



eateries like the oak-panelled Warwick Castle, which serves delicious traditional Sunday roasts amongst its extensive pub menu, and the London Shell Co, a popular seafood barge restaurant that cruises to Camden and back as you dine.

Enjoying the city while escaping its bustle is exactly what barge owner and former full-time set designer Sam Barbic intended for boat guests when she started Boutique Barges in 2014. She now leases out two boats: the *Papillon* (formerly called *Big Boat*) and *Velvet Morning*, a 53ft narrow boat that sleeps four. Barbic also provides WiFi for those looking for a unique workation.

“London living often means being crammed in flats with little access to nature,” Barbic shares. “The canals run through the middle of the city, presenting an opportunity to base yourself centrally, yet have the space and environment for more freedom. Owning a boat helped me realise canal lifestyle is an antidote to city life. Its proximity to nature, and the relaxing effect of being close to water, induce a sense of calm.” boutiquebarges.co.uk



DESIGN

Life in the slow lane

Slow living in the middle of London? Yes, on a refurbished luxury barge **BY REBECCA HALL**

The 24/7 hum of London is alluring and, at times, intimidating. As a frequent business traveller to the city, I have seen boats moored along the canals and wondered if they were open to visitors seeking a slower living experience of London. A web search led me to the *Papillon*, a century-old, 55ft barge on its permanent mooring in Little Venice, that opened in the summer of 2022.

Boat hotel stays are seen as a novelty, but my time aboard the *Papillon* was an escape to nature – right in the middle of London, no less! Sequestered in an affluent residential portion of the Grand Union Canal near Paddington Basin, the cacophony of city life is kept at bay, and I could properly enjoy the scene before me; willow trees bending into the water, canal waves splashing against the sides of the boat and waterfowl gracefully gliding by.

The *Papillon* is simple and modern. Inspired by the soothing Japandi (Japanese and Scandinavian) aesthetic, the interior living space features birchwood panels on the walls, clean



“**Owning a boat helped me realise canal lifestyle is an antidote to city life”**”

and symmetrical lines, plus cotton and linen fabrics in muted colours. In the bedroom is a raised double bed with soft pillows and a feather duvet, while the living area can be converted into a spare bedroom for up to three more. The kitchen – Smeg appliances and a steel worktop – is small but luxurious. On balmy summer evenings, the *Papillon*'s roof terrace is perfect for watching the world go by, and with its log-burning stove, winter would be a cosy time for an evening indoors with loved ones.

Despite being moored alongside the public towpath, there is minimal noise at night. Rising from a good night's sleep, the morning view through the open front doors is of moorhens jumping onto the front deck, pattering amidst potted ferns. Fresh bread, local jams, coffee, tea and milk are provided on the *Papillon* for a light breakfast. Nearby are

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