



In conversation with  
***Berkeley Inns***





There's not much greater than the great outdoors - except of course a pub beer garden. What's greater still is a beer garden that has been shortlisted for 'Best Pub Garden' at the Great British Pub Awards.

Finalists in the 2021 awards included the rapidly expanding, Berkeley Inns Group, based across Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

Head of PR & Communications from the group, Dawn-Elizabeth Rudd spoke to PPL PRS to share more about the best ways to enhance your outdoor area this summer - including how using music can help to create a space your customers enjoy.



# Since launching, The Berkeley Inns group has gone from strength to strength but where did it all start?

Berkeley Inns Group began with a desire to breathe life back into local pubs that were under performing and under invested in key locations within Derbyshire and more recently Staffordshire.

The group was formed in 2015 by Howard Thacker and a couple of close friends. Howard had returned from 10 years overseas and was sad to see the further decline of pubs locally and it was obvious that there was a strong demand for a quality food and drink offer in well-appointed venues and this presented a significant business opportunity and one generally welcomed in the local communities.

We now cover casual fine dining, high end gastro, a boutique hotel and great places for quality everyday enjoyment and we are committed to continuing our ambitious and exciting journey into 2023.



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## Part of your identity is redeveloping unloved pubs. How important is this to the local community and the overall feel of each establishment?

Berkeley Inns is mindful of the local community and is all about creating unique and special high-quality venues.

The properties have all undergone fairly extensive and sympathetic renovations which have been well received within the community.

We have been delighted with their support from the outset and were determined to retain the traditional features of the buildings and structures wherever possible.

However, it has been necessary to adapt to modern standards and requirements. Customer feedback has been fabulous over the years.



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# Speaking of communities, you regularly host live music and events. How important are these for creating the right atmosphere and bringing people together?

Our live music programmes have been especially popular over the years, and it is wonderful to be able to finally return to providing live events after pandemic restrictions were lifted.

Our customers are at the heart of everything that we do, and it is wonderful to witness the conviviality of the locals and visitors alike soaking up the atmosphere, exchanging stories, enjoying our mouth-watering food and refreshing array of drinks across all of our venues.

We have always recognised the fundamental importance of music within our venues - it is an essential part of the ambience.



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**Since lockdown, it has probably become even more important to recognise communities and celebrate togetherness. Now that we're getting back to normal, what are your plans for the summer ahead and how will your garden spaces play a part in this?**

Since the introduction of social-distancing measures, we have found an increased requirement for the development of outdoor spaces and having to adapt to a somewhat different way of life.

During the closures we made improvements across all Berkeley Inns sites and utilised this time; consciously investing in extended outside facilities especially. There was a necessity for providing safer dining environments, so we installed a total of 21 first class bespoke garden rooms complete with WiFi, music systems, and heating facilities. We also upgraded all our gardens, garden furniture, and installed various stretch tents and gazebos.

We have created three outside bars that serve the terraces and gardens. Our outside spaces are often extremely busy, which is great to see. All these investments have created valuable assets and it is a pleasure to see our customers enjoying them all year round.

**As a group, the Berkeley Inns all have a similar look and feel inside, but is this the same with the gardens? Is there a particular favourite?**

Our branding is very distinctive; but each establishment has its own completely unique identity and character; without losing the essence of the traditional British pub.

At The Cow, our award winning luxury boutique inn, for example, we have recently installed an orangery that looks directly out onto the village green and the rear garden has been designed purposely to provide 3 individual private terraces off the guestrooms which overlook the vegetable gardens; whilst our other venues have extensive gardens bursting with shrubs, flowers and pretty pathways.

The Bluebell our latest to undergo renovations has 7 garden rooms, all feature striking blue canvas panels contrasting with the natural pine structures. They have been quite a talking point locally and it is wonderful to see all our customers enjoying them all year round.



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**There is a big emphasis on the experience when they visit your gardens. How important is music within this and how does it help to creating a space that your customers enjoy?**

Music by it's sheer nature lifts the mood and creates a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Whether it's a quintessential hot summers day bathed in sunshine or thrashing down with biblical rainstorms, our customers can take shelter in their own garden room, as well as within our buildings, overlooking the garden or under any of our structures.

Whatever the weather, the mood is lifted by music, a friendly face with a drink in hand. People, food and music in a traditional country pub, what really could be more pleasurable than that?



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## And what about your staff, how important is the use of music at your pubs to them?

Music has the ability to lift the mood for everyone. It provides atmosphere and improves our staff efficiency without a doubt.

Our staff are here to serve and are passionate about what they do, musical harmony helps to lift the spirits of all our team, whether they are serving or preparing food in the kitchen, the sounds waft through each room creating a good feel factor and sets them in the right mood for work.

