

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

SEPTEMBER 2006

Passionate about life

north east
england



FASHION

Oh, you
pretty things

LIFESTYLE

Eco family's
TV turn-off

WIN

A luxury
break at
Matfen Hall

MOTORING

BEAUTY

TRAVEL

SHOPPING

GARDENING

WIN A LUXURY BREAK AT MATFEN HALL



MATFEN Hall, owned by Sir Hugh and Lady Blackett, has recently been voted the Best Large Hotel in England by the Enjoy England Awards for Excellence. Set in its own grounds and parkland, this regency mansion is located in the Tyne Valley near to Corbridge and Hadrian's Wall.

Regency character and many original features have been carefully combined with 21st century facilities at Matfen. The building may be traditional but the facilities are anything but and include:

- 53 bedrooms including suites and four poster rooms
- 2 AA Rosette Library and Print Room Restaurant
- Private dining rooms
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- The Spa
- 5 treatment rooms including a double VIP treatment room
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The 18-hole golf course is one of the finest in the area and there is a new golf teaching academy, incorporating the latest technology.

Matfen Hall offers a range of residential and non residential golf and spa programmes including The Comfort Zone Well-Being Spa Break and Christmas and New Year Packages.

The Northern Echo has joined forces with Matfen Hall to offer one lucky reader the chance to win a luxury mid-week stay at Matfen Hall. The prize includes:

- Overnight accommodation for two people sharing a twin or double room, subject to availability
- Full English breakfast
- A choice of one Comfort Zone treatment per person – Monticelli mud wrap, glorious skin facial or hot stone full body massage
- Full use of spa and leisure facilities
- Dinner in the Library and Print Room Restaurant

Further details about Matfen Hall can be found by contacting the hotel on 441661 886500 or by visiting their website: www.matfenhallhotel.com

HOW TO ENTER

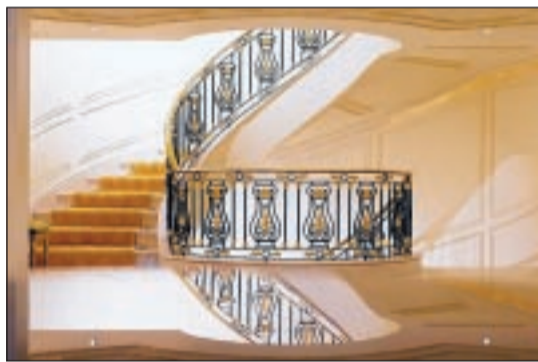
To stand a chance of winning, just tell us the name of the famous Roman wall located near Matfen. Answers, by September 15, to Matfen Hall Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF.

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sharon griffiths

“I want tops that you snuggle up in, corduroy and cashmere and perhaps a polo neck or two

BOOTS! I want boots! Soft leather boots that cover your toes, your ankles and right up to your knees. And woolly jumpers. And suede skirts. And trousers that come all the way down to your feet instead of flapping somewhere between knee and mid calf and leaving you with an odd suntanned stripe.

I want tops that you snuggle up in, maybe not hats and thick scarves just yet, but corduroy and cashmere and perhaps a polo neck or two.

I want a boxy jacket with big buttons and I definitely, definitely don't want linen.

Or strappy dresses. Or vest tops. Or sandals. Or flip flops. Especially not flip flops.

You're right. I've had enough of summer clothes.

And it's not just the weather. There is something about this time of year – that first snap of freshness in the early morning, all the dew on spiders' webs – that gives us all that back-to-school feeling. Even if we worked all through the heatwaves and hardly had a holiday, there has still been the sense of summertime and the living is easy.

The summer sun made life simple. At first everything got put on hold because when the sun shines it's criminal not to make the most of it. Then, as the heat soared, it was just too hot to do anything but the essentials.

But now it's time to get the new exercise books and pencils, stiffen the sinews and get back to work and a structured jacket.

True, not everyone could spend their summers in T-shirts, tiny skirts and strappy sandals. A friend who works for a Swiss finance company in the City of London had to wear a smart suit and tights – tights! – all through the heatwave. At one point, when the temperature was nearly 100, she thought of fainting of sunstroke at her MD's feet. But he, of course, wasn't there – off sailing round Greek Islands. Probably in shorts. Definitely not in tights.

But for most of us, summer is simple easy dressing with minimal clothes, the sun on your back and a delicious sense of freedom.

But come September the novelty has worn off. T-shirts have gone shapeless, the kaftan top is fraying, the cotton skirts are fading. Your linen trousers still bear the faint ineradicable reminders of salad dressing from a barbecue or squashed strawberry from a picnic.

And that polka dot dress that looked so jaunty in June now looks, well, a bit tired.

And when you set out in your by now slightly battered sandals, you realise that your toes are actually quite chilly and the fading, yellowing tan on your legs can't quite hide the goosebumps.

Time to forget the lazy days of summer and snap back into action. Not quite school uniform but the same sort of idea. Summer is over and now it's back to work – and with lovely cover-up clothes to do it in.

Autumn is not just the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, it's also the season to go shopping. Clothes to go back to work in, shoes and boots to kick leaves up in.

On the continent, still, they change with the seasons. Whatever the weather, if it suddenly soared to heatwave temperatures again, in Paris summer clothes are now dead and gone.

Even in America, certain standards rule. My sister, caught unawares by an unexpected February heatwave in Florida with the temperature over 80 degrees, attempted to buy some shorts.

“Shorts ma'am?” asked the sales assistant incredulously, “in winter?”

Not only did they not stock them, he was appalled that she'd even asked.

And my sister, in embarrassment and heavy jeans, slunk out shortless of the air conditioned store and into the wall of heavy humid heat.

It must be very dreary to live in the sort of country where the climate is the same all the year round. Very boring.

Not for them the joy of the first bare-legged day of summer or the comforting luxury of a warm winter coat. No sense of the year turning, of a new beginning, of a wonderful excuse to buy new clothes.

The bonus of September is that this is about the only time of year when clothes shops and climate coincide. The summer sale rails have finally gone, worn out and weary. And the new autumn clothes in their new autumn colours have taken their place, racks and racks of them, all new and enticing...

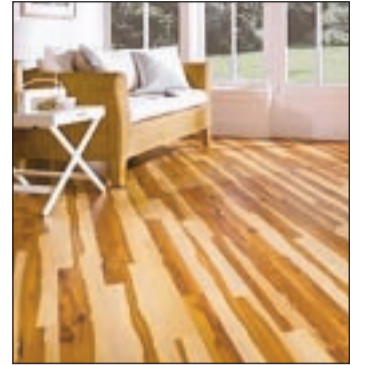
My cheap summer T-shirts have gone for dusters, the faded dresses to the back of the wardrobe and the flip flops to the dustbin.

Summer's over. I'm going shopping. See you there.

WASH AND GO

CONSERVATORIES can be harsh environments for flooring, with extremely hot temperatures at the height of summer and chill temperatures in the depths of winter. Real wood can warp but one alternative is durable vinyl flooring. Karndean aims to replicate the beautiful real wood flooring effect, but is much more practical. It is easy to maintain and clean, and is immune to warping caused by fluctuating temperatures and moisture. You can also tailor your designs by adding design strips, feature panels and borders.

For more tips on flooring for the entire home, visit



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NE window shopping

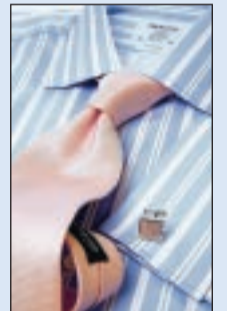
RIVAL ILVA

WATCH out Ikea, there's a Scandinavian rival in town. ILVA, a Danish group which specialises in homewear and accessories, has opened its first store in Lakeside Thurrock, Essex. The range is enormous, sofas start from £299, and there's hardly a flat pack in sight. An ILVA store will open at Gateshead's MetroCentre later this year.

www.ilva.co.uk

FAMOUS shirtmakers TM Lewin, of London's Jermyn Street, has opened one of its top-of-the-range stores at 29 Market Street, Newcastle. The new store has the full men's and ladies' collections and a full range of accessories including ties, cufflinks, shoes and socks.

