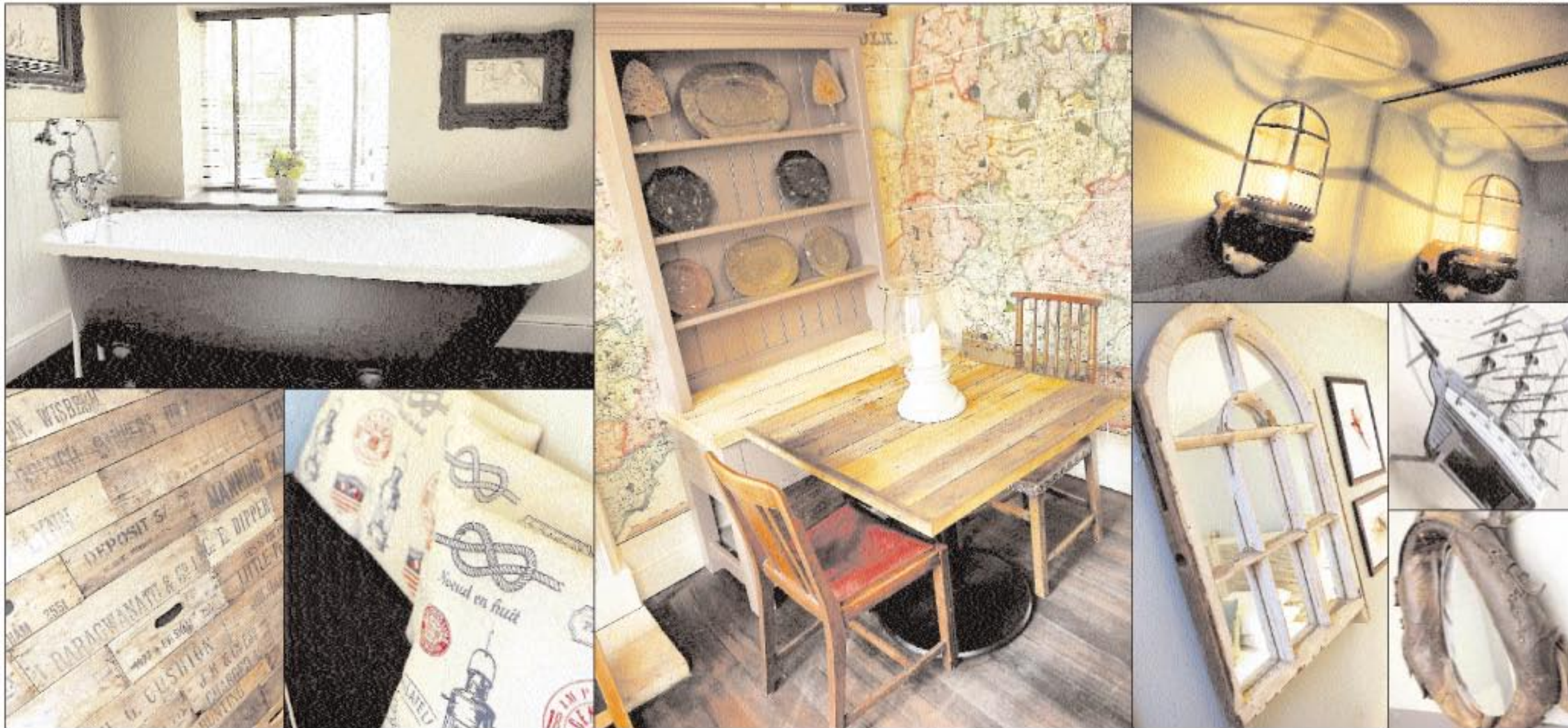


**Home front:** The 400-year-old Ship Hotel at Brancaster was something of a blank canvas for chef Chris

Coubrough as he set out to completely renovate it

Pictures MATTHEWUSHER



**Expert view**

Crispin Lambert says we can draw lessons from southern Europe in how to create some space.

Every now and again I drive past one of those stuccoed Spanish style hacienda type houses set incongruously in the British landscape. You may know the sort of thing... white walls with black scrolled bars on the windows, glazed roof tiles, perhaps a covered veranda or balconies at first floor, ceramic floor tiles and possibly a split level living room. A theatrical fantasy inspired by a holiday dream, a folly for those lucky enough to holiday in Spain in the 1970s.

