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Oundle Mill - Northamptonshire

Barnwell Road, Oundle, Northamptonshire, PE8 5PB.
+44 (0)1832 272621
www.oundlemill.co.uk
Review: Emily Hirschmann

Not far from Peterborough, nestling in the Cambridgeshire countryside, lies the picturesque and unassuming market town of Oundle, known outside of its borough only for its famed public school and beautiful 13th Century



architecture. If you don't have kids, have never been to public school and lack either the money, pretension or family name to aspire to such things, then like me, you'll probably have never heard of the place. However, now that I've found it I am selfishly inclined to keep it to myself, which in a review isn't entirely practical.

Stunning limestone buildings line the streets, softly whispering "I should be in a BBC period drama", while the River Nene winds sinuously around the town leading to the sort of scenery to inspire poems of heartbreak on a cold winter's day. Right in the middle of this scenery, just a ten minute walk from the Market Place and on the doorstep of Barnwell Country Park, you will find Oundle Mill. This beautifully restored 17th Century water mill is now home to the ultimate in fine dining restaurants and boutique-style hotels.

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Rustic chic is the phrase chosen by the owners to describe the charms of Oundle Mill, but it goes far beyond that. It is simply stunning. With as many original features restored from the horrors of a 1980's plasterboard and black-painted disco nightmare as possible, the craftsmanship that has gone into the renovation of this place is evident. Historically old meets daringly new with the stunning glass stairwell linking the building from top to bottom and a cut away glass wall reveals the water of the river racing by against the building, hinting at the Mill's original function.

With only two rooms currently available (another 16 are due to be built before Spring 2011) the hotel really does offer a sense of exclusivity. I stayed in the Mill Room, a vast open-plan space replete with exposed oak beams, 6 foot bed, double ended roll-top bath, dinner-plate shower, and Italian designed oh-so-stylish, but oh-so-comfy furniture. Every detail has been thought of, with complimentary wine, orange juice and yummy homemade cookies, tea & proper coffee making facilities - with real milk; no fiddly little UHT cartons here - Bose radio, Loewe flat screen TV and DVD player and generous Jo Malone toiletries waiting for the weary guest. The Mill offers opulence, but on a very friendly scale. And with the sound of the River Nene rushing away beneath the window, you're guaranteed a peaceful night's sleep. The only criticism I could make is that the layout of the room may not be to everyone's taste, with the open-plan really being just that; having a bath in the middle of the bedroom may not suit every shrinking violet and when I go to the toilet I like to have a door which I can close! That said, the toilet issue has also been dealt with, with a separate external loo available for those with bladders as shy as mine! Pernickety points aside, this really is an extraordinary place to stay and would be perfect for a romantic weekend break with a proposal in mind or as a way to begin married life in style.

The onsite restaurant is superb, honestly not to be missed, with The Downstairs catering for a more casual, but none the less extremely accomplished, dining experience and The Upstairs (which offers a great view into the kitchen through the fabulous glass stairwell) providing a more sophisticated fine dining menu. However, if you're staying for a few nights and wish to venture out Oundle boasts more cafes and restaurants per capita than is surely practical.

As it stands, Oundle Mill is a little slice of hostelry perfection; I wouldn't want to change it in any way. From a business point of view, it's fairly obvious that maintaining just two rooms is simply unfeasible, but from a customer viewpoint the limited space makes you feel almost elite, so I would be very interested to see if they manage to retain this sense of exclusivity once the other rooms have been completed. For the time being, however, you should go there. No, really, you should. It's fantastic. I can say no more.

Tariffs for The Mill Room begin at £265, The Lucom Room £170. For more information visit: www.oundlemill.co.uk

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