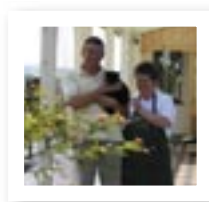






# 'We're running Britain's first organic B&B'



Neil Faiers, 52, and his wife Gill, 47, have started Britain's first 'Bed & Organic Breakfast' and tea room just a mile from the sea, near Bude, in North Cornwall. They tell **Barbara Baker** how they got started and why they love it so much

PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON WHEELER

## HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE BED AND BREAKFAST BUSINESS?

Gill: 'We bought this large, abandoned Victorian house in Poundstock in 2001. Neil is a painter and decorator, and had always dreamed of restoring a house like this. It's too big for just the two of us, but it's in such a wonderful location we thought maybe it was just the opportunity we'd been looking for: the chance to change direction and open a B&B. We had no previous experience in catering; I'd been working as an accountant for 23 years in a local firm. However, we both love food and like people and suddenly it seemed really appealing. Now it feels as though I've waited all my life to do this job – I love it.'

## WHY GO ORGANIC?

Gill: 'We wanted organic certification for our tea room from the start, but the Soil Association hadn't certified a B&B before, so they devised the name "Bed & Organic Breakfast" for us. When we approached them we had no idea we'd be the first organic B&B, although there are organic farms that offer bed and breakfast. There were no 100 per cent organic tea rooms either. As a family – I have a daughter at university – we were already eating mostly organic food. And we're also into the political

side of food – agriculture, health, animal welfare, the environment and social responsibility – so it seemed logical to become an organic business too. We're convinced organic is the only way forward on so many levels, and just getting people back in touch with food and how it is produced is very satisfying.'

## WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Gill: 'Anyone who appreciates comfort, quality and exceptional food. We have just two double suites, both with fab bathrooms, and our guests are ordinary folk, like us, who enjoy eating good food. Our house suits the couples market rather than families, which is probably why we get fewer visitors in the peak summer season, but more than usual in the spring and autumn, when visitors are looking for weekends and short breaks. We open all year round and charge from £66 per room per night out of season, and in the summer months up to £85 per room, of course, the price includes organic breakfasts. There are discounts for low-season short breaks or stays of four nights or more. The prices might seem high, but our guests always seem to think it's good value. We greet all our guests with a tray of fresh tea and homemade shortbread. We cook everything to order, we cater for special diets and, in winter, breakfast is served in front of a log

fire in the dining room. It's the attention to detail and personal touch that means a lot to our guests. Some people say they've been waiting for years for a B&B that serves organic food.'

## HOW DO YOU GET YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Neil: 'Most people find us on the Internet. In the tea room we tend to pick up passing trade, plus we have many regular locals as well as holidaymakers coming in for the first time. The county council agreed to us having a "brown tourist sign" on the road which says Bangors Organic Tea Room; it cost a fortune – about £1,500 – but it's well worth it.'

## TELL US MORE ABOUT THE TEA ROOM?

Gill: 'We started in a small way in June 2003, but it was going so well that we started serving light lunches, too. We're really excited as we've taken on a young chef, Ian Shute, to work on the lunchtime menu; we aim to grow all of the veg, salad and soft fruits we need on our five acres so the ingredients are guaranteed to be really fresh, always seasonal and as local as possible. We've also now got a drinks licence, so will be serving a good selection of organic wines, beers and cider. We cook everything from scratch, this is real food – we have no convenience items. We do good roasts, fresh soups, local fish and simple



*‘ We’re convinced organic food is the way forward on so many different levels, and just getting people back in touch with food and how it is produced is very satisfying ’*



Top: Neil aims to grow all the organic veg they need. Above right: chef Ian Shute prepares the lunchtime meals, which always feature seasonal ingredients, and can be enjoyed with a glass of organic wine or beer, too



**BANGORS HOUSE RECIPE**

**Cornish yeast splits**

**PREP 13 mins plus 1hr 10 mins rising COOK 12 mins**

**Makes 14** **EASY** 

- 900g/2lb strong white flour**
- 300g/1/2pt semi-skimmed milk**
- 50g/2oz vegetarian margarine**
- 2 tsp sugar**
- 2 1/2 tsp quick-dried yeast**
- 300ml/1/2pt hot water**
- 2 tsp salt**



Gill's speciality –  
Cornish yeast splits

- 1** Place all ingredients in a food processor and mix to a smooth dough (about 2 mins). Leave to rise, then knead again in the processor or by hand. Roll out, divide the dough into 14 balls and shape into little rounds, then place on an oiled or floured baking sheet and leave to rise.
- 2** Bake at 200C/fan 180/gas 6 for 12 mins. Serve with strawberry jam and clotted cream.

