

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

APRIL 2005

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sharon griffiths

‘Tidy gardeners like order in their borders and wage a constant war on nature

MARY, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow? Probably not with silver bells and cockle shells. But possibly with pebbles and decking, gravel and fairy lights and maybe even a jokey Loch Ness Monster somewhere beyond the fish pond. As the lawn mowers rumble out of their winter hibernation and we get out our gardening gloves and spades and shears, it's time to consider what sort of gardener you are.

TIDY GARDENERS

THESE are the people who are determined to tame the wilderness. They have immaculately tidy houses, all gleaming surfaces, sprayed and germ free, and want their gardens to match. They mow the lawn as if they were Hoovering and practically polish up the peonies on the way.

Except they probably wouldn't have peonies. Too big, too flamboyant. Too untidy when the petals start dropping.

Tidy gardeners like colour and order in their borders and wage a constant war on nature. Come autumn a leaf barely has time to touch the ground before it's whipped away into a bin bag (nothing as messy as a compost heap). Weeds dare not show their faces and poor daffodils, as soon as they have wilted, are cut back, or knotted or tied with an elastic band lest their collapsing leaves look untidy.

Tidy gardeners' lawns look like velvet. They have mathematically spaced bedding plants, perfect lawn edges and scrubbed and gleaming paths. Their gardens are neat and cheerful, but however small their garden, they would probably be happy with a smaller one, as there would be less to look after.

What to buy them: spray weedkiller.
What not to buy them: anything tall and straggly, however lovely the leaves.

INDOOR OUTDOOR GARDENERS.

THESE look upon the back garden as another room in the house. They spend a lot of time out there and, like their front room, they want it comfortable and nicely decorated.

These are the people with the decking and the patio heaters, the built-in barbecue and the lights. They have lots of plants in pots that they can move around, replace, throw out as the mood suits them. They're big on low maintenance – lots of gravel, pebbles and fancy brick work. Their idea of

gardening is to buy it ready made or ready planted because a garden is for relaxing in, not for working in. They might have a rose arch or a honeysuckle trellis, because they like their garden to smell sweet too.

What to buy them: scented anti-midge candles, barbecue tongs, stick-like modernistic plants that need no maintenance.

What not to buy them: seed potatoes, rhubarb, sweet peas, anything that requires any digging or cultivating.

GREEN FINGERED GARDENERS

THESE are direct descendants of Capability Brown and Percy Thrower with a dash of Vita Sackville West and Monty Don.

They are the best and the worst of gardeners. The best because they love their gardens and they love their plants. They create wonderlands of colour, scent and texture whether that have a tiny inner city yard or a few hundred ancestral acres. Like Prince Charles, they probably talk to their plants, know them all individually and love them to bits. They will put up with a scrawny ugly shrub for 51 weeks of the year, just because for one short week it has wonderful flowers. Would that we were all so loved.

They can put unpromising plants together and create something special. Unlikely corners are full of unexpected delights. But to them their garden is a constant canvas. Weeds to dig up, cuttings to take, plants to divide, new combinations to try. What it most certainly isn't is a place to relax. Many of them will not even take a holiday in peak growing time because they would miss their garden too much.

True, they might occasionally sit down with a mug of tea after a few hours' gardening and survey with satisfaction what they've done. But stretch out on a sun bed, with their eyes closed and not caring about the greenfly? Never.

Their garden is their life. Everything else is a distraction.

What to buy them: gardening gloves, rolls of twine, labels.

What not to buy them: any plant at all. They'd be horrified. Instead they prefer a handful of seeds harvested from your garden, or little cuttings or seedlings, ideally wrapped in a bit of soggy newspaper. However unpromising they may look, the GFG will turn them into a thing of beauty.

But whatever your style of gardening –

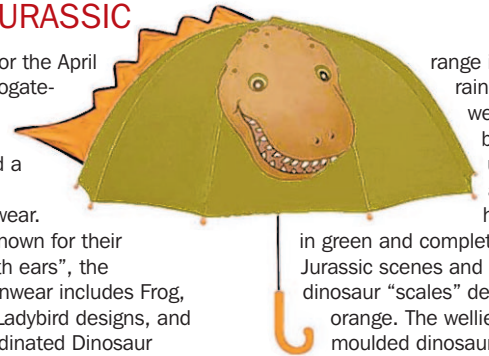
GOING JURASSIC

JUST in time for the April showers, Harrogate-based Kidorable have launched a new range of Dinosaur rainwear.

Already well-known for their "umbrellas with ears", the company's rainwear includes Frog, Butterfly and Ladybird designs, and the new co-ordinated Dinosaur



range should appeal to both boys and girls. The



range includes raincoat, wellies, backpack, umbrella and coat hanger, all

in green and complete with Jurassic scenes and a dinosaur "scales" detail in orange. The wellies have moulded dinosaur teeth on the toes, and eyes on the front and a useful additional "scale" to help pull on the boots.

Kidorable is based in Claro Park, Harrogate. For information on stockists of the range call (01423) 524407.

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Amazing glazing

The top ten tips for planning your conservatory

A CONSERVATORY is one of the easiest ways to extend living space and increase the value of a home. If done with forethought and planning, it can provide a bright new room with a lovely outlook onto your garden – just make sure you put plenty of thought into planning it.

1. Many conservatories can be built without planning permission, but don't take a chance – local authorities will be able to confirm whether or not permission is needed.

2. Be clear about what the room will be used for – playroom, dining room, relaxation area, etc. – and make sure the end result fulfils this need. Thorough research should be done into different

styles and layouts, to make the conservatory look like part of the house and not just a “bolt-on” to the property.

3. Timing is everything – once ideas are in place, allow up to six months to get planning permission and for the building work to be complete.

4. The most obvious part of a conservatory is the glass itself. It can be very time-consuming to keep the panes of glass clean and they can be difficult to reach from a standard step-ladder or upstairs window. An environmentally friendly way to keep windows sparkling is to use the new self-cleaning glass, which works with the weather to keep itself clean. This has a coating that reacts with

'Why I love my conservatory'



ONE family who are finding out about all the benefits of having a conservatory are the Cowans of Darlington. Peter and Helen, who have a little daughter, Freya, have had their extension for about a year now, and don't regret a minute of it.

Their family home is relatively modern, about 15 years old, but they wanted an extra room downstairs, a room with a view of their garden. "I'm not a keen gardener," says Peter, "but it's nice to sit and look at it from somewhere under cover."

The conservatory faces North, but the couple don't find that a problem. In summer it's plenty warm enough, and in winter, they use a portable heater. There are tiles on the floor and the room has cane furniture. "We spend a lot of time in there," says Peter.

