



What became of the likely lads?

The hoteliers: Band members Carl Barât, Pete Doherty, John Hassall and Gary Powell. Left, Margate seafront and, right, their arty guesthouse

ROCK 'N' ROLL ENFANTS TERRIBLES THE LIBERTINES HAVE OPENED A SEASIDE HOTEL IN MARGATE WITH A SUITABLY RAKISH FEEL, DISCOVERS **LAURA MILLAR**

YEAH, Pete's really into antiques, is not a statement I ever thought I'd hear but it is 2020, after all, so all bets are off. It's uttered by Beca, the manager of The Albion Rooms, as she shows me into my room, one of just seven in a fabulously tarted-up, five-storey Victorian townhouse in Cliftonville, Margate.

It transpires that Pete Doherty, The Libertines' most unpredictable member, picked up the elaborate, wrought-iron bedframe at a flea market. The rest of the room, named after poet Emily Dickinson, is composed of similar finds: a Chinese-laquered coffee table, vintage wallpaper and leopard-print cushions everywhere.

The first hints that this isn't your usual seaside establishment are its coal-black facade, a sign advertising the hotel's louche basement bar, The Waste Land (TS Eliot wrote the poem nearby in 1922), and its name emblazoned in red neon.

Inside, the feel is of the home of an eccentric aunt whose live-in goth nephew has a fascination with crucifixes, ravens and taxidermy. That's not to say it's not stylish - there's some spectacular artwork, leather and velvet furniture, gilt mirrors, patterned floor tiles and

the occasional in-joke such as the word 'death' painted across a set of steps (referencing The Libertines' single, Death On The Stairs).

So what on earth prompted one of the music industry's most notorious acts to take up the more genteel art of hospitality?

'The idea was to invest in our own recording studio,' co-frontman Carl Barât tells me.



Top taste: Chef Joe Hill



'We also wanted a place that embodied the whole band, given we live in three different countries.'

They chose Margate as that's where Pete lives, and because their money would go a lot further.

'Margate's undergoing a bit of a renaissance,' he says. 'A lot of creative people have moved here from London and are doing their thing where it's much cheaper.'

They found the building, formerly a run-down guesthouse - 'sticky carpets, dodgy hot tubs, the works' - in 2017 and spent the last three years doing it up. 'We all got involved,' explains Barât, 'whether it was knocking down walls, donating a lamp (that was bass player John Hassall's massive contribution) or designing the studio.'

Having stayed in so many over his years of touring, what does Barât think makes a good hotel, then?

'Twenty-four-hour service!' he enthuses. 'Plus, big, good-quality beds, art everywhere and absolutely exquisite food.'

On the latter, they have scored high with the appointment of chef Joe Hill, who has worked with industry leaders Gordon Ramsay and Tom Aikens.

Still, it's almost a surprise to find that the hotel offers a delicious, high-end tasting menu with dishes such as scallops with squid-ink rice, and Whitstable oysters.

Prompted by the lack of televisions in the rooms - Beca tells me it's because 'we hope to entertain you in other ways', referring to the hotel's informal programme of arts from poetry readings to exhibitions - I ask Barât if he's ever thrown one out of a window.

'No!' he laughs, 'but I once got really angry at [Liverpool band] The Bandits for pushing a TV out of a ground-floor window in a Travelodge, preventing me from watching Countdown. That was my only respite on tour.'

Now, that's rock and roll!

Rooms from £115pn including breakfast; tasting menu £50pp, thealbionrooms.live. Trains go from London St Pancras to Margate, southeasternrailway.co.uk



Celebrity style: The bar at The Albion Rooms

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