The Wales Identity.
A sense of place.

Version 2.0

This is the commanding presence of Caernarfon.
This is the creeping mist of the Elan.
This is the barrelled backbone of Penderyn.
This is the bustling lifeblood of Cardiff.
This is the stunning gleam of the Gower.
This is the crumbly taste of Caerphilly.
This is the frosty kiss of Snowdonia.
This is the comforting caress of Tregwynt.
This is the untamed wildness of Brecon.
This is the seasoned spirit of Anglesey.
This is the colourful nostalgia of Portmeirion.
This is Wales.

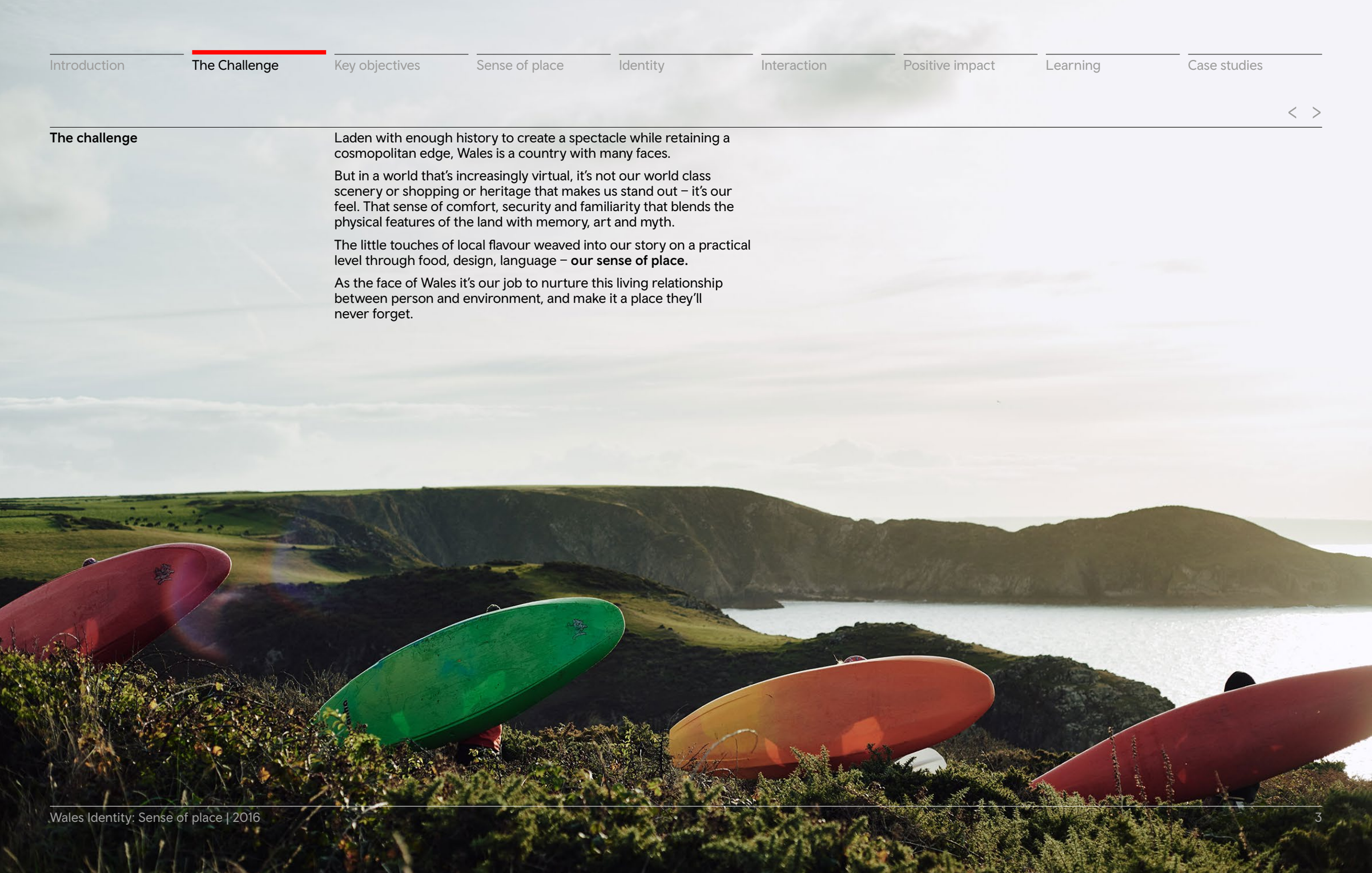
The challenge

Laden with enough history to create a spectacle while retaining a cosmopolitan edge, Wales is a country with many faces.

But in a world that's increasingly virtual, it's not our world class scenery or shopping or heritage that makes us stand out – it's our feel. That sense of comfort, security and familiarity that blends the physical features of the land with memory, art and myth.

The little touches of local flavour weaved into our story on a practical level through food, design, language – **our sense of place.**

As the face of Wales it's our job to nurture this living relationship between person and environment, and make it a place they'll never forget.



Objectives

Wales is the real deal. A nation built on the foundations of a proud, illustrious history and shaped by a bold and daring vision for the future – it's time we let the world know we're here.

We've set some goals that will help raise Wales' profile on the global stage. Think of them as a checklist when you're planning projects and campaigns, so that what you do complements our national and international tourism marketing efforts.

What do the objectives mean for Wales?

Elevate our status—
Historic yet happening – that's the Wales we know: the adventurous, trailblazing Wales inspired by our past but forever marching forward. And that's the Wales we need to tell the rest of the world about too.

What can you do to elevate the status of your business?
Can you link your success to the country wide narrative?

Change perceptions—
There's more to Wales than rolling green valleys and vivid coastline. We're a small nation – but we pack a punch. Our culture is alive with imagination. Our communities, blossoming with opportunity. Let's tell that story.

Can you leave a lasting legacy of Wales in your visitors' minds?

Surprise and inspire—
We do the big things well.

Dramatic scenery, ingenious enterprises, fabled culture – we've got it covered.

But it's the small things that make a real difference, like being greeted by the nice shopkeeper in Welsh. Or being given a little nugget of local wisdom by the helpful receptionist. Always aim to surprise.

What can you do to surprise and inspire your visitors?

Do good things—
Good doesn't mean being rich or powerful – it's something much more important: doing your bit to make the world a better place.

What are you doing that's worthwhile?
Great – share it with your guests.

Be unmistakably Wales—
Whether it's our people, places or just the little details that give Wales its charming character – let's celebrate what makes Wales different.

Do you tap into any of these things?