When the couple decided to extend, they got a number of quotes and chose D and J, of Darlington. "They did the build from start to finish and also sorted out our planning permission for us," says Peter.



Blinds can keep out the worst of the summer heat and glare

UV rays to break down organic dirt (for example, fingerprints, bird droppings, tree resin) and also causes rain to flow down the glass in an even 'sheet', stopping water from drying in streaks and smears following a shower.

5. Double glazing can help maintain temperatures by providing insulation in the winter. By reducing heat emissions, this can also help protect the environment.

6. Glass in standard windows absorbs heat from warm rooms and radiates from the outside surface. To retain heat and save energy at the same time, consider glass with a low emissivity rating which stops the heat radiating to the environment. Instead, the sun's rays are allowed through, but heat from fires and radiators are reflected back into the home. This type of glass will help reduce fuel bills, and make double glazing as effective as triple glazing.

7. Conservatories can become true hot-houses in the summer and ice-boxes in the

winter. To maintain control over the temperature, consider installing solar control glass in the roof, blinds, heating and/or air conditioning to give comfortable temperatures all year round.

8. Automatic roof vents are a good option – they can be adjusted from day to day to suit the weather and temperature.

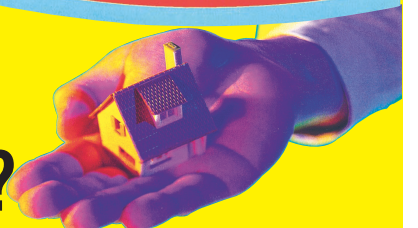
9. The floor of a conservatory should be quite hardwearing, and suitable for outdoor shoes that might be carrying mud, etc., in from the garden. Flagstones and tiles are perfect for this, but lino or laminate flooring can also be an option – these are also perfect for providing continuity from a kitchen area.

10. Under-floor heating is a great way to warm up the conservatory in winter months.

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When it comes to modern funerals, colour is the new black as people begin to move away from the traditional services left by the will and testament of the Victorians. IAN LAMMING reports on the men who are breathing new life into the funeral business



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Lifting the spirits

DEATH comes to us all, yet the average human being seems ill-equipped to cope with the loss of a loved one. Often the first sign of trouble in any street is when the curtains remain drawn all day, the house suddenly shrouded by a moribund atmosphere of grief and soul searching.

The mourning process begins, the household lapsing into a dark scene set by our Victorian ancestors. Arranging the funeral can be sad and daunting in equal measure as, in many cases, people are forced to confront one of life's great taboos for the very first time.

At times like these, the funeral director's job is vital to help the bereaved get through the period of grief and in the majority of cases it is a solemn affair with nothing but time to heal the hurt. But there can be glimmers of light among the darkness as one Darlington funeral director explains.

"The death of a loved one is to be mourned, there is no doubting that," says John Whitehouse. "But what many people forget is that it is also a time to celebrate the life of the person who has died.

"Sometimes death and sadness makes people very cold, other times we are instantly at ease and find ourselves laughing as we remember the person who has died and celebrate their memories."

Entering John's new family businesses in Cockerton is far from a depressing experience, the offices forsaking the tradi-

tional funeral parlour look for something more tasteful and modern.

Grey frosted glass windows greet the bereaved, with modern lettering etched onto their surface, along with a giant sugar stealer, a symbol of the fragility of life. Stainless steel door knobs hint at what is within and the client enters a showpiece of contemporary design.

A door buzzer heralds their entrance and they are met and shown inside by John, dressed impeccably in a smart blue modern suit, or one of his family.

The West Auckland Road building in the past has been a branch of Barclays Bank and a debt collector's agency. Now refurbished from the ground up, with new doors, wiring, central heating and décor, it offers comfort and service to people at their greatest time of need.

Neutral carpets lead to a warm, modern living room, where clients relax on Red Barn's best; chocolate brown leather sofas covered in attractive purple and blue cushions, sitting alongside a contemporary table and sideboard. Grape coloured curtains dress the windows while modern wallpaper brightens the walls, the colours chosen carefully for their taste and ability to lift the mood.

The biggest distraction from clients' grief is the beautiful artwork; coloured prints by renowned photographer and Stockton artist Rachel Fish and the celebrated townscape artist Ian Fennelly, all selected carefully from the town's Gallerina

NE interiors



Going out in style: John Whitehouse, right, and father Mel in their tasteful, modern funeral parlour. The prints are beautiful photographs by artist Rachel Fish, the sofas are from Red Barn in Darlington



Pictures: CHRIS BOOTH

art gallery. Glassware, stainless steel and tasteful lamps add the finishing touches creating an ambience which is as designer as it is respectful. It's the same in the room next door – the chapel of rest – and in the offices upstairs, where the inevitable paperwork must be filled out.

John is one of the region's youngest funeral directors. He first became involved at the age of 23 when he was working as an underwriter for motor insurance.

"I had friends who worked for a funeral director and they were always looking for people to help," says Shildon-born John, 33, who now runs his own businesses with his wife Christine, father Mel, and the help of his mother Dorothy and aunty June Wilson.

"After working for other firms, I realised I needed to do something myself. I just wanted to do things the way I felt they should be done, offering the full service but in a way which is much more personal.

"It appeals to me because I like helping people through difficult times. I am a good listener and people like to open their hearts to me. Within minutes of meeting people, I can sense what they are like and the best way to handle the situation."

It's a family business and the very first funeral John conducted was for one of his family. "It was my grandma, Doris Denham, who had died aged 91. With her being family, it did feel slightly different," he recalls. In his time John has conducted about 1,500 funerals. "But it is important to me that I treat everyone as if it is my first," he says.

The business is there to offer clients whatever they want. If that is a traditional Victorian funeral, shrouded in black and complete with horse drawn hearse, then so be it. But where he can, John leans towards celebration rather than mourning. On most occasions the funeral cars are silver Daimler Jaguars, not black. Black frock coats sport blue velvet collars and soon the drivers will wear blue.

"It's probably because we are a bit younger ourselves that we favour a more modern approach," he says. "The industry has changed massively since Diana died. The traditional

black is very much a legacy of the Victorians whereas a lot of our clients prefer the funeral to be a celebration of the deceased's life."

Increasingly, John is being asked for humanist services away from church. The coffin can be any colour or shape and can sport graphics. There have been caskets shaped like aeroplanes, another with a Stratocaster guitar painted onto the top, and some made from willow and bamboo for woodland burials. You can even get a motorcycle and side-car hearse.

Some clients want their loved ones to be buried at sea. "The burial site is about 11 miles out from South Shields near the wreck of a ship called the Gorgy Porgy. The coffin has to be encased in a steel cage and it weighs a quarter of a ton. We often scatter petals on the surface. It's an amazing experience."

