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for the North-East

JUNE 2006

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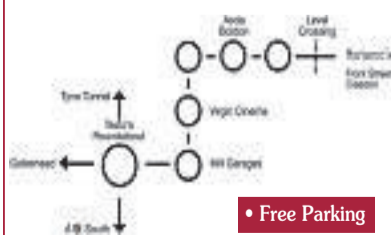
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sharon griffiths

“Maybe every man has the right to a shed, undisturbed by domestic duties

WE all need our own space. Somewhere where we can escape from the rest of the world – or the rest of the family – somewhere that’s a haven, our own little kingdom.

For a friend of mine, a mother of four boisterous boys, it was her Sewing Room. In reality, it was a sort of triangular box room, left over after some renovations. Too small for a bed, it was big enough for a chair, a bean bag and a sewing machine. While the boys rampaged over the rest of the house, fought, watched television and climbed over their father, she would be industriously locked away in her sewing room.

Of course, with all those needles, pins and scissors, a sewing room was no place for a child.

It took some years to dawn on the family that although she spent an awful lot of time in her sewing room, she never actually produced much sewing. Maybe that was also about the time they discovered her secret stash of cigarettes, wine, chocolate and trashy novels.

She had no qualms at all about her little deception, on the basis that the chance of peace and quiet over the years had saved her sanity and quite possibly even the lives of her children.

Men don’t have sewing rooms. They have sheds. These are their own little kingdoms at the bottom of the garden, a world away from the civilised world of women and houses, where they can potter round pretending to be Capability Brown, doing things with soil and seeds, or wood and metal. Or not...

Years ago, when I was young and single, I had an allotment. All the other allotment holders were old men with names like Percy, Herbert and Norman, who initially looked at me very suspiciously and without much of a welcome. Women clearly had no place in their growing scheme of things.

Gradually, they softened towards me, offering me advice, help, seeds and the pick of their prize crops. Percy even did a radio series with me. But the day I knew I was really accepted was the day I was invited into their sheds. What a revelation.

Each allotment had its shed, an apparently ramshackle construction of oddly painted planks, bits of corrugated metal, chequerboard roofing felt, oddly grand windows (unless they were being used for cold frames) and maybe a bit of a bench outside. But once you were inside, it was a totally different place.

These were little havens of masculine comfort. In among the shelves of flowerpots, seed packets, tools, twine, rooting powder and crumpled pack-

ets of Phostrogen, there’d be an armchair, ancient but comfy, maybe a Primus stove and a little stock of tea and biscuits. There were cigarettes, pipes, bottles of Guinness, copies of the News of the World and the Racing Post and maybe a battered old radio for when the cricket was on.

It had everything they needed for their escape from the world of women and was the exact equivalent of a rich man’s study or a gentleman’s club. Only smelling of earth.

I felt inordinately privileged to be there.

On summer evenings, the men would do maybe an hour’s gardening, exchange cuttings, seedlings and advice – then spend another two hours on the benches outside their sheds, smoking their pipes and putting the world to rights. When it rained, they weren’t perturbed, but retreated inside, snug with their cigarettes and packets of biscuits, knowing they could drop fag ash and scatter crumbs with compete impunity. I think there were card schools going on too, but that was a privilege too far – I was never invited in on those.

As twilight came, the old men would reluctantly drag themselves away and back to the world of women, their clean and orderly houses, where they had to take off their boots, leave their pipes in their pockets and not wipe their mucky hands on the clean towel.

Maybe every man has the right to a shed and the right to potter on, undisturbed by domestic duties. It’s probably saved a lot of marriages.

Anyway, it’s in the genes. Small boys, when left to roam wild, spend much of their time building dens, which perform exactly the same purpose of masculine retreat.

Even men who have no interest in gardening, who would never look at a seed catalogue or spend an evening lovingly fitting a new handle to a favourite hoe, still have the basic need for their own kingdom at the bottom of the garden.

Writers Roald Dahl and Philip Pullman both wrote some of their greatest works in the shed. Posh sheds, admittedly.

And they’ve got posher. Now we have garden offices, garden leisure rooms, great big buildings, all looking very impressive, like miniature Scandinavian chalets, complete with proper windows and even curtains.

But as the man sets off purposefully down the garden path to his “garden office”, don’t be fooled. However grand, it’s still a shed. And that’s why he loves it.

■ Pick of the chic sheds: see overleaf

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CORGI REGISTERED FITTING SERVICE AVAILABLE

Once the sole preserve of men and their tools, sheds are becoming a hip urban retreat from family life. GABRIELLE FAGAN discovers how to make your shed chic



CLUTTER BUSTER: Japanese-inspired shed from 101 Ways To Make More Space (BBC Books, £4.99)

THE humble garden shed, once simply used as storage space for garden gear, is increasingly being put to imaginative and versatile uses, from extra living space to workshops and home offices.

It's a trend that's becoming so popular that celebrities, including Zoe Ball and TV interior designers Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan, created 'designer sheds' at this spring's Ideal Home Show.

Zoe proved sheds have stopped being solely a male preserve with her pink-painted Girly Garden retreat. "I went for a cosy look, but with lushness too, all whites and soft dusky pinks, mirrored side tables and beautiful pale pink silk curtains with embroidered cream flowers," she says. "It's feminine, nostalgic and evokes the era of my favourite films - Casablanca and Rebecca - with my original film posters on the walls."

Colin and Justin celebrated their Scottish roots with a contemporary spin on a hunting lodge theme. They used tartans, tweeds and skins as well as chairs and a chandelier made from antlers. "Think more 21st century Braveheart than shortbread tin or white heather club," says Colin.

TV chef James Martin turned his into a mini kitchen and DJ Neil Fox devoted his shed to a pampering repair room for his pride and joy - his Harley Davidson motorbike.

So take another look at that dingy, cobwebby, dark cavern filled with old bicycles and a lawnmower. With a bit of tender loving care, and minimal expense, that shed could easily be turned into a garden sanctuary.

Don't worry about perfection in your shed - after all this is somewhere where you want to chill and relax and not worry about cleaning and tidying.

So keep it simple. Use easy-wash, cotton-print fabrics for curtains and throws, a second-hand chair (who cares if it's losing its stuffing!) and a fold-up wooden garden table.

Accessorise with prints or posters or maybe some colourful flag bunting. Hang up a clock so you know what time to make tea, add a few cushions and hey presto - you've got a sanctuary.

If you haven't already got a shed to decorate, it might be time to invest But don't rush - there are several important things to take into account and think about before getting started.

Ensure your shed is the right size for your

garden and your needs. You don't want a massive cabin-like building taking up all the space outside and blocking out daylight to the house, but at the same time you don't want a tiny cupboard for a large garden that needs lots of storage.

