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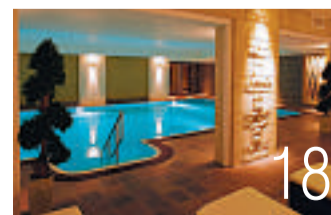
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sharon griffiths

“Afternoon tea is making a comeback, complete with cake stands, doilies and silver teapots

AFTERNOON tea anyone? Cucumber sandwich, a little smoked salmon, or a scone, cream, exquisite little pastries? Oh yes, it is wonderful – old fashioned, very genteel and a great throwback to another, more leisured age and a different way of doing things. But afternoon tea is not just history. Far from it.

Afternoon tea is making a comeback, complete with cake stands, doilies and silver teapots. More of us are nibbling at dainty sandwiches and pouring out tea from elegant pots into china cups on saucers. Well, it makes a nice change from sloshing the hot water on a tea bag in a mug while slumped at the computer. And it brings some much needed elegance into the chaos of our everyday lives. One lump or two?

The ultimate, of course, is tea at The Ritz. The menu in the gilded surroundings of the Palm Court includes five different sorts of sandwiches (smoked salmon, ham, chicken and mayonnaise, egg and cress and, of course, cucumber), pastries, scones (with compote, of course, nothing so common as jam) and a choice of 17 different teas.

It costs an eye-watering £36, which is enough to make you choke on your Earl Grey. They have five sessions a day, starting at 11.30am and if you want to take tea on a Saturday then you'll have to wait till April. Even then it would have to be for the 7.30pm sitting. By which time you might have fainted away from lack of a scone, not to mention the accompanying compote. But a friend of mine took her teenage daughter and a friend there and said, amazingly, the girls were entranced and even dressed up for the occasion. That alone, she reckoned, was worth £36 of anyone's money.

But the great delight of afternoon tea is that it's something we don't have at home. Well, most of us don't. The Queen does and there might be a few isolated Hyacinth Bucket traditionalists around, but, basically, most of us are too busy to stop for tea. And definitely too busy for doilies.

So afternoon tea has all the charm of novelty, which is what gives it its appeal. It's a real treat, a change, something you would never do for yourself.

My late mother loved going out for afternoon tea. Always one for the finer things in life, it reinforced her view of the world as it should be, not

the reality into which it has degenerated. (Can you imagine Jade Goody presiding over the silver teapot and cake stand? Precisely). It also had the advantage of being cheaper and often more interesting than lunch.

It also has another great advantage for those of us who work for a living – it's easier to fit in to the day. Especially for those of us who work from home or who have otherwise busy lives.

If you meet for lunch, it curtails the working day dreadfully. Just when you're hitting your stride in the morning, it's time to get ready to go out. By the time you've got back from a long lunch, the day has gone and just when you have all that time to make up, the last thing you feel like is working.

Tea is different. You can get a lot of work done by the time you have to go out at 3pm, so tea is a treat dangled in front of you, an incentive to work harder, to get things done. Tea, though plentiful enough, tends on the whole, to be lighter than lunch. It's also more comfortable. Instead of being perched at a table in a crowded restaurant, you're more likely to be reclining in squashy sofas in a country house hotel.

And there is no, or very little, temptation of alcohol. (By the time tea is over, the sun is usually over the yardarm and I have been known to finish off tea with a glass of wine, but this is, you understand entirely the exception) so you return home refreshed rather than bleary-eyed. But above all, afternoon tea leaves time to talk. And what is the point of meeting friends if not to talk? The food is small and nibbly. It doesn't require the effort and concentration of hacking through bits of meat, spearing pasta or watching for the bones in fish. It takes little concentration so you can concentrate instead on the conversation. Much more fun.

Great business deals were traditionally done over lunch. Then the world moved on, time got shorter and we saw the craze for power breakfasts. Much too daunting.

Who wants to make major decisions when they're still only half awake? When I rule the world, it will be a much more civilised place. All major discussions will be made over a pot of tea and a plate of pastries.

Do have some more compote and cream with your scone...

NE window shopping

FINE DINING

IN between spats, the celebrities in the Big Brother House this year dined on plates from the Jasper Conran at Wedgwood's Chinoiserie collection. Bearing the classic hallmarks of Jasper Conran design, the bone china range makes a bold and beautiful statement using bright colour, chic metallic touches and ornate chinoiserie. Prices range from £20 for an 18cm plate. For stockist details call 0800-028-0026 or check out www.wedgwood.com



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NE interiors

Beddy buys

GABRIELLE FAGAN explains how to be wide awake to bargains and best buys on the bedding front

TEMPTED to pull the covers over your head and escape the world for a little longer each morning? At least make sure your bedding is up to scratch. Tired cotton covers, flabby duvets and faded throws will simply make you feel worse, but a bedroom with a well-dressed bed – think cuddly textures like wool, velvet and cashmere – will be a comforting retreat where you can relax and recharge.

As SHE magazine editor Sian Rees points out: “The bedroom isn’t just a place to sleep, it should be your sanctuary – somewhere to relax and reflect. I think it’s worth investing in some luxurious bed linen. Zara Home and Monsoon have some gorgeous fashion designs, but also check out Kelly Hoppen at Bhs and the stylish, hotel chic range at Debenhams.”

Style for bedrooms seems to fall into two categories. One replicates the look of a hotel room, usually using neutral colours with character in the texture or detail.

Alternatively, there’s the much more romantic boudoir look with rich, coloured throws and cushions added to fine bed linen, which indulges our yearning for more colour and decoration.

Don’t be limited by trends, though. At the end of the day your bedroom is your personal space, so treat it as such. Feel free to mix and match colours and styles – your own private room is a great place to experiment.

Sian says: “Layering a bed – the trendy term these days – simply means using throws and cushions to add colour, luxury and texture. Dress your bed with silk damask cushions – try TK Maxx for style and value – and a faux fur throw is divine in colder weather.”

Don’t forget to display personal treasures such as photographs and pictures, and indulge your senses with scented candles, flowers and a mini sound system for your favourite music.

Bed linens and throws are often discounted in the sales. Just don’t get overwhelmed by sales crowds and buy a luridly striped duvet set just because it’s a ‘bargain’. There’s probably a good reason why they’ve got loads left.

Aim for top brands, which often heavily discount last season’s ranges as well as lines that use the ultimate luxury – 100 per cent cotton. Remember that you get what you pay for. Egyptian cotton can be expensive but is extremely

comfortable and will last for years if it’s laundered properly. High thread counts are a good pointer to quality – say around 300 threads per inch.

White’s a classic choice as it doesn’t date, but if that’s too plain, look out for embroidered, printed and appliqued details that make it more interesting.