Sense of place and you

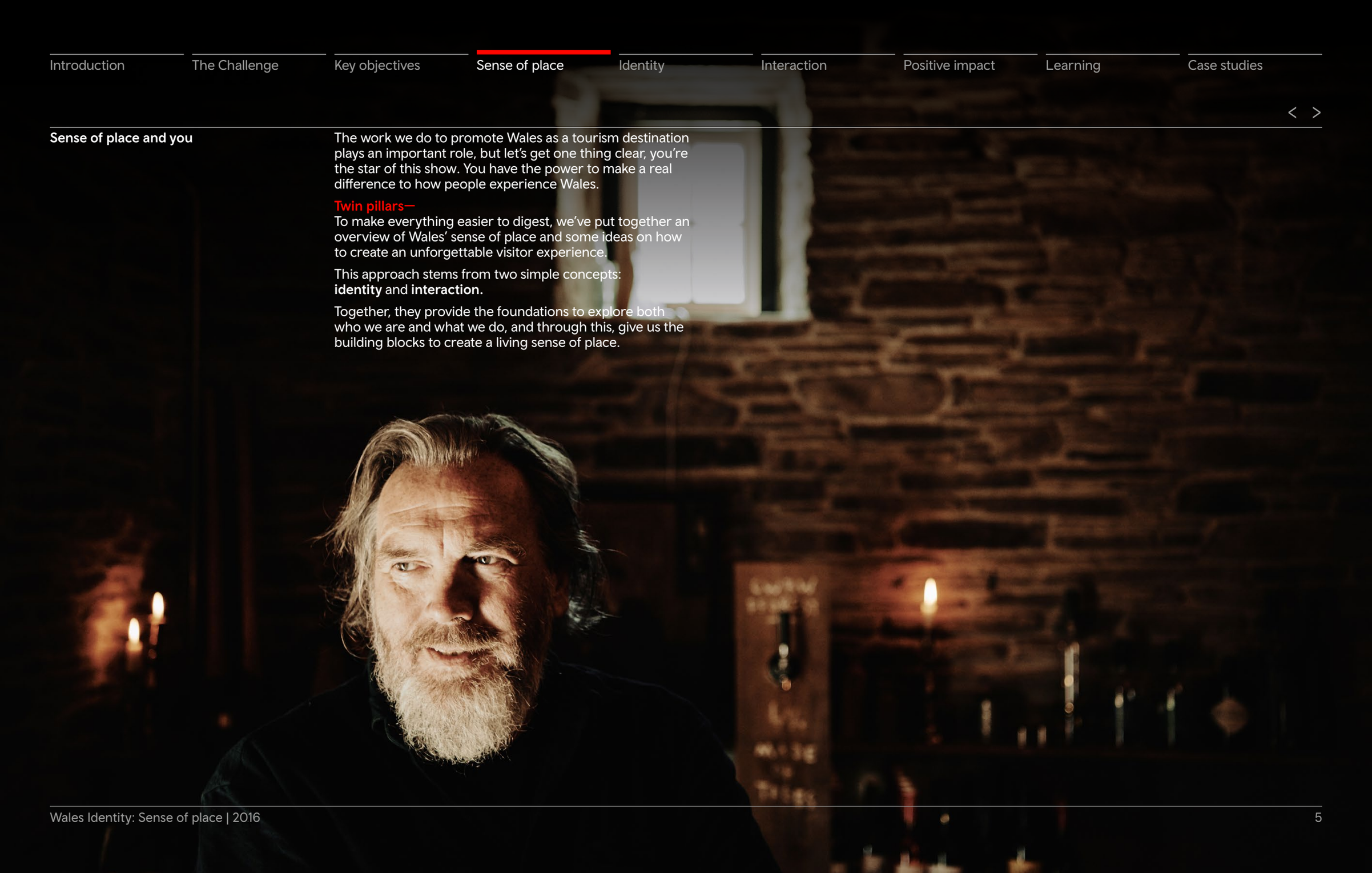
The work we do to promote Wales as a tourism destination plays an important role, but let's get one thing clear, you're the star of this show. You have the power to make a real difference to how people experience Wales.

Twin pillars—

To make everything easier to digest, we've put together an overview of Wales' sense of place and some ideas on how to create an unforgettable visitor experience.

This approach stems from two simple concepts: **identity** and **interaction.**

Together, they provide the foundations to explore both who we are and what we do, and through this, give us the building blocks to create a living sense of place.



Who we are

What makes something 'Wales'?

In truth, there's no definitive answer. It means lots of different things to lots of different people. So we suggest exploring ideas around identity that will help create a sense of place for your business rooted in your local story.

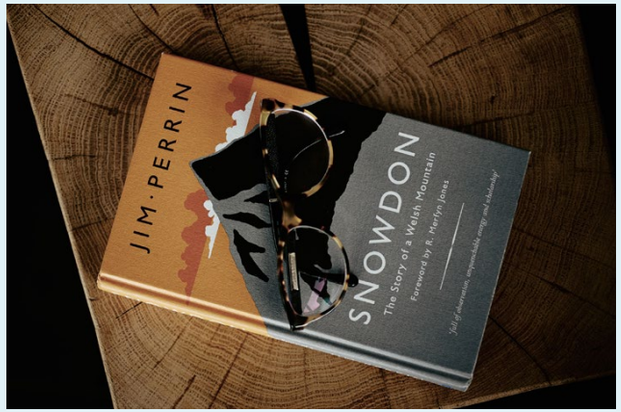
Try adding signage, a product, or a feature to your business to add a touch of local flavour. Or discover some interesting information about your area that adds to your regional knowledge, and pass it on to your visitors.

Sense of place can come from the contemporary too. New business, events, attractions, architecture. They all play their part.

(And don't underestimate our ancient native tongue – a simple 'croeso' makes a delightfully distinctive first impression.)

Croeso.
Welcome.

Who we are



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What we do

Other than just understanding who we are, most visitors like to get involved and 'do' the things we have to offer. Memorable experiences can really define a visit – they're opportunities for cultural immersion you can't get anywhere else.

Our role can be as straightforward as simply signposting which activities match which interests – a helpful way of making a great impression.

Make it matter.
Make your mark.

An authentic sense of place creates life long bonds – the key to our future. Let's leave a legacy.

Distinctiveness—
Open and honest, quirky and creative – Wales is a Celtic country with that rare old quality: distinctiveness. Our unique identity imprints on everyone that accepts our welcome, and offers them an opportunity to reflect on – and appreciate – the differences between our cultures.

Discovery—
Everybody loves discovering new things. Chance discoveries of charming local pubs and jovial chats with local shopkeepers – they're the things that really create a sense of place.

Value—
We can't change the cost of a visit, but we can increase its value. Instilling a visit with a tangible sense of place makes it a highly valuable and inimitable experience that will raise the overall positive perception of Wales.

Authenticity—
Authenticity is everything. People want to feel like they've really experienced the unpolished Wales the locals live. That comes naturally to us, but for a visitor, it's an experience they'll never forget.

Attachment—
We want everyone who visits Wales to fall in love with our country. So think about what your guests will need – what's going to surprise and charm them? Perhaps it's knowing the best spot to catch some surf, or something more practical, like where to pick up a prescription.

Memory—
The best experiences linger in the mind and form lifelong bonds with places. Let's make Wales that place.

Iterate. Innovate. Inspire.

There are businesses all over the country applying these principles to create their own unique sense of place. Whether that's through design, nature, or nurture, they've taken up the mantle of promoting Wales outwardly by focusing on their role inwardly.

Read through a few case studies, they're packed full of useful insights and inspiration.

