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# Explore Contemporary Art in Cornwall

The rugged southern tip of England is a creative hive, with world-class installations, design-minded new hotels, and imaginative restaurants.

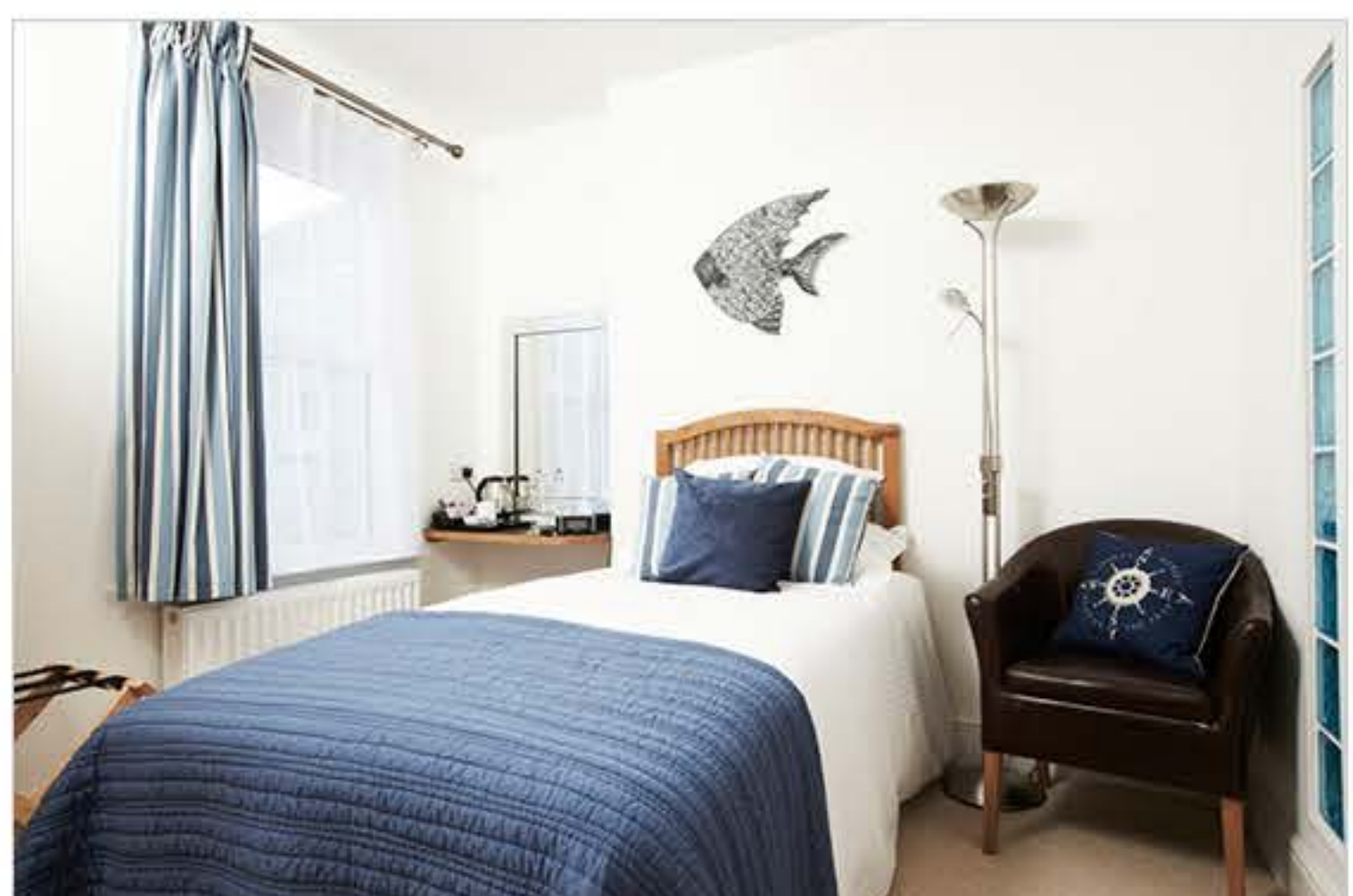
By Rebecca Dalzell Published Sep 30, 2015