This type of house may appeal to your sense of imagination and fun and transport you to another climate and place, but I would argue it does not provide any lasting lessons in how to create a more successful living environment. Now some serious lessons are being taken from the city architecture of southern Europe. In recent years London architect Peter Barber has worked with a close, dense urban housing style by layering courtyard spaces through a series of interlocking blocks. His earlier work created a whole quarter at Dorrybrook in London. The tumbling cascading forms in brilliant white evokes a distinctively North African or Spanish feel.

In the latest scheme in Dagenham, pictured, a narrow site only eight metres wide and bounded by a tall bingo hall on one side has been transformed into a terrace of 14 courtyard houses. Each one looks into its own courtyard, as well as having a view towards the road. The living accommodation is on the first floor with a terrace and small balcony. The bedrooms are on the ground floor with a far more private view into the enclosed yard. The houses are very compact, as you would expect from a social housing project, but the creation of useful private space in such a limited area is very successfully done.



There is no reason why the principles established here could not be used on larger private housing to good effect.

The reason behind these clear sculptural forms is the creation of single, or dual aspect rooms, that look out into their own outside space or rather outside rooms. The aim of the design is to provide a dense urban environment with a good quality of private space and with a strong sense of belonging to the immediate neighbourhood for those living there.

The interlocking blocks allow this to happen by creating the blank boundary walls necessary to create these outside rooms. These walls do not contain the spaces completely and there is usually a long view as well. The key to maintaining good, bright light to rooms in such a compact design is through the use of white external walls which reflect much more light into the rooms.

I believe these new projects will stand the test of time and take a valuable lesson from the hotter southern climes.

Crispin Lambert is a practising architect in Norfolk involved in a wide range of projects in the residential, commercial and community fields across the eastern area. Contact him on 01508 522952 or e-mail design@ambertbardsleyreeve.co.uk Website: www.lambertbardsleyreeve.co.uk

# Ship sets sail in a brand new direction

Chef Chris Coubrough has set sail in another Norfolk venture and has completely renovated The Ship Hotel at Brancaster. His fourth business in the county, it has been given similar interior treatment as The Kings Head, at Letheringsett, The Crown Inn, at East Rudham, and the Crown Hotel, at Wells-next-the-Sea.

"I wanted to open somewhere that was out in this direction and The Ship was the right thing at the right time," he said.

"In many ways it was a blank canvas. We had the opportunity to really do it up and to change it into something very different."

The building itself, which has a Grade II listed frontage, is about 400 years old, explained Chris. According to local folklore Admiral Lord Nelson's nanny stayed here.

"It was built as an inn and has been all sorts of things as well including a Post Office, surgery and even a mortuary," he said.

"When we were working on the building we discovered the cellar below where they used to store the bodies until the county coroner was able to get here from King's Lynn."

Today The Ship has certainly moved away from its past in many

**Abigail Saltmarsh**



ways but Chris was keen to retain a strong element of its history in its design and décor.

Walls are festooned with pictures by local photographers of Brancaster scenes, including some by Sir Geoffrey Cory-Wright. One of these is an old cigarette advert that shows Sir Geoffrey himself by the model of the ship outside the hotel.

Throughout the building are interesting marine and agricultural artefacts. Some have been worked into walls, doors and even mirrors while others are displayed on shelves or windowsills.

**Create the look**

- For more information on The Ship Hotel call 01485 210333 or visit [www.flyingwinns.co.uk](http://www.flyingwinns.co.uk) or [www.shiphotelnorfolk.co.uk](http://www.shiphotelnorfolk.co.uk)
- Map wallpaper came from Stanfords Map Shop, in Covent Garden. For more information call 0207 6361321 or visit [www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

- Many of the artefacts in the hotel were bought by Chris at car boot sales or from reclamation yards.
- The cider vat came from [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)
- The sack fabric came from J Spalding and Son, of Fakenham. For more information call 01328 862194.



"It is eclectic but people really enjoy these things," said Chris, who has used heritage plants in the décor.

The main bar area was completely opened up by Chris and now offers open space through to the dining areas. Off to one side is The Map Room, where those visiting can spend hours spotting their Norfolk homes and favourite haunts on the wallpaper.

"The tables in this room were made from an old cider vat that we bought from ebay," he said. "It looked grubby but when it was cleaned up you could see the beautiful 200 to 300-year-

old English oak underneath.

Through in the bar, lights have been made from pieces of driftwood, sack fabric has been used in upholstery and wooden vegetable boxes have been broken up to create a wall adorned with old Norfolk names.

"This is an area that is very rich in its agricultural heritage and we wanted to acknowledge that," said Chris, who has had a washroom hand-basin made from an old animal trough, door handles created from old dibbers once used in the sowing of seed, and a mirror set into an old yoke.