When it comes to people's ashes, there are even more options. They can be scattered virtually anywhere, from the countryside to a sports venue, fired into the air in a rocket and even made into jewellery.

Rather than leave the funeral service to the family, people can plan their own beforehand and even pay for it. Special pre-payment plans are available for people in the Darlington area, the money going into a special account, the accrued interest normally taking care of inflation costs over the years.

"I think people are pleasantly surprised when they walk through our door and while circumstances always dictate that it is a sad occasion, I'd like to think what we do here does help lift their spirits," says John.



It is also a time to celebrate the life of a person



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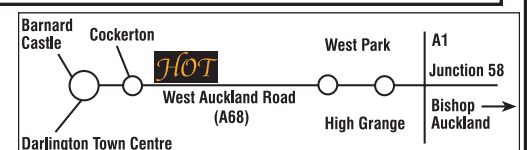
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NE gardening

Small, but beautiful

Television gardener Matt James tells HANNAH STEPHENSON how you can make the most of a restricted outdoor space

TV gardening expert Matt James knows a thing or two about gardening on a budget. He transforms dull, town and city gardens into outdoor havens of calm, colour and co-ordination, while owners keep a tight grip on their wallets.

The third series of *The City Gardener* is on now and Matt explains that anyone starting out does not need to spend a fortune on transforming a small plot.

You don't, for example, need to invest in all the tools, gadgets and gizmos on the market. A good spade and fork, pruning saw, watering can or hosepipe with an outside tap, secateurs, small trowel, hoe and a bucket, instead of a wheelbarrow, are probably all you need.

Ask yourself carefully whether you really need a lawn in a small space, he advises. It may not be necessary and smaller lawns are notoriously difficult to maintain. It would also mean you having to invest in a lawnmower and the associated problems of storing it.

"Many people think they need to have a lawn because they don't know how else to fill the space," he says. "But gardens can look great without them."

When planning your oasis, the most important consideration is where you are going to sit, he says. This may be where you have to spend the most money.

"You need to invest in hard standing or paving. Natural stone is a good option, but you can also go for pre-cast concrete imitations, which will be half the price and are widely available from garden centres and builders' merchants. If you are going for imitation, go for a darker colour. Some of the lighter ones trying to imitate York stone, for instance, look terribly fake. Dark grey goes with almost anything and doesn't stand out like a sore thumb."

Gravel and bark are cheap options and easy to install as you just need to level the ground and place a membrane over it to stop



Colourful steps are the focus in this small, split-level back garden. Pictures from *Backyard Blueprints* by David Stevens (Jacqui Small, £18.99)

the weeds coming up, putting a thick layer of gravel on top. The disadvantage is that any tables and chairs put on it will sink to a degree and you may end up wobbling in your seat. Also, if your seating area is near to your patio doors and you are in and out a lot, you'll end up dragging gravel into the house on your shoes.

You can achieve a happy medium, he says.

"Instead of paving a whole courtyard, you could pave an area outside your back door and enough for a table and chairs and then have five or six paving slabs leading through a swathe of gravel, combining cheap and expensive."

Matt says if you shop around, you can buy plants much more cheaply than they are at some garden centres and DIY outlets.

"Always go to a specialist nursery," he advises. "Plants are sometimes half the price and they have a far wider range than any garden centre. The people who serve you have much more passion as they have raised the



This extensive pergola is tantamount to an outside room with a ceiling



Gardening events in the North-East

Raby Castle Orchid Show, Saturday, April 30 to Monday, May 2. Orchid displays by societies and nurseries from around Europe with lectures, talks and demonstrations by the experts. Orchids, books, equipment, compost and sundries for sale. The castle is also hosting a plant fair on June 5. Raby Castle, Staindrop, County Durham.

North of England Horticultural Society Harrogate Spring Flower Show, April 28 to May 1. Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate.

Garden Festival at Holker Hall, June 3 to 5. Cark-in-Cartmel, near Grange-Over-Sands, Cumbria.

Spring Plant Fair, June 5, 11am to 4pm. Sutton Park, Sutton-on-the-Forest, York.

Thinking small: Matt James, left, believes even the smallest outdoor space can be transformed into something special



plants themselves and will be able to give you much more information and advice than other outlets.”

Make sure you know what plants will be suitable for both your soil type and situation. Consider the aspect of your garden, whether you live in a wind tunnel or frost pocket and make a checklist of characteristics before buying your plants.

Matt adds: “You can’t afford to impulse buy. This often ends up a complete waste of money as you end up with a hotchpotch of mismatched plants with no obvious place to put them.”

You can pick up sale plants from garden centres which may be past their best this season but will spring back to life next year, or at car boot sales. But always check the roots, removing the plant from its pot. If they are winding round and round the base, they are obviously pot-bound, which may hinder growth later on.

If you want a focal point of a shrub or tree, only buy one and then you can balance the garden with cheaper perennials which bear more flowers and give you a quicker return on your money.

If you just want to invest in a container or two to brighten up your urban haven,

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3. Contact your parish council, many of which have an allotment officer to help you out and offer advice.

it can be done cheaply, says Matt.

“You can buy pots for £1 each, but are they frost-proof? They need to be. Hunt around, go to reclamation yards where you might pick up an old chimney pot or bucket. You can use virtually anything as a container, even an old welly with a hole drilled in the bottom can house plants, blending into a woodland cottage garden.”

● **The City Gardener is on Channel 4, normally on Thursdays at 8.30pm**



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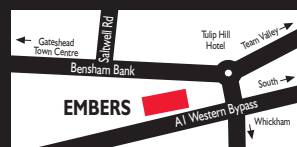


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With the amount of pesticides in clothing, food and skin-care, many mothers are turning to natural products for their children. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS reports on a new organic business for mums and kids

THE traditional image of a recyclable nappy is the old terry towelling version, but Clare Adamson is twanging away at something altogether different.

"The range and materials are much more advanced these days," she says, pulling at the elasticated legs of one of the nappies she sells as part of her organic business, Eco-boo. "I think a lot of parents would be interested in learning more about them if they knew they weren't like the old nappies."

Clare is probably right. The model she is holding has a bright, outer layer decorated with comic frogs and is just like a pair of pull-on pants. But inside there is a cotton lining followed by a disposable, and more importantly biodegradable, inner liner. With the average cost of disposable nappies for kids aged from birth to two and a half years being £1,200, and the number of disposable nappy mountains posing problems for local authorities across the country, it sounds like another good reason to go green.