01— James Lynch, fforest

02— Mirain Gwyn, Taldraeth

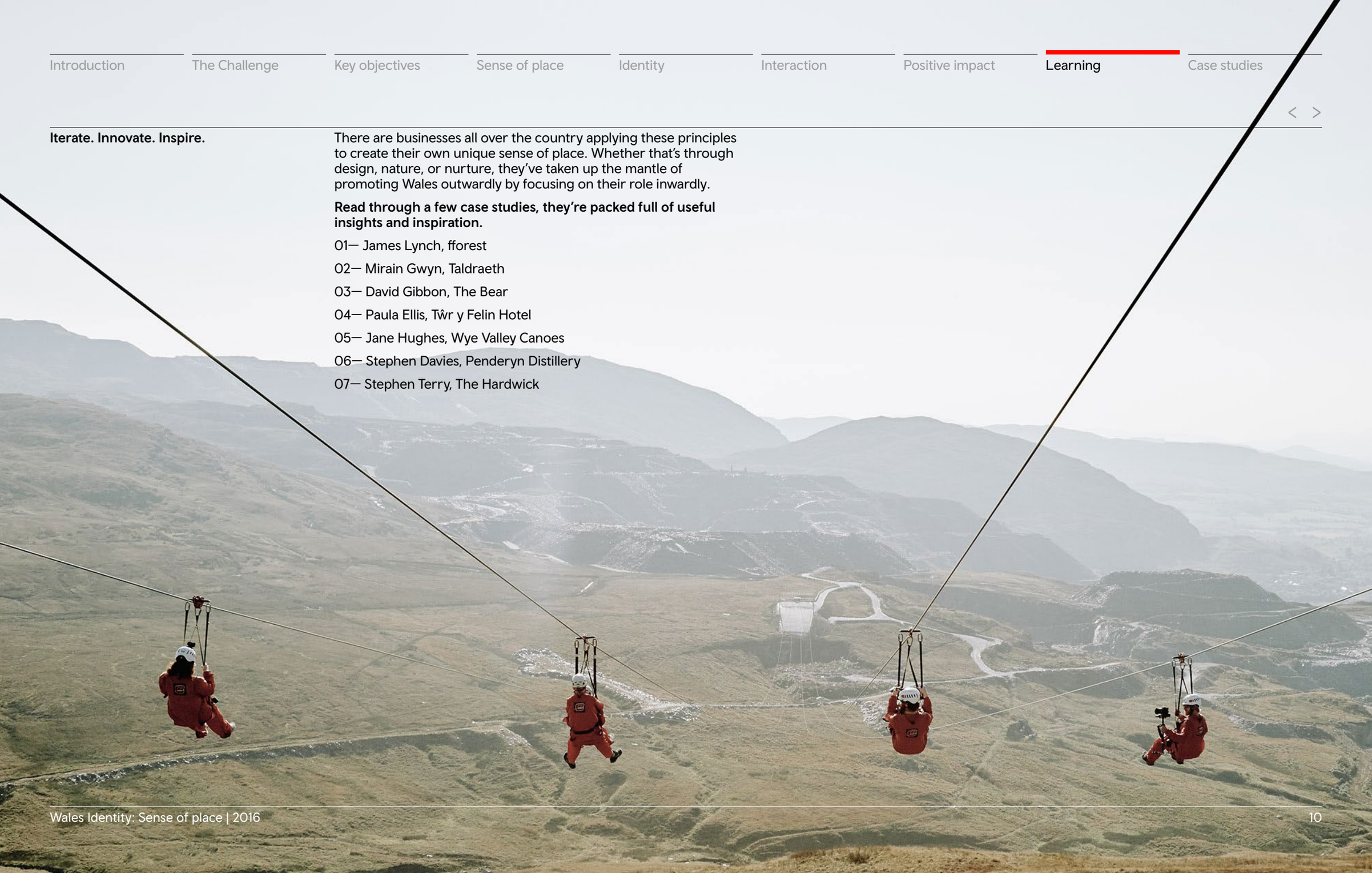
03— David Gibbon, The Bear

04— Paula Ellis, Tŵr y Felin Hotel

05— Jane Hughes, Wye Valley Canoes

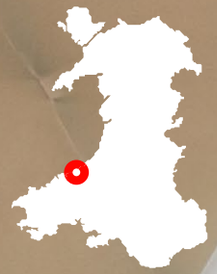
06— Stephen Davies, Penderyn Distillery

07— Stephen Terry, The Hardwick



01—

fforest, Cardigan
coldatnight.co.uk



01—

fforest
James Lynch

When James Lynch and his partner Sian Tucker came to west Wales to launch fforest camp, they realised they couldn't simply impose their design ideas. They had to work with the topography and the original spirit of the place.

Over the last 10 years they've created a unique range of tented accommodation and restored and converted farm buildings – as well as granary loft apartments and a buzzing "pizza tipi", café and bar at Cardigan quayside and a self-catering sea camp near the National Trust beach at Penbryn.

In doing so, they have expressed the strongest sense of place imaginable. But it doesn't relate generally to Wales or even to this part of Ceredigion. Here at fforest camp it's all about this particular 200 acres of farmland sandwiched between the river Teifi gorge and the Teifi Marshes nature reserve.

Quite deliberately, the car park is several hundred metres from the camp's warm beating heart: the wooden lodge where communal breakfasts are taken and the ancient bwthyn crog loft they call "the best tiny pub in the world". You have to get out and walk the rest of the way – and that's when you really begin to notice the birdsong, see the blossom and the bluebells, hear the creaking of awnings.

They say it's all the result of a dream – the dream of trying to remember what "simple" can look, feel and taste like.

How did fforest come about?
We were doing well in East London but we were hankering for something. We wanted more of an outdoors life and to be closer to the kids as they grew up. We'd been coming to Wales for 20 years because Sian's parents are very local to here and I thought: this is it. I'd developed lots of artists' studios and workspaces in Shoreditch and really this was just a progression from that – fforest was a place for people like us and our friends to come to escape the city.

But we'd never bought something without having a plan for it before. We spent a lot of time walking round and round the site just thinking about it. We started with the history and the spirit of what was already here. We thought about landscape, sunset, outlook, how it felt. Then we thought about what sort of facilities you needed to create for people to come and enjoy this pristine Welsh landscape and fantastic coast.

We custom-designed a range of accommodation from bell tents with hessian mats and futons through to domes with wood burners and double beds draped with Welsh blankets as well as shacks, tipis and cabins – and we also converted farm outbuildings and restored the original Georgian farmhouse.

How do you work with the landscape to create a particular sense of place?
We want somewhere where people will come and be reflective and quiet. Gradually it will dawn on them that their dome has been placed so that it has the best possible view or the shower block is south-facing, so you have a shower, the sun is coming up and you're looking over a great landscape – you're set up for the day. It's about actually designing a sense of place, taking best advantage of the geography, the topography and the views. It's not about putting bunting and fairy lights up.

Attention to detail is key. We probably get most comments about the wild flowers we leave on the table, all freshly picked from the surrounding fields. Our whole approach and the spirit of the place are embodied in that little bowl of wild flowers.

01—

fforest
James Lynch

What's the fforest ethos?
It's all about simple pleasures, about learning and playing in the outdoors. Everyone eats breakfast together so families are brought together on the very first morning. The kids make friends, they go off running around, parents get chatting and form friendships. When you meet people and engage with them, it makes your holiday more memorable.
It really works.

Our dedicated company Cardigan Bay Active gives our guests safe, new experiences on land, river and sea. We take them canoeing, climbing, surfing, coasteering, sea kayaking, whitewater rafting and lay on archery, mountain biking and bushcraft so they can connect directly to the unique Welsh environment that surround us.

How do you work with the existing buildings?
The pub is the spiritual heart of the place. It's where everyone gathers to chat and to enjoy local craft ales from the likes of Mantle Brewery of Cardigan and Pen Lon Brewery or the local artisanal gin Dà Mhìle, which is made at an organic farmhouse distillery at Llandysul.

It's a bwthyn crog loft, a traditional type of crofter's cottage, made out of the slate quarry behind it. It had almost completely gone, with big trees growing out of it, and we rebuilt it really carefully. A family had lived there 200 years ago and farmed this little plot and so this is a monument to that way of life. It even has its own ghost – a woman dressed in white with the head of a hound. People love to hear me tell that story in the pub when the candles and the fire are lit.

We get a really interesting set of people coming here and we do enjoy taking them for a walk, cooking them a great dinner of lamb or salads we have grown in the garden. They go back thinking Wales is just fantastic. We're not trying to push Welshness as such but it's all there in the details. Our restoration of the 1800 farmhouse is a great example – it was a combination of thousands of tiny decisions.

What exactly did you do at the farmhouse?
We scraped away 50 years of damp plaster, woodchip on the walls and suffocating cement render to reveal the story of its construction. The slate walls were quarried 200 years ago from the river gorge that the house stands above, there were massive lintels of roughly hewn oak bridging doorways and openings in the walls. We realised the house was like a cave. We had to figure out how to keep that feeling but add warmth, comfort and privacy.