(Photo: Franz-Marc Frei, Corbis)

## Where to Stay

Look out on the turquoise waters of Porthmeor Beach from your window at **West by Five** (from \$173), a four-room Edwardian guesthouse in the storied artist haven of St Ives. Crisp nautical furnishings and welcoming hosts make it a relaxing retreat after a day visiting the Barbara Hepworth museum or **Tate St Ives**, or walking the dramatic South West Coast Path. Owners Neil and Sheila Gribbin serve impressive homemade breakfasts—think smoked haddock and poached egg—in a sunny dining room and sometimes surprise guests with homemade cookies for tea.



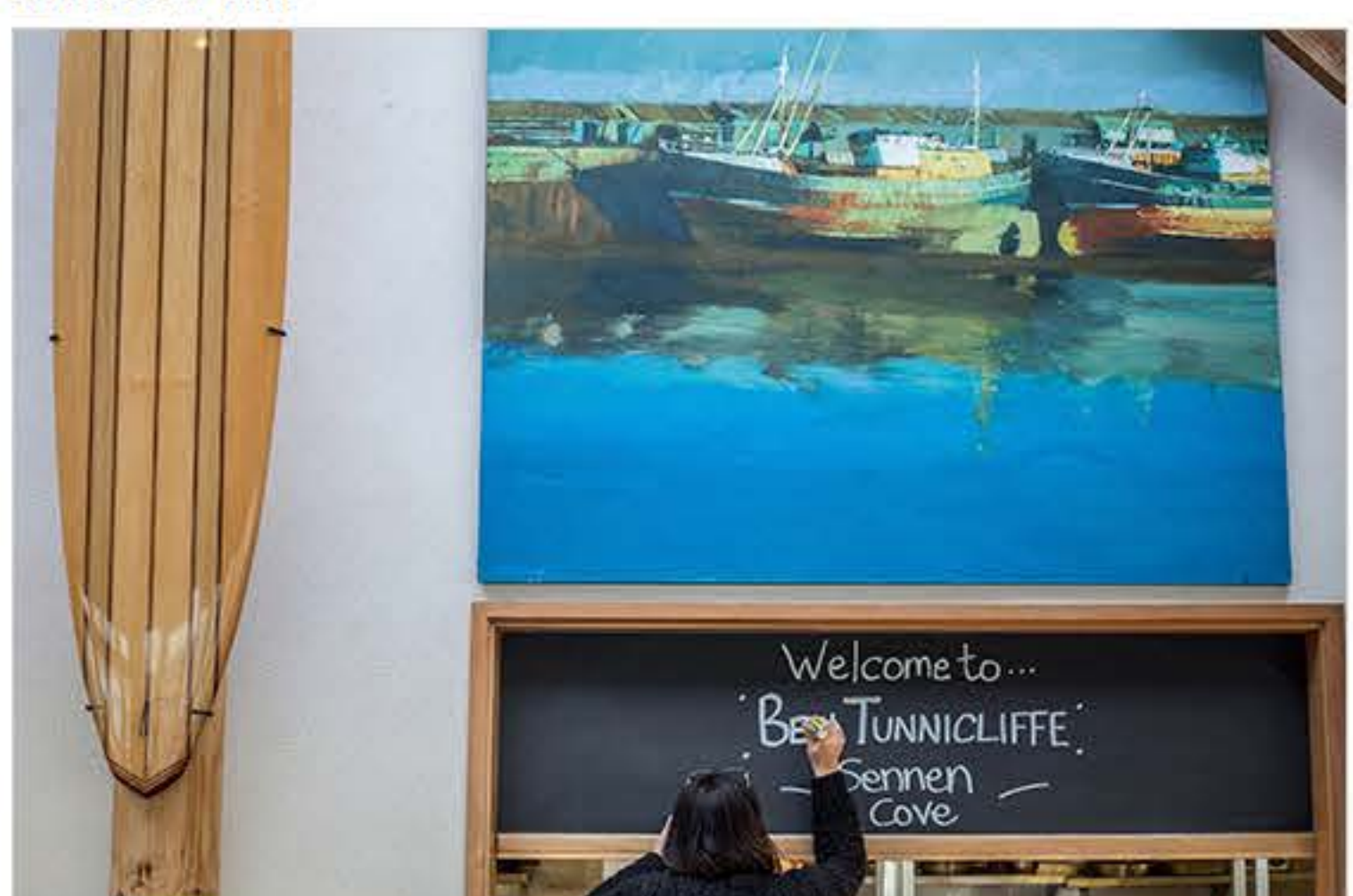
Nautical touches enliven the rooms at cozy West by Five.