"Even if you take into account washing costs, you will still be saving £500-£600 and if you go on to have more children, the savings are even greater," she says.

Clare started her mail order company Eco-boo, which she runs from her home at Heighington, near Darlington, after trying to find natural bath products for her own children, Grace, now nine, and Harriet, seven. She was particularly wary of chemicals such as sodium lauryl sulphate, which is used to make the foam in bath products and can lead to skin irritations, hair loss and eczema. Petrochemicals which are used in some bathroom products can also be absorbed in the skin and affect hormone balance and respiratory systems.

"I think in future it will become the norm

for products not to have these but at the moment the high street doesn't offer much choice to parents," she says.

Clare, 39, eventually sourced an organic range of bath products called Beaming Baby from Devon. Later, for pregnant women and new mothers, she added the Green Baby products, such as talc-free powder and soothing nappy balm. She set up her website and mail order business and went about sourcing more products for her company.

The result is a fabulous range of organic clothing from birth to four years of age; a range of organic gifts and bath products, and, of course, the recyclable nappy packs. The natural clothing contains none of the pesticides which can be found in materials such as cotton.

"People think that cotton is pure but the pesticides in cotton are responsible for killing hundreds of people who work with it," says Clare, who used to own the hair and beauty salon The Upper Room in Durham.

Highlights also include beautiful merino wool wear in pale blue and pink; newborn gift sets which make fabulous birthing and christening presents; pyjama sets and post natal bath and body oils.

Clare's next step is the launch of her own range of eco-friendly pyjamas for children aged four to eight. She is working with designer Hanni Loynes, who used to work for the fashionable label Frost French, run by actress Sadie Frost and designer Gemma French. She also holds baby showers - taking her products to people's homes.

But the best aspect, she says, is having a business she is passionate about.

Says Clare: "I'm interested in organic food and health and I think Eco-boo has been a natural progression of that - it's also nice to have a business you believe in."



Pictures: ANDY LAMB

Ecobaby: 18-month-old Francesca modelling the organic baby clothing
Facing page: Clare Adamson with products from her range

● For more information or to book a baby shower contact Clare on 07834819978. Find her company online at www.ecoboo.co.uk or visit the organic Larberry Farm, off the A66 at Longnewton, near Stockton. Clare launched her business in September and is looking at branching out into "baby shower" parties (similar to Virgin Vie-type affairs in held in the host's home) and her own pyjama range. Clare has worked with the designer on the pyjamas

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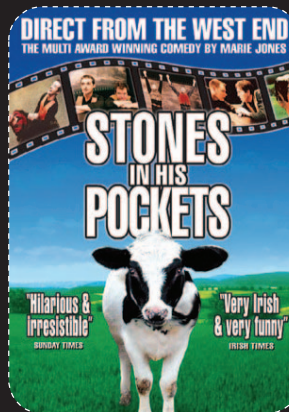
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If anyone deserves to win The Northern Echo's pampering competition, it is Hazel Robinson. Hazel almost died after her boyfriend launched a savage attack on her in July last year, stabbing her 16 times. She tells Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS about her brave fight back to health and her dream to become a nurse



My fight back the brink of

HAZEL Robinson is leaning against the cream coloured wall, looking fabulous in a pair of cut-off jeans, a ripped designer t-shirt and metallic shoes. With her huge blue eyes and blonde hair tied back from her pretty features, she looks every inch the model as she poses for The Northern Echo's photographer. Her sister Helen looks on proudly, clutching the two glasses of champagne she and Hazel are going to enjoy as part of their pampering day at designer department store Psyche in Middlesbrough.

It has taken a great deal of courage for Hazel to come here today. Eight months ago, the vivacious 21-year-old was in hospital fighting for her life following an horrific attack by her former boyfriend.

Hazel met 23-year-old window cleaner Martin Shaw at Bannatynes Health Club in Ingleby Barwick, near Stockton, where she worked as a fitness instructor. They eventually moved in together and Shaw proposed on a romantic trip to Paris. But after 12 months, their relationship soured, and Hazel took the decision to end it. She gathered her things, left the house they shared in Ingleby Barwick and went to her mother Janet's house nearby. Then, on July 23 last year, her world changed forever.

"He was very possessive and very jealous, he didn't like me going out with my friends," she says quietly. "But there was no warning for what he did, he just walked straight past my mum in the front room, came upstairs and did it."

Shaw, a fitness fanatic who had been known to take cocaine, ecstasy and steroids, armed himself with a kitchen knife and headed upstairs. He walked calmly up to Hazel before launching his frenzied attack, stabbing her again and again in the stomach, back and arms. He then tried to turn the knife on himself, suffering superficial neck and stomach wounds.

Months later, it is Shaw's disturbing composure before the attack which Hazel cannot forget. "It was the way he was so calm, he didn't say anything, he just had a cold look in his eyes," she recalls.

When Hazel arrived at the University Hospital of North Tees in Stockton she was given less than a five per cent chance of survival and needed two blood transfusions. She spent weeks in intensive care and

had to endure 10 operations. She lost a kidney and her spleen in the attack, suffered a brain haemorrhage and her lungs collapsed twice. She needed plastic surgery on her hands and wrists to repair the damage done to her tendons and her tiny frame plunged to six stone as she was fed through a tube for three and a half months.

She was later transferred to James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough and needed months of intensive physiotherapy to learn to walk again because of the muscle wastage she suffered.

Shaw was sentenced to ten years in jail in February this year, but for Hazel it is not long enough. As well as her physical and psychological ordeal, the family has had to move house to Middlesbrough because their previous house holds too many bad memories.

"It was the way he was so calm, he didn't say anything, he just had a cold look in his eyes"

"I think the sentence is disgusting," she says. "The injuries couldn't have been any worse, unless I had died. The judge said he was a danger to women. He should have got a lot longer."

Hazel left hospital in November and is slowly recovering. She credits her recovery to the medical staff, and to the fact she was so fit when the attack happened.

Having spent four months in James Cook hospital, she got to know the staff very well. She still keeps in touch with the doctors and nurses, even enjoying nights out with them. Her gratitude towards them and the job they do is immense, so much so she now hopes to study nursing at Teesside University, and to work at the hospital which helped her one day.

"I'd like to thank everybody at James Cook, they were amazing," she says, her face lighting up.



Hazel after her Psyche makeover wearing vest top by Custo and cut-off trousers by Diesel

from death

Hazel's treatment is on-going. She needs two further operations and she still has scars on her wrists and arms and underneath her clothes. The psychological scars are easing though Hazel says she is quieter now than she used to be, and less out-going, but with a new life at university to look forward to and nights out with friends and family, she is regaining her life.