So we retained the big communal spaces where people can gather to cook, eat and play. The kitchen is the heart with slate floors, massive open inglenook and a wood-smoking oven with original hooks for smoking and drying cured meats, a local tradition we want to re-establish. At the front of the house is a combined lounge and dining room with reclaimed pitch-pine walls and an open slate fireplace. On there we mounted the skull and antlers of a stag that we found in a muddy bog right here on the land. It's a memorial to a special animal from a very special place in Wales.

What about the furniture and furnishings?
It's a mixture of ethically sourced materials, period pieces and local craft, including what we make ourselves. We use a lot of old Welsh chapel chairs in elm and oak. It's a very modest approach, form following function in a specific tradition of making. All of those things mean beauty to me.

Our domes are lit by heartwood halos, a form of chandelier made from the standing dead branches of our own oak trees invisibly embedded with LED lights. As the wood dies and decays it loses it soft sapwood until only the hard inner heartwood remains. So as you lie in your bed there's a direct connection with the surrounding landscape.

Our Welsh blankets are a mixture of vintage ones we've collected over the last 20 years and new ones designed by Sian. They're a modification of the traditional Carthenni patterns unique to this area and made especially for us by a 180-year-old mill on the banks of the Teifi – the same water that flows around the camp.

There is a whole story of place just in those blankets. They are world-class goods made in a fantastic way and Wales has to be able to seize these things and celebrate them.

02—

Taldraeth B&B, Penrhyndeudraeth
taldraeth.com

Moelwyn, Cnicht, Glaslyn.

02—

Taldraeth B&B
Mirain Gwyn

Mirain Gwyn's new B&B in Penrhyndeudraeth is just a couple of miles from the famous tourist village of Portmeirion. It has a similar stupendous view across the Dwyryd Estuary towards the Ardudwy mountains. But this is no playful Italianate architectural fantasy. This is as authentically Welsh as it gets.

When Mirain bought the old vicarage of Holy Trinity Church, she didn't just want to launch a business. She wanted to celebrate every aspect of Welsh history and culture.

Everything – the food, the furnishings and furniture, the art and ceramics, the building materials, the garden produce, even the mattresses, pillows and toiletries – has a Welsh story to tell. And to do this, you need the Welsh language.

At Taldraeth, Welsh isn't an afterthought. It doesn't even have equal billing with English. It comes first and, occasionally, it stands alone. But it never excludes.

Why is the Welsh language so important for you?
It's very simple: Welsh is my first language and this a Welsh-speaking area. So it's an integral part of our culture, it's who we are. I don't think visitors realise that I can go a week or more without speaking any English at all: we speak Welsh every day, at work and at home. We want people from outside Wales to understand they are in a different country – it's all part of the richness of the experience for them and a huge part of what makes us distinctive.

How do you use Welsh in the business?
Right from the moment guests arrive and I greet them in Welsh and English, they will see and hear the language everywhere. It all begins with the name of Taldraeth itself, which means "above the estuary". There are quite a lot of old vicarage B&Bs and we wanted something unique – and of course a Welsh name. Both the guest rooms, Moelwyn and Cnicht, are named after local mountains (you can see them from the windows) and the dining room is called Glaslyn, a lake in the Snowdonia National Park. So straight away it connects us to the landscape.

All the guest information, the menus and the labels to explain more about the furniture and the paintings are bilingual. We even have labels on the breakfast items – the fruit salad, grapefruit, juices, homemade jams and marmalades. So people can get a feel for the use of Welsh in everyday life.

Our website is also completely bilingual and I'm tweeting and posting on Facebook in both Welsh and English. But we don't translate everything. When you go on holiday abroad, it can be enjoyable to pick up simple words just by seeing them in use. So some of our signs, "parcio" for instance or "preifat" and "oer/poeth" on taps, are just in Welsh.

How do you make it feel inclusive to non-Welsh-speaking guests?
We really want them to understand what the language means to us and to give it a go with a few words. There are comprehensive folders of guest information in the dining room about the history of Wales, sports and activities, local towns and villages – and there's a big section about the Welsh language. It includes a list of local place names and what they mean, something about the Welsh alphabet, how to count in Welsh, the names of the seasons and days of the week, a glossary of common words and some simple phrases for them to try such as "bore da" or "sut dach chi?". It's all about engaging people, making them curious.

How did you go about creating a strong Sense of Place in the house?
It had been empty for about six years when I bought it with my husband Geraint and we took quite a long time to clear the garden, which was really overgrown, strip out the woodchip wallpaper, paint the walls with clay paint to protect the lime plaster, sand the floors and take the woodwork back to its original Canadian and American pitch pine. This is a Grade II listed vicarage dating back to 1858 and we're lucky that it still had all these original features.

02—

Taldraeth B&B
Mirain Gwyn

It was paid for by the Oakley family who owned quarries in Blaenau Ffestiniog so there's a strong connection with the local slate industry, which we hope will soon be awarded World Heritage Site status. You can see it in the fabric of the building: slate lintels, slate floors and wonderful stone walls in the Victorian garden. We continued the theme with new slate signs, paths and parking areas. The medallions on the two-storey sandstone windows at the gable end gave us the inspiration for the Taldraeth logo, so it all ties in.

What about the furniture and furnishings?
Over 40 years my parents amassed the largest private collection of antique Welsh furniture that we know of outside St Fagans National Museum, along with Welsh ceramics and paintings by local and famous artists. Furniture like this is an important part of our heritage – as important as the language – and my father campaigned tirelessly for it to be kept in Wales. Opening Taldraeth was a wonderful opportunity for people to see it and enjoy it.

In the dining room, for instance, we have a cwpwrdd tridarn or three-part cupboard – a piece of furniture unique to this part of Wales which is dated 1729. There's also an early 18th century North Welsh dresser and in the hall a Delft rack displaying a collection of Gaudy Welsh and Llanelli plates. The bedrooms are full of these lovely pieces including a 19th century mahogany half tester double bed, oak press cupboards, a Victorian basin stand, antique tables and chests of drawers.

The rooms are designed with Welsh textiles such as Laura Ashley fabrics and wool cushions hand-made by myself in a style passed on in my family through the generations. We have Welsh blankets from Melin Tregwynt and vintage blankets from the local Bryncir woollen mill, where they've been weaving since the 1830s, or the Derw mill in Pentrecwrt, north Carmarthenshire, that flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The toiletries are from the Sea Breeze range by Myddfai, a social enterprise who make their products in the tradition of the medieval Physicians of Myddfai. The organic wool duvets and pillows are made in Harlech by Baavet and the Welsh wool mattresses come from Abaca in Ammanford. It's the whole package – something truly authentic and distinctively Welsh.

How does your food reflect the local area?
I'm passionate about food because I was born on a farm. From the house you can see my brother's lambs grazing on the saltmarshes, so of course Dwyryd Salt Marsh Roast Lamb is on the evening menu along with Ardudwy Welsh Beef Ox Cheeks, Beef and Porthmadog Purple Moose Ale Pie and Stuffed Trawsfynydd Trout. All the eggs, bacon and sausages for breakfast are from local sources – people we know. And it's all served on vintage Portmeirion pottery, of course.

In the Victorian walled garden we've planted cherry trees, original variety Welsh apples, potatoes, lettuce, onions, rhubarb, fruit trees, blackcurrants, raspberries, blueberries and gooseberries. My speciality is puddings – I've won prizes for my cooking at the Royal Welsh Show – and I make all sorts of crumbles and tarts with this lovely fresh produce.

How do you help people explore the great outdoors?
My Dad used to take us up the mountains when we were little, he knew every peak and every lake. So we don't just point guests in the right direction – we can give them proper local knowledge and introduce them to people who will help them explore with activities such as food safaris. Depending on the season we can offer trips to the family farm for lambing, shearing or haymaking. It's all part of giving them an experience that is truly authentic.

