's most celebrated minds and illustrious alumnis – from Virginia Woolf and John Dryden to Charles Darwin and Christopher Marlowe.

There is something so timeless and quintessentially British about settling down to read with a cup of tea – or something a little stronger! – with the gentle evening bustle of Parker's Piece streaming through the open balcony doors.

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The hotel's dedicated library, too, offers a moment of calm and reflection. Its book-lined walls are complemented by timber panelling, solid-wood parquet flooring and an eclectic blend of deep sofas and cosy armchairs. The focal point, however, is a magnificent original wood-burning fireplace.

The library flows through to the bar, where the academic theme continues with a bold, marble-patterned wallpaper inspired by antique book covers, as well as a traditional crest above the impressive dark wood bar.

Offering the perfect spot for pre- and post-supper cocktails, the bar features traditional loose rugs, statement lighting and a classic bead ceiling.

Accessible from the bar, as well as via its own street entrance, Parker's Tavern is a 132-cover destination restaurant headed up by Chef Tristan Welch. Serving up whimsical recreations of classic British dishes, there is an emphasis on high quality ingredients from Cambridge and East Anglian producers.

When creating the restaurant's interiors, Martin Brudnizki drew inspiration from the communal dining halls synonymous with Cambridge Colleges, opting for canteen-style seating with a mixture of free-standing dining chairs and benches, all finished in red and mustard yellow leather and dark timber.

The Cambridge Blue wall panelling echoes that of the lobby, but is offset by a traditional dark wood herringbone floor and original stained-glass windows with crest detailing.

Juxtaposing this use of traditional materials, the artwork here is decidedly contemporary, bringing injections of yellow and red to introduce warmth and fun.

In order to differentiate Parker's Tavern as a standalone restaurant, a great deal of time and attention has been dedicated to crafting a distinct brand identity that threads through the signage, menu and even the uniforms.

Chef Tristan Welch has handpicked the tableware and glassware to reflect the quality, simplicity and true 'Britishness' of the food.

Bone china is marked with the Parker's Tavern logo, while the cutlery is handmade, both by British suppliers. Staff uniforms were designed by Welch personally to be comfortable, smart and chic, complete with a wrap-around apron with a built-in waistcoat.

Aside from this close attention to detail, it is the flow between these various public spaces, the hotel and the street that makes them so well-executed. The addition of entrances to the public rooms at ground floor level allows people to filter in and out of the hotel bar and function room directly from Parker's Piece, activating the open space immediately outside of the hotel.

With the benefit of Brudnizki and Simpson's expertise and vision, The University Arms is now a cohesively-designed landmark hotel that enriches the local landscape and hospitality offering.

[www.mbds.com](http://www.mbds.com)

[www.johnsimpsonarchitects.com](http://www.johnsimpsonarchitects.com)

[www.universityarms.com](http://www.universityarms.com)





# The Machrie

Islay, Scotland

The singular beauty of Islay couldn't really have offered a better spot for Campbell Gray Hotels' first property in Scotland. The Machrie has undergone several years of renovation, with Peter Young leading the interiors.

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Famed for the smoky depths of its peated whiskies and for the splendour of its coastal landscape, the Scottish Isle of Islay is the southernmost island of the Inner Hebrides. Just a quick hop by plane or ferry from the Scottish mainland, this scenic island has a population of around 3,000 and welcomes scores of tourists each year.

Hospitality is front and centre of the island's economy and – with the recent opening of the Ardnahoe Distillery and Diageo's plans to invest a considerable sum in reviving Islay's iconic Port Ellen Distillery – the visitor experience is becoming ever more diverse.

The Machrie, in turn, offers a new hospitality experience for the island. Set amidst the dunes of Islay, next to the pristine beaches of Laggan Bay, the hotel boasts a historic golf course, 47 guest rooms, a restaurant, bar, spa and meeting spaces.

"The Machrie itself is quite an iconic building on Islay," affirms lead designer on the project, Peter Young. "Originally a farmhouse, then converted to a hotel, it

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has been a key part of Islay history for many years so the locals are thrilled to have it back in operation, and looking so good!"

Having built a firm relationship with Campbell Gray Hotels over the past two

decades, Peter's knowledge of their philosophy and design vernacular made him a natural choice to work on the group's first Scottish hotel.