(Photo: Courtesy of West by Five)

Discover work by Cornish artists on the walls at **Chapel House** (from \$236), a smart Georgian mansion near the Penzance harbor. The six airy guest rooms all have sea views and handmade oak beds, some with exposed pitch-pine beams, fireplaces, or egg-shaped Cabuchon baths. Reserve in advance for weekend suppers, which serve seasonal dishes like spicy local crab cakes, or just graze on homemade cakes in the kitchen at teatime. Common areas are filled with antique bookcases, mid-century-modern chairs, and paintings by students at the Newlyn School of Art, which curates a small gallery in the entrance hall.

Take in sweeping views of Mount's Bay from the deck at **the Godolphin Arms** (from \$150), a ten-room hotel and restaurant in the ancient market town of Marazion. A recent renovation completely updated the 19th-century building, adding a two-story glass extension to the dining room and creating stylish sitting areas with teal sofas and recycled-wood paneling. Huge windows look out at St Michael's Mount, a castle in the middle of the bay that you can walk to at low tide.

## Where to Eat



The food is Michelin quality but decidedly unpretentious at Ben Tunncliffe.

(Photo: Courtesy of Ben Tunncliffe Sennen Cove)

Watch fishing boats moor in St Ives harbor from the balcony at **Porthminster Kitchen**, which specializes in the local catch. Sit at the reclaimed-wood bar and sip a local Polgoon organic cider (\$7) while looking at the colorful abstract paintings by hometown artist Anthony Frost on the walls; then taste chef Michael Smith's international spins on regional classics, like mackerel paté served with seaweed soda bread (\$5.50) and fried baby squid stuffed with wild garlic (\$10).

Sample fresh Cornish produce at **the Shore Restaurant**, where most ingredients travel fewer than 20 miles to reach its tables in Penzance. The pork tenderloin with crispy pig's head (\$28) comes from a family farm in Redruth and fish like steamed plaice (\$28) is caught on day boats in neighboring Newlyn. After running Michelin-starred kitchens, owner Bruce Rennie opened this upscale neighborhood restaurant in July 2015 and handles nearly every detail himself: He designed the dining room, grows the vegetables in his garden, bakes the bread, preps, cooks, and greets (or sometimes serves) guests. Be sure to book ahead: It has strong word-of-mouth and only 30 seats.

Catch spectacular sunsets through the floor-to-ceiling windows at **Ben Tunncliffe**, a spacious beachside eatery at Sennen Cove, in the far southwest. Though he's won a Michelin star, the eponymous chef keeps the vibe relaxed and the menu filled with coastal classics like whole grilled Sennen Cove lobster (\$46) and a ling-fish burger on a buttermilk roll (\$17). But you can still find haute flashes in dishes like seared scallops with cabbage and pancetta (\$14) or chicken-liver parfait (\$10).

## What to Do



Capture the Cornish scenery your own way via a class from the Newlyn School of Art.

(Photo: Courtesy of Newlyn School of Art)

Try to capture the famous Cornish light in a plein air painting course at the **Newlyn School of Art**. Guided by established local artists, you'll take a canvas to hidden coves like Porthgwarra, where granite cliffs tumble into sparkling blue water, or Newlyn harbor, one of the busiest fishing ports in England. Teachers bring a modern outlook to landscape painting, demonstrating both traditional and experimental techniques. Other classes, such as stone-carving and fabric-printing, are held year-round in a Victorian schoolhouse; most last two to seven days (from \$268) and welcome beginners. Opened in 2011, it continues the tradition of the Newlyn School, a group of painters who settled here at the turn of the 20th century; you can see works by Stanhope Forbes and others from the arts colony at **Penlee House** in Penzance (\$7 admission).