03—

The Bear B&B, Hay-on-Wye
thebearhay.com

03—

The Bear B&B
David Gibbon

When he returned to his native Wales after nearly 20 years in London to take over The Bear B&B in Hay-on-Wye, David Gibbon found a place of chintz, net curtains and woodchip wallpaper. He wanted to do something more contemporary, to create a look that was minimal but quirky – and distinctively Welsh.

He set the tone with a new logo. It simply had to feature a bear. The building, part of which dates back to the late 16th century, is one of town's original pubs. It's so well known that the street it occupies, with its marvellous views of the Radnor and Herefordshire hills, is called Bear Street.

Now Hay, the world's second-hand book capital and home to its most famous literary festival, has a surprising new tourist attraction. The swinging sign outside The Bear with its bespoke illustration has become a regular target for camera-wielding visitors.

Why was the logo so important you?
It's one of the first indications of what The Bear is going to be like, that we're arty and distinctive. Rather than cutting and pasting an image from the internet, we wanted to get a local artist to do something original for us. We commissioned Ian Phillips, one of Wales' foremost linocut artists, who is fascinated by the beauty and craftsmanship of Japanese prints.

The logo is carried through everywhere from the swinging sign to our website, business cards, notepaper – and the original is framed in the entrance hallway. People love the bear and are always asking who did it. We put them directly in touch with the artist, who can produce new prints for them. Our bear has already found his way to places as far-flung as Sydney and Vienna.

What's your philosophy?
People should turn up and feel they are in a friend's home. We want to make things comfortable, distinctive and reflect something of the place, especially its Welshness, so guests feel they have come somewhere that's a bit different.

How did you go about renovating a historic building?
I felt I needed to take the house back a bit, to show its bones and its history but give it a more contemporary edge. I didn't want to create a museum. Everywhere was very dark, the beams were painted black and there was woodchip throughout. The lime plaster had been stripped off the walls so I asked a local timber merchant to replicate the tongue and groove that was still in place in the hallway and on the elm staircase. We painted the beams and the panelling off-white to really brighten the space and take it back to something like it would have been in the 18th century.

How does the furniture give a Sense of Place?
There's a lot of antique Welsh but also retro and repurposed furniture, with the odd French bedstead and Arts and Crafts four-poster thrown in for good measure. The most expensive piece of furniture in the whole house is a Welsh oak linen press from about 1760 – we just fell in love with it. There's a Welsh oak side table at the top of the stairs, a lovely piece of country furniture we bought here in Hay. The antique Welsh chairs scattered through the house were acquired in Carmarthenshire.

But it's all mixed in with some mid-20th century pieces, some by Ercol, stuff by Danish designers. We have a 1950s Italian coffee table. The dresser in the dining room cost £100 on ebay and we transformed it with blue paint and elbow grease. I can't really say for sure if it's a Welsh dresser but it certainly looks the part.

Overall we hope the effect is distinctive – traditionally Welsh but also quite glamorous and bohemian. A bit like Hay itself.

How would you define your style?
A sort of eclectic minimalism. On one hand I'm really drawn to the work of architects like John Pawson, a pared-back style featuring large open spaces and white walls, where all your worldly goods are shut away out of sight. But I also have this magpie eye. If I see an interesting piece of junk or a lovely piece of art, I'm drawn to that. So I try to use minimalism as a space in which to display interesting and beautiful objects – and because they are not competing with anything else, we retain that gallery look.

03—

The Bear B&B
David Gibbon

What's your approach to collecting?
I'm looking for unexpected treasures, a new spin on something. It might be something sophisticated and metropolitan or something very traditionally Welsh. A lot of the art is from London, including a print by Peter Davies called The Fun One Hundred – the original is in the Saatchi Gallery. I like things to have a bit of a modern edge: for example the pottery hens on the dresser are really traditional but I've hunted down the brightest ones I could find and displayed them in a group in a Warhol-y way. It moves them away from being purely decorative into the realm of art.

We bought a beautiful pair of lovespoons from the shop at St Fagans National Museum, modern but commissioned from local craftsmen to replicate early 19th century ones in their collection. We have a collection of vintage medicine bottles on display, some with their original labels from a Llanelli chemist, which is a new twist on the idea of a bathroom medicine cabinet.

Of course there are Welsh blankets in all the rooms – some vintage from the likes of Jane Beck in Tregaron or the antiques shops here in Hay and some new ones from Melin Tregwynt in Pembrokeshire. They are so unique and foreign visitors especially just love them.

Where do you go to create your look?
Hay is a good hunting ground for unusual bits and bob with places that are a funny mash-up between antiques and people making stuff. There's a shop called The End run by Marina Rendle. She's a real original with a fantastic eye for the Gothic and macabre. It's almost like an art installation in itself. We also buy lots of pieces from the Lion Street Gallery and Val Harris at The Table.

What about local food producers?
Our food is a bit different too. In the Golden Valley there is a really lovely hard cheese a bit like Gruyere called Little Hereford and for breakfast I make a Leek and Little Hereford Tart as a vegetarian option. We're blessed with three bakers in town – people are so pleased to come down in the morning and see properly baked bread – and our dry cured bacon and sausages are from Geraldine Gibbon in Castle Street. Black Mountain Preserves do the jams and we think our marmalade, from Coedcanlas in Pembrokeshire, is the best in the world. Derek Glashan of Hay Deli spends a lot of time scouring Wales for top quality food producers and I buy my preserves, cheeses and countless other ingredients from there.

How do you express your Welshness?
We might be right on the border but this is definitely Powys. I let guests know we're in Wales but without overdoing it – it's mostly expressed through things like the food and the Welsh fabrics. It's so important to know what's going on locally and, if you're enthusiastic, you can enthuse your guests. There's a lovely buzz during the main Hay Festival, for instance, but we like to tell guests about How the Light Gets In which takes place right in the town and is perhaps a bit less corporate with a fantastic atmosphere. I also like to push people further west into Wales by telling them about places I love such as St Davids, the Gower or St Fagans.

What's different about being in Hay?
There are only 1,500 residents but the cultural stuff that goes on is amazing with festivals through the year, an arts centre, live music, a brilliant independent cinema. Everyone has heard of Hay Festival but what's really surprising is that it seems to be even more famous in some foreign countries than in the rest of the UK. We get tons of visitors from overseas – the USA, Germany, Japan, Korea. It makes you realise we are on a global stage. You have to think big when you're in Hay, to be proud of your country and present the best of Wales to the world.

04—

Tŵr y Felin Hotel, St Davids
twryfelinhotel.com

04—

Tŵr y Felin Hotel
Paula Ellis

It's safe to say that architect Keith Griffiths thinks big. Having grown up in Welsh-speaking North Pembrokeshire, he now chairs Hong Kong-based Aedas, one of the world's top five architectural practices. His vision is changing skylines on a colossal scale. But he's never lost touch with his roots or the desire to express a very Welsh sense of place through history, food, language – and art.

His Griffiths-Roch Foundation has rescued and renovated three important historic buildings on the St Davids peninsula and turned them into luxury hotels: 12th century Roch Castle, the Victorian vicarage of Penrhiw near the sixth century cathedral and most recently Tŵr y Felin, a converted 1806 windmill.

The hotels celebrate a distinctive local landscape and culture. But this £16 million investment also reveals a global level of ambition – Pembrokeshire as seen from a truly international perspective.

At Tŵr y Felin, he commissioned more than 100 original artworks to create Wales's first contemporary art hotel. His aim is nothing less than to establish St Davids as a Welsh St Ives. It's the job of group general manager Paula Ellis to help make this ambitious vision a reality.

What was the motivation in creating the hotel group?
In Keith's busy life he still wants to come back to Pembrokeshire, to recharge the batteries and to remain Welsh. These important buildings were in a dire state of repair and he decided to restore them, give them back to the community and develop them into a luxury base from which guests could explore the Pembrokeshire landscape that so inspired him. It was a very philanthropic ethos.