Remember cool, neutral colour schemes in a bedroom can make it feel chilly, so coloured bed linen – or throws – give an illusion of warmth. And old-fashioned eiderdowns or quilts, reminiscent of the 50s, are enjoying a revival. Look out for satin or velvet ones.

A cashmere throw is an indulgent, pricey choice, but it will always look beautiful and luxurious so it’s worth snapping up a sale bargain. Lambswool blankets are a cheaper alternative.

BARGAIN BEDDING

IF you can’t bag a bargain at the sales, it’s still possible to get good bedding by checking out the competitively priced ranges at high street stores.

Smarten up a bed on the cheap with bedroom fashions from Woolworths, which has bedding from TV interiors expert Linda Barker. A king-size beige Soleil duvet set costs £35, or plump for its own-brand bedding with king-size Shadow floral duvet set at £20.

You can turn a bedroom into a slinky sanctuary for just a few pounds with TJ Hughes bedding. Its Pure Opulence bedding in fashionable Zen Chocolate starts at £15, or choose a classic satin stripe from £15.

Supermarkets and superstores are also butting in on the bedroom. Sainsbury’s trend-conscious homewares collection includes a red satin and velvet throw, £34.99, antique gold and mulberry boudoir cushions, £6.99, while B&Q’s soft furnishings are attracting well-deserved attention for quality and design. There’s a collection to suit any room from floral prints to beaded sequin designs, from just £14.98.

If you’re counting the pennies but still want style and quality, Dunelm Mill could be perfect. Pick up the pretty, feminine Neisha and Rainbow ranges, from £18.99 for a single quilt cover, or the Hotel range with pure white and neutral styles with a 300 thread count. They cost around £22.99 for a single quilt cover.



COLOURFUL: Linda Barker king-size shadow floral duvet set, £20 from Woolworths. Stockist details: 0870-411-7112, www.woolworths.co.uk. Bedding and cushions, above right, from Sainsbury’s





LUXURY: Mohair throws in glacier, aubergine or cocoa, £55, and velvet Garbo cushions, £25, from The White Company, www.thewhitecompany.com



MID-RANGE FINDS

The White Company is one of the top destinations for high quality bedding, with affordable and luxurious ranges. It also has throws and cushions for a glamorous bed. Mohair throws in glacier, aubergine or cocoa cost £55, velvet Garbo cushions £25.

POSH BEDDING

Fine bedding connoisseurs know that Yves Delorme is a leader in luxury bed linen, and the sales are a great time to pick up items you might not otherwise be able to afford. The designs are stunning, with trademark rich colour and detail. The Sospiro range in red would bring a warming touch to a room and starts at £65 for a pillowcase.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Linda Barker Soleil duvet set at Woolworths; Dunelm Mill www.dunelm-mill.com; bed linen from B&Q; TJ Hughes bedding, from £15, www.tjhughes.co.uk

BEDTIME STORY

If you have the space in your bedroom, give over a corner for somewhere to sit and read, listen to music or make telephone calls. Get a comfortable chair (avoid using it as a dumping ground for clothes) and a side table and lamp. Avoid having a desk or work space in the same room, or disguise it behind a screen. Lamps and dimmer switches are vital so you can alter lighting to create atmosphere, and rugs are essential for cosy toes.



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NE interiors



EGGLESTON HALL: stunning views over the River Tees

Finishing touches

Eggleston Hall in Teesdale was the setting for the popular *Ladette to Lady* reality TV series. But now the ladettes have left and the hall has reverted to being a much-loved family home, as SHEILA WEBER finds out

FOR Lady Juliet Gray, caring for her home is a labour of love. And it shows. When you step inside Eggleston Hall, the mellow feeling of a real family home is unmistakable. This handsome property, designed by the celebrated County

Durham architect Ignatius Bonomi, lies between Barnard Castle and Middleton-in-Teesdale. You enter between massive stone Doric pillars into a large, square hall with polished wooden floor. It is a large house, but it doesn't feel that way - except perhaps to the window cleaner, as it takes him two days to do inside and out.

There has been a dwelling on this site since the 1600s and Eggleston Hall was bought by the Gray family in 1919. Now very much Georgian in appearance, it was used as a convalescent home during the Second World War and, since the 1970s, has been used for cookery and flower arranging schools. Day courses are held in the autumn.

It is also, much more infamously, the setting for the hit reality TV series, *Ladette to Lady*. Gill Harbord, one of the teachers given the difficult task of reforming the loud-mouthed, lager-fuelled lasses, takes flower arranging classes at the hall. The family fled while the series was being filmed. "They simply took the house over and we moved out for six weeks," says Lady Juliet. "We had nothing to do with it really. I certainly don't want to be on TV."

The success of the show, though, has

left people thinking Eggleston Hall is a real-life finishing school. "I have had people ring me and ask if I can help their sister, who's an alcoholic!" says Lady Juliet.

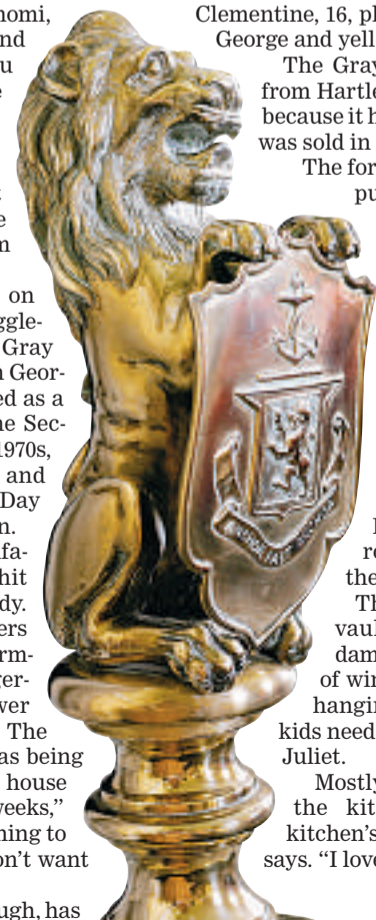
Now filming's over, the hall is back as the much-loved home of Sir William and Lady Gray, children Will, 20, Octavia, 18, and Clementine, 16, plus their pets, border terrier George and yellow labrador Henry.

The Gray family were shipbuilders from Hartlepool who bought the house because it had a grouse moor. The moor was sold in the 1980s.

The formal gardens are open to the public all year round and attract up to 30,000 visitors annually. These are owned by Rosemarie Gray, mother of Sir William, an architect who converted a former coach house into a shop/café which sells gifts, speciality foods and freezer meals made on the premises from locally-sourced ingredients.

A Grade II-listed building, Eggleston Hall has 13 bedrooms - some of which are themed - and nine bathrooms. The cellars have original vaulted ceilings and are not damp or dismal. Nor are they full of wine. "We use them for storage, hanging on to things in case the kids need to set up homes," says Lady Juliet.

