

 CASE STUDY

Waterside Country Barn

An exclusive Somerset wedding venue nestled in scenic tranquillity

WWW.MURRAYFREESTONE.COM



Georgia and Alexander Venn's fledgling wedding and events business comprises a beautiful barn and four unique glamping spaces, hand built by Alexander. Offering the ultimate in flexibility, the venue is also host to yoga retreats and there are plans for a wellness festival. We talk to Georgia.

When did you start your venue business and what is its history?

My husband Alexander grew up here at Mill House. It's such a beautiful, secluded, tranquil spot and he was adamant he wanted a big white wedding here on the farm (cue Groomzilla!). So, after a beautiful proposal on the cliffs of Mawgan Porth in Cornwall, I began planning our wedding to take place the following year in September 2015.

I'd been working as a sales, marketing and events manager for years in the hospitality industry, working with top chefs across the UK. This enabled us to have Cornwall's first ever Michelin starred chef, Kevin Viner, provide our wedding breakfast. We had a fun-filled wedding reception in a large marquee here on the farm.

I'd enjoyed planning our wedding so much and the comments from all our guests confirmed that this gut instinct of what we should be doing here was right! It seemed all my past working history was leading up to doing this, and along with Alexander's vision and building skills, it was the perfect mix!

Alexander and his team at Outbuild, which included his brother Cameron, began building the barn in 2019. After a lot of hard work, blood, sweat and tears, we saw our planning permission finally granted to use our beautiful new barn for events in 2020.

Our vision had become a reality and, after hosting a few weddings for family and friends, we were ready to share this magical space and create blissful memories for more couples choosing to spend their wedding day here at Waterside Country Barn.

Tell us about your location and site

When standing at the venue listening to the sounds of birdsong, the babbling river surrounding the venue field, and taking in the views of the Blackdown and Quantock hills, you wouldn't believe it's just a five minute drive from junction 26 of the M5! Especially with the local wildlife buzzing around, including the pair of serene swans that glide across the lake.

The wedding venue site itself is very unique. The whole field Waterside Country Barn is set on is part of a parcel of land surrounded by the river Tone. The lake in the centre has an island in the middle so is actually an island within an island!

From the moment I moved to the farm, a year after meeting Alexander, I knew that this parcel of land was special. Whenever I was feeling overwhelmed with my high-pressure job, I would start the day walking around that field, which always made me feel better – it really is a magical place.



WWW.MURRAYPRESTONE.COM

Any challenges the site presents for a function venue?

Weather can be a challenge, the gazebo by the lake is the perfect spot for a celebrant-led ceremony, but we can dress up the barn for the ceremony instead if needed.

We hosted a wedding last week, and the forecast was thunderstorms – starting right at the time the ceremony was due to take place next to the lake! 30 minutes prior to the ceremony, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. The groom and Alexander made the call to attempt the ceremony out by the lake and we were able to get everything

set up at the last minute for the couple to have their dream outdoor ceremony. It was even more magical as it was so unexpected

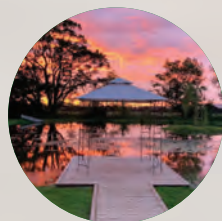
that they were going to be able to have it outside.

What facilities for outdoor functions do you offer?

As well as the gazebo on the decking overlooking the lake, we also have ample space for the hire of additional structures opposite the barn if required.

The barn has been cleverly built with removable sides, which enables the whole side of the building alongside the lake to be removed for that 'outside-indoors' experience.

We have four glamping accommodation units onsite, all built by Alexander and his team at Outbuild. They are Riverside Retreat, Lakeside Lodge, Countryside Cabin and Sunset Shepherds Hut – the perfect accommodation for the



“ALL OF THE GLAMPING UNITS ARE INCREDIBLY POPULAR ALL YEAR ROUND, AVAILABLE TO BOOK THROUGH AIRBNB”

bride and groom on the night of their wedding, complete with Mr and Mrs robes, a rose petal decorated bed and a bottle of cold bubbly to enjoy.