"It's going to take me a long, long time to get anywhere near how I was," she says. "But I'm happy going out with my friends and having a good time."

Hazel's sister Helen is naturally protective of her younger sibling and has been overwhelmed by her positive attitude.

"The main thing we have to keep in mind is that she's still with us and we count our blessings every day for that," she says. "I think she's amazing. She still puts on her make-up and goes out to enjoy herself, she's fantastic."

As part of her prize, Hazel has her hair coloured and cut at Psyche's hair salon, her nails French manicured and picks out clothes worth £300 from the store. The sisters are looking forward to their champagne lunch in the store's champagne and oyster bar after the photographer has finished. With her hair and nails done, and her designer clothing, Hazel exudes star quality.

"I wish my mum could see this," says a clearly emotional Helen. "She looks gorgeous, but then she always looks gorgeous to me."

'She's a brave young woman'

HAZEL was nominated for the pampering day at Psyche in Middlesbrough by her aunt, Barbara Allan of Gilling West, near Richmond, North Yorkshire.

Here are extracts from the winning letter: "She is so amazing, she never complains or says 'why me', she accepts and looks to the future.

"I just think she is a brave young woman, so deserving of a lovely pamper day. It would be a lovely day to put the dreadful year behind her."

Picture: STUART BOULTON

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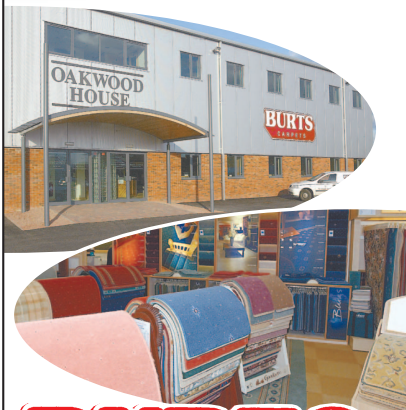
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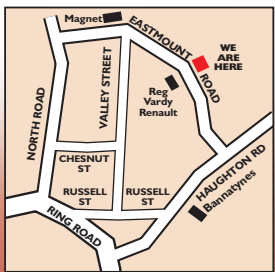
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me and my wardrobe



Pictures: CHRIS BOOTH



Sam King, 40, is a director of Dalton Medial Ltd which has two country pubs, Chequers Inn in Dalton and the Bridgewater Arms at Winston, both near Darlington. Sam will be doing a sponsored walk along the Great Wall of China to raise funds for Breast Cancer Care at the end of April.

How would you describe your look?

Probably not fashionable, more classic, understated and practical.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

A Baccarat crystal necklace, which is red on a black, silk chord. It was a gift from a friend more than ten years ago and I wear it almost every day.

What's been your worst buy?

An Escada rain coat in scarlet for £425. The first time I wore it, the wrist strap fell off and the second time, I got a big black mark on it from the car. I sent it to a dry cleaners and it all puckered up and when I tried to put

something in the pocket it fell through! I don't think I wore it again.

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

Apart from my wedding dress, probably a Nicole Farhi coat. It's really classic, charcoal grey edged in fur and I wear it every year.

What are your favourite shops?

I actually hate shopping, but I like Embellis in Newcastle, Elan, Joulani and Buckles all in Grange Road and Per Una at Marks & Spencer.

Which celebrity's style do you most admire and why?

Marilyn Monroe. She could look fantastic in a pair of cropped trousers or glammed up like a Hollywood goddess. She was timeless and you could probably wear most of what she wore then, today.

● Chequers Inn is on (01325) 721213 and the Bridgewater Arms is on (01325) 720203



Main picture: Gharani Strok suit from a shop in Nice; Minuet jacket from Strickland & Holt; boots from buckles in Grange Road; bag by Jasper Conran at Debenhams

Above: top from Principles; Day Birger skirt at Mikkelsen; Ecologico shoes from &Eve at Yarm; Rado watch

Right: Bernshaw dress and jewellery from Bygone Antiques

NE out on the town

NE Magazine's style experts scout the social honeypots of the region in search of style and individuality



MARTIN ATKINSON

McCourt & McKay

PSYCHE in Middlesbrough is a well-loved store for lots of reasons. Not only does it do a fantastic clothing range for men, women and children but it also has a fabulous ski/snowboard department. National glossy magazines have labelled it the place to shop in the North and it has recently won the title of FHM national retailer of the year.

Psyche isn't just a shop, it's a concept for living, and owner Steve Cochrane isn't resting on his laurels. His next venture is a state-of-the-art rooftop restaurant/bar, which will be open later this year.

McCourt & McKay went along to host Psyche's new contemporary classic collection for their new Ladies' Lounge.



MATT PIPER

MARTIN ATKINSON

THE 36-year-old from Middlesbrough is MD of his own company and was at Psyche because his partner was modelling. Martin looked very slick in a Prada top and Hugo Boss trousers. Martin shops at Psyche because he loves their quality labels and the fact that it's in the Boro is a bonus! To keep looking good, Martin recommends an early night with a good woman. His favourite music at the moment is Coldplay and Keane.

DEBRA THOMAS

DEBRA, 38, is a housewife with a passion for fashion. She oozed style, wearing Levi jeans with a Benetton jacket and a Psyche green. She likes to shop at Psyche, Selfridges and Fenwicks. Debra also is a big fan of Keane.

MATT PIPER

MATT, 29, came from Liverpool to support his friend in the fashion show. He really captured the smart casual look, wearing a beige cord jacket from Replay with Diesel jeans and a white Peter Werth shirt. Complimenting the outfit were trainers by Adidas. Matt had great skin and puts that down to genes with a bit of help from Clarins skincare for men.

● TV and radio presenter Judie McCourt and celebrity hair and make-up and artist Allison McKay run AM Creative Productions, which specialises in creative and social event management and PR.

amcreativeproductions.com



DEBRA THOMAS



LEON SMITH



HAYLEY McQUEEN & LAURA HUNTER

LEON SMITH

LEON, 26, from Middlesbrough is restaurant manager at Hide in Yarm and was modelling in the fashion show. Image is very important to Leon, both professionally and socially. He had an understated coolness about him, wearing Maharishi trousers with Nike sneakers and a Nike top. He likes to shop at Harvey Nichols in Leeds.

HAYLEY MCQUEEN & LAURA HUNTER

HAYLEY, 25, and Laura, 26, were supporting their mates in the fashion show. They both love their Miss Sixty Jeans. Hayley's leather jacket is from Mango, her vintage belt and boots from &Eve in Yarm. Laura's jacket is from H&M, her T-shirt from Topshop. They recommend drinking lots of water and getting plenty of sleep.