Mostly, the family congregates in the kitchen by the Aga. "The kitchen's the heart of the home," she says. "I love, love it, love it. But I am



► Continued on page 8



HEART OF THE HOME: the family likes to congregate by the warmth of the kitchen Aga, left. Above: one of the sitting rooms and the elegant, modern dining room

Pictures: NIGEL WHITFIELD



‘
The only downside about living in a house like this is the chill factor in winter, so it tends to be that we live in the little sitting room. Then it's a hot bath and off to bed

COUNTRY COMPANIONS:
 Lady Juliet Gray with border terrier George

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MELLOW YELLOW: one of the sitting rooms where the family congregates

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Finishing touches

► Continued from page 7

also very fond of the sunroom, off the yellow sitting room. It's hideous from the outside as it was built before you needed planning permission."

In winter everyone moves from the yellow sitting room to another sitting room.

"The only downside about living in a house like this is the chill factor in winter," says Lady Juliet. "So it tends to be that we live in the little sitting room. It's nice and cosy and has a real fire. Then it's a hot bath and off to bed."

A house this size requires a lot of maintenance. "It's like painting the Forth Bridge, but overall the house is in pretty good nick," says Lady Juliet. "Just keeping the roof watertight is a constant battle, but thankfully, the quality of the lead on the roof is amazing and the downpipes are very thick. This is because former owners were lead merchants."

The oak staircase used to have a brass rail, but after the Second World War it was painted black to save on upkeep and cleaning. "I would love to restore this to what it was," says Lady Juliet. "But it will have to wait a while."

The private gardens are not massive, but do feature tennis courts. And in summer there's swimming in the river... if anyone's feeling brave enough.

The Grays use the elegant formal dining and drawing rooms when they entertain. The dining room has an elm table which can seat 24, and the drawing room is lovely and light and used on high days and holidays.



LIVELY GUESTS: the TV ladettes. Above: the finishing school in the 1970s

Lady Juliet says the electricity bill is not bad – not much more than a smaller house – but that the cost of oil for the central heating is "horrendous".

She says the hall is a great house for parties – and youngsters. "We have three teenagers who can have their friends round and play loud music without Will and I being bothered by it," she says. "They have their own end of the house."





■ Eggleston Hall gardens are open to the public and there is a coach house which incorporates a gift shop and tearooms. Opening times are on the website. General inquiries about booking the Hall for events should be made on 01833-650-553

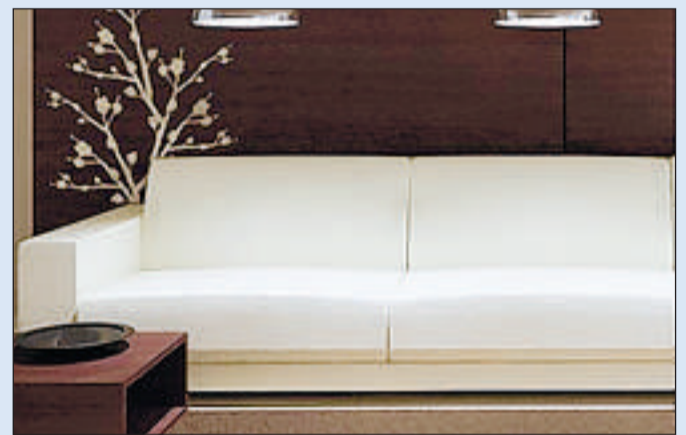
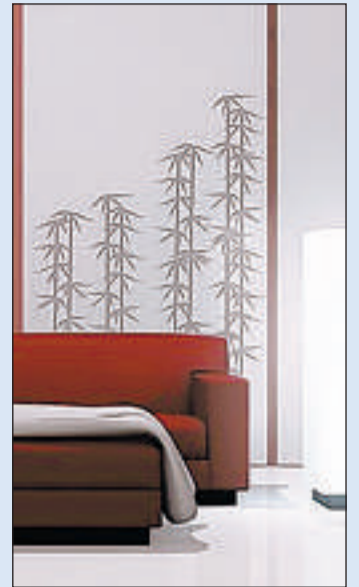
■ Well-known cook Mary Berry will be demonstrating at the Hall on November 14 and 15.

NE window shopping

WALL ART

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Taking Silk



DISHWASHER salt and a fish kettle are not typical tools of the artist's trade but, for Karen Crowe's craft, nothing else works quite as well. Through a process of trial and error she has perfected her art and turned a hobby into a business producing one-off hand-painted silk wraps and scarves. Now, she's about to move into shoes and bags.

The wraps and scarves are exquisite. Some are vibrant with bold floral designs in peacock blue and emerald green or fuchsia pink or monochrome. Others are subtle, abstract patterns in soft pink and baby blue or warm apricot and russet hues.

Karen uses a range of different silks. The fabric can be feather-light crepe de chine or have the luxurious drape quality of heavier silk satin.

Each one is different, and Karen uses her experience of colour and knowledge of how the top quality French dyes blend to produce a piece to match or to complement an outfit.

The wraps are ideal to cover shoulders in the evening or to create impact for a special outfit. The long scarves brighten up a dark, winter wardrobe while the square scarves nod to the revived Sixties look.

But back to that fish kettle. "There are iron-fix dyes or steam-fix dyes, which I use more often because they give a more lustrous finish to the colour," explains Karen.

"The dyes have to be fixed and while that's happening you must keep any water away from the silk otherwise the colours will run. I wrap them in tissue paper then foil to make sure they're watertight then position them a certain distance away from the steam.

"They steam for up to three hours. I've used a vegetable steamer and a pressure cooker before but now I'm on the look-out for a fish kettle because I think that will work well."

A teacher of A-level sociology, Karen took up silk painting as a hobby at Darlington Arts Centre. Always creative, she used to design clothes – some even made it to a Pret a Porter exhibition in New York – has always made home furnishings, loves interior design and is married to architect Simon, a director of Niven Architects in Darlington.

"That said, I was always hopeless at drawing," Karen admits, "but my friend said anyone could do silk painting. We did the course for a year then started to go to each other's houses to paint pictures. Then I went to a workshop on scarf-making.

"I made some for friends and they told me people would stop them and say, 'that's a lovely scarf, where did you get it?' so I started to think I could do it as a sideline."

Karen was confident the market was there for original and one-off pieces, but knowing how best to reach it was a challenge faced by many new businesses.

"I've been to a few craft fairs but they are rarely what I consider to be genuine craft fairs where all the items are handmade locally and of a certain quality because of the effort that has gone into them. I've found myself next to people selling stuff they've imported from Hong Kong or Vietnam which cost just a few pounds.