If you are erecting your own shed, double check with the supplier that the shed you want is in stock, as not all retailers keep all available sheds in warehouses, especially if they're quite big. It would be a shame to put a weekend aside for building only to find you don't have your flat-pack shed. Try to get some friends involved to help out with the construction, as it's pretty tough as a one-person job.

Think carefully about where to place your new shed and make sure it's not blocking any entrances or casting huge shadows over flowerbeds that contain plants in need of lots of sun. If you're going to be using the shed as some sort of workshop, consider whether you want to run electricity to it and think about trying to place it as near to the house as possible.

Ensure that you have the all the tools and materials you will need before getting started on assembly. Essentials include a saw, a few hammers, a tape measure and a level.

Planning permission isn't normally needed for average-sized sheds, but for larger designs it's best to check with your local council, just to be on the safe side.



GARDEN GIZMOS: products from John Lewis



SHED FACTS

- Britons spend around £90m a year on sheds, and a report by the Institute of Surveys says that a well-kept shed can add up to five per cent to the value of a property.
- Ten million homes now have garden hideaway.
- The Zoological Museum, now part of London's Natural History Museum, was begun by Walter Rothschild at the age of seven in a garden shed.
- A shed was chosen as one of the top 100 symbols of Britishness in the Millennium Dome.
- Wallace & Gromit's adventures, *The Wrong Trousers*, *A Close Shave* and *Curse Of The Were-Rabbit*, were written by Bob Baker in his garden shed in Oldbury-on-Seven, Gloucestershire.
- British boffin Trevor Baylis came up with the prototype of his famous clockwork radio in his garden shed.
- Shed lovers can visit a dedicated website, www.readersheds.co.uk, where you can post a picture of your shed, or join a chatroom for other sheddists.

How chic is your shed?



CELEBRITY SHEDS:
from top – Zoe's Ball's pink palace; Colin and Justin's shooting shed and DJ Neil Fox's repair room for his beloved Harley Davidson



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NE interiors

It may be little known, but thanks to its shortlisting for a major accolade, fame could be round the corner for Markenfield Hall. Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER pays a visit



The hall with it all

THERE can be few things nicer than being considered for a grand title – except, perhaps, when the news of this comes as a complete surprise. That's exactly what happened to Ian and Lady Deirdre Curteis when they learned their home, Markenfield Hall, near Ripon, was in the race to find England's finest. "The competition was Country Life's The Nation's Finest Manor Houses 2006," says Ian. "We didn't enter it – they rang us and said 'you're on the shortlist, do you mind?'"

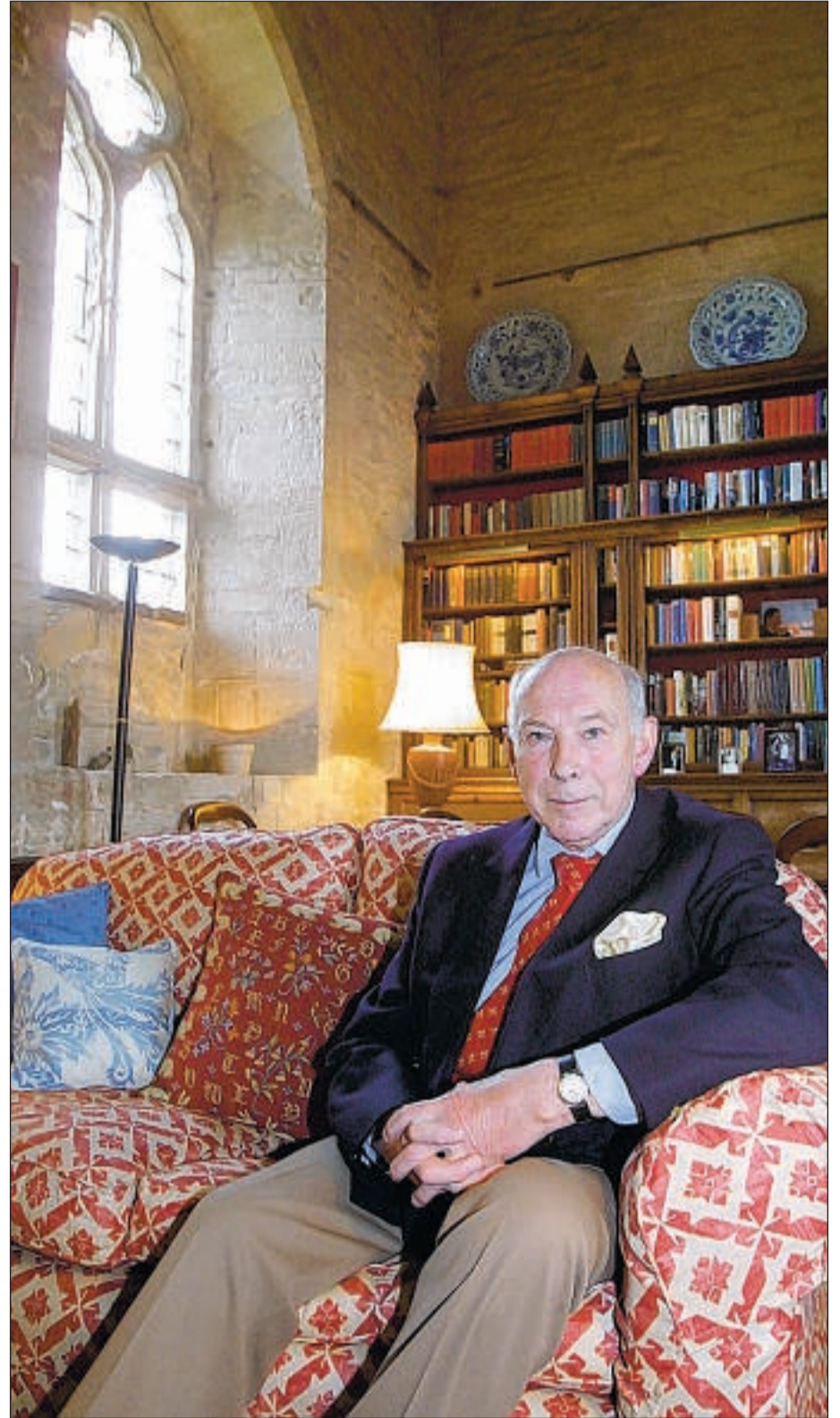
Of course the couple were delighted, and when the magazine's editor asked to visit, were more than happy to entertain him. My request for an interview, soon after this auspicious event, was similarly well received. So it is that on a beautiful spring day, I'm sitting with Ian, gazing past the moat to miles of fields, as he tells me the house's story.

"We've got two claims to fame," he begins. "One is architectural in that we're the most unspoiled early 14th century house in the whole of England. The other great claim is

its wonderful, quite isolated position. It's a very romantic house and it's got the most wonderful atmosphere. The reason for its survival is that it was the great house of a great Yorkshire family, the Markenfield family."

