

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

JULY 2003

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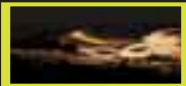
Highlights



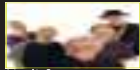
Dream Concert
Fri 22nd August 8:30



Comedy Store 7:30
Sun 3rd August & Sun 9th Sept



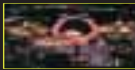
Strass Gala
Mon 1st September 7:30



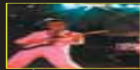
Undisforme
Wed 1st October 7:30



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vouchers

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magazine

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Picture: **STUART BOULTON**

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sharon griffiths

“Clothes suit the place where they are sold. You won’t get much surf wear in Darlington...”

TRYING to pack for holidays? Are you surrounded by mountains of clothes, none of them quite right? Trying to work out what to take, what to leave at home, what you need to dash out and buy?

Take the easy way out. Take nothing. Oh all right, pack your most comfortable sandals, a few pairs of knickers and your favourite sundress. But pop them in your hand baggage and travel blissfully light.

If there are shops where you are going, you can buy everything there. Problem solved.

The best solutions are often discovered by accident. Like the time my niece and her family took a last minute October break in Spain.

Spain was having an autumn heat wave – temperatures in the high 80s. But in London in October the only clothes you could buy were woolly jumpers, thick tights and heavy trousers. As her children had most unreasonably grown six inches since the summer holidays, she couldn’t squash them into summer clothes so spent days trekking up and down Oxford Street trying to find something suitable.

And then their luggage got lost. Well, it didn’t get lost exactly, it just never left Gatwick.

So on the first morning, my niece hit the Spanish markets and in about half an hour got three children, husband and herself kitted out for about a tenth of the cost and a fraction of the time that she had at home.

And when they left, they brought a few items home and donated the rest to one of those batty Spanish/English charities which raises funds for downtrodden donkeys.

Buying when you get there makes perfect sense. That way, you’ll get clothes that fit the climate and, as a bonus, you’ll look like a local.

(It’s not that long ago when you could always tell British tourists abroad. Something about men’s Crimplene trousers and the women’s white cardigans. Things have moved on – but not all that far.)

It seems daft to trek flip flops and sun hats half way round the world to places where there are racks and racks of them on every street corner. If you want cheap and cheerful, then why not buy them where they’re even cheaper and much more cheerful?

Best of all, clothes suit the places where they are sold. You won’t get much surf wear in Darlington, but then you don’t get much surfing, either. You’ll get masses of both in Cornwall. You get your walking boots in hill country, your sailing gear at marinas, your fur hats in Moscow.

Why waste such a lot of time and effort trying to buy such things in places where they don’t sell them or have only limited choice?

As well as being easier, there are bonuses to shopping abroad. I still treasure shopping for clothes in Texas where men are men, and women are frequently mountainous, and where I had the novelty of trying on some of the smaller sizes on the racks. A rare treat. A male friend regularly buys his clothes on business trip to Holland because there they are used to men who are 6ft 5ins with massive chests and he has plenty to choose from. Conversely, skinny little people have masses more choice in small-boned France.

There are bargains too – like the beautiful leather handbag I bought from a market stall in Florence for only £10. And when the girl told me the silk scarves were the equivalent of £3 each, I bought half a dozen.

A certain type of businessmen has always bought shirts and suits in the Far East – the tailor will come and measure you up at your hotel and the beautifully fitting suit is ready two days later. All for about the price you’d pay for something off the peg here.

And at a posh dinner recently I admired the black silk dress worn by a friend. It turned out to have cost her £15 in the Italian equivalent of Tesco.

You can get it wrong, of course. Waiting to shop for your cruise clothes until you’re actually on the boat can be an extremely expensive gamble – and it’s tricky to hop overboard to shop elsewhere.

If you lost your ski luggage en route to America, you can stock up on ski wear that’s stylish and fun. But in Switzerland it would be very chic and very expensive. In Norway it would be very expensive and covered in reindeer patterns.

And there was the time when my sister and her husband were in Australia and went to Ayers Rock, or Uluru as we must now call it. Temperatures in the 90s. But no-one told them that the temperatures plummeted after dark and my brother-in-law hadn’t bought a jumper with him. So he went out and bought one. Trouble was, in such a touristy place, the only woolly jumper he could find was decorated with a giant picture of a kangaroo.

Shopping locally is usually a brilliant idea, but just occasionally there are exceptions...

● Don’t miss Sharon Griffiths in The Northern Echo every Wednesday and Friday

FAIR TRADE FASHION

EXPLOITATION of workers in developing countries and the excessive use of pesticides have for too long been linked with the fashion industry. The World Health Organisation estimates that 20,000 people a year die from pesticide use and misuse, of which cotton – consuming around 15 per cent of the world’s pesticides and 25 per cent of all herbicides – is the single biggest contributor.

HUG is a new kind of fashion company: passionate about clothes, serious about ethics, and fun too. HUG aims to make their brand of leading edge fashion the benchmark for those who care what they wear – great clothes, respect for the environment and the people who make them. HUG uses the hottest young creative designers – who also work for leading design houses like Dolce & Gabbana. The tops are made from 100 per cent pure certified organic Tanguis

cotton – long fibre cotton grown in Peru. It is softer than high street cottons, washes better, and lasts longer. The dyes used are environmentally friendly. HUG tops, which cost from £20, are fairly traded, with the farmers who grow the organic cotton getting a guaranteed fixed price, set comfortably above the market price for conventional cotton. Organic farming means there is no danger to the



environment or workers from dangerous chemical pesticides. You can buy the goods online at www.hug.co.uk

NE window shopping

LIE BACK AND THINK...

PERFECT for swinging your troubles away, this vibrant hammock will look great in any shady corner of the garden. It can be assembled in just three minutes, then all you need to do is hop in and relax. It features a solid wood frame with steel fixings and a hard-wearing canvas sling in a stylish stripe design. £149.99 from Homebase. For stockists call 0870 900 8098.



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It's time to bring back the wow factor...

Showhome interior designer Karen Staniforth shares some of her top tips with CHRISTEN PEARS

WE'RE fascinated by interior design. You can't turn on the television these days without seeing Laurence Llewellyn Bowen or Linda Barker sloshing paint on a wall, while there are hundreds of decorating magazines and books. But with so much inspiration around, it's difficult to know what to do in your own home.

Karen Staniforth is interior designer for Haslam Homes, creating innovative schemes for the company's show homes across the North-East. While the rest of us may not be quite sure whether we should be buying chintz or leather, carpet or laminate flooring, she keeps on top of the latest trends.

She says bare boards and neutral walls are out. It's time to bring back the wow factor into our homes with sensuous velvet, strong colours, patterns, carpets to sink your toes into, textured fabrics and even wallpaper.