"A unique, hand-painted scarf can take a whole day to produce so the prices should reflect that. The lightest weight silk scarf starts at £23 and prices range upwards to £45. The wraps are bespoke and the cost is therefore dependent on how complicated is the pattern or beading that the client wants," she says.

Karen sees top end craft events as her market place, together with designer shops like Elan in Grange Road, Darlington. With the launch of her website she hopes clients will also come direct.

The designs are only limited by Karen's or the customer's imagination. She can embellish with beading or sequins, which has taken her towards the idea of making matching bags.

"If someone has an outfit already we can match the colour for a scarf or a wrap and, eventually, shoes as well, which is something I'm working on at the

moment. I think there is a strong market for luxurious one-off pieces for weddings and other special occasions like balls or the races. The wraps, in particular, are perfect for complementing a bride or bridesmaids' gowns or alternatively to create a unique look for the mother of the bride."

Karen chooses to design using the more technically difficult free painting method, which requires extra skill to create the patterns. She sprays the paint from a pressurised bottle onto the plain Chinese silk and has built up a good understanding of how the paint reacts differently depending on the weight of the fabric.

She uses table salt or dishwasher salt to create pattern and texture while alcohol has the effect of taking colour away to create a different look.

The most difficult piece she has produced was a large, black and white wrap a customer ordered.

"I soon discovered that monochrome is the hardest design to do.

It actually didn't look right with only black and white and I had to make the decision to soften the contrast with grey. You can't make small changes to a design in silk, you have to be bold," Karen explains.

She spent 40 hours perfecting the design. "I learned such a lot from it, though ultimately it might not have worked: luckily, the client loved it. She attended an event at the Savoy in London and apparently turned heads, which was lovely to hear.

"It's rare these days that you can find something original, that is special to you and that you know is the only one of its kind."

■ For more information, Karen can be contacted on 01325-320938 or via www.sedasilks.co.uk





Creative college lecturer Karen Crowe has been turning heads with her one-off fashion designs. SARAH FRENCH reports



Model: Clare Adamson
Hair by Taylor Wood, Darlington
All clothes from Elan, Grange Road, Darlington



If someone has an outfit already, we can match the colour for a scarf or wrap, and eventually, shoes as well, which is something I'm working on at the moment

– designer Karen Crowe

NE my style



Hilary Cooper, 34, teaches general studies at Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College in Darlington. She is mum to five-year-old twins Naomi and Rebekah

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Describe your look

On a good day, I aim for classically well-groomed. On a bad day I am more manic mummy in an anorak. I'm a bit unpredictable.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

I have a pair of jeans with burgundy flocking. They look a bit like pub wallpaper, and people always comment on them. Despite this, they just make me feel happy.

What's the most you've ever spent on an item of clothing?

When I had just started teaching, I went to Fenwicks sale with my mum and I spotted a coat. It was £60 and she had to go halves with me to persuade me to buy it. I've never liked to spend a lot on clothes!

What's been your worst buy?

As a teenager, I had this thing about Laura Ashley floral dresses. My mum will probably say that I looked lovely – a proper little lady – but my husband will tell you they were the main reason why we didn't start going out three years earlier.

What are your favourite shops?

TK Maxx, because you get some really nice clothes at discount prices, Primark and second hand shops. I like to think you don't have to spend the earth to look good, but someone might be about to tell me otherwise...

What's your favourite beauty product?

Sleep! If there was a tablet you could take to wipe out the effects of tiredness, I would buy it in bulk. And happy people look beautiful too, I think.

Have you any beauty tips?

I think it's more important to be content being who you are than to strive for physical perfection. Woman who are confident and comfortable in their own skin are attractive and sexy, whatever their size and shape.

Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
 ■ Jumper from boutique in Barnard Castle – £6 in the sale; skirt from M&Co in Barnard Castle; boots from TK Maxx
 ■ Trousers from Next; jumper from Primark; 99p necklace from Wilkinson's; bracelet from Bay Tradin
 ■ Dress from Coco dress agency in Grange Road, Darlington; necklace from Primark

I'm not big on celebrities – I think they are under too much pressure to conform to impossible standards. I really like Dawn French for just being herself, and I once saw a picture of Helen Mirren wearing no make-up with her hair scraped right back. It was as if she was saying: "This is the real me." I admired that.

If thermal underwear makes you think of granny-style long johns then think again – now it's feminine and pretty. Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER visits Bella di Notte

■ Bella di Notte,
0870-7706830,
www.belladinotte.com



ITALIAN CONNECTION:
Susan Johnson with some of the designs

A warm front... and a warm behind!

ON first impressions, I'm impressed. The modern building stands on an industrial estate in Helmsley, on the edge of Ryedale. I open the door into a small but stylish shop, then climb some stairs to reach the staff room. It's not at all what I expect. There are magazines and a TV; there's even a baby changing mat. With real wood floors and pared-down decor, this is rather smarter than the average workplace.

The site is home to Bella di Notte, a mail order firm which deals in thermal underwear. This hardly sounds glamorous – we all remember the frumpy vests and waist-high pants our grannies wore – yet it claims to be quite different from what we know. I'm met by marketing and finance director Nigel Mellor, who shows me just how chic these type of smalls can be.

Nigel shows me a cream vest, which looks so delicate and pretty that I have to ask if it really is thermal. Of course it is – it's made from wool and finest silk to be both comfortable and warm. As Nigel says, it would appeal to any woman. "We don't really market it heavily as thermal underwear. I used to work for Damart and their stuff would be three times thicker than this. This is pretty but with warmth. It's everyday wear."

While the firm's key market is women in their 50s, some of the items, like lacy vests and simple trouser briefs, could be worn by those of any age. Conservative colours – the main ones are ivory, nude and black – make this an easy range to wear. It isn't cheap, but customers are willing to pay for quality. "Most of the stock comes from Italy and the factories are good at producing quality garments," says Nigel. "By and large, I think that's what women in their 50s are looking for."

The business was founded by Susan Johnson, who's 38 and lives nearby. She soon explains the Italian link – and how she came

to be involved in the underwear trade. "I was living out in Italy, teaching, and one day in November I was very cold," she says. "I'm a farmer's daughter and I lived on the North Yorkshire Moors so I was used to wearing vests, so this cold day I thought I'd better go out and get myself one."

"I went to the market and found these very elegant vests made in natural fabrics – wool and silk with beautiful lace. They were much more beautiful than anything I remembered. So I came back home thinking 'if I like them so much, surely other people will'."

As she'd always wanted to launch a business, she started thinking along these lines. "I didn't have much money left so I approached The Prince's Trust and they gave me a loan," says Susan. "That was eight years ago. I lived in a little one-bedroom cottage and I ran the business in my kitchen and my living room. I just lived among boxes of vests, basically."