Briefly returning to the present, Ian explains his own association with Markenfield Hall. "I came here eight years ago," he says. "My wife was married to Lord Grantley, whose family had owned the house since 1761, and he died in 1995. My wife and I married in 2001 in the chapel here."

We leave our seats beside the moat and Ian points out the fortified entrance. Designed to repel the Scots, it may have kept the house safe, but couldn't always protect its occupants. "In 1569, the Rising of the North was instigated by Thomas Markenfield," says Ian. "A large contingent collected in the courtyard and the leaders last had mass in our chapel before they marched out and were hideously routed. The house was confiscated by the Crown and later sold to Sir Thomas Egerton, who never lived here, so



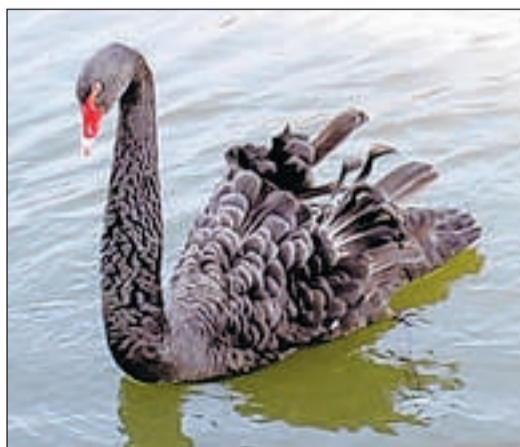
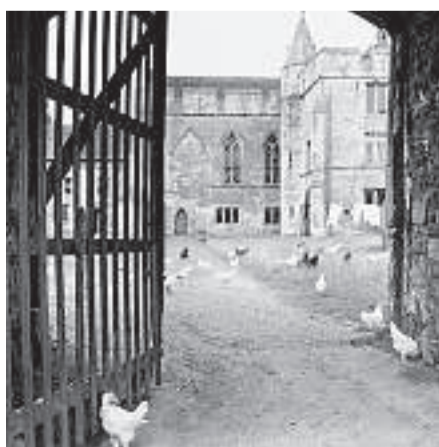
CUSTODIANS: Ian and Lady Deirdre Curteis feel it's a huge honour to live somewhere as beautiful, tranquil and full of history as Markenfield Hall in North Yorkshire

from then until 1980 it was a tenanted farm house. It just dwelt on untouched and that's how it's survived in this wonderful state."

Looking at the house now, it's very much a lived-in home, as well as being a hub for tourists. Ian takes me to a private room where family portraits adorn the walls. Charmingly old-fashioned – and remarkably well informed – he uses terms like

'formidable' to describe the subjects. "That's Sir Fletcher Norton," he says of an austere looking gentleman. "He was speaker of the House of Commons. He became the first Lord Grantley and took the title of Lord Grantley of Markenfield. That's Cecily Norton. She was maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth."

Continued on page 8 ►



FROM LEFT: the courtyard circa 1932 (North Yorkshire county council archives); the chapel; one of the black swans that patrols the moat; the gatehouse (Picture: John Furlong)



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: the vaulted study; shelves in the library, which will eventually house 5,000 books, including the Markenfield archives; the arched windows are testament to the hall's great age; the stunning setting for Markenfield Hall, near Ripon

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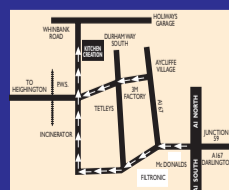


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BELOW: the four poster bedroom, which will be open to the public this year



The hall with it all

► Continued from page 7

As if its pedigree were not enough, the house is remarkable in another sense – it holds the distinction of being part of the North’s smallest parish. Ian expounds on this with great delight.

“The parish has a population of four – my wife, me and our tenant farmer and his wife. A parish meeting is when I run into our tenant farmer in the middle of the courtyard,” he jokes.

“In the 1980s, in a local government re-organisation, there was a plan to do away with the parish of Markenfield Hall and my wife’s last husband wrote to them and said he’d called a parish meeting, that there was 100 per cent attendance and that it was felt that it was a privately owned parish which received nothing. Facing it in a scrap book is a letter from the ministry saying that in view of the strength of feeling in the parish, it was dropping the proposal.”

In Ian’s time there, the house has seen major changes, the most dramatic of which has been the restoration of the Great Hall. The vast space, once cold and empty, has now been brought back into use, with a medieval fire its stunning centrepiece. To blend with their setting, all the bookcases have been ‘aged’ and the chapel entrance now bears the image of Lady Deirdre.

As well as open days, the Great Hall hosts concerts and civil weddings and with the chapel alongside it, couples can even have a blessing.

Taking me through to the tiny church, Ian explains how it operates. “It’s a Catholic chapel – my wife is Catholic – but I’m an Anglican so we share it 50/50,” he says. “People come here from miles away. The Catholics love it because all their churches were taken away and they love coming to an ancient Catholic chapel, and the Anglicans love it because all our services use the old version of the Book of Common Prayer and people love that. When my wife and I were married here, it was the first marriage here that we know of since 1487 – five years before Columbus discovered America.”

While the house’s running takes up much of his time, Ian does have another job – as an eminent playwright. He’s just completed a theatre piece and reveals that years ago, his TV writing reached the heights of Z Cars and The Onedin Line. Yet if he minds the hall’s demands, he doesn’t show it.

“It’s a huge honour to live in a place like this,” he says. “I wake up every morning and can’t believe it. I think the atmosphere is the extraordinary thing – this extraordinary sense of tranquillity seems to shine out of the walls like sunshine on stone.”

■ Markenfield Hall will next be open to the public from June 18 to July 1, and can be booked for group tours throughout the year. For more information, call (01765) 692303 or visit www.markenfield.com



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: the de Markenfield family coat of arms; the interior of the chapel; administrator Sarah Robson in the new library

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NE shopping

Dreaming of a sleepover?

As a Giant Sleepover looms, PETER JENKINSON selects some of the best gadgets to make the slumber party go with a swing

GET involved in a great cause, try and break a world record and keep the kids entertained all in one hit. Sounds too good to be true?

Well the BT Giant Sleepover, taking place on June 17 and 18 and aimed at kids between the ages of six and 11, is a nationwide event where you organise a sleepover and help raise money for your chosen charity or the worthy partner of the event, Childline.

This is a perfect opportunity for the kids to have loads of fun and take part in what could possibly be a record breaking event – last year more than 31,000 children took part, so get signed up.

This year it is also incorporating the first ever Aquafresh Minty Mouth Challenge – the world's biggest simultaneous tooth brushing event – so you could be part of two records in one night.

To get involved click on www.giantsleepover.com or call 0870 240 1640.