What did the renovation of Tŵr y Felin entail?
It took five years of planning, design and construction. We wanted to do justice to its varied history as a windmill, a temperance hotel and an outdoor pursuits centre where the sport of coasteering was invented. Our Tyddewi suite, for example, is a unique space occupying the original windmill tower with spectacular 360-degree views from its own observatory, reached via a listed wooden staircase. We've done all we can to preserve the character of the building while constructing a completely new wing in keeping with the tower. Inside it's all about clean modern design and high-quality craftsmanship with furniture from Channels, international furniture makers of the year in 2015, and bathrooms by Philippe Starck. All our properties are hypoallergenic which means leather rugs and very close-knit or textured fabrics such as suede. It's a very contemporary take on an historic building.

Why is the art so important?
Art is Keith's passion. He wanted to depict Pembrokeshire from a new perspective. So he invited eight contemporary artists to come and spend time here, respond to the landscape and create a body of work to fill the public spaces and bedrooms at Tŵr y Felin. They include graffiti and street artists like Pure Evil, a friend of Banksy, who following on from his Californian-based Nightmare Series was commissioned to create eight Welsh icons including Shirley Bassey, Catherine Zeta Jones and Anthony Hopkins to celebrate the launch of the hotel. Other original pieces were collected from Welsh, British and international artists, complementing the commissioned works and enhancing the art hotel brand.

Welsh artists include Catrin Webster, who explores the interaction between light, colour and the local landscape. Amanda and Dan Wright of Goat Street Gallery here in St Davids produced tapestries, bespoke crockery and ceramics for Roch Castle and Penrhiw. Geoff Yeomans from Fishguard had been working on a huge seven-piece painting inspired by the wrecks of tugboats near Solva but had never found a home for it. Tŵr y Felin was designed to incorporate a very long corridor especially to display this painting.

04—

Tŵr y Felin Hotel
Paula Ellis

We want to establish St Davids as the art capital of Wales, building on the legacy of painters such as Turner, who in his youth sketched around Ramsey Island, and Graham Sutherland, whose work can be seen just a stone's throw away in the gallery at Oriel y Parc – a unique collaboration between the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and National Museum Wales. There are more artists in this peninsula than anywhere else in Wales and it's because they are attracted by the particularly beautiful light.

Why did you choose a Welsh name?
Tŵr y Felin is a challenge for non-Welsh speakers. People thought we should change it to Milltower Hotel or Windmill Tower but we didn't seriously consider it because our language is so important to us. So far about 80% of our guests are from South Wales and a high proportion are Welsh speakers – I think it's because of the name.

Our Welshness is a unique selling point. We may only have a population of three million but our language is growing and developing. We ought to nurture and protect it for future generations.

All the public names are in Welsh: the bar is called Cornel (Corner), we have a cosy sitting area we call the Cwtch, the restaurant is Blas (Taste) and the new wing with the main gallery space is Oriel (Gallery). All the bedrooms are named after local bays or islands, although we tried to choose the most easily pronounceable ones and used alliteration where possible. So we have Abercastell, Abermawr, Aberbach and Abereiddi, also Caerbwydi and Caerfai, Porthclais, Porth Melgan and Porthgain. But all the rooms have numbers as well!

Do you speak Welsh?
We encourage staff to greet guests in Welsh: "Bore da, good morning." So we don't say "bore da" and leave it there and make them feel intimidated or embarrassed, we offer the English translation as well. And we'll always say "Croeso, you're welcome." There's a fine line. We want to demonstrate our language but we can't force it on our guests.

What's most important to us is the Croeso Cynnes Cymreig. Our hospitality in Wales is unique in the world. It's all about that unpretentious warmth and lack of stuffiness. That's what I instill throughout the whole organisation. We need to be busy creating the "sunshine", going the extra mile, giving people memories, tastes and flavours of this unique culture. If you focus on spending time with your guests and exceeding their expectations, that will result in happy guests and a healthier bottom line.

How exactly do you go about making guests happy?
It's partly about helping them to explore the real Pembrokeshire. We don't just point them towards well-known places – we'll give them the inside story. If they go towards the Preseli hills we'll tell them to look out for a little brown sign to Nevern, where they can see the bleeding yew tree in the churchyard. Or we might send them to the Gwaun Valley, where they still celebrate New Year's Day on January 13th, and in to the Dyffryn Arms where old Bessie will serve them a jug of beer in her front room. This isn't tourism – this is how these people live. It's the real, distinctive flavour of Pembrokeshire. People are just overwhelmed when we share our favourite places with them.

How does food fit in to this approach?
It's another opportunity to offer sense of place. Being on a peninsula surrounded by water means that people want to taste the local produce and so to offer seafood and fish is very important to us. We also use foraged food a lot, so at the moment our chefs and gardeners are coming back with wild garlic flowers, primroses and samphire. At breakfast we offer laverbread with cockles and bacon, our meat is from the local butcher here in St Davids, our rustic homemade bread is from the Preseli hills. The local Goodwood honey is made by Welsh black bees feeding on lavender, wild flowers and tree blossoms. Guests can even buy a jar to take home if they want. The mini bars and honesty bars are stocked with Wickedly Welsh chocolates and Jones Welsh crisps as a treat. We try to offer a true culinary experience, a taste of Wales.

05—

Wye Valley Canoes, Glasbury-on-Wye
wyevalleycanoes.co.uk

05—

Wye Valley Canoes
Jane Hughes

Jane Hughes, owner of Wye Valley Canoes in Glasbury, knows a good idea when she hears it. So when a passing architect learned of her plans to convert the Welsh Baptist chapel across the boatyard into a posh bunkhouse and said "I hope you're going to have a slide", she didn't bat an eyelid. "Wow!" she said. "I wasn't going to – but I am now."

The bunkhouse may be the very model of a sensitive conversion of a mid-19th century religious building. But it also has a stainless steel chute that gets you from the open-plan mezzanine to the ground floor in two seconds flat. Everybody loves it, and not just the kids. It's a big hit with 30-something groups looking for something truly distinctive.

The bunkhouse is the latest addition to a mini empire that now includes canoe and mountain bike hire, four B&B rooms above a café that doubles as a local art gallery and another room right beside the river – all cheerfully presided over by Jane and her enthusiastic, well-trained and very local staff.

What persuaded you to install the slide?
We thought it would be such a great thing because it's so much fun. If you're doing accommodation now, you have to have something a little bit different. Lots of people are converting chapels but there aren't many with a slide, I have to say. A friend who's a playground designer sourced a company in Germany – it's probably the only thing that's not local in the whole building.

How much did the slide cost?
Let's say about as much as a small Volkswagen! It was worth it because it's such a talking point.

What was your experience of renovating an historic building?
There were lots of issues working with a Grade II listed building, a classical red-brick chapel built in 1866, but we got through them with negotiation. The council didn't have a policy for an indoor slide, so I may have got under the radar there, but they were very keen for us to retain as many original features as possible and to preserve the original sense of scale.

The bunkhouse seems to float in the space, all lit by the big arched windows, and there are glimpses of ground level through glass floor panels. You can still see the chapel's globe-shaped pendant lights, the ornate ceiling rose, some old chapel chairs and a piano to remind us of its previous purpose. We were very pleased to keep the imposing wooden pulpit downstairs – it makes a great office for the mountain bike and canoe hire. This was a working chapel until a few years ago and there are still quite a few local people who were married here and so on. It remains a public building really, so people can come in and have a little look at what we've done.

What about the interior?
We wanted it to be posh but practical and as local as possible. The crushed velvet sofa next to the log burner and the huge pink lampshades in the kitchen are from Baileys in Ross-on-Wye. The bunk beds, the coffee table, the double bed and the 16-seater kitchen table were designed especially for us by young Hay-on-Wye furniture makers, Barnby and Day, who used to work for me here. Their furniture is influenced by Scandivanian and Japanese design and all about clean lines and subtle details. So it's very local and Welsh, which is important to us, but also international in outlook. As with the slide, we weren't afraid to look around the world for inspiration.