TM Lewin managing director Geoff Quinn says: "North-East England



is renowned for the vitality of its retail sector and we are delighted to become a part of that." www.tmlwin.co.uk





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FLOWERY:
 Laura Ashley's Freya bedlinen from £45 for a single duvet cover and £150 for bedspread. Below: Ikea's Lunna Svarta swivel chair, £98

Flowers in bloom prints give a wholesome, lived-in feel that's the perfect softening touch for modern rooms. GABRIELLE FAGAN takes the pick of the bunch



Coming up roses

FLOWERS may have died off outside but there's no reason why you can't have a fresh bouquet of florals in your home. And there's no need to fear that florals will make rooms look old fashioned – they dumped their chintzy, dated image long ago.

Few people have interpreted floral style as successfully as designer Cath Kidston. "In the early 90s, the taste in interiors was for ornate, overblown, country house decoration, which has never appealed to me," she says. "I much prefer a fresher look, still using those great old floral prints but placing them in a much cleaner, more contemporary setting."

Her book, *In Print*, is packed with practical advice on how to use different types of floral prints from large, blowsy patterns to delicate mini florals in a thoroughly up-to-date way. With her "little goes a long way" philosophy she avoids the floral effect becoming claustrophobic, showing instead how it can look blooming marvellous in any home.

This look will outlast the summer and easily adapts to autumn settings, says Laura Ashley design manager Gillian Farr.

"Pretty floral schemes look good all year round when combined with soft tweedy textures and casual checks or stripes. Keep the feeling contemporary with neutral backgrounds, light-coloured flooring and pale paint finishes for woodwork and walls. A floral fabric in tones of one colour looks more sophisticated than one with a mix of colours and is easy to tone in with other pieces in the room."

Here's our guide to flower power.

BIG FLORALS

Cath Kidston says: "These are the epitome of the classic print. Uncluttered rooms are where I prefer to use big floral prints, in quite a simple way, rather than mixing them with other patterns."

"Curtains made up in an oversized floral print can sometimes look too traditional, whereas a chair cover made in such a fabric always seems to work."

HER TIPS: Use a panel for a bedhead or bedcover or a tablecloth. Revive an old armchair by recovering the seat cushion in a floral print and adding a cushion to match. Jazz up a card lampshade (drum shades are ideal).

SOURCE: Collect vintage print fabric from antique fairs, car boot sales and auctions, or replicate Cath's style with her fabrics: Ottoman Rose, from £12 a metre, or Classic Rose, in four colour ways, from £11 a metre. Alternatively delve into Laura Ashley's ranges including its new Ruskin curtains from £95 a pair.

MAKE A STATEMENT

Gillian Farr says: "Florals make fabulous statement wallpapers. Use on one wall with a toning paint. Or use as panels by papering sections of the wall then framing with beading to make a feature. Laura Ashley's Oriental Garden, and Erin, both £22 per roll, are particularly chic, and don't miss Crowson's wallpaper collection which includes contemporary florals from £28.99 a roll. Matching and complementary fabrics are also available."

FLORAL TREATS

For impact choose a Graham & Brown floral





FLORAL MURAL: Pinl Rose mural from Graham & Brown. From £75

digital mural – pink or cream rose, blossom flowers, purple alliums or gerberas. Mural from £75.

Even washing machines are desirable when they're floral. A limited edition Designers Guild LG Steam Direct washing machine costs £1,300 from John Lewis or Splash out on Ikea's Lunna Svarta swivel armchair, £98, in a black and white floral print. Matching footstool, £58. When it's time for bed, you can snuggle up in Laura Ashley's red roses Freya bed linen. A single duvet cover costs £45, a bedspread £150.

MINI FLORALS

"Mini florals are some of the prettiest fabric prints. These delicate, tiny florals are ideal for either making or trimming bedlinen," says Kidston. "Combine these with other prints, such as classic gingham. I've made cushions from tiny floral prints that I have teamed with a gingham check backing."

HER TIPS: Use a floral pelmet and team it with gingham curtains in a complementary shade, have a flowery bed throw, or contrast plain bedding with floral pillows.

SOURCE: Create the look with Cath Kidston's Pastel Flowers fabric, £22 a metre, or Bird Fabric, £15 a roll.

MAKE A STATEMENT

"Keep floral curtains looking modern by choosing a simple eyelet heading and pull out one colour for a plain fabric and use this as a bold,

ADDRESS BOOK

Cath Kidston: 0870 850 1084

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Crowson fabrics: 01825 761055

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leading edge feature," says Farr. "Also tea time florals are back in style, so mix floral china with colourful glass cake plates."

Marks & Spencer's red and white Damask china collection is a stunner. A 12-piece dinner set costs £55, or treat yourself to Joanna Wood's Chelsea Gardens china, £27 for a boxed set of four cups and saucers.

■ **Cath Kidston In Print (Quadrille, £9.99)**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Graham & Green's Ram's head chair, £295, with bone inlaid floral decoration; large florals from Cath Kidston in Print; Laura Ashley's new Ruskin ready-made curtains in raspberry, which start at £95.; Designers Guild LG Steam Direct washing machine, £1,300 from John Lewis.

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Life without television

WHEN first I set eyes on Ellie Langley, she's in the midst of chaos. Her Weardale farm, set high in the north Pennines, is awash with debris – the downside of work to convert the byre – and cars are everywhere. Ellie and I shake hands, appraising each other. She's dressed in jeans and a strappy top, her feet encased in hard wearing sandals. I'm in a suit and high heels. She's right at home, at one with nature with her flowing hair, while I feel hopelessly buttoned-up; a fish out of water. Yet if she notices – and of course she must – she's too polite to let on. Instead, in her gentle tones, she asks me in.

Since 2004, Ellie, her partner Philip, and six-year-old twins Isaac and Gabriel, have called the farm their home. Today, along with builders, it's hosting a workshop. On our way to the main farmhouse, we stop at a shed where The Healing Garden is in full swing.

While the day-long session, as Ellie informs me, is based on plant remedies, when we look in, it seems the teacher has digressed. The talk is of vinegar for use as a salad dressing and fragrant pots of the stuff are being passed round. Between sniffing – the blackberry-infused concoction goes down a treat – the course participants are taking notes. It seems the natural way of living the farm espouses is one they're keen to share.

For Ellie, who at 38, looks ten years younger, their interest is no surprise. Though green living is now in vogue, with politicians like David Cameron rushing to embrace it, it's always been central to her beliefs.

"I've always been interested in sustainable things and I've done a lot of courses over the years," she says. "I've always been interested in plants and natural things. I used to keep bees and make candles and beeswax polish and things like that."

In Philip, her partner of 23 years, Ellie's found a like mind. I ask his surname, assuming, since she refers to him as this, that they're not married. She surprises me by saying they are. "We were very young," she says regretfully, then qualifies this by adding: "I don't believe in marriage or anything like that. I did think we should get divorced but then I thought 'no, because

With issues like global warming in the news, more and more of us are going green, but could we live without electricity or swap our loo for a compost toilet? Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER meets someone who has – and has never looked back

that's recognising marriage and I don't believe in it'."

When the couple moved into their first house, they began to live out their green convictions. An early casualty was the television. "We've not had a TV for 12 years," says Ellie. "Years ago we were renovating our first house and what would happen was that we'd get in from work and we'd sit and watch something and we'd end up not doing anything. One day we decided to give it away until we finished the house and we've never had one back. We don't miss it. I don't see how we could fit one in really."