Once you've signed up you'll be provided with a Treasure Chest, goodie bag each and story books and we've some suggestions to make this and other sleepovers special.



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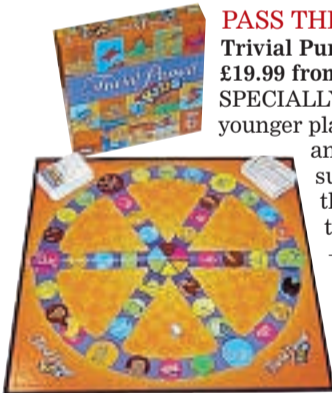


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Peter Jenkinson



KIDS CARRIERS

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Felt might not be an easy medium to work with, but it can provide some surprising results. SHEILA WEBER talks to three artists who specialise in texture



Talking textiles

IN years gone by, people in Mongolia used horses to drag fabric across the Steppes to create felt. Thanks to mechanisation, things are a bit easier these days. In Mongolia – and in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales.

All of which is good news for people like Andrea Hunter. She is a felt artist who has teamed up with two other women to try to promote textile art in the area. And the trio are off to a good start, having been selected for the North Yorkshire Open Studios scheme.

Andrea, Nancy Murgatroyd and Caroline Dunn are all passionate about the importance of their work – and that of other artists – to the local economy.

The Open Studio project started last year and is proving very successful, largely through its link-up with the Mercer Gallery in Harrogate and a slick catalogue which lists members throughout the area.

Andrea, who works from her home in Hardraw, uses pure wool for her creations. "I use the wool as if it was an art medium," she says. "I work with very fine layers to create an image as if it was a painting. When I am happy with that, I turn it into felt."

She does that by spraying the picture with soapy water and rolling it in bubble wrap to create friction. The friction is the key and it used to be real hard graft. When applied to pure wool, it turns it into felt.

"It is like putting a sweater in the washing machine," says Andrea. "I create the image within the felt, which has traditionally been used for functional items such as purses and slippers. For me, it is an artistic medium."

Andrea says felt work is becoming more popular. She started six years ago. The first few pictures came through surfing the Internet. But the style was unique.

A textile graduate, she had worked as a conventional artist, but wanted to do something different. "So I got back to textiles," she says. "I fetched my old degree coursework out of the attic, got some felt and made a start."

Andrea does a lot of monochrome images and landscapes with sheep. These are her favourites, but she also features other natural sights such as trees and flowers. "I like the wild, stormy Dales," she says. "That atmosphere. I try to capture all that."

Membership of the Open Studios scheme can only

come through invitation. "We don't want to devalue what anyone else does and selection can make you a bit nervous. But it showcases the work people want to see," says Nancy. "As textile artists, we are a minority and that is quite nice."

The women see the OS scheme as being a major source of business and are considering creating new work every year especially for the catalogue. "It's worth putting pieces together," says Nancy. "People often have to travel some distance for this kind of art so you have to make it worth their while."

All three are taking part in a series of special weekends at the Mercer Gallery. These run alongside an OS showcase exhibition spotlighting the work of more than 100 North Yorkshire artists and makers.

Caroline Dunn has a studio in Reeth. She concentrates on embroidery and paints and dyes fabrics and used to use felt a lot. "But felt is very hard work," she says. "Even the people in Mongolia now use machines."

Caroline is constantly amazed that she got into textile art. "I was doing a PhD in philosophy, but I wanted a relaxing hobby as a contrast. I saw a course advertised, got to like it and was hooked," she says.

She ended up with qualifications in both spheres – HND and PhD. Caroline specialises in medieval subjects. She also likes portraying birds. Her Reeth studio attracts quite a few people now. "This aspect of art is still quite specialised but it is growing," she says.

Nancy, who lives and works in Middleham, was in the fashion and textile industry before she started to paint. "After a few years I hankered to go full circle and return to my textile roots, using painting as a basis," she says.

"I wanted to get my painted image on to natural fabrics and it took me a long time to work out how to achieve this. I re-worked the image into a textile with additions such as stitching and beading. It took on a different life in this way. But it is all to do with texture."

With farming losing its grip as the traditional income source in the Dales, the women say that work such as theirs is increasingly crucial to the local economy.

"We get a lot of interest from people who live farther afield," says Nancy, "but as an area we should promote ourselves much more."

"Being selected for the Open Studio has been hugely important for us," adds Andrea.

It's like putting a sweater in a washing machine. I create the image within the felt, which has been traditionally been used for functional items



■ The three special weekends start at the Mercer Gallery, 31 Swan Road, Harrogate HG1 2SA, on June 10. Details from the gallery on (01423) 556188.

MAIN PICTURE:
Andrea, Nancy and Caroline with samples of their work

Pictures: NIGEL WHITFIELD



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me and my wardrobe



SEEING RED: clockwise from main picture – black lace skirt and top from Heaven in Darlington's Skinnergate; black buckle mules from Carvela in Binns, Darlington. Pinstripe jacket and chunky pearl necklace from Topshop in Newcastle; Miss Sixty jeans from Leggs in Darlington; Bronx boots from Schuh in Newcastle. Sequined shrug from Morgan in Binns, Darlington, and top from River Island; River Island light green cord shorts; multi-strand necklace from Virgin Vie

Vanessa Reeve, 24, is the new manageress of Taylor Wood Hair Spa in Darlington. She lives in Coxhoe, near Durham, with her partner Brian Bonarius, 26, and their two Persian cats, Betty and Nina.

Describe your look

I like to look trendy but smart, whether I'm going to work, or going out. My favourite look at the moment is fishnet tights with boots. I think they make me look up-to-date and sophisticated at the same time. My signature look is my pillarbox red hair, which I started getting coloured about five years ago. Before that, my mum and I tried to colour it red but it was never red enough. Now it is! I like my look to be different to everyone else and reflect my personality. I suppose I like to stand out.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

It's more a favourite outfit. I love my Topshop long green shorts which I wear with a River Island brown top and a sequined see-through Morgan shrug. I wear them with some green Bronx round-toed boots when I go out in

Newcastle, and I always feel great. It's a very versatile outfit which I can dress up with a fake fur jacket. For a glam evening look, I wear a black skirt with lace round the bottom which I got from Heaven in Skinnergate, Darlington.

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

I'm not a designer girl at all and much prefer to shop in the High Street if I can put together a different look, but I spent £120 on some Leggs jeans two years ago. They're denim and have black stitching. They're a nice fit and skinny so they tuck well into boots, another of my favourite looks.

What's your worst buy?

I bought a cream and gold sequined dress from Quiz at the MetroCentre in the days before I discovered blusher and I looked like a ghost when I wore it to a wedding! Now I know not to wear cream as it washes me out.

What are your favourite shops?