PER SPLIT 370 kcalories, protein 12g, carbohydrate 12g, fat 6g, saturated fat 2g, fibre 3g, added sugar 3g, salt 1.11g

dishes, but a speciality is traditional Cornish yeast splits. These are soft, white rolls made with milk and water, served with strawberry jam and Cornish clotted cream instead of scones – they're absolutely gorgeous (see recipe, above). We've worked hard to get the best local organic suppliers; Barwick Farm provides our milk and cream, Helsett Farm our ice cream and Providence Farm our bacon, sausages and ham. The beef and lamb come from J & J Smeeth at Treknard Farm, which is just across the road from the tea rooms.'

**IS THE BUSINESS PROFITABLE?**

Neil: 'The total turnover in 2004 was £41,000: including the tea room, and we expect this to increase by about 30 per cent in 2005, with the B&B making about £12,000 of this. Our net profit was only £5,000 because all the house expenses are offset against tax. However, we measure our success by other criteria than just the bottom line. We live in a beautiful house in a wonderful location, meet interesting people, work for ourselves and eat fantastic food! It normally takes about three to four years to establish this kind of business, so we're doing very well. This is only our second year of trading and many of our visitors now come to us via a personal recommendation.'

**WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE?**

Gill: 'We start at about 7am and prepare for breakfast. We mix the bread and splits for the day, cook and serve breakfasts and chat to the guests. Then we clear away, make the bread and do all the other baking for the tea room, organise the staff, discuss lunch menus with the chef, service the rooms and serve lunches and teas until 6pm in the tea room. Then it's time to wash up, clear away, wash floors and lay out breakfast for the next day. In between, I do all the paperwork, enquiries, bookings, purchasing, ordering, wages, publicity and advertising. Neil does the gardening and maintenance on the house. We

now work longer hours than we ever did before, but we enjoy it and it really is a great lifestyle for both of us.'

**WAS IT HARD TO GET ORGANIC STATUS?**

Gill: 'It was a bit daunting at first, but staff at the Soil Association were incredibly helpful and friendly. The Association has to approve all the products and ingredients, and this is formalised on a schedule, although you can add to the list as you find new products or suppliers. We have to keep records of everything we purchase and everything we bake so that the Association inspectors can check it all tallies. Everything is fully traceable and, of course, certified organic. It costs about £400 a year to certify a small business like this, but you get a lot of support and technical help. Many people don't realise that "organic" is a legal term. You can't claim on a menu that you serve organic food, even if it says "organic" on the packaging, unless you are properly certified by the Soil Association or one of the other certifying bodies. If you do, you're trading illegally.'

**WHAT ARE THE BEST AND WORST BITS ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?**

Gill: 'Worst is washing and ironing! Plus my feet ache and it does mean I'm on duty all day, which can be draining. Best? I love meeting new people, making my own bread and sharing our lovely home with people from all walks of life who are interested in food. I love the challenge and being my own boss, knowing I can make something happen.'

**WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?**

Neil: 'We have a coach house in conversion which will create two more suites for Easter 2006. We may expand the restaurant side of the tearoom to offer evening meals. And Gill wants to start our own organic bakery in one of our outbuildings. It's all very exciting.'

**Neil and Gill's set-up tips**

- If you want to run an organic B&B, contact the Soil Association Producer Services Department for advice (0117 914 2400).
- **Buy the best you can afford or you'll need to replace things more often – that goes for kitchen equipment, bedlinen, everything.**
- If you want to grow your own produce to serve in your B&B, remember that the land you grow on must be certified organic.
- **Try to arrange your space so that you are able to live separately from your guests – you'll appreciate the privacy.**
- Ensure you have a proper 'office' because the paperwork mounts up. A corner in the kitchen won't do!
- **Take time to research the best local suppliers. The food you serve will only be as good as the ingredients you use. Talk to suppliers to ensure you get the best possible deal – that they'll deliver to you, for example. Smaller suppliers are more likely to have a smaller minimum order and offer a personal service.**
- Ask around friends and family for their favourite recipes and don't be afraid to adapt them, experiment and develop your own recipes.



To contact Bangors House, call 01288 361297 or visit [bangorsorganic.co.uk](http://bangorsorganic.co.uk)