If this sounds like deprivation, what the couple faced when they bought the farm must seem like purgatory. "We had no electricity for about nine months," says Ellie casually. What, none at all? "We had an old MOD generator – I think it was one they had used for radio communications or something like that," she says, making it sound like something out of Dad's Army. "It could take two of us up to an hour to get it started. The hardest thing really was when it was hot and we had no fridge, but luckily it was mostly winter. There's a candle factory at Alston and they sell seconds so we had a lot of boxes of candles."

So it was of necessity, as well as preference, that Ellie and Philip looked at alternative sources of power. "As soon as we moved in, we got quotes for water and solar power and went ahead as quickly as we could with that," says Ellie. "We put in a solid fuel Rayburn to cook on and heat the house."

The couple went further. Unhappy with their toilet, which, like all conventional ones, used a lot of water, they turned instead to a compost loo. Now the quirky convenience, housed in a shed, is the one they favour. Ellie takes me to see it and I must admit, it's not that bad. It doesn't smell and, apart from the missing handle to make it flush and the basket of paper shreadings (to help with composting, Ellie explains) it

looks quite normal. I do wonder, to put it delicately, if you're faced with evidence of prior use, but Ellie assures me that you're not. Well not that often.

From being a green family, the Langleys turned their vision outwards. They started workshops – from singing to dry stone walling – in late spring, and the piles of rubble result from plans for a B&B. At every turn they've found support. "We'd always intended doing this but the electricity system was very expensive," says Ellie. "The installers said to us 'there's a business grant that you can get' and they said 'you should try for it' and we said 'we're not a business yet'. We contacted them and they said 'apply anyway'. We got a Defra grant to convert the outbuildings to do bed and breakfast."

A KEY reason for this backing, as Ellie explains, is the local depression. "A lot of people seem to have given up hope and accepted that there's nothing here for people and I don't think that's the case," she says. "We want to do something for the area in a tiny way. I think when most people come here they can see how beautiful it is and a lot of people come back. If we can offer something that people are interested in – and people are interested in sustainable living – and if we can get people to come and stay in our bed and breakfast, it can benefit the area."

Ellie's personal contribution is making felt from local sheep's wool, a skill she passes on to others. Yet just how green would she say she is? While most of the family's lifestyle is eco-friendly, there is one anomaly. "We wouldn't have lived here if we could have afforded to live closer to Newcastle because Philip works in Newcastle and it's not very green travelling there every day, but he lift shares and he tries to work from home a day a week," says Ellie. "He's also been doing a project at Gabriel's and Isaac's school, which



ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE: main picture – Philip, Ellie and six-year-old twins Isaac and Gabriel. Above: tutor Jill Schnabel brews up at the Natural Remedies workshop

means he's been there one day a week."

With the couple both working – Philip as an academic and Ellie as a part-time nursery nurse – it's not as if they shut themselves away. Do people think they're a mite... eccentric? "Maybe some people think we're a bit odd but then again, being green has become very mainstream now," says Ellie. Though she admits: "One of my brothers thinks I'm very strange."

The point for Ellie and Philip is that, like it or not, it's their life – and they're more than happy with it. "Gabriel and Isaac love running down to the burn to play and they get so excited if we find a rare bird's nest or something like that, and I think a lot of children don't have that opportunity," says Ellie. "They'll play out till nine, ten o'clock at night and have a whale of a time. I think we have a really lovely life. We're so lucky."

■ For details of workshops, which run until November, ring Slack House Farm on (01388) 537292 or visit www.fleecewithaltitude.co.uk



‘
Maybe some people think we're a bit odd but then again, being green has become very mainstream now... one of my brothers thinks I'm very strange



ECO LOO: the twins play in the new earth closet.

Top: mum Ellie outside Slack House farm, near Ireshopeburn, which has won a number of eco awards.

Left: a Natural Remedies workshop

Pictures: NIGEL WHITFIELD

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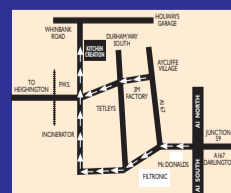


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A SWING BACK TO PRETTINESS: Matilda Dant in Poppy clothes with mum Anna and brother Edwin

Pictures: SARAH NICHOLSON

MORE than 20 years ago Stephanie Richardson started designing bright and cheerful textiles for children's rooms. Soon she was designing textiles for children's clothes too.

Poppy textiles and clothes – bold, bright and original – were a great success and sold in all the best places at home and abroad. The dresses with their unusual prints and clever design details were popular with mums and little girls alike.

“But then tastes changed,” says Stephanie, formerly Stephanie Holt, whose family own the treasure trove of a store, Strickland and Holt in Yarm. “The fashion was more for sports wear, casual wear. And I had plenty of other things to keep me busy.”

Business went quieter – “although we were always popular in Ireland, perhaps because little girls still get dressed up to go to church every week” – until the Internet boom.

“Then we noticed that a lot of our old dresses were coming up for sale second hand on eBay and being snapped up. There is big demand for them and Poppy has a huge following that we didn't really know about. Fashion has changed once more and people want pretty things again.”

At the same time, Stephanie's daughter

Poppy blossoms

Poppy is blooming again – which is good news for little girls who like pretty dresses. SHARON GRIFFITHS reports

Bryony had completed a design degree. Now Bryony has designed a new Poppy collection. “I wanted to keep the Poppy idea but give it a modern twist,” she says.

The result is a sort of streamlined Poppy – the same prettiness, the same traditional ideas but slimmer, simpler and more in tune with the times. “She's captured the essence of it and brought it up to date, which is wonderful,” says Stephanie.

The collection includes dresses with bold designs in strong pastel colours in easy-fit

styles and washable fabrics. There are co-ordinating cardigans, aprons and, just to complete the outfits, matching bags.

“I'm trying new ideas, it's still quite early days, but I like things that are fun. They're Sunday best dresses but they're comfortable and easy to wear – and wash,” says Bryony.

Our model Matilda Dant, aged five, was entranced with all the clothes and instead of picking a particular favourite, wanted to wear them all – and the aprons.

“Tilly hardly ever wears trousers. She's a

very girly little girl and likes pretty dresses,” says her mum Anna Cox. “These are perfect because although they are pretty, they're not fussy. Ideal really.”

Tilly's little brother and a friend, meanwhile, were much entranced with the bags...

After the success of the small summer collection, Bryony is already completing her first winter collection, including lots of co-ordinated casual separates and a reversible pinafore in a polar bear print.

Fun, unfussy and definitely different.

“It's all very exciting,” says Stephanie, “and it's wonderful to see Poppy having a new lease of life.”

■ Poppy designs, including fabrics, are available from Strickland and Holt, High Street, Yarm. And from www.poppy-children.co.uk, where they also have limited stocks of some of their vintage designs.

■ Dress £30, cardigan £20, apron £10, bags £10. Drawings are of the new autumn collection



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www.littlepresentcompany.co.uk



NE window shopping

THE NAME GAME

WHEN 28-year-old Claire Royle realised her ambition to start a business, it was her baby daughter who helped provide the inspiration. Camilla, now almost two, still happily plays a valuable role



modelling some of the beautiful personalised clothing and gifts for children. Claire Royle Appliqué supplies a range of items – from bath sheets and robes, hooded baby towels, beach smocks and blankets to laundry bags, face cloths, cushions and quilts with the initials or name exquisitely appliquéd in gingham, floral and vintage-style fabrics.

“When Camilla was born I was given a lovely hand appliquéd towel from France and was surprised to find that no one in the UK seemed to do anything as nice. So I bought a sewing machine and spent weeks just teaching myself to appliqué,” says Claire.