I love Topshop, but it has to be the one in Newcastle city centre as that gets items

other branches don't get and I always feel confident my outfit is going to be a little different to everyone else's. I like their accessories and Faith shoes.

Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?

It has to be Kate Moss and the trendy way she wears her trousers tucked into her boots.

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My mum and I tried to colour it red but it was never red enough. Now it is!

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NE out on the town

NINA CLIFF

NINA loved the venue and liked the idea of a 70s night which wasn't cheesy. Her outfit was a mixture of designer and high street with her dress from C&A and her shoes by Jimmy Choo. She is a business development manager and relies on Tigi Camera Shine to keep her hair looking good day and night. She is currently a big Arctic Monkeys fan and loves to shop at Cruise 1 and Cruise 2 in Newcastle.



ELIZABETH OKAROH

AGED 24, Elizabeth is a fashion design student at Northumbria University. She managed to look very trendy while still fitting in with the 70s theme of the night. Her hotpants were from Zara, her layered tops from charity shops and Topshop, and she finished off the outfit with chains from H&M. She keeps her skin super soft with the Body Shop cocoa butter. Her current CDs of choice are anything by Hed Kandi.



ANDREW 'PANDA' RAINE, PAUL REDFERN AND BEN PERITTON

THE boys were out to celebrate winning the cup with their local football team, The Spotted Dog. Normally holding down respectable jobs, including being a building surveyor and salesmen, the boys were sporting garments from numerous fancy dress shops around the region with the aim of imitating Snoop Dogg in the film Starsky and Hutch. The boys normally like to shop at Psyche, Triads and occasional trips to shopping mecca Harvey Nichols in Leeds. Their playlist includes the Arctic Monkeys, The Zutons and the new album by Jamie Foxx. Health tips were very varied from these three, some of them unrepeatable! Paul relies on Glue from Label M to keep his hair in place while Andrew is a big fan of Hair Fudge.

THE launch night of Brutus Gold's Love Train at The Point in Sunderland was always going to be different to the usual night out. Usually found jetting across the globe entertaining stars such as Tina Turner, George Clooney and the BMW Williams Formula 1 team, Brutus Gold has taken up residency at The Point on the last Friday of every month.

The Love Train show, hosted by Brutus Gold himself, is an interactive-style cabaret show which is a mixture of comedy, fun and perhaps most importantly, music that dancing was made for.

The Point opened just over six months ago after an impressive £6m investment. It encompasses three bars and one nightclub with varying music styles and decor, ensuring something for everyone.

SARAH WORSNOP, HUTCH AND SARAH-JANE BLAKEY

SARAH and Sarah-Jane, both in the education sector, were supporting Brutus on his first residency, while Hutch is one of Brutus's team. Sarah wore an outfit borrowed from a friend while Sarah-Jane hired her outfit from Masquerade in Stockton. Hutch was sporting 70s original Adidas shorts and sweat top and finished off the outfit with modified American stunt skates. The girls' current choice of music is very varied - Sarah-Jane got ready to the hip hop beats of the Black-Eyed Peas while Sarah was reliving some late 90s trance albums. Hutch is a huge fan of US gospel house.



ished off the outfit with modified American stunt skates. The girls' current choice of music is very varied - Sarah-Jane got ready to the hip hop beats of the Black-Eyed Peas while Sarah was reliving some late 90s trance albums. Hutch is a huge fan of US gospel house.

HEATHER PEACOCK AND MARTIN CUNDY

THESE two somehow managed to make white John Travolta suits sexy. Heather, a marketing manager from Newcastle, and Martin, a security systems sales manager from Darlington, were both here to support friends, who were working. They will definitely be getting dressed up again to visit the Brutus Gold residency but in the meantime will be listening to the Arctic Monkeys and Hard-Fi. Heather can be found shopping anywhere - from supermarkets like Tesco to the more upmarket boutiques of Newcastle and Jesmond. Her favourite beauty tool is GHD hair straighteners. Martin likes to shop at House of Fraser for its wide selection of menswear.



● This month's column has been supplied by Blue Mongoose Limited PR and event management consultancy. Tel: (01325) 285-535, www.blue-mongoose.co.uk

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NE interiors



When they needed a stylish bathroom designed for their new house in Wynyard, Graham and Michelle Shanks turned to the people they knew had all the relevant experience for the job – themselves



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HAVING recently moved to their brand new house on The Fairways in Wynyard, Michelle and Graham Shanks, like most homeowners, were faced with the task of planning and decorating each and every room in their new home, from carpets and curtains to the final design of their kitchen and bathrooms.

So at a time like this what better company to have as your family business than The Bathroom Studio & The Bespoke Kitchen Company, which has been designing and installing the most prestigious bathrooms in the region for over 30 years?

And Michelle and Graham have shown exactly what can be achieved using some of the very latest products available from the leading manufacturers in the industry – and a great deal of planning and knowledge – to create stunning results.

Michelle says: "We were very lucky that our builders Charles Church were so accommodating and allowed us to design and install our own bathrooms. They helped with moving walls, blocking up doors and even prepared all the first fix plumbing. We are absolutely delighted with the results and hope that we can now share our experience with other home owners on Wynyard."

The first room to get the full Bathroom Studio treatment was the downstairs cloakroom. Graham, as sales director and leading designer of the business, had a completely blank canvas to work with and was determined that his choice of product and finishing touches showed the quality the business could offer.

"We really wanted to create an impression with the cloakroom and probably went a bit over the top, but the reaction we have had from friends and family have shown what an important little room it can be," says Michelle. "With our clients, more and more emphasis is

being placed on the cloakroom, and rightly so. When you have visitors that is probably the only bathroom that they will see, so it makes sense to ensure it looks its best."

Michelle and Graham chose Kohler products because of their quality and the very contemporary look that they wanted to achieve – with a wall-hung WC, soft closing seat and chrome flush plate. The beautiful Escale hand basin has useful storage underneath.

One of the problems most people face with cloakrooms is that you can always see ugly pipe work and boxing around the room, so the main aim with this room during planning was to hide all the pipe work.

Clever use of tiled boxing and furniture helped achieve the exact look the couple wanted. The addition of a beautiful Bisque radiator, chrome taps and accessories completed the overall look, while the stunning high gloss travertine tiles added the finishing touch of pure luxury.

The brief for the couple's ensuite was very different: this was to be a room of complete indulgence, a mini sanctuary, where they could relax, pamper and forget about the demands of running their successful business.

"I was really excited about designing this room and knew exactly what products I wanted.

However, when Graham designed it to scale on the original layout, the room wasn't big enough," says Michelle.

Not to be deterred, they decided to move walls, eliminate the walk-in wardrobes, and steal a little extra space from the bedroom and achieved an amazing room in the space of only one week.

