



# Good things come in threes . . .

First The Packhorse, then the Rupert Brook just over the border. Now entrepreneur Philip Turner has turned his attention to Ounce House in Bury St Edmunds. Tessa Allingham talked to him about his vision for Chestnut Inns

PHOTOGRAPHS BY [JAKE EASTHAM](#)

**P**hilip Turner's hair has that mussed up look of someone who has pushed his hands through it one too many times. He seems a bit restless, wired ("Had to take a sleeping pill last night," he admits) as if there's something other than a magazine interview on his mind.

There probably is. He shows me the glamorous prospectus he's about to present to his 15 or so existing investors, the group of friends, ex-colleagues and business connections who have helped to get Chestnut Inns off the ground and make Philip's first 15 months in the hospitality business the whirlwind it has been. He will ask them to keep the faith in his youthful enterprise by asking for an additional £1million or so (with ongoing capital from the management team), and continue to support the company's growth as more properties join the portfolio. He has no interest in Chestnut Inns being an out-in-the-sticks cottage industry, he will say. He means hospitality business.

"What's great is that now our investors are putting money into a proven business," Philip says, with more than a hint of relief.



A year ago, when looking to finance the original concept -The Packhorse Inn, Moulton - Philip couldn't display three AA rosettes (the only place in Suffolk to have so many), he couldn't claim to be the best food pub in the East (the Publican's Morning Advertiser Great British Pub Awards 2014), he couldn't boast an entry in the Good Food Guide, he couldn't say that

Sawday's considered The Packhorse to be one of three favourite newcomers in the UK, and he couldn't pull out a Sunday Times travel feature that put The Packhorse in the top ten inns in the country. He's particularly pleased, he adds, that the awards have recognised the food and accommodation aspects of the business in equal measure.



Below left; inside the Rupert Brooke and top; The Packhorse at Moulton. Above; Chris and Hayley Lee with Philip Turner of Chestnut Inns

It's been a good year, then, I suggest. He shakes his head, sinks it into his hands, takes a slug of coffee, sighs. "Yes. But I don't know where I get my energy from. I don't think I've put my head above the parapet for months. I've lived and breathed this business and I've taken more risks in the last 15 months than I ever did in 20 years in the City - not just financial ones, but emotional ones and ones that affect my family."

Is it taking its toll? Is the hospitality industry tougher than he expected? He admits to naivety, but adds that without that naivety he probably wouldn't have embarked on the project in the first place. And yes, it is a tough industry, very tough. Philip's eyes reignite. "The excitement I feel about what we are achieving far far outstrips any excitement I ever felt in banking. The difference is that in the City, Suffolk February 2015

even though I was successful, I was effectively carried along, I had very little real influence.

"This business is all about my and Amanda's [his wife's] vision - it's crystal clear to us what we want to achieve - and it is so exciting to see the vision become a reality. Sometimes I have to pinch myself that it's really happening, that I managed to persuade so many people [he repeatedly references the talented and experienced team he has assembled around him] to support me to make the vision a reality."

Such is Philip's ambition and determination that barely had he called time on The Packhorse Inn's first birthday party than he opened his second pub, The Rupert Brooke in the picturesque village of Grantchester just outside Cambridge. "We've tried to remain true to the pub's heritage - I'm trying to find as many first editions of Rupert Brooke collections as I can! - but the pub has had a chequered history, starved of capital investment and we have remedied that."

It's now shades of tasteful taupe and plum, there are textures of rich velvet and natural wood, and Chris Lee's food on the menu (a family-size chicken chasseur to share and a liver and bacon casserole have been particular hits). The Chestnut Inns signature boar's head is on the wall.

Pub two - tick. But Philip hadn't even been trading in Grantchester for 48 hours before he exchanged contracts on a third property. As Suffolk magazine went to press, he was in the process of completing on the freehold purchase of Ounce House in Bury St Edmunds.

What's brought him into Bury? There's

an unswerving logic to Philip's answer as he numbers off the reasons: "It's a growing town, there are 15,000 new houses planned, developments at the Tesco roundabout are about to start, transport links are improving all the time, and Bury has the highest net migration in the 35-45 year old sector and some of the fastest UK broadband connectivity. London is moving east, Cambridge is driving regional economic activity and everything is supported by the government's commitment to infrastructure spend in the region. I'm committed to East Anglia, Bury is a charming town with the right mix of families, business people and retired people, and I think it's still undersupplied with food businesses."

And Ounce House in particular? Philip loves the fact that the building, an imposing red brick pile on Northgate Street, is robust, that the internal configuration sort of works as it is, and that the location, just a stroll away from the medieval heart of the town, is perfect for locals and visitors. "We need to put in a commercial kitchen and reorganise the

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parking area, but I envisage eight to 10 bedrooms, a lounge, a bar with a club feel and a lovely south facing terrace."

His vision for property number three is already crystal clear, and Amanda will no doubt get to work on the interior design to create a stylish, comfortable, intimate townhouse feel, a place, Philip hopes, that will appeal as much to the local community as it will to visitors to Bury.

"I don't want it to be a hotel in the conventional sense with 24-hour room service and a concierge. But I do want to surpass people's expectations. I want guests to want to stay longer than they planned in all my properties."

And with that Philip gets up. He'd love to stay longer, he says. I think he means it, for in the maelstrom of purchasing, refurbishing, opening and operating, finding time to sit down and reflect is probably a luxury he rarely affords himself. He puts his hands through his hair again, gathers up his brochure and leaves: he has investors to woo.

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