The current range is for children from birth to age 16 and priced from as little as £5, but adults are now asking for items embroidered with their partner's pet name and other customers are sending her their own fabrics so that the appliqué matches their furnishings.

■ Claire Royle Appliqué is on (01833) 627151 or visit www.claireroyle.co.uk



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NE gardening

SHEILA WEBER meets a couple for whom gardening turned from a way of feeding a growing family into an obsession



Pictures:
RICHARD DOUGHTY

'I can always find something to do in the garden'

VIVIENNE Bailes makes no bones about it. Gardening is not a hobby. It's an obsession. And that also goes for her and husband, Doug. Together, they lovingly tend their ample plot on the Thorp Perrow estate in North Yorkshire.

In good weather, the couple can easily spend 90 per cent of their day in the beautiful garden-cum-vegetable plot at Park House Farm.

The Bailes have lived on the estate for 47 years, starting off as dairy farmers. The cows were allowed to graze in what is now the garden just to keep the grass down.

In the 1960s, Doug started growing vegetables to help feed the couple's three daughters and a son. The rest of the land was largely unused.

But as time went by, Vivienne created a flowerbed and it went from there. "We never sat down and planned it," says Vivienne. "It just happened. I just love growing things. It amazes me that you can put a tiny seed in the ground and end up with a gorgeous flower."

The couple have been members of Thornton Watlass gardening club for 20 years, as a way of enjoying the social side of their hobby. They also exhibit some of their produce and have won a number of trophies.

The floral side of the plot is the archetypal cottage garden with lots of colour, herbaceous plants and beautiful trees. The soil is light and sandy, creating some limitations. For instance, Vivienne can't grow rhododendrons in the main area. She grows them in pots instead.

FAVOURITE PLANTS

Vivienne: camellia, delphinium and peony
Doug: potatoes, onions and parsnips

TOOL THEY WOULD LEAST LIKE TO BE WITHOUT

Vivienne: small gripe
Doug: spade

TIPS FOR OTHER GARDENERS

Vivienne: keep an eye out for pests
Doug: never do next week what you should have done last week

Much of her pleasure in gardening comes from the fact that she uses the plants she grows for her hobby of flower arranging. "It's just a love of flowers in general," she says. "I read gardening books and magazines like other people read novels."

To some extent, Doug's dedication comes because he has always been used to working seven days a week. "I can't come into the house and sit and do nothing. I can always find something to do in the garden," he says.

Vivienne reckons she inherited her green fingers from her great-grandfather John Clark, who also loved gardens. "He was a very old man when I was a child, but I used to love coming to stay with him in Snape and pottering in the

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 Sunday 24th September 2006



I used to do all the physical work. I love to feel my hands in the soil and I will continue gardening as long as I can

COTTAGE GARDEN: delphiniums and lupins burst up from the flower bed



garden," she says. "I must have his genes."

Sadly, Vivienne has had to curtail her activities as she suffers from MS. But, not one to be beaten, she gets out and about on a motorised scooter, which doubles as a wheelbarrow. Otherwise, she admits, she makes work for Doug to do.

"I used to do all the physical work," she says. "I love to feel my hands in the soil and I will continue gardening as long as I can."

Doug says he was forced into gardening at the start of the war when schoolchildren were given tasks to do. "I came to love it," he says, "and it got us out of lessons. I see it as a challenge because we have so many enemies - rabbits, pheasants, pigeons, you name it."

The Bailes' garden has lawns, its vegetable plot and cottage garden flora in a natural setting.

Vivienne urges people not to be scared to try something new. "You learn as you go along," she says. And Doug warns: "Avoid the experts."

In their working days, both found that even half an hour in the garden after work was a stress-buster. "It was very calming," says Vivienne. Doug always does as much digging as he can at the back end of the season. He says it's not essential but makes life easier come spring.

"You are halfway there," he says. "If you leave everything until spring you are already behind." Vivienne agrees. "You need to garden all year round," she says. "It's no good just being a sunshine gardener," she says.



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Emma's flexible friends

THERE could have been no inkling in the mind of willow sculptor Emma Stothard just where a loan from The Prince's Trust would take her. But that helping hand, which made it possible for her to pursue her ambitions, led all the way to Highgrove, Prince Charles's country home.

And it was there that Emma personally delivered a thank you gift to the heir to the throne.

Fittingly, the gift was a sculpture of his choice, made from willow grown at Highgrove. The Prince had chosen a model of Tigga, his beloved Jack Russell terrier which had died a couple of years ago.

"To find out I was able to present the gift to Prince Charles in person was such an honour," says Emma, who lives and works around Whitby. After gaining a BA Hons in fine art, she has taught art at schools in Yorkshire and most recently at Whitby Community College.

Emma lives on the North Yorkshire coast with husband Rob and son Alfie. The couple run the award-winning Green's Restaurant where Rob is chef/patron and Emma – using her married name of Green – runs front of house.

Her link-up to The Prince's Trust came in 2001 when a loan not only enabled her to buy the equipment she needed to pursue her work as a sculptor, but also meant she could rent a workshop based on a farm in nearby Dunsley.

Emma says: "Without The Prince's Trust loan, I would have really struggled to find the funds to invest in my materials as well as finding the rent for my workshop. It gave me such confidence, and I had a far more professional approach to my work."

Her progress has been tremendous and she is now recognised as a talented and successful sculptor, exhibiting at many prestigious galleries as well as having completed numerous acclaimed commissions.

Sculptor Emma Stothard uses willow to form the sinuous creatures for which she is becoming increasingly well-known. She tells SHEILA WEBER why she owes Prince Charles a debt of gratitude



But when she wrote to Prince Charles to let him know how the loan had helped her and offered to make a sculpture of his choice from willow grown at Highgrove, she never expected to be delivering it personally.

"I was thrilled to be asked if I would make a sculpture of Tigga," she says. "I was able to visit Highgrove to meet head gardener David Howard to select the willow from the estate and take it back to prepare the sculpture. When Tigga was completed, I hoped I would be able to deliver her and install her at Highgrove, taking the working drawings I had done."

As 2006 is also the 30th anniversary year of The Prince's Trust, the gift seemed more than timely.

Emma makes life-size sculptures which can be sited inside or outdoors. Her subject matter includes animals, birds and figures which she creates by studying the subject through sketches, drawings and photography.

The willow is soaked to make it pliable, then interwoven and shaped around a metal armature or framework. Finally, the piece is coated in linseed oil to preserve and protect it.

Emma's drawings, which are an art form in themselves, are used as part of the process of producing the willow sculptures. The physical act of drawing on a large scale gives an exaggerated feel of muscle shape, form and movement.

As well as her gallery exhibitions, Emma has also been featured on television and two of her life-size willow figures are to be sited at the Louis C Tiffany museum and gardens in Japan. The museum welcomes thousands of tourists each year and is home to the largest collection of Tiffany glass in the world.

Emma says inspiration for her work surrounds her. "It can come from the working rural environment of the rugged North York Moors, protected woodlands or the power of the North Sea."

■ www.emmastothard.com; e-mail: stothard.sculptor@btopenworld.com; Tel: (01947) 600284



To find out I was going to present the sculpture in person to the Prince of Wales was such an honour



WILLOW WONDERS: sculptor Emma Stothard, right, with Tigga, the piece she made for Prince Charles

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NE my style



GLAMOROUS: Mona is pictured wearing a selection of clothes from Joulani

Mona McTaggart, 39, owns the clothes shop Joulani on Darlington's Grange Road. She is originally from Israel



Describe your look

Glamorous. I'm a very glamorous lady. I'm not conservative at all – more sophisticated and sensual. I go for mama mia things.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

I like Italian things, and Ikito, which is a French label. My favourite two dresses are Ikito but I don't really have favourites – I wear things and get rid of them. I'm a person who gets bored. Every two months I change my clothes. I just give them away.