The main feature of the room is the stunning double-ended, free standing bath from Jacuzzi, with underwater lighting and eight powerful massaging jets.

"Our children, Ella and Lewis have never enjoyed bath time as much and instead of having to persuade them to go in, I actually find them

“

It has been very exciting to see the computer-generated design come to life in such a short space of time, and to use the products we enthuse about to customers



The Bathroom Studio & The Bespoke Kitchen Company. Showrooms at:
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 ■ Airport Industrial Estate, Kingston Park, Newcastle 0191 271 5800

running their own baths now," says Michelle. All the products found in this room were supplied by Jacuzzi, from the bath to the furniture and pottery, and also the all glass steam/shower cubicle. "As my brother is sales director at Jacuzzi, we have built up a very strong relationship with their brand and we were lucky to get hold of some of the very latest products on offer, in particular the new Essteam shower, which is absolutely fantastic," says Michelle. The beech double bowl vanity unit and the extra storage around the WC use the space very cleverly and maximise storage for all the unwanted clutter in the bathroom. Again, the finishing touches make all the difference with the detail to lighting, the large Hot Spring radiator, underfloor heating and tiling completing the stunning end result. The tiling is more minimal in this room with

only one wall fully tiled and then feature tiling as a skirting board around the room which helps tie the design together. When tiling larger rooms, it can become expensive so Michelle recommends feature tiling such as panels behind the basin or WC. "It has been a great experience for us both to actually understand what our customers go through when choosing the products and then during the installation period, which can often be quite hectic," says Michelle. "It has also been very exciting to see the computer-generated design come to life in such a short space of time and to use the products we enthuse about to our customers." With two more bathrooms still to plan and design Graham and Michelle are looking forward to the challenge of producing something even more spectacular than their cloakroom and en-suite – so watch this space.

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RE-TOUCH: images can be made brighter and better

Altered images

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Cast your eye over the family photo album and you're sure to find them. The strange images with the little sticker on that says 'Under-exposed, next time use the flash' or 'Blurred images, next time try standing still'. The advent of digital has allowed us to re-touch our photos at the click of a mouse button. But which photo package is the best for you? Gadget guru NIGEL BURTON reviews the current state of play

BEST FOR SEMI-PROS

Corel Paint Shop Pro X
ORIGINALLY a shareware programme, Paint Shop Pro has grown up into a fully-fledged Photoshop rival. This latest version has a revamped help system designed to make the software less intimidating.



Some of the automatic fixes could be better too and you'll need a decent PC to run it at speed. Price: from £45

All the power is still present and correct though – and there's little you can't do to your digital snaps. For less than £100 it's great value.

BEST FOR ENTHUSIASTS

Photoshop Elements 4
TAKES the best bits from the magnificent Photoshop CS2 programme (software that still costs more than a decent PC) and bundles them up in an attractive interface. All the tools you need for touching up your pictures and plenty to let you get creative. This is a close rival for Paint Shop Pro X. Costs less, too. Price: £65

BEST FOR THE DISORGANISED

ACDSee 8
BRILLIANT programme for sorting the wheat from the chaff. Catalogue every image on your PC, give them special names and search on key-words. There's a limited amount of editing available but even Photoshop is no use if you can't find your snaps. The option to back up your precious pics to CD is also a useful feature. Price: approx. £30

BEST FOR THE HARD UP

The Gimp 2.0
A COMPLETELY free image manipulation programme that boasts much of the power of Photoshop for the cost of an Internet download. Only the unimpressive interface lets this software down. If you are new to digital photography, it could prove to be frighteningly complex. Worth trying before you invest in anything else though.

BEST FOR NEWBIES

Microsoft Digital Image Suite
STRANGELY, for a company so utterly dominant in many areas of software development, Microsoft has never managed to crack the digital imaging arena. This software is mainly aimed at beginners – the degree of hand-holding will be annoying if you know your way around something like Photoshop Elements – but it has some useful features all the same.





What: Magistral Spa Facial
Where: Alquimia Spa, 18-20 Stonegate, York, YO1 8AS
(01904) 632888, www.alquimiaspa.com

ALTHOUGH this is called a facial, it is almost a full body treatment, and starts with a soothing foot bath in a plush beauty treatment room upstairs at the spa. As my friend Claire and I soaked our feet, we were given three oils to smell and choose from for our massage. Therapists Sophie and Jenny explained we usually choose the oils our body needs – I went for a soothing camomile, rosemary and juniper mix, while Claire chose the anti-ageing Cleopatra oil. All the Alquimia products used are natural and imported from Spain.

Then came the really gorgeous part and it went on and on... and on... Sophie and Jenny started our back massages. Claire and I had been hunched over our computers but our therapists eased the knots out of our necks and we were almost too relaxed to bother turning over for our facials.

Our faces were cleansed with ylang ylang cleanser, followed by exfoliation with some dead sea salt, which was pleasantly rough and grainy. A dead sea mud face pack was used to draw toxins and impurities from our skin, then we had a lovely long facial massage with eye contour extract and rosehip oil, which helps to regenerate skin cells.

A second mask of moisturising seaweed is used, and while that worked its magic, our therapists gave us a delicious foot massage with Healthy Feet Oil. Once the mask was removed, rosewater was used to tone our skin and the treatment ended with a soothing scalp massage, and an application of anti-ageing elixir, which tightens, nourishes and protects.

The attention to detail was first class, and throughout the whole treatment, we were cared for impeccably. We were kept warm, cosy and nurtured, whether our heads were being supported for a neck massage, or a different massage technique was being introduced. There was a gentle transition between each stage and at the end of our two hours, we were so relaxed we were barely able to speak. We counted our blessings we had travelled by train and didn't have to drive home.

This is a real treat of a treatment. It may be more expensive than most salon facials, but it is very good value for two hours of extreme bliss, and now, days on, my skin has a lovely dewy look that it hasn't had for years.

- Magistral Spa Facial, £85 for a two-hour treatment
- Day returns from Darlington to York are £13.70 with GNER. Call 08457 225 225 or visit www.gner.co.uk

Christine Fieldhouse



THE WAITING ROOM: anticipating a pampering

WIN a fantastic anti-ageing treatment

THERE'S no escaping time and its ravages, but at least today we have more weapons in our armoury to keep wrinkles at bay.

Facial fillers and skin peels can both bring back youthfulness to our looks, are quick and simple to do, and don't require a worrying trip to surgery.

Collagenics, based in Darlington but with clinics throughout the North-East, specialises in anti-ageing and non-surgical beauty treatments. They have a range of peels and dermal fillers and qualified practitioners will help you find the right product for you.

The latest treatments Collagenics has added to its list are Restylane Vital, which stimulates the production of collagen and elastin to help reverse the skin ageing process, and Restylane Lipp, which can replace lip definition and plumpness, which are lost as we age.