"I have worked on many projects with

Campbell Gray Hotels over the last 20 years, notably Le Grey in Beirut and The Phoenicia Hotel in Malta," he explains. "It's been wonderful to maintain that relationship with Gordon and such a pleasure to work with him and his team over the years.

"We feel part of the Campbell Gray family and when we were asked to work on The Machrie we were absolutely thrilled."

Renowned architectural firm, Hudson Architects, have modernised the original Victorian building and have designed a striking contemporary extension. The hotel's interior naturally mirrors this blend of traditional and contemporary, preserving original details and incorporating locally-made furnishings, while creating a fresh, Scandinavian-inspired aesthetic.

"The brief was to create a mix of Scandinavian style with a warm Scottish feel, so contemporary but warm and welcoming at the same time," Peter explains. "We wanted the hotel to be quite residential, almost like a home from home.

"We have been honest to the local vernacular regarding certain details, such as





the original staircase which we maintained and refurbished, and also externally with the window treatments which have a local border detail."

Following a scenic drive to the hotel's entrance, guests are warmly received in the comfortable lobby. A rich palette of dark red hues, with a natural slate floor and a crackling fire, create a traditional countryside feel, balanced out with quirky modern art.

Just off the lobby space is a cosy snug, where guests can read in front of the fire, or partake in some board games. Warm green and blue tones create a peaceful atmosphere, with pops of colour and texture from the soft furnishings and carefully curated artwork.

Also located on the ground floor is a small but perfectly formed PureGray Spa and Gym. Complete with two treatment rooms, a sauna and fitness suite, visitors can enjoy a range of relaxing Aromatherapy Associates treatments to the distant sounds of the North Sea.

In addition to offering the only spa on the island, The Machrie also offers the only cinema

in the form of a 30-seat screening room.

"The screening room's dark blue carpet and chairs is surrounded by a beautiful dark blue tartan fabric walling sourced very locally from the Islay Woolen Mill, which is so subtle but absolutely stunning," adds Peter.

The Machrie's public spaces continue upstairs with the Stag Lounge. The focal point here is undoubtedly the gargantuan floor-to-ceiling windows that offer views out over the 18th hole. Come rain or shine, Islay's dramatic panorama brings beauty and atmosphere to the space.

"The Stag Lounge features large format wall panels and a 7ft high fireplace – everything in this room is oversized, and yet through the colour scheme, fabrics and furniture it is a really cosy room and a lovely place for afternoon tea," explains Peter.

After a pre-dinner drink or quiet moment by the fire, diners can move through into 18 – the hotel's luxury restaurant. Specialising in high quality, fresh Scottish ingredients, the restaurant features an impressive vaulted

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glass ceiling that floods the space with natural light. Furniture in pops of red, blue and, yellow, brings colour to the space, without detracting attention from the awe-inspiring south westerly views over the Links and down to Laggan Bay.

A striking bar runs along one side of the room, with a sculptural mural depicting the 18 holes of The Machrie Links Golf Course as an architectural relief map above it. Next to the bar are a series of random illuminated golden slots in the wall displaying whiskies from the nine local distilleries on the island.

In terms of The Machrie's guest accommodation, rooms range from classic, through eight private lodges, to the grand split-level Ben Hogan Duplex Suite. The accommodation as a whole features a clean, neutral palette, with choice pops of colour from the curtains, velvet armchairs, Roberts radios and soft furnishings.

Once again, views over the links and Islay countryside provide a key focal point here, but it is this remote beauty that perhaps posed the biggest challenge for Peter and his team.

"The largest challenge was the remote location of Islay, off the west coast of Scotland, Queen of the Hebrides, and getting materials to site," he explains. The builders were from Northern Ireland and did a great job organising the resources. It wasn't an easy location."

Despite these logistical challenges, The Machrie has created an exciting new option for tourists, whilst also enriching the local

community and landscape. The stunning dune land of The Machrie Links – originally designed by Scottish golf professional, Willie Campbell, and modernised by former Ryder Cup Vice-Captain, DJ Russell – once again has a splendid hotel as its backdrop.

[www.peteryoungdesign.co.uk](http://www.peteryoungdesign.co.uk)

[www.campbellgrayhotels.com/machrie-islay-scotland](http://www.campbellgrayhotels.com/machrie-islay-scotland)

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