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

When I lived in Israel I bought a Valentino suit – I can't remember the price.

What's your worst buy?

I bought a Moschino skirt and it's never fitted me so I've never worn it. It's too small and I thought I'd lose weight but I haven't.

What are your favourite shops?

And Eve – it's a shoe shop in Yarm – and Rubie Heels in Yarm too. I'm different, I'm Mediterranean. I dress differently to the English. I like Harvey Nichols in Leeds. At the moment I'm buying from Morgan because it's very trendy – a few pieces for a hot day to go for a walk with my dog.

Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?

I like Victoria Beckham. The way she dresses is always classy and glamorous. I also like Catherine Zeta Jones's evening dresses. I like glamorous women.

■ Joulani, 19 Grange Road, Darlington (01325) 352355.



gadget man



■ Don't miss Burton's Bytes – game reviews in The Northern Echo every Tuesday

If you want to jot something down, then transfer your words of wisdom onto a PC, invest in a DigiMemo

Taking notes

FOR ALL the advances made in handwriting recognition these past few years jotting notes down on a Pocket PC, PDA remains a frustratingly slow process.

I still can't make my writing small enough to pen more than a sentence on a PDA's tiny screen before I have to wait to let the processor recognise my scrawl. And if the machine gets a word wrong I have to go back and correct it. Cue more waiting.

To someone used to writing at 100 words per minute in shorthand this is a depressingly convoluted way of doing things. Progress? You must be joking! For anything where I know speed will be required, the PDA gets left in my jacket pocket.

Until now there was no alternative to the good old fashioned reporter's pad and pen. Now a new gadget has come to the rescue.

On first acquaintance, the DigiMemo from Acecad looks like a humble A4 clipboard. It has a pad of paper and you write on it with a pen. Case closed surely?

Look a bit closer, however, and you'll spot some crucial differences. How many memo pads do you know that need batteries? And what is that strange LCD display on the left hand side all about?

They are there because the DigiMemo uses cutting edge technology to digitally capture and store everything you write using an ink pen on your pad.

You take notes in the usual way, scribbling on a normal paper pad (the DigiMemo requires no special paper) and the digital pad secretly records everything in a small(ish) 32MB memory store.

It feels completely natural and comfortable because you aren't stuck with a tiny screen or waiting around for the recognition process to take place.

The magic happens when you hook the DigiMemo up to your PC using the supplied USB cable. Click on the DigiMemo Manager software and within a few seconds your notes are electronically scanned and transferred into the computer. From there they can be annotated, deleted, turned into an e-book or saved for use in Word documents or PowerPoint presentations.

You can even send your notes as e-mail attachments if you want to share your thoughts with others.

The battery inside the special pen lasts an impressive 14 months and the digital pad's four AAA batteries are good for approximately 100 hours.

And the good news doesn't end there. The DigiMemo can also transfer sketches, drawings and charts into your PC. So humorous/obscene doodles of the boss as a way of whiling away the boredom of a long meeting are a definite no-no.

If you lash out on the optional character recognition package this fantastic little

gizmo can even turn your scrawl into editable text.

For someone who needs to write down a lot of information, such as a PA or a manager conducting staff appraisals, this baby will save hours of laborious typing work.

It really is a wonderful gadget and I wonder how I ever managed without one.

■ The DigiMemo costs £75 and is available from the importer Selwyn Electronics at www.selwyn.co.uk or by calling (01732) 765100.

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TIPS FOR CHOOSING A CARE HOME

■ **Think and plan ahead.** For many families, their first thoughts about care for an elderly relative come when there is a crisis, ie, they go into hospital after a fall which results in them needing additional care.

■ Visit homes that you think may be suitable. There is a lot of stigma over what homes are like but it's often based on myth. Again, visit before reaching crisis point so you already have an idea of what your preferred options might be. By planning ahead you are also more likely to get a place in the home you want.

■ **Make their surroundings as familiar as possible.** Dress their room with personal items to make them feel at home.

■ **Be realistic about cost.** High quality, full time care does not come cheap. Good homes have to pay nursing staff NHS rates and have stringent regulations and standards to meet. As with most things, you get what you pay for. Consider the cost of living in a hotel on a full-board basis.

■ Communication is key. Care home owner Simon Loveridge says: "Many people do not want an elderly relative or loved one to go into a care home. In the first few weeks Gratia spends as much time talking with relatives as we do residents. It's about understanding and



PURPOSE-BUILT: Gratia Care

adapting. Your lifestyle may not make it practical to look after an elderly person at home."

■ **Put your relative's needs first.** Take time to discuss with care professionals to work out what are your relative's specific needs. Modern care offers plenty of choice to meet individual needs. It is important that these needs are identified, albeit they may change over time.

■ Remember, ill elderly people can recover. Going into a home does not automatically mean they will not be able to return home once they have recovered.

Home from home



CARING: staff member Maria Moss tidies one of the rooms. Below: Vicky Lambert in the lounge

FOR more than a century, there has been a tradition of care in the North Yorkshire village of Scorton. Continuing the heritage today is Gratia Care but in a way that is much more in line with modern nursing than the conventional care provided by a former private hospital and old people's home.

Managing director Simon Loveridge says: "The care industry is evolving and in the last ten years alone aspirations and standards have increased greatly. There is a better understanding of the complex range of needs that people have and as a result, the levels of training have increased. People have recognised that the future is to build modern facilities where people can continue to enjoy a full and varied life."

Gratia Care bought the former St John of God hospital three years ago. Just last month its newly built 60-bed care home opened, providing purpose-built, en suite accommodation for residents who previously lived in the former hospital.

Residents are placed into four groups of 15 rooms with each group having its own lounge and dining room so friendships can develop. In addition to the residential care for elderly and general nursing care, Gratia also offers specialist Alzheimer's care, which often is not available elsewhere.

"Dementia is increasing because people are living longer. It's something we all have to face. But there is no reason why people with dementia can't get involved in social activities. It's about interaction and understanding their needs and aspirations, as well as the aspirations of their families."

"We have exceeded the minimum requirements for national care standards and the building itself has been shortlisted for a design award. But it's mainly about quality of care for people who have nursing needs or some level of dementia," says Simon.

Meanwhile, the main Victorian building is part way through a complete renovation. It will eventually provide assisted suite-based living



for residents who can look after themselves most of the time but need some support close at hand.

It also provides residential care for elderly mentally ill people, general nursing care and specialist Alzheimer's care, often not available elsewhere because of the high level of support that is needed.

A second new-build project will offer 24 apartments to rent or to buy leasehold for elderly people living independently but with access to the social side of the care village complex.

The emphasis is very much on the benefits of providing a varied social life for residents, which includes a coffee shop, cinema, flower shop, library and plenty of occupational therapy activities both for residents and adults who need extra support who make day visits from Richmond, Northallerton and Darlington.

"We encourage people to have as normal a life as possible, including trips out for residents and activities involving people from the community," says Simon.



RATIA CARE Ltd

Gratia Care Ltd is delighted to announce the opening of a brand new purposely designed care home, which provides specialist nursing and dementia care in the outstanding location of Scorton, one of the prettiest villages in north Yorkshire

This new care home forms part of the existing Abbey Care Village, and boasts a standard of accommodation and care which more than exceeds expectations.

Set in delightful landscaped gardens, the new facility also offers the benefits of existing on-site amenities such as a restaurant, coffee shop and cinema suite providing a stimulating social life for those who wish.

All accommodation is in beautifully appointed single rooms with en-suite facilities, providing every comfort and a homely and private living space. All rooms have points for satellite television and are fitted with individual phone lines to help residents keep in touch with their loved ones.