Karen says: "There are some great patterns coming through now that will turn all the recent design principles on their head. The new look will be to use wallpaper as a feature, maybe mixing different combinations with each 'hang'. Using this method you can create a look that is totally unique. If you're not totally confident about this look, then opt for a vibrant coloured matt finish paint – hot orange or bubble gum pink definitely have the wow factor."

Fabrics are tactile: woven, pleated and weave finishes are in, along with linens, lace and mohair, but if you can't bear to part with your bare boards and serene atmosphere, Karen says it's fine to mix and contrast the two looks.

But it's important that your home doesn't simply look good, it should complement your lifestyle and offer you a haven at the end of a busy day.

According to Karen, it's easy to make the entry into your home a pathway to peace. Place some lavender plants along the path or in tubs either side of the door. As you walk by, brush the tips with your fingers – the fragrance is calming and uplifting.

Hang a wind chime just inside your door. The gentle tinkling noise is light on the ear and, according to Feng Shui experts, it also helps to slow down the rush of energy entering your environment.

Music is great for breaking down negative energy built up throughout the average day, so whether it's rock, pop or Mozart, have one of your favourite tapes or CDs on standby so when you flick the switch the music goes into action.

Karen also recommends aromatherapy. Have some of your favourite oils ready to burn. Lavender is very calming, as are neroli and ylang ylang. Scented candles work equally well and as the natural light fades, create a very calm atmosphere.

Colour has a huge impact on the senses, so if your colour scheme doesn't have that feel good factor, then neither will you. Calming colours include lilacs and greens while strong shades such as yellow ooze sunshine and the effects can be energising.

The ultimate mood enhancer is a camomile lawn or a patch where you can walk barefoot, adds Karen, and the perfect way to continue that peaceful pathway right into the garden.

Karen explores all aspects of design when she plans a new show home, including the ancient Eastern art of Feng Shui.

She says: "Throughout history, civilisation has discovered myriad ways of bringing mind, body and spirit back into a harmonious working relationship. Feng Shui comes from a viewpoint that external environmental factors can also affect our well-being."



HOME TRUTHS: Colour has a huge impact on the senses. Lavenders and lilacs are very calming, says interior designer Karen Staniforth, seen here putting the finishing touches to one of the showhomes. Below: the sitting/dining room and study. Far left: the country-style kitchen



Most people know something about Feng Shui but don't really understand it. If you've seen it on TV, read the book or magazine, you may be mixing different kinds of Feng Shui and causing chaos rather than calm.

Feng Shui means 'wind, water' and the whole idea is to balance these and other elements in our environment to create the perfect blend. The theory goes that when the environment is balanced you are free to live your life, make decisions and go forward.

"There are some myths which make me smile – closing the loo seat to prevent energy draining from the house is one of those. Wind chimes are very popular, but many people make the mistake of placing them outside the door. The best type of

chimes are a pentatonic type and the ideal position is hanging inside the door. The idea here is that as energy comes in through the front door the chimes act as a break to slow the energy down.

"Feng Shui is fascinating and we're always looking at ways to enhance our interiors."

Haslam's latest showhomes and sites, ready to view now at Ryhope, Sunderland 0191 523-8176, Newton Aycliffe (01325) 321207 and Moorfield, Darlington (01325) 469855.

Building has begun at Seaham and Ushaw Moor, Durham – information from Haslam Head Office 0191 487-3800.



“There are some great patterns coming through now that will turn all the recent design principles on their head



"I wouldn't want to be seen in anything else"






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NE shopping

Vintage lines

From Victorian capes to 60s mini skirts, vintage clothing store Attica is a treasure trove of period pieces.
CHRISTEN PEARS reports

WITH the current craze for 1950s-inspired fashion, Stephen Pierce is inundated with customers looking for the real thing – and the chances are they'll find it. Tucked away in a cobbled side street in Newcastle, his vintage clothing shop was described by former Clothes Show presenter Caryn Franklin as a "period clothing paradise". It was awarded the title 2002 Shop of the Year by Dazed and Confused magazine and it's easy to understand why.

The ground floor is packed with rails, bearing everything from 1930s evening dresses to 1970s leather jackets. There are shoes, braces, hats, jewellery and bags, and each item is meticulously labelled. The walls are covered with images of old movie stars and celebrities, ranging from Garbo to the Beatles. The changing rooms are decorated with kitsch mirrors, framed with vacuum-packed toys, while a

mellow jazz soundtrack plays in the background, contributing to the laid-back atmosphere.

Stephen started off with a flea market stall but after two years, it had become so popular, he no longer had the space to display all his stock. He opened his first shop 20 years ago at Newcastle's Haymarket and moved to his current site in High Bridge in 1990.

"There is always a core of customers but trends come and go," he explains. "I have mainly 50s and 60s clothes but I do carry a big range, right back to Victorian times. I'm always looking for 20s and 30s stuff because I particularly like it."

In the early days, he had to scavenge historical clothing from auctions and house clearances, travelling across the region, but he's now so well-known, many people approach him. He selects only the finest pieces, meticulously making sure they're clean and pressed, with no missing buttons or broken zips.

Continued on pages 8 & 9

PERIOD PIECES:

Stephen Pierce opened Attica in High Bridge back in 1990, a shop filled to the gunnels with vintage treasures

Pictures: BRIAN CLOUGH



6 OF THE BEST TENTS

WHEN you think of camping holidays, do thoughts of Carry On movies, dreadful weather and sites in the middle of nowhere put you off? Fear not, this great outdoor pursuit is being catered for by an increasing number of superb locations around the country. Just make sure you get the right accommodation...

TIP-TOP TEEPEE

Eurohike Tamar tent £79.99



This four person tent has everything for those of you who may want to pack up and head to another location at a moment's notice. The three-pole construction frame means you could almost put it up with both eyes closed.



OUT ON ITS OWN Eurohike Trent tent £119.99

If you need a little privacy, you may want to consider this four-person portable sleeper. Inside there's a zip-up sheet to separate the tent into two parts if you can't bear to look at the kids for a second longer.

GRANDER VERANDAH

Eurohike Welland £149.99

If you are planning to take a trip for longer than a couple of days, it's advisable to get a slightly larger tent. This one is split into three compartments and also has a porch attachment for the front so you can put out your milk bottles and feel right at home.

SHELTER SKELTER

Eurohike Derwent £249.99

If, somehow, you have been coerced into taking a gang of kids on a camping adventure, you are going to need all the



space that this eight-man tent will offer you on the inside. And

it has two entry points in case you feel like escaping unnoticed.

BELTING BIVOUAC

Vango Colorado 800DLX £299.99

At this end of the tent scale they are starting to get a little bulkier and heavier so you might not want to be lugging this one around for too long.