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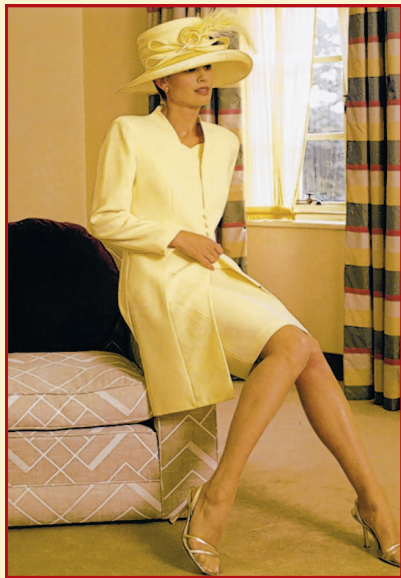
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NE fashion



Inspiration:
Judith Healey's
mum Doris
Lilian, below



Dorrie's designs

Judith Healey had bags of advice on style from her beloved late mother Doris. Now she's designing fashion accessories in her memory, she tells CHRISTINE FIELDHOUSE

A CHILDHOOD passion for art has led to a new career for marketing consultant Judith Healey – and a very fitting tribute to the mum she lost as a teenager.

Judith, now 44, was 16 when her mum Doris Lilian, also known as Dorrie, died of a pulmonary embolism after suffering angina and a series of deep vein thromboses in her legs.

But Judith has now designed a range of handbags and named them after her mum, who was 45 when she died.

"Losing Mum at that age was something I never envisaged," says Judith, from Billingham. "I went from being a happy-go-lucky teenager to a girl whose world was turned upside down overnight. I tried to get back to normality, but I knew I would never be that person again."

As a child Judith and her mum spent hours sketching and designing clothes. Then the pair went and bought fabric and Dorrie made the clothes.

"I would have had a fantastic wardrobe if she were still here," laughs Judith, mum to ten-year-old Dale. "Everything on the inside was as neat as on the outside. She was a real perfectionist. When I once made a red gar-

ment at school, and sewed it with white cotton, my mum unpicked and re-sewed it. She didn't want anyone thinking she'd done it!"

Judith, who was brought up in Linthorpe, Middlesbrough, worked in a public relations company after leaving school, and is now managing director of Talk Marketing, a Middlesbrough-based marketing consultancy.

Sadly, her father Derek, managing director of Armstrongs Motorcycles in Middlesbrough, died ten years after her mum, after suffering a heart attack at only 53.

"His heart attack seemed to come from nowhere," recalls Judith. "He was a fit and healthy man. I think he died of a broken heart at the end of the day. He missed my mum so much. My father was my backbone. I felt as though the rug had been pulled from under my feet and I was ill for a long time after that."

Now Judith, and her childhood friend Lynne Aungiers, have taken Dorrie's sketches and used the designs – based on tiny-waisted Fifties women – for a range of fast-selling handbags. Their name was an easy choice – Simply Dorrie, after Judith's mum.

"Lynne and I have been friends since we were 14," remembers Judith. "She was the only one of my friends who knew my mum."

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In memory of mum: Judith Healey with her collection of 1950s-inspired Simply Dorrie bags

Lynne's dad died suddenly in the same year as my mum so we formed this bond.

"Lynne and my mum used to talk about dressmaking and they swapped patterns and books. Lynne was also very talented and she loved Mum's sketches and prints."

There are ten different bags, all with Fifties women's names such as Marion, Elsie and Audrey and they all feature the Fifties shape – with the little waist.

"They're in funky colours and fabrics," says Judith. "For example, there's a bright shocking pink bag with spotty handles, an animal print one and a brown cord bag with sunflower handles. We'll be bringing in different bags for different seasons."

"There's also a little mirror label on the bag so we can re-do our lipstick when we need to. The D on the mirror is the D from Mum's signature. They also have a zip pocket inside. "We have also put little feet in the bottom of the bag. We found women hated putting their bags down on the ground and getting them dirty. We've done our best to make these bags functional."

Judith won the best creative product award in the 2004 Women in Business awards in Middlesbrough, and top store Harvey Nichols is interested in the Simply Dorrie range.

"The buyers in London really like the shape and concept of the bags," says Judith. "I think they just want the brand to be a little better known before they commit themselves. I'm still learning such a lot, especially about seasons and colours. I'm also planning to design some wedding bags."

The bags, which cost £95 each, are selling better than Judith ever dreamt.

"One of my friends has the bright pink one and she says

going out with her bag is like taking a little dog for a walk. People stop her and chat to her about her bag," says Judith.

Judith now has very happy memories of her mum – and believes she would have been proud of her daughter and grandson.

"She would have been so happy with the way Dale has turned out," says Judith. "But we've talked about her a lot and he knows a lot about her. She would have also been quite shocked about the handbags. She was a lot quieter than me and liked to blend into the background."

"But she was a great believer in getting out there and doing what you had to do, especially if you had the opportunity. She was very forward-thinking, but she was held back in her own career as women often were in those days."

"I have got to the point where I can celebrate her life now," continues Judith. "I look at her photograph and smile. I'm just so thankful to have had the mother I had for the short time I had her."



● Simply Dorrie bags can be found at www.asinnovations.co.uk, or visit www.simplydorrie.com Judith is a former director of Birmingham City Ladies Football Club and gives her talk – Football and Handbags – to businesses.

"I think he died of a broken heart. He missed my mum so much"

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"Then it doesn't matter much which way you go," said the cat.



DO you know where you want to go in life? Without some idea of what you want, it is difficult to live successfully. There are so many opportunities that come our way everyday, how do you decide which fit unless you have a vision in mind?

Drifting through life or making your own path is a choice we all have. Life would be boring if everything were mapped out and controlled, but successful living does need a vision of what you want. So ask yourself this month, what do you really want in life? Create a vision, begin to dream again, pick up a pen, write it down or get some paints. Don't worry how vague it seems at first, let it take shape naturally. As you get clearer, so will your life.

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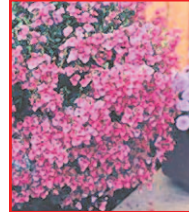
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gadget man



3G Has it been worth the wait?

● Don't miss **Burton's Bytes** - game reviews in **The Northern Echo** every Friday

The third generation of mobile phones was supposed to revolutionise the way we used our handsets. So what is all the fuss about?

THE third generation of mobile phones were supposed to mark the moment we finally abandoned our laptops, PDAs and antiquated wired telephones for one dinky little handset.

Five years ago when bidding for the right to launch a UK 3G service reached a frenzy, anything seemed possible. The biggest telecoms companies in the world eventually forked out more than £22bn just for the right to offer their British customers a 3G service.