All of the glamping units are incredibly popular all year round, available to book through Airbnb. Some have their own little pathways leading down to pebble beaches alongside the river Tone. Guests return time and time again and really enjoy the peace and chance to get back to nature; they love the little touches, like the complimentary marshmallows to toast on their own private firepit.

What services do you offer?

Our accommodation units can be booked separately or all together, perfect for wedding and group getaways prior to an event. The





bride and groom from last week's wedding are planning on booking out the accommodation units for themselves and their friends to celebrate their wedding anniversary next year!

We also run yoga retreats, with our last one being a stand up paddleboard (SUP) yoga day here on the lake – something that's been incredibly well received.

Waterside Country Barn is the perfect place to celebrate wedding blessings and receptions, vow renewals, parties, and to participate in wellbeing retreats and functions. We have two main wedding packages, one with and one without catering. Both can be flexible and bespoke, depending on the couple's requirements. We also have the flexibility of couples being able to choose anywhere on the site to hold their blessing.

We have an array of outdoor lawn games, including giant Jenga and croquet to keep guests of all ages occupied and we set up hay bale seating around a large Indian kadai firepit so people can keep warm whilst watching the amazing sunsets we get here.

I offer event planning services and work closely with the couple or client and their suppliers to ensure everything runs smoothly.

Describe how you researched and sourced your structures

Outbuild, Alexander's business, is responsible for building the beautiful structure that is Waterside Country Barn. Alexander has a real eye for detail and is a complete perfectionist. This is Al's everyday

“WE HAVE AN ARRAY OF OUTDOOR LAWN GAMES, INCLUDING GIANT JENGA AND CROQUET TO KEEP GUESTS OF ALL AGES OCCUPIED”



job in between getting involved in the set up and breakdown of events.

How do you work with your customers to make their event unique?

I meet with the couple or client several times leading up to the big day. I listen to their vision and offer any ideas they may not have thought about that fit in with their theme. I like to understand what makes them tick, hobbies etc. that can be incorporated to make their day as personal and memorable as possible. I always do my own research to ensure they're getting the best deals and quality of service possible with any outside suppliers.

How do you publicise yourself?

We've been lucky so far – word of mouth has been our main source of bookings to date. We've invested in a new website this year and have set up social media pages. A goal this autumn/winter is to do some up to date training and utilise our online presence more.

How would you describe your style or unique selling point?

Versatile; we've had some very different events this year, from a classic white wedding to an all-out festival theme, and both work amazingly well at Waterside Country Barn. The space is like no other locally; the views, the setting and the packages and flexibility offered is totally unique.

What challenges have you faced historically?

Well... Our first official year was 2020! So, despite the obvious (lack

of bookings and revenue), I think that in some ways we were in a blessed position. I had just had my own little lockdown baby, so the pause on work enabled me to be a full time Mumma for longer. It was also a blessing that we only had three weddings to postpone – I was really glad as we were able to offer those couples a huge choice of dates to move to. Every cloud!

How has Covid-19 impacted you?

Covid-19 undoubtedly impacted our bookings. We have had a very minimal first year. Instead of feeling frustrated with having our hands tied, I used the time to perfect our offering and spent time building content for a new website. I did a lot of research and some online training.

We had one Covid restricted wedding in 2020 – my sister in-law's. Other than that, our first season kicked off just as the restrictions were lifted in July. The venue is super ventilated with very large double doors and windows, removable sides and a high ceiling, which puts people at ease in these strange times.

How large is your team – any special people you'd like to mention?

We're primarily a husband and wife team and hire people in as and when we need them for events. Our families have been an absolute godsend in the set up and maintenance of the business.

My father in-law Barry, who's seen his family home where he grew up change so much over the years, has always supported the business plan and works tirelessly



to keep the whole venue grounds looking perfect. My father Rob has helped with all sorts of jobs from varnishing windows, painting, shop runs, as well as being our main source of childcare throughout the pandemic! Both our mothers have also helped with childcare and my mother-in-law has got stuck in helping on events too!