Restylane Vital can be used on the face, and areas such as the neck, décolletage and the back of hands, which are particularly prone to sun damage. An initial course of two to three treatments is followed by maintenance treatments.

"Some women do have very aged hands, depending on what they do for a living, and others suffer from very



FACE SAVERS: the team at Collagenics

crepey skin on the chest," says Collagenics nurse practitioner Alison Matthews. "This product adds volume back to the skin and the sort of fresh-faced juiciness that younger women take for granted."

Unlike other lip enhancement treatments, Restylane Lipp is made entirely from non-animal, natural sources, minimising the risk of allergic reactions. The product is a crystal-clear form of hyaluronic acid, a substance that occurs naturally in the lips but diminishes with age.

For more information or to book call Collagenics on (01325) 367 367.

COMPETITION

THE Northern Echo has teamed up with Collagenics to offer one of our readers the chance to win a free Collagenics consultation plus a voucher for a treatment up to the value of £300.

Just tell us the name of Collagenics' latest treatment for lips. Answers, by June 20, on a postcard or the back of an envelope, to Collagenics Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. Entrants must be over 18 and usual newspaper competition rules apply.

TIPS FOR SEXY SKIN

- **FOR a deep cleanse, pour boiling water into a bowl with lemon juice and rose petals, and hold your face over the bowl, covering your head with a towel. The steam will invigorate you, aid breathing and help loosen blackheads. Cleanse afterwards and follow with a cool-water rinse to close pores.**

- Salt is nature's own favourite exfoliator. The grains help exfoliate skin gently, and its natural healing and antiseptic qualities help skin stay smooth and problem-free. Bathe in it for a quick detox or soak swollen hands in saltwater.

- **For small pores, stay out of the sun. Sun damage makes pores appear larger because the sun's UV rays break down collagen, making the tissues around the pores weaker and causing the epidermis to thicken. The effects can be permanent.**

- Walk wrinkles away. Walking delivers oxygen to the complexion, gets blood flowing and reduces tension-related wrinkles because it releases feel-good chemicals in the body, which reduce stress and boost relaxation.

- Cleanse and exfoliate skin after being in smoky atmospheres to remove free radicals, drink lots of water and exercise regularly. Your skin's natural defences can also be boosted with vitamin C, green tea and resveratrol (found in red wine).

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NE motoring

Park and ride

Motoring correspondent IAN LAMMING discovers how the new Lexus RX350 can help overcome parking paranoia

NO matter how great the car is at going forwards, it is often the way it goes in reverse that wins or loses a sale. Mentioning no names, but someone very close to me, someone who shares the business and the bathroom, is put off by the sheer scale of some vehicles. This is not because she can't fit them through various gaps but because they could be difficult to park.

When you are as busy as a bee and time is money, it's no use driving around traffic-choked towns and cities looking for a parking space the size of an airport runway in which to leave your car.

So even though she would love a big posh off-roader in which to look down on the world, she wouldn't dream of buying one and prefers to stick to her little Smart car.

Now help is at hand, thanks to the latest modern technology has to offer. The new Lexus RX350, a vehicle she likes in every other respect, now has one of the most sophisticated parking reverse systems on the market.

Slip the gear lever into reverse and a dashboard display becomes a television rear view of what lies behind. Better still, there is a variety of on-screen lines, including a rather useful set of yellow ones, which move with

the steering wheel. Swing the wheel left or right and they show you exactly where you will end up if you continue to stick to that trajectory while green ones show you where you should be aiming for. It's a bit weird at first, but a quick test reversing into a very narrow set of gateposts proved to me that it really is inch perfect.

It's the same with slotting into an end-to-end parking spot. The camera allows you get within a hair's breadth of the bumper behind, allowing you to fit neatly into spaces barely larger than the RX itself. Problem solved, get one ordered darling.

Size now overcome, the RX350 offers the modern businessman and woman every convenience and luxury imaginable. Park yourself inside the leather-lined cabin and there are voice activated controls and bluetooth technology so you can use your phone safely through the built-in wireless hands-free unit.

The satellite navigation is superb. Not only will it lead you where you need to go, telling you how far you are away from journey's end and how long it will take you to get there, but you can talk to it too. If you are running low on fuel, you can ask it to take you to the nearest petrol station and it flags up on screen just where the fuel stops are.



LEXUS RX350 SE-L: the off-roader that's easy to park. From £42,505

The cabin is luxury personified and everything is of the highest grade, including the excellent Mark Levison hi-fi. Everything is electrically operated for your convenience and comfort, from the seats and steering column, to the windows and tailgate. Even the lights are cleverer than normal and move around with the steering to ensure that the maximum amount of road is lit at all times.

All this said, the RX350 is still a car, so how does it drive? The new 3.5 litre V6 gives it a bit more oomph with 270bhp and 342Nm of torque on tap. It will hit 62mph in 7.8 seconds – staggering for this size of vehicle – and goes on to 124mph. It does this, of course, with typical Lexus refinement and improved fuel economy on the old RX300.

Air suspension takes care of the bumps and can be raised and lowered at the press of a button for forays off and on the road. It's easy to forget that this is an off-roader, albeit an extremely luxurious one. The nearest I managed was a grass verge to get some

pictures but with Toyota's mud-plugging heritage behind the RX, there is little reason to doubt its ability.

Ride and handling are pretty good and it is comfortable for everyone on board. Of course, it is never going to handle like a car but it's not bad and easy to live with – and the views from such a height are magnificent.

Underneath, the wonderfully modern and sculpted skin lies all manner of anti-skid/lock equipment to keep the Lexus pointing the right way. If the worst does happen then there are knee airbags and extra large side and front air bags, all designed to protect your soft bits in the event of a crash.

The Lexus RX350 shrinks a big problem for drivers of all sexes who suffer from parking paranoia. It is accomplished in every way and boasts a prestige and quality that is the envy of many marques.

With qualities like this, there can't fail to be more buyers looking to park one in their driveways.

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The Lexus hybrid GS 450h

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The new GS 450h launched on 22 May 2006 and is available from £38,015 OTR. To arrange a test drive please call Lexus Teesside on 01642 808000.

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Model shown GS 450h SE with metallic paint £44,470 OTR. GS range prices start from £30,805 to £47,710 OTR. Prices correct at time of going to press and include VAT, delivery charges, number plates, full tank of fuel, one year's road fund licence and first registration fee. BBC Top Gear Magazine Motoring Survey 2005 based on the results of questionnaires from over 76,000 motorists spanning 159 models from 36 manufacturers. Auto Express Driver Power Survey 2006 based on the results of questionnaires from 46,423 motorists.