It can sleep up to eight people, but try just two of you and it will feel like a palace.



MAGNIFICENT MARQUEE

Coleman Savannah £399.99

When people can't get a room at the Ritz, this is the kind of tent they would buy. A six-person sleeper, it is a piece of cake to set up and offers separate sleeping, living and storage areas.

PETER JENKINSON



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NE shopping



ALADDIN'S CAVE: One of Attica's specialities is vintage clothes, below, so you can be sure you're wearing something unique



A lot of people want unusual clothes. They know that if you buy something here you're not going to see someone wearing the same thing when you go out...





NE window shopping

► Continued from page 7

"A lot of people want unusual clothes. They know that if you buy something here you're not going to see someone wearing the same thing when you go out. Older clothes are also better made than a lot of contemporary ones unless you pay a fortune for them."

Notable past finds include pieces by Biba and Ozzie Clark, although Stephen prefers the elegance of the art deco era. He points out a beautiful 1930s wedding dress, in mint condition, with flowing lines and a sweeping train.

"I love it when you find something really special like that," he enthuses. "Part of you doesn't want to let it go and you know that when it does, you're never going to get anything like it in again."

There are lots of regular customers but plenty of others stumble upon the shop by chance. Both men and women, young and old, come to browse through the rails.

"We often get mothers and daughters in buying things. It does appeal to both generations, which I really like," says Stephen.

There is a huge choice and Stephen admits that it can be a bit bewildering at first. Just a quick glance reveals Victorian capes, fake furs, velvet jackets, dinner suits, dressing gowns, bow ties, and umbrellas.

But as well as clothing, Attica also stocks retro furniture. Make your way upstairs and you will find a huge range of glassware, ceramics and furniture from the 60s and 70s – everything from dining room suites to a pineapple-shaped ice bucket.

Although Stephen's first love is clothing, he started selling furniture about five years ago. At first, he sold a range of antiques but he found that people were ignoring them in favour of the clothes. That's when he decided to specialise in pieces from the 60s and 70s to tie in with the majority of his clothing stock.

"That was quite unusual then but a lot more people are interested in furniture from that period now. We've got one customer, for example, who's furnishing his entire loft in the 60s style. You can find some amazing pieces."

Interestingly, Stephen says most of the people who come to buy furniture wouldn't dream of looking at clothes, and vice versa. But once in a while, someone comes in looking for a dress and ends up buying a dining room suite.

"I suppose that's the beauty of the shop really," he says. "You never know what you're going to find."

**Attica, 2 Old George Yard, off High Bridge, Newcastle.
Tel: 0191-261 4062.**

KEEP YOUR COOL

PERFECT for summer picnics, this funky thermo-electric Mini Fridge holds up to 12 cans and keeps your party going longer. With a useful carry handle, it can be plugged into a car cigarette lighter or the mains and is available for £49.99 from Homebase stores nationwide.

And if your home or office is proving a little on the stuffy side, Pifco has a stunning range of oscillating fans in a modern chrome finish to keep you cool. The nine-inch desk fan has a two speed operation, the 12 and 16in models both have three speeds. From £24.99. For local stockists call (0845) 658 9700.



DON'T BAKE. FAKE IT!

WANT a smooth, even, long-lasting tan without the damaging effects of the sun? Then you need look no further than Saks Guisborough.

Fake Bake is the latest product to be launched by one of the UK's leading hair and beauty salon groups. This revolutionary organic tanning treatment is already hugely popular with celebrities, including Britney Spears, Madonna and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

Recently voted best self-tanner in a New York Times survey, Fake Bake contains 37 per cent more tanning ingredient than any other self-tan, with results lasting up to seven days. For best results indulge in an in-salon treatment. After allowing the tan to develop for at least six hours, and ideally overnight, you can shower off the tint to reveal a fantastic, golden tan.

A home-kit which includes the Fake Bake, Passion Fruit Body Polish and Skin Smoothie Oil is also available to maintain your new tan at home (from £40).

To book an appointment at Saks Guisborough call 01287 630055. Fake Bake is available at selected Saks salons nationwide and a treatment costs from £35.



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Gardening correspondent BRIGID PRESS visits a North Yorkshire garden which is very close to her mum and dad's



Verdant inclinations

LOCATION: Ingleby Greenhow, North Yorkshire
AGE OF GARDEN: 25 years
3 FAVOURITE PLANTS: tree peony, fritillaries, lemon verbena
TOOL CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT: hand sickle
MAINTENANCE: twice or three times weekly
WORST JOB: cutting beech hedge at the back of the garden

FROM the front, Anne and Kevin's garden looks like any other well matured plot. The bowl-like location at the foot of the North York Moors means that the trees grow tall towards the light. That includes the majestic acer Crimson King and queenly silver birch that stand and survey their domain in the front hawthorn hedge. They mark the beginning of a wild woodland corner which is planted up with fritillaria, campion, cyclamen and aconites. A lopped off branch has been turned into a fitting seat, and now with a gentle covering of moss, blends into the dappled background.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

CLUSTERED BELLFLOWER
(Campanula glomerata)

SUMMER flowering perennial that can be found growing wild in most of the Northern hemisphere. It grows up to two feet tall, topped with a clump of violet-purple bell shaped blooms, and has a 18 inch spread. The name 'campanula' comes from the Latin for little bells. Each flower cluster gives off a sweet grape hyacinth perfume. It will grow in either sun or shade, but the petal colour may fade in full sunlight. It is one of the most resistant campanulas to rust, and holds up on its own without staking. Unlike other campanulas, it is easily contained and does not spread rampantly.



Brigid Press

Read Brigid's Gardening column every Saturday in The Northern Echo

In the centre of the ever-decreasing lawn grows a Marjorie plum. It was meant to be a small tree, but has spiralled upwards. The juicy purple fruit grow too high to harvest, so are left mainly for the birds and wasps. A rose and clematis snake their way up its trunk.

An evergreen border just to the side of the driveway is planted up with several conifers (thuja plicata), lonicera nitida and cotoneaster with a ground cover of bugle. This was recently home to a female feral cat and a newly born litter. The conifers have had to be topped out recently as they were getting tangled up in the telephone line. The open stump can only be seen from the upstairs view in the house and is unnoticeable from the ground.

The back garden is reached by a flight of steps just to the side of the house. It is only then that you realise that this is no ordinary garden: the house itself has been built into the face of a steep hill, the back garden has only been developed since the children left home. The gradient was so severe that they used dare each other to roll down it on skateboards.

A selection of terraces have been built up. The first one provides a barbecue-cum-bird feeding area. On this level there is also a wildlife pond sunk into the terracing, with its resident white frog. From here, a dry stone wall holds back a large border crammed with very mature cotoneaster, berberis, rowan and a winter-flowering cherry. A middle-aged variegated sycamore is illuminated against the sky as you up through the canopy from below. Clematis and roses clamber up the tree trunks and poke their blooms out from behind the curtain of foliage.