Unsure of whether they'd catch on, she started showing them to people. To her surprise, she sold the lot. "I took the vests out to get people's reaction and they all sold instantly in the first winter," says Susan. "Then they started asking me for other designs, so I went back to Italy and had them design for me what people were asking for and that's how the company has developed, really."

Now, as well as thermal underwear, the firm sells outerwear and nightwear, swimwear and bras. She may have just had another baby – a little sister to one-year-old Edward – but Susan is committed to further growth. In just two years since moving from home, she's found that trade has taken off. "Sales have just continued to grow every year," she says. "There are 25 of us now."

Her prime concern is convincing women that thermals really have moved on. "My whole mission with the business is to reinvent thermal underwear," she says.

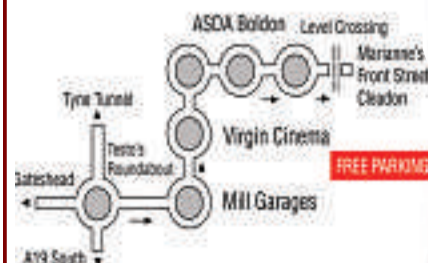


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It's in the perfect position to attract hungry golfers straight off the course at Wynyard, but new brasserie and bar nineteen is hoping to cater for non-sporty sorts too. Anyone, in fact, who wants good food in fantastic surrounds



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A NEW dining venue next to a well-known golf club is all set to suit bon viveurs to a tee. The nineteen brasserie and bar aims to offer high quality meals and exclusive meeting or celebration facilities.

Situated right next to Wynyard Golf Club, the new venture makes the most of the attractive surroundings enjoyed by the course.

Oozing sophistication and good taste, nineteen features lots of brown leather furniture, chrome fittings, wooden floors or soft brown carpeting. A bar area and impressive wall of wine leads to a large dining area – complete with grand piano.

And there are plans to make good use of the musical addition with a resident pianist providing background music every Friday evening. Various special events are also in the pipeline.

Operated by Sapphire Hospitality Ltd, nineteen opened in December and since then trade has been steady throughout lunchtimes and evenings.

An application has been made for a licence to conduct civil wedding ceremonies. It is planned to have a marquee able to accommodate up to 350 people in place by March, amid landscaped gardens ideal for wedding pictures. A wedding fair is all set to take place on Sunday, March 4, 10am-4pm.

Away from the bar and dining area, two upstairs rooms offer additional facilities. There is the Wynyard Room, ideal for small meetings or conferences, while the larger Boardroom will be available for people to hire for an evening's fine dining – complete with their own butler.

Seven course meals with wine will be served in the intimate surroundings.

Weddings could also take place in this room, with guests adjourning downstairs for a reception, with double doors leading out on to a terrace.

nineteen prides itself on its policy of using the freshest ingredients from local suppliers. Everything is prepared and cooked on site – including

bread and specialist pastries from the pastry chef.

People booking weddings at nineteen will be able to order in-house wedding cakes for the occasion. Wedding cakes will be displayed at the wedding fair next month.

An all-day menu includes main courses such as braised lamb shank (£10.95), beer battered cod loin (£6.95), vegetarian options and salads (from £6.50). There is also a range of baguettes served with pont-neuf potatoes and salad (from £5.50 to £6.95) and a choice of great puddings (£3.95 to £5.95).

The a la carte selection includes starters such as pan fried smoked salmon with lemon and dill risotto and caviar dressing (£5.25) and twice baked leek and grain mustard soufflé (£6.95).

Mains feature roast saddle of venison with braised red cabbage, dauphinoise potatoes and bitter chocolate sauce (£21.95); honey glazed duck breast with pink peppercorn mash and cherry and cointreau sauce (£14.50) and baked Arctic trout with saffron and vegetable broth (£12.95).

Desserts start at £5.50 and there is an extensive cheese board at £7.75. Afternoon teas are also available.

This new venture is certainly going to be the venue for the future and the place to be for all.

nineteen brasserie and bar is at Wellington Drive, Wynyard Park, Billingham. The all-day menu is available from noon to 7pm, with the a la carte from 7pm onwards. The venue is open every day except Monday. Tel 01740-645194 to make your reservations.



f

The impact on people's lives can be massive and the level of confidence the client gets is huge... it really is powerful stuff and fulfilling for everyone, another reason why I am happy to be part of this

WINNER:

Bryan picks up the award for national franchisee of the year



THE days of reshaping the way we look are here. Channel hop through the myriad terrestrial and digital channels and you are likely to come across any one of a host of makeover programmes, shows which have moved a long way from the days when experts just recommended dumping the frumpy outfit and changing the cut of your hair. Today's new looks can include a reshaped nose, wrinkle free skin, tooth veneers, bigger bosoms and an instantly thinner waist.

Once the preserve of the rich and famous, developments in technology have put cosmetic surgery within the grasp of ordinary men and women.

At the cutting edge of these changes in the North-East is award winning beauty company Collagenics which has just announced the launch of a surgical service to complement the non-surgical side of the business.

For the past four years Collagenics practitioners have been working with clients to smooth away the years using the likes of Botox and natural fillers. Now, for the first time, they are being trained to become surgical referral centres, offering expert advice on procedures and linking up with a team of exclusive surgeons, including leading lights Harley Street doctors Dai Davies and Nick Percival.

Collagenics staff at 60 clinics in the North-East will be offering clients information on breast augmentation, liposuction, rhinoplasty, bariatrics (gastric bands) and face and brow lifts. The work will be carried out through BUPA Washington.

Collagenics director Bryan McCourt says it is a fast growing industry with powerful and rewarding results for those involved. Last year in the UK alone £486m was spent on cosmetic surgery. In four years time that is expected to rise to £1.8bn as the world becomes ever more image conscious and people become more determined to battle the natural ageing process.

"TV, film, the media and the internet have created an industry that is expanding at a tremendous rate," says Bryan, who has just won the coveted title of national franchisee of

the year. "Just switch on the TV and look what is on; Extreme Makeover, Ten Years Younger, Make Me Perfect and Plastic Surgery School: it's all become part of our culture. Plastic surgery has also become more affordable – you can even get interest free credit – and therefore accessible. I was talking to a hairdresser the other day and she remembered when it was once frowned upon to colour your hair. Now cosmetic surgery is totally socially acceptable because it shows you care about your appearance."

Saks' Collagenics treatment centre in Darlington also took the award for best clinic from 600 across the country.

"Both awards are extremely prestigious and I was delighted and very proud of the result," he says. "The impact on people's lives can be massive and the level of confidence the client gets is huge, particularly with breast augmentation. When our surgeons talked to clients and realised the psychological benefits of such work, they didn't hesitate to get involved. It really is powerful stuff and fulfilling for everyone, another reason why I am happy to be part of this."