Even on a sweltering day when our pubs are packed and our staff are stretched, melodies generate happiness amongst our team and create a wonderful ambience for our customers for them to remember and return to. Music is powerful and promotes energy.




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## **Like all other aspects of the business, much consideration has gone into the gardens. What has influenced the style and design of the outdoor space?**

Our gardens play a pivotal role and on pleasant days provide a fabulous space for our customers to enjoy. There is a great value of being able to look out across connected green spaces and this is proven to be excellent for maintaining our mental health and it has never been more apparent than during the COVID pandemic when we all had time to reassess our lives.

When redesigning the outdoor spaces, by necessity, we were fortunate that all our venues were already situated in beautiful rural locations with super views and landscapes. A great deal of thought and consideration was given to the individual garden spaces, practicalities, and personalities when we set about the redesign. The influences are many, but in the case of the Cock Inn, Howard was very impressed with the gardens at Chateau Pommard in Burgundy and certainly took ideas for the layout from there. Howard works with local companies, Mercaston Tree Company and Talbot Farm Landscapes in the creation of all gardens.



## **You've been shortlisted in other awards too, such as The Publican Awards, what's in the pipeline for the months ahead?**

We have had a tremendous year so far and are incredibly proud of our teams here across Berkeley Inns. We are currently shortlisted in the finals of the Great British Pub Awards in 4 categories; we have just been crowned Pub of the Year in the National Pub and Bar Awards and scooped the prestigious Gold Winner in the Tourism and Good Food Awards 2022.

We have entered the Marketing Derby Food and Drink Awards for 2022 and will also soon be preparing our applications for the Peak District & Derbyshire Tourism Awards 2023 in affiliation with Visit England. Later this year we embark on our series of interviews and awards for the Estrella Top 50 Gastropubs to maintain our listing. We then look forward to the National Publican Awards (the Oscars of the Pub Industry!), where we were a finalist last year and won Best New Site previously. A busy and exciting year ahead, we are tremendously excited about the new chapters which lie ahead for us.



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## Presumably your gardens will always be a big part of your business and brand identity. What are the main benefits of creating an appealing outdoor space, regardless of size or scale?

There is no doubt that the pandemic brought with it many challenges but one of the favourable outcomes was that it made us all adapt and change the way we do things. It made us look at our gardens with a renewed emphasis; looking at what we could do to further enhance and utilise the spaces we had.

We all know the benefits of being outside, but this has not always been easy, practical, or desirable.

We have made significant investments along with radical changes to our landscapes - and are delighted to have some very special and unique dining environments and places for our visitors to sit, eat and drink comfortably in warm and safe havens. The outdoor spaces we now have provide great assets and allow us to increase our dining capacity, whilst still providing an enjoyable and memorable experience for our guests.



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**As a finalist for the Best Pub Garden in 2021, you clearly have a good idea of what makes a great outdoor space, what advice would you give to other businesses when it comes to making the most out of their garden area this summer?**

Listen to your customers, look at your surroundings and what works for your business within the location.

Whatever your budget, if you can provide a convivial garden space with excellent food and drink facilities you are never going to lose.

Collaborating with your local food and drink suppliers is also an excellent way of providing garden events for your local community and this provides excellent revenues for everyone particularly our rural economy.

Look at shelter, accessibility, utilising buildings and outdoor structure... be creative!



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***“Music in pubs and restaurants is a fundamental part of the entertainment experience. Choosing the right background music will help you to create the right atmosphere...”***



## **All of your premises have their own style and quirks. How does music play a part in this and how important is it for your branding and identity?**

Playing music in pubs and restaurants is a fundamental part of the entertainment experience. Choosing the right music helps create the right atmosphere. We are mindful of this with our selections and always listen to feedback from our customers and make changes, if necessary, particularly to volume adjustments.

Whether we host live performances with DJ's or use music segments in our monthly quiz events across our venues or play background music via audio devices we simply choose the appropriate artist and acoustics for the venue dependent on the season and days of the week play a part in this decision.

We spread our live music over the latter part of the week, bank holiday weekends, seasonal festivities along with some sporting events. The Horseshoes for example, could be described as quintessentially English dining. Its understated elegance and sophistication requires a more subtle instrumental genre. It is imperative that it matches the restaurant concept or in the case of using background music, it is important to have decent sound quality. The right combination of decoration, cuisine, and music will achieve the desired result by creating the right atmosphere and mood for our guests.



Whatever the occasion, using music in your outdoor area can help to enhance the atmosphere and make it even better!

These are just some hints and tips to create the perfect space and how using music can help to make the most out of the months ahead. To find out more and try music for yourself, visit [pplprs.co.uk/getyourlicence](https://pplprs.co.uk/getyourlicence)



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