A narrow stone path takes you through a corridor of holly and yew, and up into an area that has recently been planted up with native wildflowers such as geum, aquilegia, scabious and astrantia. This used to be a lawn, but proved too steep to be safely cut (Kevin used to swing the Flymo across the face of the hill on a piece of rope), so is now a mixture of pathways and perennials. The paths themselves are edged with woven willow and elder, and mulched with shredded garden prunings.

Knobbled and knarled apple trees dot the hill. They provide a bounty of fruit in autumn, which Anne turns into chutney or chills in the garage for winter use. Before the lawn was planted up, the apples used to be harvested by placing a net at the bottom of the hill and collecting them as they fell off and rolled down.

A small gate takes you into the vegetable garden. This is a strip of land at the top of the



hill, so is flat. Much of this area is taken up with blackcurrants and raspberries, both the red and the golden varieties. There is a herb bed, but you won't find the usual suspects growing in there. This is the home of the monsters of the herb patch, such as lovage, angelica, fennel and borage.

The greenhouse, in which are growing a selection of interesting tomatoes, yams and courgettes, doesn't need shading. A passion vine does that job. In late summer it smothers the place in the scent of its glorious, plasticky flowers.

This is a mature garden that has been modified over the years. It has been built in defiance of many natural obstacles. Most of the planning and planting has been done so as to encourage and sustain local wildlife. It is not one that you can sit indoors and survey, but needs to be physically explored in order to fully understand and enjoy it.



DRIVE TIME

A bit of cleaning and some repair work can smarten up a vital part of the front of your home

Oil spills are a big problem on concrete drives. To get rid of them you need a degreasing agent, which you pour on the oil stain. Leave it for a while, and then wash off with water



For moss and green slime, use a proprietary cleaning agent. A pressure water sprayer directed on the concrete can give a good result

Repairing tarmac

Cut away damaged area until you find a solid base. Paint edges with bitumen emulsion and fill with layers of cold asphalt, tamping down hard. When filled level with drive, roll surface smooth



Repairing concrete

Rake out cracks and cut back with a chisel and club hammer so edges slope backwards, leaving bottom of crack wider than the opening on the surface

Fill with mortar mix. Ready-made mix is available from DIY stores

Repairing blocks

A damaged block can be easily removed by drilling holes into it and breaking it up with a few sharp taps. The replacement block may need additional sharp sand underneath to bring it level

QUICK FIX

Do I really need to line the walls before I hang wallpaper?

It is not absolutely necessary but professional decorators line the walls with cheap off-white paper before hanging expensive wallcoverings or heavy embossed papers.

How can I break up heavily compacted soil, especially if it contains a lot of buried rubble?

The job will be much easier if you use a medium-weight pickaxe.

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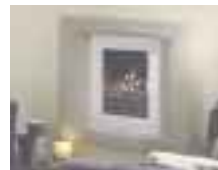
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by RICHARD SPENCER

Is your driveway all it is cracked up to be? A shabby drive can give a grim appearance to your home. The potholes, cracks and oil spills all combine towards creating a shabby look which can affect the impression your home gives to visitors.

Repair and refurbishment are the order of the day and much of the work is easy for a DIY enthusiast to do. Drives can be made from several materials, including solid concrete, paving slabs or crazy paving, concrete blocks, gravel or asphalt. Some may even be a combination of two or more materials. The way you repair a drive will vary depending on the material you are dealing with.

One of the big problems with concrete drives is oil spills. Once they are there, they just stay there. The answer is to use a degreasing agent which you pour onto the stain, leave for a while and then wash off with water.

Other stains can be cleaned off with a stiff brush using soap and water. For moss and green slime use a cleaning agent. You can get a good result against general grime by using a high pressure water sprayer which directs a high velocity water jet at the surface.

Concrete drives can crack and look unsightly. Small cracks can be ignored, but larger cracks should be raked out so that the bottom of the crack is wider than the width at the surface. The crack can then be filled with a mortar mix.

Hollows in concrete drives are more difficult to deal with and should be properly dug out and filled with a concrete mix.

A concrete block drive is more likely to have

been laid properly, so the risk of hollowing is far less. You may find oil spills which can be dealt with in the same way as for concrete, but the biggest problem with this type of drive is likely to be cracked or broken blocks.

Cracked concrete blocks can be replaced with matching blocks. Lever out the old block and drop a new one into its place. Concrete block drives should be washed down at least once a year and weedkiller applied to prevent weeds growing in the tiny gaps between the blocks.

Stone or concrete paving slabs can split on a drive. It is easy to remove an individual slab and replace it with a new one, bedding it into some mortar for a snug fit.

A gravel drive is one of the easiest to maintain, provided it has been laid properly in the first place. All that needs to be done is to rake the gravel occasionally, fill any hollows with fresh gravel and apply a weedkiller if weeds are a problem.

But if the gravel has not been laid with proper edge restraints, it will tend to spread and get into places where it should not. The answer to this problem is to fit concrete or brick edging strips, which will stop the gravel drifting beyond the drive.

An asphalt or tarmac drive is not something you want to lay yourself from scratch as the bitumen tar-coated stones are best laid and rolled hot. But it is not difficult to repair a tarmac drive, using bags of cold-lay asphalt.



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NE fashion IN ASSOCIATION WITH 



Three mature students have realised that if you want to get ahead, you get a hat business. IAN LAMMING reports

The hat pack

THE banter has the speed of an American sitcom. In fact, the interview could have been a scene from the Golden Girls. Three very different ladies share a new-found friendship. Three very different backgrounds share a common love of hats.

It's hard to keep track of the three-way conversation amid bursts of laughter. And all the time their hands never stop, as if they are on automatic pilot. Hat making waits for no man, woman or child, though it does pause for the odd cup of tea.

Ann March Banks, of Richmond, Shirley Anderson, of Darlington, and Pam Andrews-Mawer, of Stockton, met on a City and Guilds course in millinery at Darlington College of Technology. They enjoyed the work and each other's company so much they decided to set up their own firm making hats. So every Tuesday they go back to the classroom at the Cleveland Avenue site, not to learn, but to hire the college's equipment, to meet their orders and run The Milliners, a business offering hats for all occasions, from formal to casual wear.

"We finished the course but didn't want to give it up," says Ann. "The college offered to let us use their equipment so we started the business," adds Pam. "And it's proving great, we are all getting on really well," says Shirley.

Now they are offering buyers a personal service and exclusive designs – guaranteed to be different at any wedding, Christening or garden party.

"When you arrive at the service you can be sure there will not be another hat like this," says Ann. "It will be a one-off hat, the style you want, and it will actually fit."