For people not wanting to go as far as surgery the non-surgical alternatives are going from strength to strength with developments in products and techniques.

Practitioners are fully trained medically as well as Collagenics trained. They only use natural products based on hyaluronic acid, which occurs in the body, plants and animals, retaining water in skin and joints.

Botox, known as the line tamer, has been around for many years in cosmetic treatment and has been used medically since the 1960s.

"We focus on how we treat our clients and want to make them feel as good as possible and that they have been given good value for money," says Bryan.

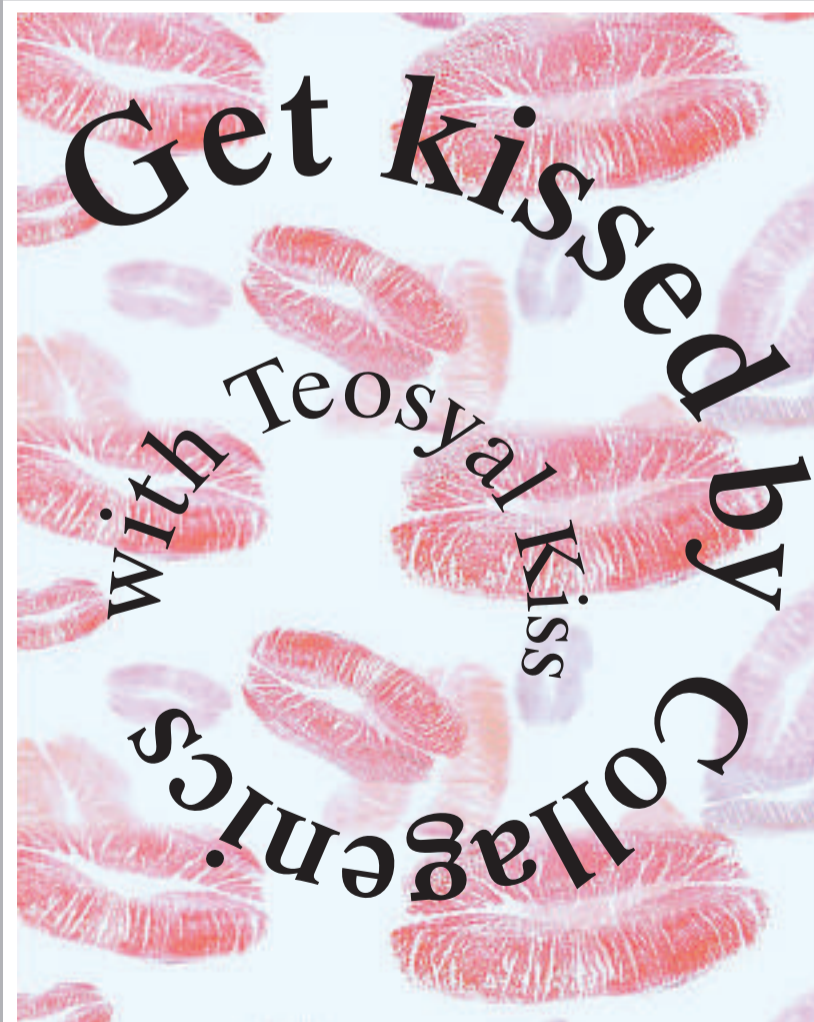
"We have a massive amount of clients who are regulars – they come back time and again and become friends with their practitioners – and they leave our clinics feeling really good about themselves."

■ For more information on Collagenics call 01325-367367



At the cutting edge

Extreme makeovers are on their way as a North-East beauty business expands its services. IAN LAMMING reports



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NE leisure



OLD AND NEW: the modern spa, above, is a complete contrast to the hotel

Comfort zone

There are no pool queues at the new multi-million pound spa at Headlam Hall, just oceans of space and tranquillity. JENNY NEEDHAM dons a fluffy robe and prepares for a pampering

TAKE the twisty backroads to the little village of Headlam in County Durham and you'll be treated to the sight of a stunning Jacobean mansion, standing in beautiful walled gardens. The 17th century building is called Headlam Hall and it's long been well known for hosting weddings, balls, birthday bashes and for its traditional country-house ambience.

Now Headlam has added a new wing for those who prefer contemporary to period features, for those who like being pampered, for those who like to keep fit... and for those who like to sweat it out in temperatures of 90C in the midst of a cold County Durham winter.

Headlam Spa, a £2½m project, opened its doors at the end of last year, and locals rushed to join. "Nearly all of our first 100 members lived within a three-mile radius of Headlam so it's made a nice social group too," says director Clare Metcalfe. "We have put a ceiling on memberships of 250, though anyone can book in for a day or for a treatment."

Full memberships cost from £456 off-peak, but if you want to escape a dreary English winter, this is the place to be. It's been beautifully designed and the attention to detail is superb.

"The interior was designed by a firm called Corporate Edge based in London, but we were looking for ideas long before that: African statues were picked up in Washington; lights from a trip to Prague," says Clare. "We knew we didn't want any clutter but you can be too minimalist, which leaves things feeling a bit cold."

The spa is far from cold, with features such as low lighting, a relaxing lounge, copper effect mosaic tiles and quite the fluffiest

bathrobes I have ever come across. Day visitors have full use of the heated indoor swimming pool, the outside spa pool, Swedish pine sauna and a steam room with herbal aromas and pretty fibre optic ceiling lighting which resembles a brightly coloured Milky Way.

Upstairs in the new building are five bedrooms and two suites, which are much more contemporary than original hotel - "We wanted to give people more choice," says Clare - plus a fully equipped technogym and air conditioned studio for classes.

"We tend to stick to stretching exercises, such as yoga, T'ai Chi and pilates," says Clare. I peeked through to see a T'ai Chi class in session, led by instructor Ken Hornug. Clare laughs and tells me it's not his only skill. "He's also an instructor in kick boxing, a tennis coach, a driving instructor and Elvis impersonator too," she says. Assistant spa manager Ross Woods does aqua classes and Lucy Hall takes the personal training programme, together with fitness classes in the studio.

The gym is kitted out with the latest techno-equipment, each gargantuan machine with its own screen with TV, radio and Sky Sport.

But some people come just to be pampered and I sampled two treatments at the spa, relaxing in between on a lounge by the poolside soaking up the relaxing atmosphere and plenty of trivia from OK! and Hello magazines. Bliss! I didn't even have to worry about missing my treatments as the beauty therapist came in search of me at the appointed times.

For their treatments, the spa takes its influences from around the world and works closely with Aromatherapy Associates and the French beauty experts Thalgo, who specialise in marine products.