Explore Penzance's contemporary art offerings. Visit the 20-acre **Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens** (\$13 admission) to see site-specific works like James Turrell's *Teulwallow Kernow*, an underground chamber that opens to the sky, and David Nash's *Black Mound*, a huddle of charred oak in a field of bluebells. Overlooking Mount's Bay, it feels surprisingly tropical for England, with palm trees, cacti, and bamboo surrounding the art. Since opening in 2012, the garden has continually evolved, adding new and temporary works; upcoming installations include a modernist slate garden by Darren Hawkes. In the center of town, stop by **the Exchange** (\$6 entry), a large gallery that hosts performances, screenings, and community events. Along with its sister location, the Newlyn Art Gallery, the Exchange shows regional and international artists like Lawrence Weiner, Christine Borland, and Sandra Blow; this fall, they'll host a joint retrospective of British abstract artist Terry Frost, curated by Tate St Ives.

Stroll around 50 acres of pastures and ancient woodland at **Kestle Barton** (free entry), a restored 15th-century farmstead that became an arts center in 2010. The gallery, in a former barn, hosts four exhibitions from April through October, featuring work by contemporary artists like Andrea Büttner and Roger Ackling. Visitors can also catch an artist talk, hear live music (there's a popular summer solstice brass-band concert in the wildflower meadow), or explore outdoor work like Paul Chaney's *Encampment Supreme*, a temporary pavilion made of bent hazel and post-consumer waste. A public footpath connects the property to nearby Frenchman's Creek and the thatched-roof village of Helford.

## Expert's Tips



The Cornack Theatre's oceanfront setting gives even the grandest opera houses a run for their money.

(Photo: Courtesy of Cornack Theatre)

From *Sam Bassett*, a painter in St Ives whose family has been in Cornwall since 1680.

There is a feeling of freedom here, something a bit rough around the edges, especially the farther west you go. I grew up in Carbis Bay, a mile outside of St Ives, and used to hang out on the headland known as **Hawkes Point**, on the coastal path from Lelant to St Ives. It has a fantastic vista and is a great little spot for jumping off the rocks into the sea.

**Millennium** gallery in St Ives shows a great selection of established and emerging artists. Joseph Clarke, the director, is passionate about the artists he represents. The changing gallery program is exciting and fresh, allowing artists to be ambitious and experimental.

I work in the Porthmeor Studios, which look out over Porthmeor, which means "large cove" in Cornish. If you are keen to learn to surf, there is a company by the lifeguard hut there called **St Ives Surf School**, run by a bunch of really nice guys. They offer lessons at Porthmeor beach, which picks up some good surf. You can also find great waves across the bay at Godrevy beach in Gwithian.

Built into the cliffs in Porthcurno, the **Minack Theatre** has an epic setting and is surrounded by tropical gardens. It puts on fantastic shows, sometimes starring members of Cornwall's famous Kneehigh company, but it can be difficult to keep your eye on the play when dolphins swim behind the stage.

I try and get my books from an independent store in Penzance called **the Edge of the World Book Shop**. I collect nicely illustrated and locally made books, which you can find there. Penzance has many interesting little corners like this, worth a dig and a delve!

One of my favorite walks is from St Ives out to Zennor, which is about two hours. At the end you get to **the Timners Arms**, a really nice pub with low ceilings and dim light. It's been around since 1271. If it's raining they get the fire blazing or if it's hot, the garden is a sun trap and has great views over fields to the sea. They do some nice gins, local ales, and great food.

## Resources

Figure out travel logistics, find local attractions, and get ideas at **Visit Cornwall**, the area's official tourism site.

Search cultural events by keyword or location at **What's on Cornwall**, whose exhaustive listings cover exhibitions, screenings, and festivals.

Browse a directory of museums, galleries, and exhibitions in the region on the artist-oriented **Visual Arts South West**, part of a national group of creative professionals.

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