# Former Dubai residents turn 16th-century castle into boutique B&B



In a remarkable turn of events, former Dubai residents Simon Hunt and Stef Burgon have transformed a 16th-century Scottish castle into a boutique B&B following their purchase of Kilmartin Castle in 2014. This historic property, built in 1550 during the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots, was acquired by the couple for £331,780—a sum they deemed cost-effective compared to exorbitant central London parking prices.

The idea of owning a castle began as a whimsical dream after they stumbled upon a captivating article highlighting the affordability of such properties against the backdrop of London's soaring property market. The couple, both in their early forties, had previously resided in Dubai for over a decade, where they held careers that, despite being lucrative, lacked the fulfilment they desired. Their search for a more meaningful life prompted them to consider Kilmartin Castle, situated approximately a two-hour drive from Glasgow.

Stef, 45, described the purchasing journey, revealing that they submitted a lower sealed bid against the asking price of £375,000, combined with a heartfelt letter detailing their aspirations for the castle. Their emotions resonated with the sellers, who too had a fond history with the property, leading to a successful acquisition despite their offer not being the highest.

The couple, having sold an Australian property for the venture, realised their budget of £80,000 for renovations would not suffice, a lesson they learned as they worked to transform the castle into their vision of 'rustic-luxe'. Initial renovations were minimal, allowing the space to be rented out while they planned extensive improvements.

In 2018, after a two-year hiatus spent married, the couple embarked on a European road trip to antique fairs, gathering unique decor and furnishings for the castle. They took on multiple roles during the renovation process—Simon's background as a creative director aided in design, while they both engaged in hands-on work such as digging up flagstones and installing underfloor heating.

The castle boasts an array of enticing features, including a wild swimming pool, organic gardens, patio spaces equipped for outdoor gatherings, and reading nooks with views over the glen. Simon noted, "We wanted something exciting and different everywhere you look," a goal evidently achieved through thoughtful design and curation.

In October 2019, Kilmartin Castle opened its doors as a boutique B&B, offering accommodation for up to ten guests. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic shifted their operational approach, with growing interest in private rentals as people sought secluded getaway options.

Despite initial concerns over the viability of their castle accommodation, the pair received accolades, including being named by The New York Times as the fourth-best place to visit globally. Their property also earned the title of 'Holiday Home of the Year' on Vrbo, reflecting its appeal through superior amenities and positive reviews.

Recently, the couple returned to Dubai for a brief visit to reconnect with old friends. Reflecting on their past life, Simon remarked, "There’s not enough money in the world to pay me to go back to my old life," highlighting their satisfaction with the current direction of their lives.

Now, with new opportunities to engage with guests, the castle serves as a unique and artistic retreat, attracting visitors keen to experience a slice of Scotland’s rich history, coupled with modern comforts and a personal touch in its décor and hospitality.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys24hhUiaC0> - This YouTube video provides information about Kilmartin Castle, including its history and architectural features, corroborating its status as a 16th-century Z-plan tower house.
* <https://www.celticcastles.com/articles/kilmartin-castle-restoration/> - This article details the restoration of Kilmartin Castle by Stef Burgon and Simon Hunt, highlighting their efforts to preserve its historic charm while modernizing it for guests.
* <https://www.kilmartincastle.com/> - The official website of Kilmartin Castle offers insights into its luxurious accommodations and amenities, supporting its reputation as a boutique B&B.
* <https://www.thecastlesofscotland.co.uk/the-best-castles/other-articles/kilmartin-castle/> - This webpage provides historical context and architectural details about Kilmartin Castle, including its past ownership and current status as a restored residence.
* <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/kilmartin-glen/> - This webpage from Historic Environment Scotland offers information about Kilmartin Glen, highlighting its rich cultural and historical significance, which complements the appeal of Kilmartin Castle.