First, therapist Emma Jones, who lives in



I come three times a week and it's excellent. For me, swimming and sitting around the pool are the real luxuries



REST AND RELAXATION: the lounge area

Darlington, treated me to a Marine Algae Seaweed Wrap, which stimulates circulation, increases metabolism, conditions skin... and temporarily leaves you resembling an extra from "Swamp Thing". It certainly worked, though, and left my winter skin feeling nourished and beautifully soft.

The afternoon treatment was a Thalgo facial, aimed at detoxing polluted "city" skin. The oxygenating skincare range helps breathe new radiance into stressed skin. Lying on a heated couch, I drifted off while Emma cleansed, exfoliated, kneaded and pampered me, administering a scalp massage and leaving my face rejuvenated and glowing, its winter pallor sloughed off.

The pool area, though, is one of the biggest draws for members. The changing rooms set the tone with subtle lighting, underfloor heating and frosted glass shower screens. Loungers are lined up in the poolside bay window and you can pop outside for a dip in the hot tub. Cold drinks can be ordered over the phone.

"I come three times a week and it's excellent. For me, swimming and sitting around the pool are the real luxuries," one local woman, who has been a member since the spa first opened tells me.

Attached to the spa is a new brasserie, which overlooks the surrounding countryside and Headlam's golf course. On the day I visited, it

was blowing a gale, the course was waterlogged and the wind was whipping round outside, but I duly padded in, picked up a paper and settled down to a tasty snack. (If you feel a little vulnerable exposing yourself to public gaze dressed in a towelling gown, there is the option to eat in the comfortable lounge area.)

The brasserie serves up delicious dishes such as local cheese with onion marmalade (£4.50), poached pear and blue cheese salad (£6.50) and parma ham and melon (£6.50) to those who fancy a light bite, with more substantial fare such as black pudding with mixed bacon and house dressing and beef and ale pie with fries and veg for the hungry bunnies coming off the golf course. Two courses from the main menu are £10.50, three £13.50. It is open to anyone and bookings are also taken for Saturday nights.

Other guests enjoying lunch the day I visited were Pat Holland from Nunthorpe, Middlesbrough, and Elaine Coulson from Hartburn, Stockton. Elaine had bought the pamper day as a Christmas present for Pat. "There were supposed to be three of us coming today, but our other friend had to work so we'll just have to come again," laughed Elaine, while Pat professed herself to be "in heaven".

She's not far off the mark.

■ Headlam Spa, Headlam Hall, nr Gainford, Darlington, County Durham DL2 3HA. Tel: 01325-730691. Email: spa@headlamhall.co.uk Web: www.headlamspa.co.uk

■ Headlam Spa offers a range of day spa packages from £80 per person, which includes a spa therapy, lunch and use of other facilities. Packages with accommodation cost from £172 per person. Annual membership of the spa costs £570 per person, £1,026 for a double membership, £456 single off-peak.

■ City Dweller facial £42; Marine Algae Seaweed Wrap £52. Other beauty treatments on offer include manicure, pedicure, waxing, self-tanning and massage therapy.

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NE motoring

Son of Corolla

Motoring correspondent IAN LAMMING compares the new Toyota Auris with its bestselling predecessor

IT took a brave man or woman to drop the name of the world's most popular car, but that is exactly what Toyota has done. Farewell Corolla, hello Auris, and the new model has a lot to live up to, including outselling just about every other car that was ever made.

To fans and disciples who have stuck to the Corolla like bugs to the windscreen, fret not. This remains a Toyota through and through, sharing all the same abilities, dynamics and qualities of the model it replaces.

Auris looks kind of Corolla-like, a gentle evolution that will go largely unnoticed, a kind of pumped-up Yaris. It's a great look if you need a no-nonsense, park it anywhere during the day or night type vehicle.

It's not flash, it won't attract admiring glances and you are unlikely to be out there every Sunday morning on the driveway washing, polishing and preening. It's a functional, no frills, penned by computer,

honest workhorse – and there's nothing wrong with being unpretentious, particularly in Britain, where it's seen as a blessing.

Inside is much funkier than its plain clothes would suggest. The dash and centre console border on the groovy with space-age shapes and dash-mounted handbrake and gear lever. The clocks are nice too, sort of 3D and very modern beneath the scalloped hood. It all gels together really well and on top of working perfectly, also looks a bit different.

The relationship between seat, steering wheel and pedals is perfect too... well it is for my Japanese gentleman proportions.

Press the starter button – how very racy – and the 1.6 litre engine jumps to life with little more than a shudder. All the controls operate slickly enough and it's very easy to drive. The four cylinder motor is peppy enough with 122bhp to draw on and decent amounts of acceleration and torque. Com-



TOYOTA AURIS: worthy successor to an automotive icon

bined fuel consumption is a healthy 39.8mpg. On the motorway it is extremely relaxed, allowing for long distances to be travelled with ease. In town it's a breeze to drive and park, thanks to modest proportions and great swathes of glass.

Handling is smooth, safe and secure and the ride is good, soaking up the bumps without being too harsh on the spine.

If safety is your thing then you will love the nine airbags and antilock brakes, not to mention the 'minimal intrusion cabin system' which soaks up impact energy and channels it away from occupants. Crash test experts Euro NCAP liked it and awarded the Auris five stars for safety.

Equipment levels are high and welcome. There is air conditioning, electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking and a decent sound system with CD player. Further up the model range you get bigger alloys, audio controls on the steering wheel, leather bits and bobs and a sunroof.

If you don't fancy petrol there are also three diesel versions to be had, boosting the range and appeal of the Auris. Oh, and it's also made in Britain.

Son of Corolla boasts all the attributes needed to be a worthy successor to an automotive icon. It can't fail to appeal to the Toyota-faithful and should win a few million new friends along the way.



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NE leisure



Paradise regained

A stone's throw from the bustling tourist attractions of York lies one of the area's best kept secrets. MARIE CARTER enjoys a weekend in Paradise with her parents

FAR off the beaten track, our car trundles along old B roads as the landscape opens up to reveal the gently rolling countryside of this lovely, yet still largely undiscovered, part of Yorkshire. Turning down a winding track, we arrive at Paradise Leisure near Storwood village in East Yorkshire, just 20 minutes' drive from York, and near tourist magnets like Beverley and the seaside resorts of Scarborough, Whitby and Bridlington. We are staying at a deluxe holiday lodge, located amid stunning scenery for a weekend of sight-seeing, relaxation and fishing.

The spacious and surprisingly luxurious self-catering cabins can house up to four people and include ensuite facilities in the master bedroom, power showers and widescreen television with a large selection of family DVDs. But watching TV might well be the last thing on your mind when you come here, perhaps because it seems to intrude impolitely on the blissful peace and quiet.