"It will be the colour you want to match your outfit," adds Shirley. "I have hats I don't like because they came with the outfit. Well that won't happen here," says Pam.

The three ladies agree that shopping for hats can be a traumatic affair with the pressure to buy forcing people into bad decisions. Often staff will say they suit you when they don't but it seems impolite not to buy. The result can often have hat wearers looking like a mushroom, they agree.

The Milliners offers the personal touch in the buyer's home or theirs. "We can mix and match brims and tops," says Shirley. "It's much easier and nicer," adds Ann. "There isn't the pressure of buying in a shop," says Pam.

Word of mouth and the odd flier are bringing in the

orders and the fledgling business is beginning to grow, with hats ranging in price from £50 to £200. Hiring the facilities at Darlington College of Technology saves them expensive start-up costs – brim blocks can cost up to £200 each and the steamer can cost £700 – and there is no need to find premises.

"We can also make hats for people who don't like hats by coming up with some form of headdress or tiara," says Shirley. "We like doing that, it's really satisfying. We had one grandmother who wasn't at all interested in clothes but her face lit up when she saw the hat we had made for her," adds Pam. "That's the nice thing, when you finish it and people are really happy with the result," says Ann.

The humble hat is enjoying a revival at the moment right across the age and social spectrum. Youngsters are wearing baseball caps and street hats while the cause is being taken on by high profile designers such as Philip Treacy. But running a hat business is a new experience for all three women.

Ann, who lives at Gayle, near Richmond, has a background in fashion. She went to the London College of Fashion and worked in the industry before she had her daughter. She has also studied embroidery and designed uniforms for airlines, hotels and businesses.

"I've always worked with my hands and in design," she says. "I love art and drawing and I get my inspiration from the things I see. I see interesting shapes and play around with them. It may be a jar which you think to yourself 'oh, that would make a nice hat'. It's all about looking around and observing. You also get happy accidents, then others hats simply evolve, so I never start with a finished product in mind."

Shirley was born in South Africa but married a soldier and escaped the apartheid regime 30 years ago to live in Britain. She has lived in Darlington for 18 years and studied a variety of courses at the college including fashion and design.

"I love making hats because it's like working on a painting and when you have finished, you have a masterpiece," she says. "It's your creation and you can go absolutely wild. It's like a kid being given paint to splash all over without anyone shouting at you."

Pam was born in Darlington but now lives in Stockton. She went to Darlington College of Technology when it was the girls' high school and her group photograph remains on the wall today. Before she retired she worked as a



Pictures: STUART BOULTON

training manager with the Employment Service and with the Benefit Office in Newcastle. "It was very stressful and at lunchtime I used to go into Bainbridge's and try hats on," she recalls. "I saw a flier for the milliners' course and we all just clicked. What I like about hats is that they allow you to go off at a tangent. It's my creativity coming out which was held in abeyance when I was a civil servant. That's probably why my hats are always the most challenging."

Interview over, there are hats to be made and my head is spinning from the banter.

"When the course was over we didn't want to stop making hats or lose contact and the business dovetailed from there," says Pam. "I think our husbands would like us to make a lot of money," adds Ann. "We just like the buzz."

The Milliners can be contacted on (01325) 718355, (01325) 468333 or (01642) 675331



HEAD START: The Milliners, Pam, Shirley and Ann, with (far left and right) other women on the hat-making course

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a bargain

How would you describe your look?

My daughter says: "Practical, smart, tidy
and bright," but would add "slightly
different". I like to do something a bit
different with all my clothes. As I've got
older, I have quietened down a bit but I
used to like to make an impact when I
walked into a room.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

I have a long, green dress which I wore
when Graham Norton presented me with
the Lingerie Retailer of the Year Award. I
love it but it's not something you can
wear every day. My other favourite thing
is my winter coat, what I call my "Herr
Flick" mac. I always feel dressy in it.

Where do you shop?

Nowhere in particular – sales always
attract me.

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

I can't remember because I love
bargains. I always shop at the sales.

What's your worst fashion buy?



It was in the 60s when I used to buy all
these brightly coloured shoes to match
my dresses.
Everyone did it, but my worst buy was a
pair of blue shoes with four-inch heels.
They were so pointy, they gave me a
corn.

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

I think it would have to be Joan Collins
because she is in my age group and
she's always smart. I met Denise Welch
recently and she's always nicely turned
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NE beauty IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Carrying round the entire contents of your make-up bag may not be practical but it's essential if you want to stay looking good. CHRISTEN PEARS meets a design student who has found a way round the problem



A man with designs on your handbag

ADMIT it, ladies, your handbag is full of make-up and beauty products. There are at least three lipsticks in there, a compact and probably an old, dried-up mascara. You get embarrassed at the supermarket check-out when you can't find your purse but pull out a handful of crumpled up tissues and cotton wool balls. It's a disaster when the lid comes off that tube of moisturiser and squirts all over your mobile phone and diary but you simply can't do without these things.

Now there's a way to carry round the everyday essentials you need to keep you looking good without filling up your handbag – and, perhaps surprisingly, the idea comes from a man.

Final year Northumbria University student Adrian Hanlon is proving that he's in touch with his feminine side by designing a range of make-up and body care accessories for women. The 21-year-old, who is from Ashington in Northumberland, developed the idea of "Time: Capsules by Time Cosmetics" after watching his girlfriend Gail Baxter fill her handbag with different types of cosmetics every day.

"It was a nightmare waiting for her to get ready. She spent hours sorting out what she needed to take with her," he says.

At the time, Adrian was working on a design brief for a university project to develop a range of cosmetics for men or women to help combat ageing. He decided to combine the two ideas.

"I realised that when Gail gets ready, she uses different products depending on the time of day. I thought the products could be split into time frames and all the essential cosmetics could be packaged depending on a woman's make-up and beauty needs at any particular time."

The idea features body care products in themed capsules that are small enough to fit into a handbag. Each one contains a selection of related products that work together.

Adrian explains: "Time To Respond, for example, is for the morning when you're getting ready. You've got a two-year-old to get ready and then you've got to get to work. This is just something you can put in your handbag. There's cleanser and moisturiser and body gel so you can have a shower when you get to work."

Time To Refresh contains everything you need to keep you going during the day, including hand cream, lip gloss and deodorant wipes, while Time To Replenish includes cleanser, toner and an intensive moisturiser to put the goodness back into your skin before you go to bed. Time To Relax is perfect for a Friday night, with hair and body honey mud, bath oil, cucumber eye pads and rich moisturiser.

But while women are experts when it comes to make-up and skincare, Adrian had to do a lot of research.