GS 450h fuel economy figures: extra-urban 7.2l/100km (39.2 mpg), urban 9.2l/100km (30.7 mpg), combined 7.9l/100km (35.8 mpg). CO₂ emissions 186g/km.

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NE connections



BASE FOR THE DAY: the Strankorb stand sentinel on the beach. Above: a typical country scene in Schleswig-Holstein

ANDY ELLIOTT finds unexpectedly beautiful beaches in Northern Germany, as well as the ubiquitous beer and bratwurst



MILES of white, spotless beaches, beautifully clear water and that away-from-it-all feeling characterise some of the world's most sought-after holiday destinations.

But Germany? Surely some mistake...

For a start, Germany doesn't have that much coastline to boast about. And secondly, with the World cup taking place, it's hardly going to be the place for peace and quiet this summer.

But up in the north, where it seems the land that didn't quite fit the plan and the country juts into Denmark, you'll find a region that stands out from our usual perception of Germany.

In nearly all respects, Schleswig-Holstein is an oddity. It has most of Germany's coast, without any of the economic powerhouse cities familiar to most Europeans, and is distinctly different in geography and culture to the rest of the country.

Take those beaches, for instance. On the Baltic side, die Strände (that's German for beaches) are made of pure white sand, and are barely disturbed by the sea as the tidal range is minimal.

Communities and resorts have grown up around them and become the focal point for the area. This is the place thousands of Germans used to go on holiday until, like the Brits, they discovered the Costas and the Canaries.

But they're still as traditional as they ever were. Having paid to enter the beach – the small fee pays for the nightly cleaning of the sand – you can hire a Strandkorb for the day, let the kids go paddling in the clear water looking for starfish and crabs, and make the strange seats your base.

Strandkorb – literally a "beach basket" – are unique to the area and are semi-permanent structures on the beaches around Schleswig-Holstein. They're big enough to sit or lie in, change in, keep your things in and generally be your home for the day. And where there aren't any, it's traditional in this area to make a huge burrow in the sand, decorate it and keep it as your own for the holiday.

Schleswig-Holstein is an oddity. It has nearly all of Germany's coast, and is distinctly different in geography and culture to the rest of the country

Sun, sea and sausages

We settled on the area around Flensburger Forde – a large chunk of water which separates that part of Germany from Denmark.

We spent some time just along the fjord in Glucksburg, a small but dapper resort with a magnificent castle, before moving back down to Flensburg for its annual festival. In a town where the signs are in both Danish and German, the festival draws on all influences.

But the thing you notice most is the food.

Schleswig-Holstein is known for its fish and Flensburg has many fish restaurants. But during the festival the streets fill up with all manner of stalls selling all manner of food. A stock snack is the Brotchen – a bread roll filled with anything you like, but most commonly herrings to form a Bismarck Brotchen, named after the region's most famous son.

And then it wouldn't be Germany without the sausages. Huge Wursts are cooked on large pans about 6ft across, suspended by chains over a fire and moved back and forward and around like a kids' park ride to cook the sausages or the meat evenly. Having bought your Wurst, you can then cruise along to one of the many beer stalls to wash it all down or even try another of Flensburg's specialities, rum – another oddity.

We didn't know what to expect of that region having taken the DFDS ferry, Duchess of Scandinavia, from Harwich to Cuxhaven in north west Germany.

DFDS holidays in Holland, Scandinavia and

Germany include self-catering, city hotel breaks and self-drive touring, and we opted to tour Schleswig-Holstein before staying for six days at Center Parcs at Bispinger Heide, just south of Hamburg.

An 18-hour crossing might seem a long time on a boat, but once you accept it's part of the holiday, you find you relax into life on the ship. There's plenty to occupy both kids and parents, and on a warm summer's evening it was easy to pass a couple of hours on the sun-deck before going down to the sumptuous buffet. Remember to pre-book meals, because it's much cheaper than paying on board.

From Cuxhaven, if you're heading north, you don't have to go all the way down to Hamburg. The drive is picturesque, but unusually for Germany, the road isn't fast, and you can cut a large corner by taking a small car ferry across the Elbe.

The autobahns are as fast as you've heard. I was cruising at 80mph most of the time and virtually every car was passing me. But unlike on UK roads, cars don't sit in the outside lanes – everyone pulls over after overtaking.

Also unlike many UK roads, the quality of service stations is high with fresh food cooked in front of you while you wait and pleasant restaurant areas.

However, if you do go off the beaten track, remember that credit cards aren't always taken so have some cash handy if you want to try local cafes or get petrol in towns or villages.

After the different sights and sounds of Schleswig-Holstein, we headed to Center Parcs for some familiar holidaying where the children would be guaranteed to have a good time.

Like all CPs, the villa and village layout are reassuringly similar to others in the UK and

Europe but there seemed more for younger children to tap into, ranging from themed evenings in the restaurants to simple playgrounds every couple of hundred metres around the park.

My young son spent hours playing in an enormous sandpit, the size of about a quarter of a football pitch which came with cranes, pulleys, running water and mini-aqueducts.

And while the food was very good, the best thing of all for big and small alike was the German tradition of cake and coffee midway through the afternoon. Yes, it's one which contributes to what some might call the German physique, but it's a delicious habit to get into with their range of gateaux, tarts and cheesecakes.

Bispinger Heide is on the edge of a national park, Luneburg Heath, and having explored the countryside in the morning, we settled on a traditional German hotel for lunch, sitting outside in the shade watching tourists being taken for rides in huge carriages drawn by teams of four horses.

As we were leaving, a fellow guest asked in broken English why come to Germany for a holiday. After all, these days most German holidaymakers headed south – either to their own lakes or further to the Mediterranean.

I just pointed him northwards and told him there was an undiscovered country right on his doorstep.

TRAVEL FACTS

■ Andy Elliott was a guest of DFDS Seaways, which offers a range of holidays to Scandinavia and Northern Europe on its ferries from Newcastle and Harwich.

■ DFDS's Classic Gardens of Germany tour from costs from £509 from June to Sept, and from £419 in low season, with child discounts of £100 including ferry crossing and room-only hotel accommodation.

■ On self-catering holidays at Center Parcs Bispinger Heide, the lead-in price when four are travelling together is £259 per person, for seven nights' accommodation only and use of four berth inside cabin, and standard vehicle on return ferry crossings via Harwich.

■ DFDS Seaways. Reservations: 08705-333 111 or online at www.dfds.co.uk.

■ Flights are available from Newcastle to Hamburg.



IT'S that time of year again when the 1.8m people who own a conservatory in the UK are spending more time in them. But while the evenings are lighter and warmer, it's still nice sometimes to have a radiator to take away the chill.

The Multiline Bench radiator from MHS is ideal for conservatories because it maximises both space and comfort, providing warmth without detracting from the building design or taking up valuable space on walls. Outputs range from 1460 to 3041 watts.

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