



Gold Standard Awards 2009 Hotel of the Year (Small Hotel/Guest House Category)

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Emma Hill,
Joint Proprietor
North Berwick Golf Lodge

Picking up an award is a nerve-wracking experience bristling with emotion and tension. Some recipients burst into tears while others thank everyone they've ever met. For Emma and Tom Hill at the Golf Tourism Scotland Gold Standard Awards, it was more a case of shock and awe than talk and walk.

"We were absolutely gobsmacked," admits Emma, joint proprietor of the North Berwick Golf Lodge. "We were thrilled to know we had been recognized by the golf industry for the product we offer. It showed us that all the hard work had paid off. We were very proud, if a little stunned."

Amid the camera flashes and interviews which greeted the couple after receiving the Hotel of the Year Award (in the small hotel/guest house category), Emma and Tom retained an air of calmness that perhaps goes some way to explaining their success. "A lot of it comes down to the personal care we give to the client," she reveals. "We look after the client from the original enquiry stage and we're with them throughout their stay. I think it's the continuity they like."

Emma and Tom fine-tuned their personal approach during 15 years in the hotel trade where they reinvented numerous run-down hotels in East Lothian. Four years ago they decided to embark on a new adventure that would give them more free time with their kids. The North Berwick Golf Lodge was born and after a £200,000 facelift and a 12-month renovation project, the former coaching house was transformed into a five-star guesthouse complete with Arctic spa hot tub and a Huxley all-weather putting green.

"We lived in the coach house while our property was being built and then moved into our new house while the builders moved into the old one," says Emma. "We started off with a blank canvas – it was a brand new business. There was nothing there so we had to generate everything ourselves."

What Emma and Tom created was a luxurious, six-bedroom property offering comfort and privacy as well as somewhere to relax after a day out on the course. It's a remarkable business which is expected to reach 75% occupancy this year and is already taking bookings for 2012. Although Emma says a lot of this comes from repeat business, word of mouth and referrals, there are some specific strategies that the couple employs to make the clients' stay all the more special.

"We place a lot of emphasis on a personal service delivered throughout our guests stay," she says. "That could mean putting together breakfast or dinner packages or simply making their stay as comfortable as possible. More often, it's about providing the added extras that can make a trip really special."

This value-added service even extends to getting the drinks in. "We have arrangements with local wine suppliers so we get very good wines at trade prices and we pass that on to our clients without any mark-up. It's little things like that which give an added incentive to stay. It's about listening to your clients and looking after them the best you can so when they go home they shout about it from the rooftops."