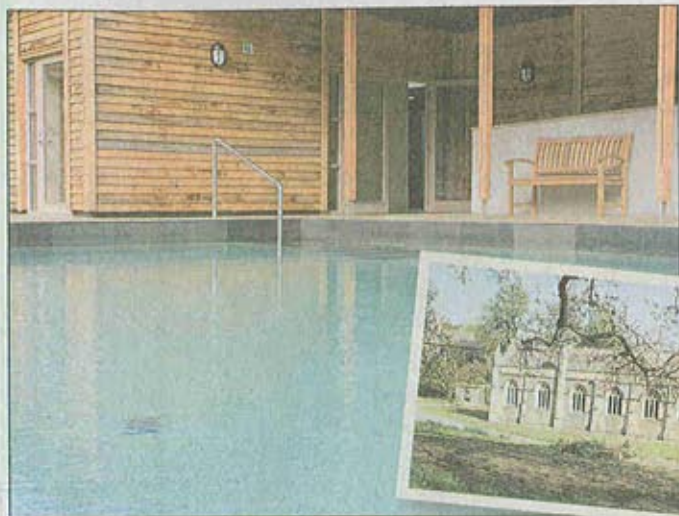
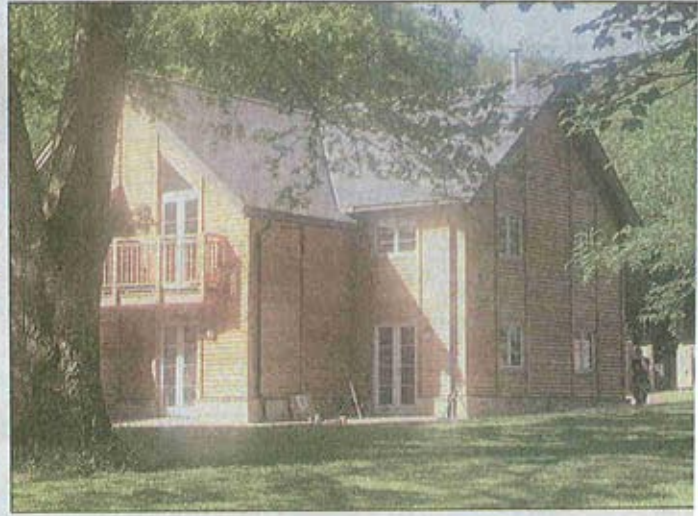


Home & Living



Clean and green: Trelowarren Estate has been constructed to exacting environmental standards in both its restored and new buildings. Even the pool is cleaned without harmful chemicals



It's timeshare, but not as we know it

Far from the stereotypical high-rises, these lodges are second homes without the 'eco-guilt', writes Elspeth Thompson

Children's wetsuits drying in the porch, a bottle of wine and glasses on the garden table, paths leading down through private woods to the river and the sea – Penhillick Cottage on the Trelowarren Estate seems like the dream Cornish holiday home. And indeed it is – not least because it comes without the "eco-guilt" associated with second homes.

Clocking up the carbon in terms of road travel to get there, as well as the costs of maintaining a place that stands empty for long stretches every year, there is also the nagging knowledge that second homes in popular spots such as the West Country eat up the local housing stock, put schools and shops in jeopardy, and can price existing families out of the area.

But Penhillick is different on two counts. One of 16 such properties on the Trelowarren estate, it is owned through timeshare, ensuring full occupancy throughout the year, and making upkeep far more efficient and cost-effective. But if "timeshare" conjures up visions of tacky high-rises built with more of an eye for

economy than quality, then think again – this clutch of houses, with 30 or so more in the pipeline, has been constructed to the highest aesthetic and environmental standards. "We considered not using the term 'timeshare', because of its negative associations," admits Sir Ferrers Vyvyan, the dynamic owner of Trelowarren and mastermind behind the "eco-lodges". "But in the end it's the easiest and most honest way of explaining what we do. What's rare is to offer this degree of luxury and environmental responsibility alongside." To Sir Ferrers, the lodges provide an environmentally sound way of restoring the 1,000-acre estate that he inherited 10 years ago. The timeshare income (between £4,000 and £35,000 a week, dependent on property size and time of year, for a 30-year period) goes straight back to work on the estate, clearing derelict ground, restoring Cornwall's oldest botanic garden, and converting or constructing new buildings. To his customers, the lodges offer a holiday home in a superb location, at a fraction of the purchase cost, with impeccable green credentials.

All the properties, whether new-

build or conversions from old barns and crumbling cottages, have been insulated to beyond the regulatory requirements, and are heated by woodburners fuelled by woodchip coppiced on the estate. The new-build properties, constructed from local stone and untreated oak, echo the style and proportions of existing buildings, while the conversions have been carried out with sensitivity.



keeping as much of their historic character as possible. The two-bedroom Doctor's Cottage, for instance, built in the 1640s but newly available for timeshare, is to keep its open-raftered ceilings and Aga and pretty terraced garden.

"With environmental design, the key is finding a balance between efficiency and aesthetics," declares Sir Ferrers. He is particularly sensitive when it comes to windows – eschewing the plain sheet glass

windows his architect specified for the new-build houses in favour of smaller panes more in keeping with the vernacular style (even if it meant shipping them in, custom-made, from Scandinavia), and, for one of the barn conversions, inventing and patenting his own method for triple-glazing and insulating sash windows. (The windows, which look exactly like traditional sashes, but open sideways, have since been taken up by the National Trust). Large windows and light wells are used liberally in all the buildings, to cut down on the need for additional lighting during the day.

Looking round the houses, the over-riding impression is one of light and contemporary luxury. Pale, organic paints are used on the walls, the cream stone or wood floors are heated from below, and the modern kitchens lined with reclaimed ash units.

"The estate may be peaceful and old-fashioned, but when it came to the houses, the last thing we wanted was sagging sofas, draughts and inconvenience," explains Sir Ferrers pointing out the enormous beds, a satellite TV, hi-fi and DVD players. "We don't ram the green message down people's throats. But when their energy bill for the week comes, they're often amazed it's so low and want to learn more."

Even the outdoor pool, for the sole use of timeshare residents, is kept clean without the use of chemicals, and 90 per cent of food served at the New Yard Restaurant is sourced within a 10-mile radius.

If, after all that, there should still be any lingering eco-guilt, from next January those travelling to Trelowarren by train can book their own electric car to be picked up at the station, activated by a smart card, and charged up for free on the estate.

Trelowarren, Mawgan, Helston, Cornwall, 01326 222105, www.trelowarren.com

GOING THE WHOLE NINE YARDS



Holiday homes on the Lower Mill Estate resort just got greener. Last week, nine new properties occupying the best plot in the beautiful Gotswood water park went on sale. The houses, called The Nine, are built to tougher eco-specifications than previous properties on the wildlife reserve. Prices start from £850,000 for a four-bedroom house, due for completion early next year (01285 869489, www.lowermillestate.com).

Features of The Nine include timber from renewable resources, woodburning stoves, double-glazed, argon-filled insulation units, low-energy external lighting and rainwater butts. The houses come with a manual for the "green running of the home". The communal "Artspa", pictured above, boasts a chemical-free pool. Local wildlife can feel at home here too, with bat boxes, nesting boxes, insect refuges and bird feeders fitted around the 450-acre estate. A tree nursery has been created and for every home built, five trees are planted.