"Women use the products all the time, so



IT'S IN THE BAG: student Adrian Hanlon gets to grips with his girlfriend's make-up muddle

they know everything about them. I had to start from scratch. I had three weeks to work on the project and spent the first two developing and researching, finding the right combination of ingredients."

Each pack is designed around different nutrients. Time To Refresh, for example, contains vitamin C, which gives the skin a boost, while Time To Replenish contains healing vitamin E.

Adrian, who graduates this month from the BA (Hons) Graphic Design course at Northumbria University, is already winning accolades for his designs. He won a Rexam Travel award of £2,500 in this year's RSA awards for his packaging design. He will use

the money to fund a study tour to the United States over the summer, where he hopes to secure work placements with multi-media and graphic design companies in New York, Los Angeles and California.

He says: "Winning this award has opened up so many opportunities for me. It has without doubt given me confidence and hopefully an edge as a design graduate. It feels good to have a national award under your belt."

Adrian is now in the process of patenting his idea and is looking to establish a partnership with a cosmetics company. Hopefully, his products will be on shelves next year. And, of course, in our handbags.

Diary of a make-up artist

ALLISON MCKAY

ALTHOUGH models are generally naturally beautiful, the most successful are those who radiate beauty and look healthy and glowing. This is something that requires a healthy diet, exercise, and a strict beauty regime. As a hair and make-up artist, my kit bag has to be equipped with lots of quick fixes, and although miracles can be done at once, it is the impossible that takes a bit longer!



Here are a few tips and products I always have in my kit to assist in a quick fix.

1 Toothbrushes: for dry lips brush lightly over the lip area then apply a good lip balm or gloss. My favourite lip-gloss is Juicy Tubes by Lancôme.

2 Cotton buds: if your mascara smudges over your perfectly applied foundation, allow it to dry then dip your bud into the foundation and work it over the smudge.

3 For thin eyelashes work a brown or black very dark eyeliner right to the roots of the lashes then lightly dust over with powder and finish with mascara to leave your lashes looking thicker.

4 Tired looking eyes can really benefit by Fresh Eyes Brightener by Optrex, a definite kit must-have.

5 For hair that lacks shine and substance, try Wella System Professional Power Mask. After just five minutes, your hair will be restored to its full, shining glory.

6 Puffy eyes are gone in five minutes with Skin Caviar Revitalising Eye Mask by La Prairie at Harrods, £80. A cheaper alternative, which definitely helps, is chilled damp camomile teabags placed over the eye lids for several minutes.

7 Spot Remover by Origins: it reduces redness and speeds healing (that is the impossible bit that takes a bit longer).

8 Finally, the one thing I can't carry in my kit bag is NailBar 1 in Northumberland Street, Darlington (01325 483486). My nails are my worst feature and to go in there and get a set of perfectly manicured acrylic nails is my quick fix treat to feeling good.

● A cover girl make-up artist for glossy magazines, Allison McKay is now based back in the North-East

Great looking kit from M&S



DESIGNER products at affordable prices seems a contradiction in terms, but for the best-looking cosmetics check out Marks & Spencer's new Autograph cosmetics range. Designed by British Make-up Artist of the Year, Sharon Dowsett, the range's sleek mirrored packaging is ultra-stylish, so show it off at every opportunity. With 24 products in the range, priced from £5 to £13, choose from 14 shades of Powder Eyeshadow, £7, and 20 shades of both the Colour Rich Lipstick, £9, and Nail Polish, £7. You'll be spoiled for choice, so give in to temptation, re-stock your entire make-up bag – and make sure you grab the fabulous Cheek Colourwash, £10 and Full Volume Mascara, £10.

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NE beauty



Changed woman: Jayme at school, left, and as beauty therapist

Beauty course has changed me on the inside...

Hair and beauty therapies can transform more than a mere look. They changed Jayme Saye's attitude as well. IAN LAMMING reports

HAIR in place, make-up applied, nails polished and shaped, Jayme Saye looks the picture of perfection, the ideal image for her profession as a hair and beauty therapist.

She perches atop a salon stool in her clinically white uniform, smiling pleasantly, speaking politely, as she administers her new found art to her client's nails. Her tutors marvel at the transformation, not in the manicure itself, but in the teenager performing it.

Jayme is a student at Darlington College of Technology studying an NVQ Level 2 in hair and beauty therapy. But when it came to education in the past, she would be the first to admit she was not always the best pupil in the school.

"I hated school. It was boring," she recalls, shuffling in her seat in embarrassment. "Doing the same lessons every day just didn't interest me and I got into a lot of trouble. On one occasion I was suspended for walking out of a detention.

"My attendance record was appalling. I would go in about three mornings a week and then go home for the rest of the day. I got seven GCSEs but they were all grade Es except one D."

Jayme's problems didn't stop there. While out of school one day she got into trouble with the police for fighting in a supermarket with four other girls. Luckily for her, charges were dropped and she was let off with a final warning. "It wasn't really like me but I had totally changed," says Jayme, of Colburn, near Catterick. "It started about the end of year

nine and I went right off the rails. I dread to think where I was heading."

Her salvation was Darlington College of Technology after her parents and boyfriend spent six months persuading her to apply.

"I needed three Cs and above to get on the course but I was so keen that I begged them to give me a trial," she says. "After two weeks they let me stay on and I have been getting 100 per cent in all my tests ever since."

Hair and beauty therapy senior tutor Brenda Pearson can't believe the change in Jayme. "She was given the opportunity to prove herself and has succeeded in every way," she says. "Jayme is now a model student who has proved that with interest and enthusiasm you can achieve your ambition."

Not only has Jayme found direction and purpose in her life thanks to her studies, she has also developed ambitions. "I would love to work in television as a make up artist," she says, "a flash of excitement lighting up her face. "Failing that, I would like to work on cruise ships so I can see the world.

"The course has completely changed me. I used to be at home all the time and now I am always here at college. I have 100 per cent attendance record. In fact, not long ago I felt really ill but I still came into college, I love it so much. College is so different from school, it's more real life and you are treated like an adult. It really has changed my life."

With that she heads back to her studies, hair in place, make-up applied, nails polished and shaped, the picture of perfection, the ideal image for her profession as a hair and beauty therapist.

PUT YOUR BACK INTO SUMMER

EVEN if you're not planning on flaunting your figure in a bikini this summer, you can't avoid showing a bit of skin with strappy tops and slinky skirts when the sun's out. But while legs, arms and tummy gets most of the pampering focus, don't forget your back will also be on display. Spotty shoulders are a definite no no, so try Australian Bodycare Daily Cleansing Wash, £4.99, to put any problems behind you. Containing tea tree oil, it'll tackle spots without drying out your skin. Available from Superdrug and independent pharmacies, or call 01892 750 333 for more information.