Owners Simon and Val Cranmer Gordon have worked miracles since developing the site over six years and turning it into a prosperous business. Val arrives to greet us and we are immediately made to feel very welcome as she gives us a tour of our cabin and makes sure we know how to operate everything. She and Simon live on site, and so are readily available to answer any questions.

I stand on the covered veranda looking out on to the lake, which is stocked with hundreds of fish, thronged with water lilies and bordered by mature trees. There is even a young orchard next to Simon's woodland walk. The place is not just a haven for total rest and relaxation, but a coarse fisherman's paradise, boasting two of the very finest fisheries in the country.

Amid the 15 acres of landscaped greenery and woods, the dedicated or even novice fisherman can try his or her hand at this peaceful but still competitive pastime. The site boasts two coarse fishing lakes with one strictly for residents and another set away from the cabins, which can be enjoyed by anyone on a day ticket.

Simon, a former fisheries officer with the Environment Agency, has almost single-handedly landscaped the site and dug out the lakes. He even drew up a design for the cabins as no one was producing what he wanted. Paradise is clearly a labour of love for this straight-talking Yorkshireman with an indomitable thirst for hard work and a determination that would put most of us to shame.

Simon shows me the carefully created woodland walks. "The driving force was really to create a place which people could enjoy but which didn't intrude on the environment. It's all about blending what we've created into the surroundings," he explains.

There are bird boxes in the trees, which attract everything from woodpeckers to owls: the former punctuate the silence with their rat-tat-tat on the trees.

My dad is particularly entranced by the faintly surreal sight of Second World War planes, Tornados and Lancaster bombers, circling above us. The Elvington Air Show is on, and the ominous drone of planes is at first mistaken for thunder. The show is an annual event - in August - but enthusiasts can view these old beasts of the air all year round courtesy of the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington.

We gamely tried the fishing, explored the area, including the canal walks, and also sampled some excellent local fare at The Melbourne Arms, but a weekend in Paradise is just too much of a draw to find time to explore the wider area. Many people stay for a week, with the whole family trying their hand at fishing or they might go walking or cycling or perhaps try golf at the local club. Alternatively, they might prefer just to soak up the total peace and quiet. My parents had one word for Paradise, and that was "bliss". I found it hard to disagree.

For more information about Paradise Leisure, log on to www.paradiseleisure.com or contact Val or Simon on 01759 318452 or email info@paradiseleisure.com.

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PERFECT PEACE: the cabin interiors



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Six of the best to ease the ironing nightmare

AT long last scientists have come up with a magic formula for the world's most hated chore – yes, the art of ironing has been pondered upon by boffins at Bristol University who have been working with Morphy Richards.

In the equation there are some key elements: the material of the shirt and fabric thickness; the fluidity of the material, which governs the ease with which creases occur; the area of the soleplate, plus frictional drag of the iron; steam and water output and, of course, good old elbow grease.

Here are some of the top crease-busters...

SPOT ON

Morphy Richards Precise Steam

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www.morphyrichards.com

MAKING manual ironing just a little easier, the Morphy Richards machine has four settings on the dial. You just match the dot on the iron with the one on your garment care label and it'll adjust to the correct steam level and perfect heat. No holes, no burns and no shine.

MULTI-TASKER

Russell Hobbs Digital iron – £49.99 see



CREASE-BUSTER: the Russell Hobbs Digital iron

www.russellhobbs.com

ONE of the world's first digital irons, this machine has a microprocessor on board and that was enough to impress me. Turns out there is much more to it: this apparently helps it maintain an even temperature and beeps when it's reached. This iron is also a powerhouse at vertical steaming, so you can run it over suits that you've dropped on the floor or straighten up those curtains.

BORED WITH YOUR BOARD

Ironman – £99.95 from www.firebox.com

THE unique shape of the Ironman has



helped it claim number one spot for both form and function in the international ironing board championships. It is shaped in the human form and therefore it can de-crease our clothes that little bit better. And it looks good into the bargain. A range of four covers is available if you still haven't grown out of your dressing-up stage.

INTELLIGENT IRON

Laurastar MagicS5 – £799 from www.harrods.com

ANOTHER eye-watering price-tag, but then you are investing in a masterpiece of modern technology, and it's from the A-listers' favourite shop. The movement of the iron controls the steam: it knows when you're pushing forward and increases the amount of steam produced. It has an automatic cable rewind



FULL OF HOT AIR

Siemens Dressman – £1,058.95 from www.tytrade-appliances.co.uk

THIS futuristic machine is now available to all. The ultimate de-crease machine uses the power of hot air and a parachute silk lining to smooth shirts in about eight seconds. Just place your garment over the 5ft 8in automaton and a blast of hot air expands the silk lining and, in turn, your shirt for perfect results.

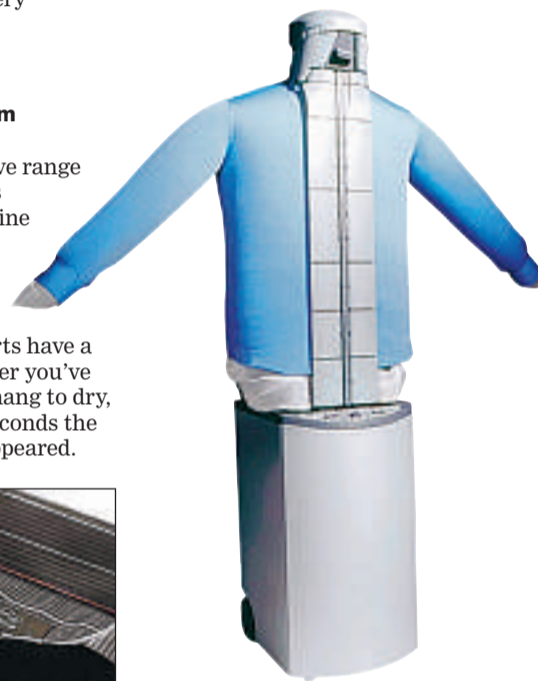
Peter Jenkinson

mechanism and looks like a machine to be taken very seriously.

SMART SHIRT

Eton Shirts – £100 from www.etonshirts.co.uk

THERE is an impressive range of fabrics and patterns available from this online shirt store and, to the naked eye, they are just a collection of classy white collar wear. All of Eton's shirts have a non-iron finish and after you've washed one and let it hang to dry, just pop it on and in seconds the creases will have disappeared.



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Plans are now in place for 2007's events, so please watch this space!

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If you are reading this and think that you need help and guidance, I promise you never look back. It would be untrue to say that the programme is easy. You need determination, will power and to commit to 12 weeks attending the gym at least 3 times a week. Follow the advice the girls give, if you are unsure of anything, ask. All the girls are great and will always take time to explain and help you when you need it.

I hope to see you soon. Once you start you will feel fantastic and your confidence will improve as your fitness improves.

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