We work closely with local small businesses such as the butcher Tom, located two miles from us, who offers the tastiest hog roast ever! Rob at Mid Somerset Catering Hire goes above and beyond to ensure we have what we need for each event and Jon at Jon Peters Photography has worked with us from the beginning, capturing artistic shots of the venue during weddings, parties and yoga days, which have all helped with our marketing. Joe at Bright Blue Light is incredibly helpful, knowledgeable and transforms the venue into a magical space after dark.

Have you worked with any industry bodies or consultants?

I joined Faye Cornhill’s Wedding Business Club, which I’ve found to be a useful platform for support and training. I also listen to a few different podcasts for inspiration and keep up to date with latest wedding industry news.

What are your plans for next season?

To continue to achieve the highest standards for our brides and grooms, and ensure their dreams are fully made into reality! Happy brides, grooms and guests is the most important goal. I’m also planning a wellness festival, which I’m very excited about, along with more yoga and SUP yoga retreat events for 2022.

Describe your average day mid-season

That’s a very difficult question to answer – each day is so incredibly different and varies hugely depending on the event. An average non-event day would include visits to the wholesalers, several calls and emails with suppliers, emails and calls with brides and grooms/ event attendees and setting up/ breaking down the venue ready for the next event. It could also include prepping food for an event.



What do you enjoy about the business and why?

For the wedding side of the business, I would say it would be making dreams a reality and having played a part in creating the most special day of people’s lives! For the yoga retreats and glamping accommodation, I really enjoy seeing how relaxed and happy people look when they leave.

What other outdoor hospitality sectors do you operate in?

We offer glamping, which integrates well with weddings/events. The whole site is offered as a weekend package for couples/clients, allowing them to extend their celebrations.

As mentioned, we offer yoga/ wellbeing retreats and SUP yoga on the lake. I’m also planning a wellbeing festival for next year – watch this space!

What are you most proud of?

The feedback we get, not just from brides and grooms and their guests, but also from guests of the glamping units and the yoga retreat days. Testimonials like these make my day:

“Hi all, my family have just celebrated the wedding of my daughter at this wonderful venue. Not only is it in a beautiful setting, its main and mighty asset is its owners! Help and understanding in abundance. They help you make your dreams come true. I cannot praise them enough for the day they helped us create. Thank you from the bottom of my family’s hearts – you are the best. When the occasion arises, we will be back. Till then I wish you all the success that you rightly deserve.”

“A wonderful yoga retreat hosted by Georgia in a location



“...I WOULD SAY IT WOULD BE MAKING DREAMS A REALITY AND HAVING PLAYED A PART IN CREATING THE MOST SPECIAL DAY OF PEOPLE’S LIVES!”

that provides calm and tranquillity. Practising yoga with views of the lake and serene swans floating past was a magical experience, not to mention the amazing, delicious home cooked vegetarian meal – such a lovely day to treat my body and mind. I floated all the way home!”

What advice could you give to someone coming into the industry?

Join a group, like the Wedding Business Club, or partner up with another venue that’s not local to you (so they don’t see you as competition) and ask them for advice. Don’t try to do everything yourself, know your weaknesses and delegate where necessary. Be open to always learning and do lots of research, keeping ahead of new trends.

 ADDRESS BOOK

OUTDOOR STRUCTURES

Outbuild – www.outbuild.co.uk

FURNITURE

Mid Somerset Catering Hire – www.midsomersetcateringhire.co.uk

LIGHTING

Bright Blue Light – www.brightbluelight.com

PHOTOGRAPHY

Jon Peters Photography- www.jonpetersphotography.co.uk

CATERING

Barefoot Stone Baked Pizza – www.barefootstonebakedpizza.co.uk
Bishops Hull Stores Butchers – 01823 337497

ADVICE

Wedding Business Club – www.fayecornhillcoaching.co.uk

INSURANCE

NFU Mutual – www.nfumutual.co.uk

DETAILS

**Waterside Country Barn, Mill House
Bradford on Tone, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1EP**

**01823 461817 / 07597 707505
www.watersidecountrybarn.com**