Carol figures out a weighty problem

Most women want to look good in a bikini for their summer holidays. One who does is TV presenter Carol Vorderman, who shares her secrets with LISA SALMON

BRAINS and beauty have helped Carol Vorderman become one of TV's most popular presenters. She has shed pounds to transform herself from a mumsy TV brainbox into a sex siren, is happily settled with her partner in London and is confident about the future.

Most people remember Vorderman in her larger days on Countdown more than four years ago, when she was a size 14. Since then, she has slimmed down to a size 8-10 and stayed slim, *without* counting calories. So how did she win the battle with her weight?

The 42-year-old presenter initially shared her diet secrets in her bestselling book *Detox For Life*, a 28-day eating plan designed not only to help shed pounds but to make you feel better, increase energy and improve skin and hair. Her new book is designed to do the same thing, but in just 14 days.

The idea is that the mini-detox can be used in the run-up to summer holidays, or just for the summer itself when there are no longer bulky clothes to hide behind.

Vorderman says: "I had a terrific feedback from the first book, and people were saying they wanted more recipes, particularly for the summer, as *Detox For Life* came out in the winter. I do a 14-day detox twice a year, so it seemed appropriate to bring the new book out. You can definitely get results in 14 days, but obviously the stricter you are, the better, and if you want to carry on for 28 days, that's great."

The idea behind Vorderman's detox is that it is not the quantity but the quality of food you eat which makes a difference to your body.

That's why she doesn't count calories and the diet is full of

calorie-packed foods like nuts, olive oil and avocado.

"We're not asking people to go without food," she says. "You just eat very healthily on it. I was quite sceptical about it at first, because it's got things like nuts in. It's got lots of foods, but the right foods. It's not about calories – you don't think about them. I don't count calories, weigh myself or go to the gym, but I think my weight only goes up or down by about 5lbs – I just go by how tight my clothes feel."

Vorderman discovered detox four years ago, after the birth of her second child. Before that she had been a yo-yo dieter and although she was not very overweight, she was unhappy about what she ate and felt constantly guilty.

After seeing how good a friend who had been on detox looked, Vorderman tried it for 28 days herself. At the end she found she had dropped a dress size and had lots more energy. She hasn't looked back since.

She promises that even on the new mini-detox, dieters will "lose bloat, lose weight, kill off some of the cellulite, feel healthier and fitter, and get great skin, shiny hair and sparkling eyes".

There are no meat, fish or dairy products on the diet and typical meals are warm salads of green beans with cashews or baked sweet potato drizzled with extra virgin olive oil with guacamole. There are even puddings.

Vorderman says: "I don't claim to be a professor of nutrition – all I know is that since I've been on the detox diet I've felt better, my skin's been better and I've maintained my weight. I feel a great freedom."

● Carol Vorderman's *Summer Detox* (Virgin, £10.99)



NE slimmimg

HERE is one of the delicious and healthy recipes from Carol Vorderman's *Summer Detox* (see left). This protein-rich salad can be varied by using ready-bought marinated peppers or aubergines instead of the artichokes, and substituting other kinds of fresh herbs for the basil and parsley. Chickpeas are an excellent source of fibre, protein and iron. They contain fructo-oligosaccharides, a type of fibre that maintains healthy gut flora.

CHICKPEA AND CHERRY TOMATO SALAD

Serves 4

2 x 400g (14oz) can of chickpeas, rinsed and drained
225g (8oz) marinated artichoke hearts
450g (1lb) cherry tomatoes, halved
Small bunch of spring onions, sliced
Handful of fresh basil leaves
Handful of fresh parsley, chopped
Fresh ground black pepper

Dressing

3 tablespoons (45ml) extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon (15ml) lemon juice
½ teaspoon (2.5ml) Dijon mustard
1 small clove of garlic, crushed

METHOD

Put the chickpeas, artichoke hearts, cherry tomatoes and spring onions in a bowl. Make the dressing by placing the ingredients into a screw-top glass jar, shaking well.

Pour the dressing over the salad. Add the herbs and black pepper and mix together well.

Chill and serve.

DID YOU KNOW?

CONTRARY to popular belief, spots are not caused by eating chocolate and junk food. People only think they're linked because we usually crave sweet things when we're premenstrual, a time when our hormones are naturally surging and giving us spots.



Choc horror!

IF you've been treating yourself to a large hot chocolate from one of the well known coffee shops, you may be horrified to learn that they contain around 563 calories per cup – and that doesn't include the whipped cream.

It seems that many of today's drinks contain as many calories as a high calorie meal. For example, a super-sized Coke from one of the fast food giants contains 323 calories and a milkshake contains 516 calories. These are the equivalent to a fried breakfast or two chocolate bars.

Recent research from the US has revealed that we don't seem to register the calories that we drink. Scientists discovered that the trial participants given an extra 100 calories of food automatically made up for it by eating 100 less calories less later that day, but when they were given the extra 100 calories as a drink, they made no adjustment.

LIFE COACH

BELIEFS: FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR LIFE

BELIEFS are a guiding force in our lives. When we believe something, we behave as if it were true. Take a moment to think of some beliefs that you have? Are they useful? What evidence from your experience do you have to support your beliefs? Beliefs come from many sources, such as our upbringing or the culture and environment we are born into. Positive beliefs such as "I am a loving person" are energising and supportive through life. Limiting beliefs, on the other hand, have a negative effect on

our lives. They usually begin with "I can't..." Yet we are not born with beliefs. We can choose them. Over the next month drop a belief that limits you and adopt a positive one. Write down your new belief and repeat it to yourself daily. This helps reinforce the new belief in your mind. Look for evidence to support your new positive belief and you'll begin to lay the foundations for a happier, more successful life.

Juliette Lee



Juliette is available at www.sunflowercoaching.com (01833) 621438



JOE KEENAN: the chef and manager who is absolutely passionate about food
Pictures: GILBERT JOHNSTON

Selling fresh, local produce, The Food Shop is a testament to the diversity of local farmers. **CHRISTEN PEARS** samples some of its delights

Food, glorious food

THE Food Shop. A straightforward, no-nonsense name that both sums up and yet fails to do justice to this new delicatessen and farm shop. On one hand, it does indeed sell food – very fine food – but on the other, it is much more than simply a shop.

Opened by the Durham Markets Company, it builds on the success of the city's monthly farmers' markets and offers a vast selection of locally-produced meat, cheese, preserves and bread six days a week. Chef Joe Keenan is the manager, bringing a unique brand of enthusiasm and expertise to the store.

The garrulous Scotsman is absolutely passionate about food. He won't settle for telling a customer about something when he can let them taste it or show them how it's done. He has a mini kitchen in the corner of the shop where he gives demonstrations.

By the time I leave, I've tasted everything from pickled onions to ginger wine. I've learned the difference between different sorts of balsamic vinegar and I've been shown how to make a salmon and Californian salad, using a piece of cut-off plastic drainpipe as a mould.

