

GETAWAY

What's black and white and luxe all over?

DAVID PRENTICE discovers there's nothing Fawltly about this world class B&B in Torquay

TORQUAY guesthouses don't do rooms with views of "wildebeest sweeping majestically across the plain." Basil Fawltly pithily pointed that out.

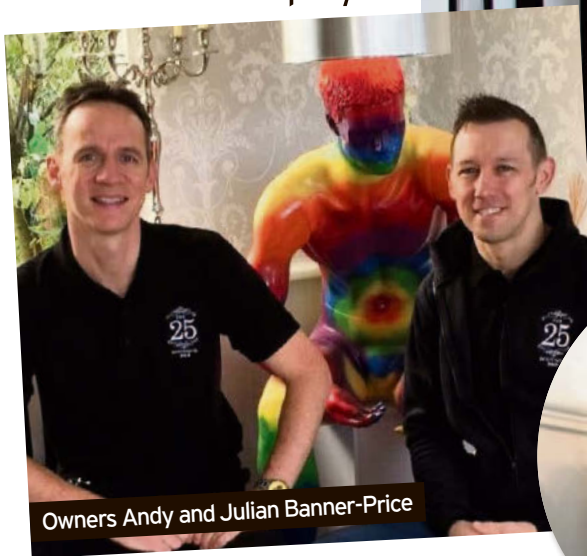
But "The 25", standing on Avenue Road, just a short walk through the seaside town's Abbey grounds from the seafront, can offer a zebra called Frank.

That's a zebra wearing sunglasses. On his head, obviously, because everything about Andy and Julian Banner-Price's boutique B&B - recently voted the best in the world - is funky, stylish and downright eclectic.

That 'world's best' endorsement came from some of the most discerning judges imaginable, Trip Advisor guests.

And they're bang on the money. Every imaginable service is on hand: Alexa in the bedroom - "Alexa, can you put Netflix on the TV please?" - yes, Netflix is available on a giant flatscreen TV too, an iPad with local information, tea, coffee and biscuits, a walk-in dressing room with the kind of lamplight mirror you usually see stars using backstage in theatres, a wall-mounted TV next to the power shower (with a waterproof remote, obviously), home-made cake on arrival and truly magnificent breakfasts - locally and ethically sourced and offering everything from a full English to homemade granola and smoothie shots.

But it's the decor which makes The



Owners Andy and Julian Banner-Price

25 really stand out.

It's colourful, it's original and it's innovative. The reception area is enlivened by a former mannequin re-painted in bold stripes and transformed into the most unusual lamp you've ever seen.

The zebra's head adorns a wall in our spacious, bright and oh so comfortable bedroom, and quirky little touches can be found everywhere in the six-bedroom B&B.

The phrase "bed and breakfast" undersells the attention to detail Andy and Julian have put into accommodation which is now approaching its fifth season under their sparkling stewardship.

Formerly proprietors of the five star Plas Dinas Country House in

North Wales, Andy and Julian's own story is engaging.

Andy explains: "I'm from Lichfield Julian's from Leicester. We completely and randomly, entirely on a whim, decided to buy a hotel.

"Julian was an IT manager and had been made redundant, I was just about to be promoted at a call centre for Audi, Bentley and Porsche in the Midlands and didn't want to be looking after 200 staff.

"We could find jobs we liked in London, but no houses nearby. We could find houses we liked in Shropshire, but no jobs. So I said maybe we should do something together, some kind of business, although I didn't know what.

"So I just changed my search on Google from 'houses for sale in Wales' to 'businesses for sale in Wales' and Plas Dinas country house was literally the first thing which came up.

"At the time we had a five-bedroom detached and the hotel was 10 bedrooms, so I thought 'well it's only double what we have now, and we'll have staff to help. We already have friends over dinner and we give them tea and cake on arrival.'

"Besides, as part of the next level of jobs I was looking at I had been psychometrically tested and they suggested various things to me that I would be good at. One was call centre manager, which I was already doing. Another was retail manager which I'd already done. Then there was recruitment manager which I'd



The 25's decor is one of its standout features



Frank



Andy and Julian have created a luxury experience for guests

already done. And Prison officer which I didn't fancy! The other was hotel manager!

"It just kind of fell into place.

"We fell in love with Plas Dinas but couldn't afford it. So we put in a really low offer and six months later it was accepted."

So began the new careers of a couple now running an establishment voted the world's best.

"I just tried to put my customer service background, which is all about empathy, into the hotel industry," Andy added, "We created our ideal place to stay so as long as you like what we like, you'll have a good time."

Torquay offers its own particular attractions. The picturesque Devon fishing villages of Dartmouth and Brixham are a short drive - or ferry ride - away and the magnificently brooding Dartmoor is also a brief journey away.

But however you spend your days out and about in Devon, The 25 offers a welcoming and memorable haven at the end of the day.

"We want it to be completely different to any place you've ever stayed and we want it to stay in your memory," added Andy. "We want people to think next time they stay somewhere 'They don't do it quite as well as The 25'.

"People have come to us because we have won the award who wouldn't normally stay in a B&B, because they perceive a B&B as a basic terrace house with a landlady with a rolling pin who locks the door if you're not back by 10pm. They don't realise that for less money you can get better than what you would get in a five-star hotel, with much more personality."

If you think you know what a B&B is, think again.

NEED TO KNOW

■ THE 25 can be found at 25 Avenue Road, Torquay, Devon, TQ2 5LB. Telephone: +44 (0)1803 297517. Prices start at £129 per room per night. Visit the25.uk/ for information.



The 25 has six bedrooms