In those heady days, the phone companies talked confidently of video-on-demand, lightning-fast download speeds well into broadband territory and a new type of mobile phone experience.

Until recently, those bullish predictions appeared to be pie-in-the-sky.

The public became fed up with waiting for 3G. Most of them said they were happy with a folding handset and a nifty leather pouch. Who wanted video-on-demand anyway? It seemed as though 3G was a technology looking for a buyer who couldn't be bothered.

Twenty years ago, the very first mobile phone call was made on the Vodafone network so it is perhaps fitting that one of the world's biggest mobile providers should be at the forefront of the 3G revolution.

Vodafone customers can select from six 3G phones - the Motorola V980, Motorola E1000, Nokia 6630, Samsung Z107, Sony Ericsson V800 and the Sharp 902 - all offering a new range of services.

I tried the Sony Ericsson V800 to see what all the fuss was about. The handset makes for an interesting comparison with my own Sony Ericsson 910i smartphone.

According to Vodafone, the 3G experience improves download speeds and the quality of handset sound. Specifically:

- Customers can make video calls for the first time, send and receive video messages (up to 12 seconds) and download longer video clips. This includes film previews and a special version of the hit series 24.
- Vodafone Live! will offer near CD quality music. Entire tracks can be downloaded and saved.
- 3G games are supposed to offer a richer

experience with better sound and graphics. A selection of Vodafone handsets will feature pre-installed demos.

The price of 3G membership varies. Handset prices range from free up to £300, depending on the type of tariff selected.

It all sounds very exciting and - when it works - it certainly does offer an improved mobile phone experience. But our Sony Ericsson V800 demonstrated all the pitfalls of emergent technology.

Downloads of movie trailers usually ended in a terse message telling me there were errors in the data and it couldn't be played back. The ITN streaming video news service suffered from severe break-up, making it almost impossible to watch and the Internet still felt constrained by the small screen size. The V800 doesn't have a touch-sensitive screen so composing messages still takes an age.

The music downloads are excellent and the playback quality is clear as a bell. Likewise, the games are generally of a high order.

Compared to my Sony 910i, the V800 comes in a close second. The smartphone has a better suite of built-in applications, a better Internet experience, plays back movies far more smoothly and plays CD-quality music (provided your Memory Stick has the capacity for such large files).

Admittedly, the 910i has a laughable camera and it doesn't look so trendy but it still feels far more like a "real" PDA/phone/camera to me.



Good games: the Sony Ericsson V800



NE shopping

NEWTON AYCLIFFE



JUST outside Darlington and bordering Aycliffe Village, Newton Aycliffe is, at first glance, deceptive. On entering the town, you'd be forgiven for thinking it was no more than an industrial estate, flanked, as it is, by a mass of factories. However, when you reach its heart, it becomes clear that it is much more vibrant.

One of the first things that strikes you about Newton Aycliffe is its sense of community. Unashamedly traditional, it still has working men's clubs and the kind of small, friendly businesses that were once the North-East's mainstay. While progress has brought many positive changes, it's reassuring that such places still exist, so far removed from the soulless corporate giants.

Perhaps the best thing about the main shopping area is its compactness. Easily accessible by car or public transport, it even has free parking – so rare in this age of wholesale charging. A short walk takes you right to the central shops, packed closely in a kind of T-shape. There's everything you could ask for from a small town – a supermarket, post office, job centre, banks – and if anything, more than you'd expect. Specialist shops like Motor World rub shoulders with all-purpose stores like Boyes, and there are a few national chains, including Boots and Savers.

The emphasis is clearly on good value – a prime concern for most families – and here the bargains are in abundance. Newton Aycliffe even has its own market, with plenty of stalls to poke around.

As well as being functional, the town centre also has flair, as demonstrated by shops like Petals. Instantly inviting, its profusion of flowers are a blaze of bright colour. Not only is it a florist, it's also a pet shop, so there's plenty on offer to purchase.

Within the Thames Shopping Centre is an intriguing shop called PACE, which stands for People Accessing the Community Environment. Warm and friendly, it's perfect for browsing, but what really draws you in is the quality of the goods.

The window is full of beautifully crafted dried flower displays, in colours to complement any home. Inside, there's more hand-made stuff, including mats, jewellery and artwork. It wouldn't look out of place in an exclusive craft shop yet prices are minimal, with a framed sketch costing only £20. It's a revelation to learn that most of what's on sale at this social services run-outlet has been made by adults with learning disabilities.

Project worker Joanne Hackett says: "We used to be based on an industrial estate and we feel that this has been a real positive move. It's given the people here much more independence and we know the majority of people in the other shops. I think there's a strong sense of community."

Joanne explains that most of the stock is produced in workshops on the premises and that the general public is welcome to join in, or exhibit their own work. Recently, PACE has branched out into wedding bouquets, and it also does image printing. "It's improving all the time," says Joanne.

Home to much thriving industry, Newton Aycliffe is also a compact and self-contained place to shop, as SARAH FOSTER discovers

The emphasis is clearly on good value, a prime concern for most families



Pictures: ANDY LAMB

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NE motoring

A Class of its own



The A Class: the new model would have no problems passing the 'elk test'

IAN LAMMING tests the new version of the mini Mercedes which promises aspirational motoring at an affordable price

Mercedes A Class

IT'S a dream badge. Three points encased in a silver circle and the symbol of wealth, class and quality. Some people would pay anything for the marque; the fortunate do. But Mercedes came up with a marketing masterpiece when they invented the A Class seven years ago.

Aspirational motoring at an affordable price and 1.1 million motorists snapped them up. Sometimes there is just no substitute for telling the world 'oh yes, I drive a Mercedes'.

Now if you feel that the new A Class can't be a proper Mercedes because of its sub-£14k price tag, then think again. In some ways the model has been a testbed for technology for the whole range and the latest version boasts 200 patented parts and technology many cars can only dream of.

The old model was maligned from day one thanks to the exploits of some Scandinavian journalists and something called the elk test, which they claimed it failed by falling over.

It cost Mercedes dearly but resulted in a car which was way in advance of its pricetag. The electronic stability aids which won the A Class back its stripes have been expanded even further with the latest generation, making it one of the most stable vehicles around, despite its lofty driving position.

Mechanically it is never going to go anywhere except where you point it thanks to a 145mm extended wheelbase and track which is 53mm wider. One glance at the sleek new shape is enough to tell you this car is going to round bends with ease – or even elks.

It no longer looks high: in fact, the proportions make it look low, menacing and aggressive. But jump in the driver's seat and you still tower above other traffic.