The Abbey Care Home has been designed to be a real home from home with intimate residents' lounges and separate dining facilities throughout the building which encourage social interaction in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

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To find out more about the Abbey Care Home or Gratia Care Ltd and our availability, please telephone us on (01748) 811971 or write to us at:

Gratia Care Ltd, Abbey Care Village, Scorton,
North Yorkshire DL10 6EB



There is no reason why people with dementia can't get involved in social activities




A pub's new restaurant venture is making the most of the North-East's proud railway heritage. SHEILA WEBER reports

The chew-chew train

IN A move to create more dining space, The Fighting Cocks in Middleton St George has bought an old rail carriage to offer an eating experience with a difference. Diners will have a brush with history as they enjoy meals on the site of what was probably the very first ticket office for the Darlington-Stockton rail line.

The new Georges Restaurant opened in August after months of planning by pub landlords Sue and Ian Kemble. "It is very exciting," says Sue. "But I am also a bit apprehensive as the project nears completion."

It was on September 27, 1825, that the first passenger train in the world ran from Witton Park to Stockton, via Darlington. According to reports, the train stopped at The Fighting Cocks for more passengers to board before journeying on to Stockton.

Originally, there was no separate station for The Fighting Cocks, with the inn itself being used as a ticket office. Now, a new walkway – adorned with railway memorabilia – will link the pub with the new dining carriage, which will be able to seat up to 45 people. Booking confirmations in the form of a rail ticket will be sent out to customers.

Fine dining will be the order of the day with a smart dress code and a ban on children under 14. There will be a special menu featuring dishes such as lobster, Angus beef and game – all local produce, wherever possible.

Wood panelling will go hand in hand with crisp, white tablecloths, cut glass and individual walnut tables and chairs, and diners will look out on to decking in the form of a railway platform.

The carriage itself dates from the 1960s and went out of service last year, its last route being Luton to Gatwick.

Sue and Ian – who have extensive experience in the hospitality industry – have run The Fighting Cocks for four years and have lived in Middleton St George for the last ten.

"The chance to take on the lease came up and we decided to have a go," says Sue. "We knew by its reputation that the pub was very busy and

that we would have to extend it somehow. At certain times we had to turn customers away as there was just not enough room. So we asked ourselves: what do we do, build a conservatory on to the back or do something unusual and link in with the pub's affinity with its railway history?"

"This was the first place where tickets were sold and the old station buildings are still across the road. It made sense to associate ourselves with all that."

As work on the carriage has been taking place, it has attracted a great deal of interest from locals and passers-by. A competition to name the new restaurant drew more than 350 entries and the winner was a Middleton St George woman who was rewarded with a meal for four on opening night.

The pub's existing restaurant is also being extended to include the present lounge area and the pool room is being turned into a lounge where smoking will be allowed. In fact, the pub as a whole is being refurbished with new carpets and curtains and redecoration.

Sue says The Fighting Cocks is popular because it offers good, fresh food in friendly surroundings. "It is not frozen meals or boil-in-the-bag stuff," she says. "The staff are welcoming and there is a nice atmosphere."

She wasn't prepared to open the new carriage restaurant until she was satisfied that everything was just right.

And with a waiting list for the opening night, pub regulars proved they were keen to be on board the carriage's first culinary outing.

■ Georges Restaurant will be open for bookings on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 7pm. Sunday lunch will be served throughout the pub and in the carriage from noon to 4pm, with an evening menu in the carriage until 9pm. The carriage can also be booked for private parties and functions. Georges will have a special menu with bar meals available in the pub. Tel: (01325) 332327.

A new walkway will link the pub with the new dining carriage, which will be able to seat up to 45 people

FIGHTING COCKS

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HAIR HEAVEN: Michael Young, left, and Gary Hooker with the MD for Tom's Companies Debrah Dhugga. Below: the salon at Seaham Hall

Hair heaven at Seaham Spa

TREATMENT: Simply the Best (luxury cut and blow dry)

WHERE: Hooker & Young at the Serenity Spa, Seaham Hall

HAVING sampled the delights of the Serenity Spa, a haven of luxury at Seaham Hall Hotel, I was eager to try its latest addition – the new hair salon run by Hooker & Young. This hairdressing duo – Gary and Michael to their staff and clients – have fast become the region's most sought-after stylists, tending the tresses of top celebrities. I arrived at the salon hoping for some VIP treatment of my own.

Access to the hairdressers is through the spa's reception, and as you climb the wooden stairs, it becomes clear that it continues with the same theme. There's calming music and a delicious smell, and the pared-down decor oozes Oriental chic. I'm led to one of the stations, where I sit in a roomy chair, and a friendly staff member offers me champagne. Already I feel I'm in heaven.

Michael Young arrives and with his warm greeting and friendly smile, quickly makes me feel at home. In fact, despite its luxury, the salon is far from intimidating, and local staff add

a down-to-earth touch. Through simple questions, Michael gets the facts on my hair – its condition, how often I wash it, the way I want it etc. From my responses, he drafts a prescription suggesting products I should use, then it's down to business. I'm taken to the sink to have my hair washed and told to sit in a big white seat.

With the press of a button, the seat reclines so I'm horizontal. I'm taken enough by this, but there's more to come – a movement starts beneath me and as my hair is washed, my body is gently massaged. This feels lovely, especially in conjunction with a head massage, and I lie feeling almost comatose.

When it comes to my haircut, Michael shows his expertise, tidying up my layers and giving me a good overall trim. The icing on the cake is the final touch – a thorough blowdry that leaves me with 40s-style waves. Chilled out and with film star hair, all I need now is a premiere.

■ Other packages at the salon include spa treatments and lunch in the Ozone restaurant. For more details, call 0191-581 9900.

Sarah Foster



LARI WOODALL: determined to crack the New York fashion stores

Pictures:
NIGEL
WHITFIELD

Fashion designer Lari Woodall is dead set on taking a bite at the Big Apple... and she's not about to let a little thing like cancer get in her way. SHEILA WEBER meets the determined one-woman whirlwind

RIGHT from the word go, you get the impression that Lari Woodall is a woman who goes all out for what she wants. That there is little room for dithering or compromise. Holding court in her little empire above Bedale's market place, she exudes confidence.

So when she talks about clinching a fashion creation deal with Fifth Avenue stores in New York, you tend to believe it will happen.

For Lari has steered a steady path through life – always sure of what was in her sights. Only one thing seems to have taken her by surprise – breast cancer.

But even that's been fended off, sparking Lari into using her fashion talents to become a committed fund-raiser for cancer charities.

When we met she had just returned from New York, where she had been exhibiting examples of her bespoke design and tailoring service. She did two shows which went 'fantastically well' and which she hopes were a prelude to an autumn contract.

Surrounded by various fashion creations, fabrics, photographs and sewing machines, Lari works alone. She prefers it that way. Getting staff, she says, is 'nigh on impossible'.

Originally from York, the 37-year-old has lived in Bedale since August last year having bought a Victorian cottage with her partner, Paul, and 13-year-old daughter, Hollie.

Her gran taught her sewing from a young age. "I always wanted to be creative," she says. But Lari stumbled on a job tailoring in the bespoke Mecca of London's Savile Row quite by chance.

She had studied art and office practice at York. "I hated the admin side, but I had to persevere," says Lari. Then she answered an

ad for someone to work at a tailor's and found it mainly involved making bespoke clothes for men.

"That was ideal," says Lari. "I could do women's fashions, but the two are very different. There are very few men's tailors around now and sewing is not taught in many schools these days."

She worked on Savile Row for a number of years and was amazed how much diversity there is in fashion. "It can go on forever. The opportunities are endless," she says.

But she wanted to go it alone. And during a visit to New York she once again stumbled upon an opportunity – a fashion event.

"I met a man called Joseph Andrette who was running the show. It was unbelievable because our events are so tame compared to those in the US. I was blown away by it all. I thought: 'I can do this'. So I did."