How did the café come about?
About 15 years ago I took over a long-established canoe hire operation on the banks of the River Wye. People were coming off the water thirsty and hungry and so pretty soon we set up the River Café in what used to be the village post office. We're committed to freshly-prepared local food, beer from round the corner and you can come in a suit or a swimsuit, a pirate outfit or shorts and flip-flops.

05—

Wye Valley Canoes
Jane Hughes

A few years ago we even got a four-star review from the Sunday Times food critic AA Gill. He liked the food, thank goodness, but he was also bowled over by the warm Welsh welcome. In fact he said: "The service was utterly, embarrassingly, bucolically charming, and a tacit reprimand and balm to city cynicism and insincerity."

How do you achieve such good service?
It doesn't happen by accident. Our restaurant manager, Kasie Jenkins, has lived in this area all her life and holds regular staff training sessions to make sure they know all about the provenance of the food and the best places to explore. All our waiting-on staff, for instance, will know to point out the herd of cattle on the other side of the river where our yoghurt comes from.

They're all born and bred in a five-mile radius and have been with us for ages. People who understand the whole vibe and the enthusiasm we have, they just seem to stay – and of course they have fantastic local knowledge.

How do you convey a Sense of Place in your marketing?
The river here is so beautiful and unspoiled. It's pure relaxation. Paddling between here and Hay you see about two or three houses, maybe the odd fisherman, and the rest is just fields. If you're lucky you might glimpse kingfishers, little egrets, sand martins, even an otter. I try to portray all this with photographs of the scenery both here on the river and up in the hills. If I go for a walk I always take pictures and put them on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter... it just reminds people what they are missing!

What's surprised you about running the business?
Working with other businesses has been an unexpected pleasure. Over the years you build up these amazing contacts just from talking to customers and from living in and knowing the area so well. A local girl with a beauty salon does nails for people in the bunkhouse, a boy with a gym does boot camp fitness sessions for them. Someone else does flash mob singing, we work with clay pigeon shoots and go kart tracks. We're ambassadors for the whole area and I've loved that part of it.

What do you wish you'd known at the beginning?
If what you do is good enough, word will get out – but it takes time. I was a bit slow to realise that if you do the marketing and networking properly, it can cut a lot of corners. I didn't employ any sort of marketing specialist and think now I probably should have done. Nor did I utilise people like the Chamber of Commerce, Business Wales, Visit Wales, Brecon Beacons Tourism – I barely knew they existed. Now thanks to social media it's much easier to get your message out there but you have to be on it pretty constantly. I also join networking business groups where there are usually opportunities to stand up and give an idea of your business in 60 seconds. People who are interested will then come and nab you after the meeting.

06—

Penderyn Distillery Visitor Centre, Penderyn
welsh-whisky.co.uk

06—

Penderyn Distillery
Stephen Davies

Back on St David's Day 2004, Penderyn launched their single malt whisky on an unsuspecting world. They were the first Welsh whisky distillery for more than century and there was a big question mark over their credibility. Not any more.

For one thing the world's leading whisky guru and author of the definitive "Whisky Bible", Jim Murray, can't get enough of Penderyn. He loves the taste, naturally. But what he really loves is its Welshness.

"In terms of world whisky, they have created a completely new style," he says. "It is unmistakably Penderyn; it is perfectly, uniquely Welsh."

So, how do they do it? How has this little company in the Brecon Beacons created an internationally popular whisky hailed as "one of the great Welsh manufacturing stories of recent times"?

More to the point, how do they make it seem so Welsh – and still succeed in an industry where the words "whisky" and "Scotch" were once virtually synonymous?

There are, according to Penderyn chief executive Stephen Davies, lots of ingredients in building the perfect brand. And he doesn't just mean fine malted barley and pure spring-fed water. He's talking about passion and authenticity, about the importance of good design and above all about storytelling.

Every day Penderyn are writing their own legends about what Welsh whisky, or wysgi, really means. Their £850,000 visitor centre attracts 40,000 people a year. But it isn't merely one of the most popular tourist attractions in South Wales. Its true significance is that it helps Penderyn to tell their uniquely Welsh story.

What was your main objective when you launched the visitor centre in 2008?
We wanted to convert all the thousands of people who came here into brand ambassadors. Of course, we want to sell to them – but the primary thing was to make them feel they are part of the brand. We didn't have the resources to send people out into the world but we do have a good strong story to tell.

It is a unique process – we don't make our whisky the same way as the Scots or the Irish or the English. We use a single-pot still with two columns that produces the highest, purest strength of malt whisky you will find anywhere in the world. Our house style is to mature the spirit in hand-selected bourbon barrels and finish it in Madeira barriques. Then prior to bottling we reduce the strength with our very own Brecon spring water.

We really have to work on conveying those points of difference because it creates the style of what you're drinking. You would never mistake Penderyn for Scotch – it is completely different, lighter and fruitier. Sense of place is very important and then you build those points of difference around that. The visitor centre is the perfect way for people to see these things for themselves.

What does the visitor experience involve?
It starts from the moment our visitors arrive and see the dark wooden building with the gold seam of Welsh gold, or Aur Cymru, just like the branding of our premium Madeira Finished Single Malt Whisky. And of course they get the amazing smell of whisky straight away.

Inside there's a bilingual exhibition on the history of whisky making in Wales, designed by our brand designer Glen Tutssel, with a timeline linking Taliesin and the Mabinogion to the Chartist riots and the heyday of the South Wales coalfields. Visitors can watch a film about the origins of Penderyn and see a 122-year-old bottle of the last genuine Welsh whisky from Frongoch near Bala.

Since 2013 the guided tour, which is also available in Welsh, takes them right onto the shop floor so they can see the whole distillation process at first hand, from the grist mill and the mash tun to the original single-pot still designed exclusively for us by Dr David Faraday. It's been a big step forward – our visitors get to see everything.

06—

Penderyn Distillery
Stephen Davies

Afterwards in the tasting room they can sample our whiskies and learn to recognise aromas such as cream toffee and raisins and pick out notes of tropical fruit or vanilla. In the shop we really reinforce the brand message with lots of our products for sale including rare single cask whiskies.

How do you draw on your Welsh heritage?
The trick is not to look overly traditional. In distillery terms we are still just babies and we're quite proud of the fact that it's a contemporary whisky. So we don't over-rely on heritage but we still like to draw on it. In the exhibition we talk about Wales as The Land of Legends but we include everything from medieval castles to Roald Dahl and Mathew Rhys the actor, one of our brand ambassadors, just to give people a sense of the richness of our culture.

Our Icons of Wales whisky series was designed to celebrate people or milestones in Welsh history that have an international significance – not just from the past but modern day legends as well. Red Flag commemorated the 1831 Merthyr rising, for instance, but That Try was all about Gareth Edwards' famous score against the Barbarians and we'll be launching a new whisky with opera singer Bryn Terfel.

How important is it to be distinctively Welsh?
Malt whisky is all about authenticity – it's not quite the same with our vodka, gin and cream liqueur. People who drink whisky want to know what the stills look like, what the water's like, they want to know the area, they love all the details. You have to be specific. We've focused a lot of our marketing material on the Brecon Beacons National Park rather than on Wales in general. At shows and presentations we have a silent film running in the background of our distillery, our people and the environment – just to give a sense of the place where we are from. It gives us that authentic feel.

But in the end it's all about the quality of the product. People shouldn't buy the whisky because it's Welsh. They should buy it because it's one of the best spirits in the world. We didn't want to be seen as a Welsh novelty brand, which is why we invested in world-class product and packaging design from the beginning and why we'll be launching a new bespoke bottle in 2017. Those sorts of things make a statement in the industry.