A Class also has new suspension featuring something called the parabolic rear axle, adaptive damping and all sorts of other technical stuff that the average driver will never need to know about, save to say it all works. A Class, therefore, handles better than ever before. In fact, Mercedes is so confident in the chassis and handling departments that later this year it will fit a super sporty, 2.0 litre turbocharged 193bhp motor, which can't fail to be a flier.

If you want the ultimate in sporty looks then go for the three-door – yes that's new to the range – and the bigger alloys, it's a belle.

That said, the five-door is no ugly duckling either and the new look, while recognisably A Class, is fresh, modern and nothing short of an eye-catcher. Full marks to the stylists.

Engine-wise there's the choice of 1.5, 1.7 and 2.0 petrols and three 2.0 diesels with three power outputs. As you might expect, the 95bhp 1.5 wouldn't win any drag races but what it will do is cruise nicely at the legal limits with enough in reserve to overtake safely and still return more than 40mpg. Use the very slick gearbox and a few revs and you won't ever be very far behind.

Inside is better too. There is much more room both in terms of shoulder and leg room and the boot is a whole heap bigger, vast if you opt for the special seats that lift out and can be stored under the height-adjustable load floor.

The old A Class was a bit in-your-face with a high dashboard and slightly claustrophobic feel. The new one is a peach with lower waistline, larger windscreen and an airier feel altogether.

Great care has gone into the touchy-feely nature of the new A Class and the choice of materials, quality and colours really do give it an upmarket feel worthy of the badge.

On sale in the UK from February, 50,000 orders were placed the minute it was released in Europe and having experienced the new A Class, I can't say I'm surprised. It is bigger, better and cheaper than the popular model it replaces and, as the marketing hype goes, it's in A Class of its own.



IN ASSOCIATION WITH

NE connections

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Double delights: you can enjoy a treatment with a friend or partner at Chancery Court, right

Drifting off side by side

CHRISTINE FIELDHOUSE tries out the luxurious treatments at Chancery Court, which has been voted Britain's Best Day Spa

BEAUTY treatments used to be a chance to escape our busy lives, where we could just lie down and enjoy some solitude while we were pampered and massaged. But celebrities, who like togetherness at all times, have changed all that. We started by having manicures with friends, Sex and The City style. Now we're having beauty treatments a deux too.

In Los Angeles, where the new practice started, celebs go for beauty treatments with their partners, their mums and their friends. Not convinced, I decided to give it a go in Britain, but was careful to choose my "partner" to come along to sample one of the best "Couples Suites" in Britain. I opted for Rachel Foster who, as a midwife, must have seen worse sights than me naked – just!

The Spa at Chancery Court in London has won Best Day Spa of the Year in the British Beauty Awards 2004 for the second time since it opened four years ago. Situated in the basement of the Renaissance Chancery Court Hotel at High Holburn, the Spa houses London's first VIP treatment suite, which consists of two treatment couches, a changing area and a steam shower that seats two people. It all sounded very adult!

Everything about The Spa at Chancery Court is lovely, from the shimmering gold leaf relaxation room, to the friendly unpretentious staff. Even our boots were treated with respect and taken away on a tray! After filling in the health and lifestyle questionnaire, we were shown through to the relaxation room with reclining beds, a treat in itself for Rachel, a mum of two girls under five.

We had booked the Spa's Nourish Ritual in the hope we might say goodbye to dry, tired, neglected skin. But the whole experience, which lasted almost three hours, was about far more than just skincare. Waiting on our treatment couches was an orchid-decorated tray with a pot of herbal tea and the most delicious platter of berries. This was serious

pampering. We started with a foot bath in the steam shower, where our modesty was protected by the clouds of steam. We made a pact not to chat during the treatment so we could make the most of the relaxation.

We chose our favourite-smelling oils for the therapists to use before getting on the couches for the first stage of the Ritual – skin brushing, followed by a salt exfoliation.

It would be hard to pick out the best part of this treatment – it was all so lovely, but the massage that followed was wonderful. For what seemed like an hour, we were massaged with hot stones and calendula until every ache and pain had vanished. Although we both drifted off, we knew the therapists were working together and every move was being done in synch.

We were then smeared in green mud and wrapped up and left to relax on the heated couch, while our therapists used Espa products for our facial and scalp massage, both wonderful treats in themselves. By this stage we were oblivious to anyone else in the room.

We were both slightly woozy when the treatment was over but we agreed it had been the mother of all beauty treatments, the best ever single treatment we had ever had. We had a day off work, our children were being looked after and we had the whole of London at our feet... though it was very hard to tear ourselves away from The Spa at Chancery Court.

FACTBOX

The Nourish Ritual starts at £140 per person. An overnight stay at the Renaissance Chancery Court costs £366 excluding VAT per couple and includes a beauty treatment. Telephone Reservations on 020 7829 7009 or visit www.renaissancechancerycourt.com For travel between the North-East and London, phone 08457 225225, or visit www.gner.co.uk



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MATFEN Hall, near Newcastle, voted Best Small Hotel of the Year in 2002, offers side-by-side treatments for couples in their spa. Treatments include Versace facials and hot stone massage. More details on www.matfenhall.com or by telephoning the Spa on (01661) 886510.

THE man in your life needn't be left out at Broom Mill Day Spa, out in the countryside near Ferryhill. While you enjoy a facial and manicure, he could try out the Sportsman's Spa, 2¼ hours of massage and pampering for £50. The chill-out room also has a full-size slate-bed snooker table. The spa is at High Hill House Farm, Dean Bank, Ferryhill, Co Durham (01740) 654225. More details on www.broommilldayspa.co.uk.

The CACI Beauty Oasis, opposite the Imperial Express near Darlington's Grange Road, will also pamper couples side by side. (01325) 489970. A full range of treatments is available.

The £10m Serenity Spa at Seaham, boasts 19 treatment rooms, Hammam and black granite steam rooms, a Canadian redwood sauna and an ozone-cleaned pool and offers 80 treatments, including mud cleansing rituals for couples. Call 0191-516 1400.



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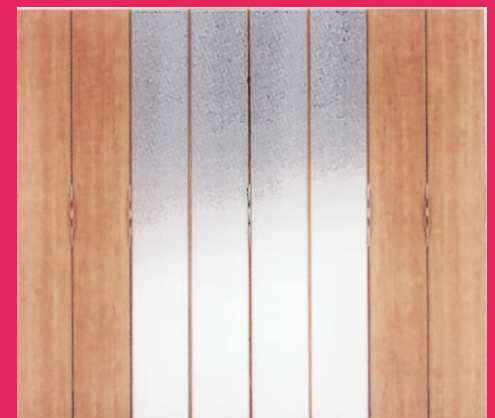
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