Lari returned to the UK, packed in her job at Savile Row and worked from home in York for a while, building up a client base. She then spent some time in Huddersfield – the old centre of the worsted trade – and did a couple of charity events for breast cancer causes.

"My work gives people a chance to express their ideas about how they should look. And it is for me to put it all together," she says. "My work is totally bespoke. You won't find the same clothes on anyone else. It is unique to the particular personality."

As she progressed, she got into TV and work for celebrities and has exhibited at Earls Court. One dress she created was made from carpets. To my look of astonishment she replies: "I know," implying that the customer is always right.

In and among, she has kept returning to America to do more shows of her work.



Bloomingdale's or bust

"This kind of manufacturing has just about disappeared in this country," says Lari. "No one can sew any more. It's a dying art, unfortunately."

Gradually, she set up her own collection and targeted the main UK stores. One big deal is in the offing. But she also kept an eye on New York in general and Macy's and Bloomingdales in particular.

"I went over in July and did two shows which went fantastically well," she says. "I am going back in October to do three shows in Miami. But my biggest will be next March, also in Miami, with a show for 8,000 people and possible coverage on MTV."

Macy's and Bloomingdales – famous as the top people's stores in the Big Apple – liked what they saw but want more examples. "They are extremely exacting and perfectionist as this is a very exclusive line, very limited," says Lari. "These clothes would cost a lot of money. You could say they are for the rich-ish."

For now, though, Bedale is the hub

Lari makes clothes for both men and women, in fabrics of their choice and tailored to their own ideas. Well, mostly.

"When you are wearing something, especially if it is costly, you have to feel comfortable and confident in it. If you don't, then it's all a waste of time.

"I believe in being honest with people and will say if I don't think their ideas are right

for them. I don't mean to offend, but much of my business is by word of mouth. If they go out in something which doesn't look right and tell people who made the garment, then it reflects badly on me. They want to feel a million dollars and if they don't, then I have not done my job properly."

Men tend to ask for suits, women for wedding outfits or ball gowns. Corsets are also much in demand just now. Among fabrics, silk is extremely popular, as is linen, cashmere and worsted wool.

From Lari, a suit would cost around £350, with the customer choosing the fabric and lining. You can even have the lining decorated – with a map of London if you like. A silk gown would cost in the region of £500.

Lari was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003. Fortunately, it was in the very early stages.

"I was caught off guard as I had had no symptoms. It didn't sink in at first, or ever since really," she says. "You have to look at it as if you have a cold. If I hadn't done that,

I would have found it hard to get out of bed on a morning."

She was treated with hormonal drugs and has now been given the all-clear.

"I thought: 'How dare this invade my life?' I can be very stubborn but I was also very lucky," she says. "The drugs caused me to put on weight and I found that hard as I have always been tiny. But really that's not much of a price to pay.

"Everything could have been taken away from me. Just like that. You just have to get on with it and I know not everyone is so lucky. I am content with my life. Very much so."

While she clearly loves her life in Bedale, it is equally evident that New York is important to her.

"I think I might want to live there in later life," says Lari. "My work has changed a lot since I started out. As you get older you can be at a crossroads and you can't take all the different directions.

"To have something of mine for sale in

Macy's or Bloomingdales would be the pinnacle. I hope to sign a big contract in New York next month."

Seeing the determined glint in her eye, you get the notion it's just a matter of time.

■ **Lari Woodall Designs, 6 Market Place, Bedale, North Yorkshire DL8 1EQ. Website: www.lariwoodall.co.uk. Tel: (01677) 426824/07708 384894. Opening hours: Monday-closed; Tuesday to Friday-9.30am to 5pm; Saturday-9am to noon**



This kind of manufacturing has just about disappeared in this country... No one can sew any more. It's a dying art



ONCE A BIKER... Ian Lamming samples the pleasures of the open road on the new Honda CBF1000

Confessions of a bike-buying junkie

OPEN the door to the garage and there lies my pride and joy – my motorbike. Seldom ridden, often polished and sitting atop best laminate flooring, like its forbears, the KTM SuperDuke 990 is pristine.

My last bike was two years old and travelled just 888 miles. The one before that did 250 and the one before that 600. Madness, given the thousands of pounds I am happy to shell out on gleaming motorcycle parts.

It can't be helped – I'm a bike buying junkie – and I'm not alone. All my biker chums are the same. I use the phrase 'biker chum' loosely as we never actually ride together. In fact, we seldom ride at all.

Why? For all manner of reasons. It is often too cold, this year it's been too hot and now it's too wet. Then there are other distractions to life such as work, chores and people. Then there's the fact that you feel too tired to ride safely.

Pitiful really, but the pleasure of buying and owning a bike, or poring over a bike magazine or swapping biker tales of derring-do never diminishes and the prospect of not having a motorcycle turns my blood as cold as the English weather.

The real surprise, even after 27 years of proud ownership, is that when you do finally throw a leg over the saddle and venture out onto the road, you have an absolutely amazing time and you wonder why you don't do it more often.

I had to test the new Honda CBF1000 recently, a worthy and capable motorcycle but not one with a particularly sexy nature, and it was great.

The mercury was rising and had topped 30 degrees. In all my protective gear I was sweating like a fatty in a bodywrap and as the bike ticked over, the heat rising from the engine

was enough to melt my soul. But once under way, life on the road became cool again. Motoring correspondent IAN LAMMING admits to being one of the boys who loves his motorbikes... but too often forgets how much fun they are out on the open road

The CBF offered the armchair comfort of a Deauville tourer and the exhilarating performance of a Fireblade. The F, lent by White Brothers of Darlington, takes an old 'Blade motor, knocks some of the edge off the top end power and boosts bottom end and mid-range. Stick this unit in a traditional frame with one of the most comfortable riding positions known to man and you have a bike you could happily ride forever – if you get started in the first place.

In the first run of silver machines it did look pretty bland but the latest colour range includes a rather fetching blue which seems to alter the F's shape completely and helps it catch the eye much more. It still won't appeal to the head-banger sports brigade but it will kindle something in the masses of other motorcyclists looking for a good bike.

The back end is fresh and modern, attractive and stylish. The front fairing could be better looking but at least does a decent job of deflecting the wind. The twin pipes are a nice touch. The rest is smart, clean and func-

tional. You are not going to look for large shop windows to catch your reflection but then that might be a good thing on safety grounds.

At 220kg it does feel weighty at rest and the steering is a bit ponderous at slow speeds, but you soon adapt and towns become a piece of cake thanks to a motor that is happy to trundle along in top at 30mph. It really is that tractable and is more than willing to pull from there to 100-plus mph if that's your thing.

As I said, the riding position is near perfect, the generous saddle comfort personified with a short reach to the wide bars and pegs just in the right spot for your feet.

THE CBF turns out a modest 96bhp but don't be fooled as it is a complete torque monster with more than enough poke to pull your arms out of your sockets.

Handling is good too. In slow bends it does feel like it wants to drop into corners but you soon adapt and use the throttle to pick it up again. Otherwise the handling is fun and involving in a way many superbikes aren't.

Brakes are good and are backed by ABS though a decent amount of pressure is needed on the front lever to get things moving.

In practical terms the tank holds a reasonably generous 19 litres which should give the F a decent range between fuel stops. The 795mm seat height also helps make the CBF manageable for those like me who are challenged in the length of leg area.

The big Honda provides a lesson to us all, particularly the sad clan of virtual bikers who talk the talk but never leave their garage. No matter what the machine, motorcycles are there to be ridden and enjoyed. It's just a shame I haven't been out on the bike since – but then it has been a bit rainy.