Do you see yourselves as ambassadors for Wales?
We enjoy being ambassadors as part of telling our story. Because we are outside Scotland we come under the industry category of World Whiskies, along with places such as Sweden, India, Taiwan, Japan and England. Not a lot of these whiskies make it obvious where they come from or tell stories about their country. We're different.

So when I'm talking about Penderyn, I spend a lot of time talking about Wales, about the connections that we have with the Welsh National Opera, the Wales Millennium Centre, the Celtic Manor 2010 Ryder Cup, Swansea City, Cardiff City, the rugby, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. We try to reach out to all things Welsh.

What are your aims for the future?
We're planning a second distillery and visitor centre in the old Hafod-Morfa copperworks on the River Tawe in Swansea. It will be exciting to be part of the regeneration of that part of the city. By 2019 we could be opening the doors to 100,000 visitors a year.

A lot more Penderyn whisky will be available for bottling over the next few years. We currently sell 250,000 bottles a year and we're looking to grow that to 400,000 bottles all around the world. The best way to do that is to continue to tell stories – we've got plenty of ideas in the background. It's just about finding the things that really resonate.

07—

The Hardwick Restaurant with Rooms, Abergavenny
thehardwick.co.uk

07—

The Hardwick
Stephen Terry

Stephen Terry, genial and unpretentious chef-patron of the Hardwick Restaurant with Rooms near Abergavenny, has quite a culinary CV. As you might expect from someone who was best man at Gordon Ramsay's wedding.

He worked with the famously fiery Scot at Marco Pierre White's iconic restaurant Harvey's in 1990s Wandsworth. After a stint at Le Gavroche with Michel Roux Jnr he won his first Michelin star aged just 24 as head chef at White's Canteen restaurant in Chelsea. He moved to Paris to join legendary chef Alain Passard at L'Arpège and then put Oliver Peyton's Coast in Mayfair on the map.

Shortly after taking over the Walnut Tree Inn at Abergavenny, Stephen won his second Michelin star. By then he had already begun to fall in love with the landscape, the people and perhaps above all the produce of Wales. So when he left the Walnut Tree there was no chance of this stellar chef heading back to the big city full-time.

With his wife Joanna and father-in-law Derry Nicklin, he took on a rundown rural pub called the Horse and Jockey and turned it into the Hardwick. It's now the best restaurant with rooms in Great Britain and Ireland, according to the 2017 Good Hotel Guide Awards.

In the 11 years since he opened the Hardwick, Stephen Terry hasn't just been a passionate advocate for Welsh food on shows such as Great British Menu and Saturday Kitchen. He's become an honorary Welshman too.

What are you trying to achieve at the Hardwick?
It was a dream come true to have my own place and right from the beginning my intention was to provide good food at good prices, using as many local products as possible. Of course local has to mean top quality. But we are very fortunate – we do have some wonderful producers around here. It's about offering a real sense of place but it's also about being part of a community. You can't complain that local people don't come to your restaurant if you are not using local suppliers – you have to support each other as much as possible.

It is easy to take for granted in London, and most major cities, that you can pick up the phone and order pretty much anything you want to be delivered the following morning. But imagine how wonderful it is to go to some of the producers directly, choose my own produce alongside them and then give them a mention on the menu. For me it's about building relationships with incredibly passionate people because ultimately the Hardwick is only as good as the produce it uses.

What sort of food producers do you work with?
You've got people like Phil Jones, our local fruit and veg dealer. He doesn't just buy from the market, he grows stuff himself. People like him are massive because I'll say to him: "Right, what's good?" They are directly influencing our menu. We get fantastic strawberries from Pasquale Lenza at Tredillion Fruit Farm, who is in his 80s now and still so dedicated. All our cheeses are local and mostly Welsh. Our goat's milk cheese comes from Abergavenny Fine Foods, there's beautiful Hafod organic cheddar, Caerphilly, Perl Wen.

Our beef comes from HJ Edwards butcher's in Abergavenny, we get slow-matured Welsh black mountain sheep from Pen-y-Wyrlod and charcuterie from Trealy Farm in Monmouthshire. Another great one is Ancre Hill Wines, who won an award for the world's best sparkling wine a few years ago – and Alex Gooch at Hay-on-Wye makes the best sourdough in the world according to the World Bread Awards.

People might say our food's amazing but at the end of the day I can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I am showing a lot of love and respect to a product that needs very little doing to it. It doesn't need to be turned inside out and that's not my style anyway. Yes, it's got to look good enough to eat but the taste has to be amazing.

07—

The Hardwick
Stephen Terry

What was the reaction when you represented Wales on Great British Menu?
I didn't realise the enormity of it on my first outing in 2008, when I was lucky enough to cook the fish dish in the final – Welsh salmon three ways with crab fritters and cockle "popcorn". It made a massive difference to the way people saw the Hardwick and hopefully helped to raise the profile of Welsh cooking. With the likes of Bryan Webb at Tyddyn Llan, Will Holland at Coast and Bryn Williams at Porth Eirias, the reputation of Welsh chefs is growing all the time.

How would you define Welsh food culture?
Apart from a handful of traditional staple dishes like cawl or bara brith, Wales is all about the quality of the ingredients – and we are spoilt for choice. I like to be an ambassador for that, talking about wonderful things like Welsh cheese and lamb. Why wouldn't I? I live and breathe it.

It's important to make sure all these producers get the credit they deserve. Here at the Hardwick we make sure the front of house staff know about the provenance of the ingredients and are able to describe them to the customers.

If you were going to cook a meal to showcase the best of Welsh produce, what would it be?
I've already done it! In 2014 I was asked to design the menu for the Nato Summit at Celtic Manor Resort attended by 60 world leaders including Barack Obama. We started with hot and cold smoked salmon from Black Mountain Smokery in Crickhowell and Cardigan Bay crab. The main course was roast saddle of Brecon Beacons lamb with Welsh new potatoes and Wye Valley asparagus followed by Welsh fruit summer pudding with Neal's Yard Creamery crème fraîche.

I honestly believe that what we're doing in Wales at the moment is as good as anywhere in the world and this was a great opportunity to prove it.

How do you create a sense of place inside the Hardwick?
The bedrooms and the restaurant echo the philosophy of the kitchen in that we try to give a real flavour of the local area. We bought the wooden tables out of a barn in Pandy, the leather banquettes were made up the road by Lyn Morgan Furnishings. One big painting on the wall is from Carmarthen, a lobster sculpture is from a gallery in St Davids, we have originals by local artist David Day of Usk, Crickhowell and Big Pit. Some of the decorative wood in the restaurant was rescued from the river near where I live. The wooden cladding on the bar counter is made from reclaimed floorboards from a demolished country house. There are settles from a pub in Abergavenny, local church pews, lamps from Abertillery, a sewing machine that we found in the attic. Everything tells a story.

Inside the bedrooms we wanted a feeling of comfortable quality, nothing too ostentatious, with North Wales slate from Inigo Jones, throws and pillows by Melin Tregwynt, the furniture and lighting by a wonderful local shop called Homes of Elegance. I love interior design and we pay as much attention to the surroundings as we do to how our food looks on the plate.

After all this time, do you feel Welsh?
I've never felt more at home than I do here in Wales. My wife and children are Welsh, I even support Wales when they play England in rugby or football. I feel much more part of a community – I love the conversations, learning about the culture. I know much more about Wales than I ever did about where I grew up in Bedfordshire.

When I left the Walnut Tree, a lot of my friends from London just expected me to go back there. One of them happened to call me while I was on top of Sugar Loaf mountain with my dog and I said: "You want to see where I live and where I am sitting right now. No, I'm good, thanks."

Pob lwc.
All the best.