The pleasure of buying and owning a bike, or poring over a bike mag, or swapping biker tales of derring-do never really diminishes



6

The pleasure of buying and owning a bike, or poring over a bike mag, or swapping biker tales of derring-do never really diminishes

London boasts a wealth of attractions to tempt even the most jaded visitor and autumn, when the streets are cooling down, is a great time to visit. MARIE CARTER reports



REST AND RELAXATION: clockwise from left – the Royal Albert Hall; a pampering at the Soma Centre; the Royal Garden Hotel and its gleaming foyer

THE 18th century writer Samuel Johnson once wrote that “when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford”... These days, thank goodness, you can revel in bucolic bliss at the opposite end of the country and still enjoy a day trip consisting of retail therapy, fine dining and a show in the capital. Less than a three-hour train journey from our region, and with regular flights from Teesside and Newcastle airports, London is more accessible than ever.

Finding a hotel close to the main shopping areas, such as the Kings Road, Kensington High Street and Oxford Street, is key to making the whole experience stress-free. No Tube trips, no unnecessary, cajoling crowds, no frayed nerves.

For a treat, I booked into the five star Royal Garden Hotel on Kensington High Street for my first night in the capital visiting friends. With fantastic shops just a few minutes walk from my room, I could indulge my credit card at stores like Joseph, Gap and Monsoon. The Royal Garden's prices are reasonable considering the location and the standard of accommodation – rooms are spacious with CD and DVD players, interactive TV and high-speed Internet – and the views from many of the suites are simply breathtaking.

The capital's skyline, including the leafy and beautifully landscaped Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, stretched before me as I gazed through my window. Joggers mixed with yummy mummies pushing prams. But first, I needed to relax...

The hotel's prestigious Soma health centre is the brainchild of Carolan Brown, former personal trainer to Diana, Princess of Wales. Soma focuses on the mind, body and spirit and offers treatments to relax and rejuvenate. Perfect. Celebrities such as the Arctic Monkeys and Rula Lenska regularly stretch themselves with yoga or Pilates sessions, get trim with personal training at the centre's fully equipped gym, indulge in a complementary therapy like massage or reflexology or else try

Simply capital



a relaxing treatment. It's the perfect pit-stop for the weary shopper.

I opted for the wonderfully relaxing hydramoisture source facial. Warming and refreshing creams and balms are applied to the skin and then your face is wrapped in a cooling towel. The treatment left my skin feeling soft and looking radiant. My cheery Australian therapist also gave me an amazing hand and shoulder massage, which was so relaxing I almost nodded off.

The Boxwood Cafe at the Berkeley Hotel, Knightsbridge is probably the only Gordon Ramsay restaurant you can get in to without joining a long waiting list, being best friends with an It girl, or bearing a strong resemblance to a film star. On a Wednesday at 8pm it was full to the rafters with the obligatory American tourists, champagne quaffing City

types and glamorous ladies. But don't let the hub-bub put you off as you tuck into treats like John Dory, pan-fried and served with creamed leeks and squid, foie gras burgers with the most amazing chips and wicked chocolate puddings. Prices can be on the steep side, though, with basic mains starting at £55.

After checking out of the Royal Garden and into The Bentley Kempinski hotel in the heart of Kensington – more of that undiscovered gem in a moment – I caught the Tube to Mayfair to meet my lunch companion. I have never a massive fan of Indian food, but the feast that awaited at Tamarind was superb. The dishes are all reasonably priced with appetisers from £6.50 and devilish desserts (I recommend the fig and almond roll) from just under £5.

My hotel for the night, The Bentley Kempinski, is a boutique hotel with a history. Tucked away along a street punctuated by the grand houses of old money, The Bentley recalls another more rarefied era, but with the advantage of today's comforts and technologies. Smiling porters are on hand to meet me, and carry my luggage through to the opulent and luxurious lobby, with its marble floor and ancestral portraits. The property, which was built in 1880, was originally four grand private residences now restored with its original facades.

Luxury is the hallmark of The Bentley, but I am still stunned to learn a fact or two about the hotel... 600 tonnes of marble were imported from Turkey, Italy and Africa to furnish this most lavish of interiors, for example. The crystal chandeliers in every room, the Louis XV furniture and a truly decadent Turkish bath make The Bentley a real experience. My room was large and marble-lined with a Jacuzzi and walk-in shower. But strangely, despite the lavishness, it also had a homely feel. The Bentley is only a 15 minute



WHERE TO STAY

Royal Garden Hotel
2-24 Kensington High Street,
London W8 4PT.
Tel: 0207 937 8000
www.royalgardenhotel.co.uk

The Bentley Kempinski London
Harrington Gardens
London SW7 4JX
Tel: 0207 244 5555
www.kempinski.com

WHERE TO EAT

Tamarind
20 Queen Street
Mayfair
London W1J 5PR
Tel: 0207 629 3561
www.tamarindrestaurant.com

The Boxwood Cafe
The Berkeley
Wilton Place
London SW1X 7RL
Tel: 0800 652 6349.

WHERE TO PAMPER YOURSELF

The Soma Centres Ltd
2-24 Kensington High Street
London W8 4PT
Tel: 0207 361 1995
www.somacentre.co.uk

walk or quick taxi ride away from the Royal Albert Hall, where I enjoyed a lavish production of La Boheme. Must-see attractions like the V&A and the Natural History museums are also within walking distance.

London is never going to be cheap, but if it's luxury you're looking for, it's just a short train ride away.

The capital has many hidden charms away from the bustle and brashness, and I only sampled a few. It's probably time, then, to plan another trip...



I gazed through my window. Joggers mixed with yummy mummies pushing prams

Six of the best playground crazes

IN the past they've included Top Trumps, Pocketeers and Cabbage Patch dolls – and games such as hopscotch and conkers have apparently been around since the beginning of time.

Modern day playground crazes have long included a highly collectable series of interactive keyrings and the collecting of cards in some form or another but this year there are plenty of alternatives on the block.

After spending more time on them than is healthy for a grown adult, I've trialled, tested and attempted to break dozens of wannabe sought-after school items for break times – and here are the six strongest contenders.



WHEELY GOOD FUN
Street Gliders
£14.99 from www.hamleys.com
GLIDE and walk at the same time

As the autumn term begins and children fill the school playgrounds once again, PETER JENKINSON recommends some fun toys to pack in their satchels

by attaching these two wheeled skates to just about any shoe. Stopping is simple – well after a little practice – and the whole thing lights up as you move from one side of the playground to the other – Wake up late? Get your skates on.

RELEASE THE INNER ARTIST

Floam
£4.99 per tub from www.toysrus.co.uk

ONE of the biggest selling items of 2006 is this micro-beaded compound that sticks to just about anything. As the manufacturers say you can "Roll it, mould it, cover it, Floam it!" – Available in various colours these tubs are flying off the shelves.



COULD BE A MONSTER

Gamoja
from £1.99 www.tesco.com
THERE are more than 40 of these meteoric monsters in the

collection. Packs contain two or four of the fierce looking, two centimetre high figures to begin your collecting quest.

Play tournaments against other keepers of Gamoja and make sure you find a shelf to show them off.



THEIR LIFE IN YOUR HANDS

Test Tube Aliens
£12.99 each from www.argos.co.uk

THE invasion is underway, owners of these interactive Aliens must feed and nurture them from chrysalis to eight times that size over a two week period.

Register one of your six individual characters online and monitor its health and extend its life on the interactive website.



JUST LIKE THAT

Marvins Magic Range starts at £8.99 from www.hamleys.co.uk

CHOOSE from an array of illusions from the tricks with money set, dynamic coins or mysterious mind reading kit. Then progress onto the slightly more difficult close-up trick set or executive collection.

A bit of practice and your friends will be hooked and parting with loose change to see your tricks again.



YOU SPIN ME

Kodai Djinns
£27.95 for a pair from www.firebox.com

IF you thought the humble yo-yo had been consigned to the history books, here comes its 21st century saviour to rescue it from the pile of has-beens.

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