"People can come in and ask me lots of questions and I can give them the answers and I can show them. All of the stuff you see in the restaurants, you can do it in the house. You just need to know how."

Take the drainpipe mould, for example. If you buy the real thing in a specialist cookery shop, it will cost £30 to £40. If you follow Joe's tip, it's a fraction of the cost.

It's the sort of advice that takes customer service to the next level and it's exactly what Joe's aiming for. He wants to share his expertise with the public and introduce them to new ingredients, many of which aren't available anywhere else in the region. This is the first shop in the UK to stock Morelli pasta, for example, while another of his suppliers only sell their pate to the Food Shop and Harvey Nichols.

There are shelves stacked high with dips, rubs, preserves and pickles. The enormous freezers are full of fruit and vegetables and home-made ready meals.

Pasta and pulses jostle for space with cakes and bread while the fridge is full of the most mouth-watering meats and cheeses. There are also a lot of organic and gluten-free products.

Most of the food is from the North-East, North Yorkshire and Cumbria. There are cheeses from Wensleydale, fruit juices from Lanchester, soups from Hexham, and honey from Berwick. But Joe is extending the range to include suppliers from further afield – Scotland and even Italy and Greece.

He's constantly inviting people to taste what's on offer. When a party of curious Glaswegians ask about Lindisfarne mead and wine, they find themselves sipping

ginger wine and, of course, leave the shop with a couple of bottles clinking in their carrier bags.

There's no need for any hard sell. Joe knows the products speak for themselves. He has selected every item on sale because he's used it during his long career as a chef.

He started his career as a chef at the Savoy hotel in London. Since he moved to the North-East ten years ago, he has worked across the region and has won numerous awards for his cooking. He worked at the Rose Tree in Shincliffe, the Centurion in Langley Park and Durham's Kingslodge hotel. He's still in demand, carrying out cookery demonstrations but he wanted a change and the Food Shop provided the perfect opportunity.

"The idea of the shop was to help the Indoor Markets. The farmers' market is hugely popular and people come from all over to buy things once a month. We can sell them six days a week.

"People want something different from what they can buy in the supermarket. They want high quality and they want to know where it comes from. We can trace our food back to its source and what's more, most of it is local."

The Food Shop, Claypath,
Durham. Tel: 0191-384 8198.

EATING OUT

A TASTE OF THAILAND RICHMOND



TUCKED away to such an extent that people who've lived locally for years don't know it's there, A Taste of Thailand is definitely one of Richmond's best kept secrets.

The atmosphere is relaxed and friendly, with staff happy to explain dishes to uninitiated diners or correct hesitant pronunciation. The menu doesn't explain how hot some dishes are but don't be afraid to ask. It's packed with spelling mistakes but that just adds to the authenticity of the place.

The airy restaurant serves alcohol but also allows customers to bring their own, an arrangement which must benefit the off-licence across the road no end.

Starters: The starter menu includes chicken satay with peanut sauce, kha nom gheep, which are steamed dumplings served with golden fried garlic and soya dip, goong hom pha, deep fried prawns wrapped in pancakes served with a chilli dip and a variety of spring rolls, deep-fried vegetables and fish dishes.

There are also soups to choose from, including hot and sour king prawn, and mushroom and coconut milk with lime and lemon juice.

A platter for two, at £9.50, includes chicken satay, tod mun pla, which are cod cakes made with red curry paste and green beans, spring rolls, the deep-fried prawns goong hom pha and dressed crab claws served with a chilli dip.

We couldn't resist finishing off every bit – something we would come to regret when we couldn't finish our main courses.

Main courses: There are plenty of unusual dishes on the main course menu which is a fish-lover's dream, with squid, king prawns and even whole trout to choose from.

Vegetarians also get a reasonable choice including stir fries, vegetables in sweet and sour, oyster or traditional green or red curry sauces.

We plumped for kai kra prao (again, don't be offended if the staff correct your pronunciation), sliced chicken stir-fried with fresh basil, onion and chilli – and, as we discovered, industrial quantities of garlic. It made for a delicious dish but be warned, don't have it on a first date unless you're pretty confident you can persuade your partner to try some too.

We also tried the chicken panang, which is a dry curry cooked in coconut milk and garnished with shredded lime leaves, and which was thoroughly appreciated.

Pudding: We didn't see a sign of any pudding on offer, which is probably a good thing as we were already stuffed to bursting point.

A Taste of Thailand is well worth a visit – it's reasonably priced, the food is absolutely delicious and the staff are friendly. Just watch out for that garlic...

The bill for two people, including two beers and two orange juices, came to £33.20.

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NE motoring



MINI ONE D: from £11,385 on the road

Mighty Mini

In a radical departure BMW has decided to fit a Japanese diesel engine into a British icon. IAN LAMMING drives the new Mini One D

WHEN Mini first burst onto the scene in the swinging Sixties amid a flurry of knee length boots and Mary Quant, it set a trend to be aped by many a manufacturer. It was funky, it was groovy, it was pretty awful to drive, but the buying public loved it anyway.

Four decades later, things have changed. BMC has become BMW and, it has to be said, is better for it. Mini remains funky and groovy but is now superb to drive and the buying public is still in love. In fact, in the past two years, 250,000 of them have flown out of Plant Oxford, 60,000 of which have found new homes in the UK.

BMW, however, isn't one to rest on its laurels. It probably learnt that from the failed British motor industry. But in the latest guise, the One D, Mini isn't setting the trend but following one. For the first time in the history of the brand, Mini is now available with a diesel engine. That will rub the gloss off the purists' old knee boots.

A Mini oil burner now joins the range, which means if you are minded you can buy a normal Mini, or one with a supercharger or a turbocharger.

In the current climate it makes perfect sense. More Minis than ever are becoming company cars and guess what, the new Mini One D is in the lowest company car tax bracket.

Modern technology has transformed the humble diesel from something that sounded and smelled like a tractor to something you would struggle to tell wasn't a petrol engine. The great buying public has responded by buying plenty of them. Sales have shot up every month for the past 30 and this year diesels are expected to account for one third of all new cars. Under the circumstances BMW would have been foolish to ignore such a trend and foolish it is not. In fact, it's still being rather clever, as it was when it decided to reinvent the Mini in the first place. So not only has it entered the market of the small diesel, it has done so in a big way by producing arguably the most sought after model there is.

That said, BMW is expecting to sell just 2,000 Mini One Ds a year and since its smallest diesel unit is a rather too large 2.0 litre, it needed to buy one in from elsewhere rather than go to the expense of developing its own.

Engineers shopped around, tried this one, rejected that, and finally came to the conclusion that Toyota's 1.4 D4D would best fit the bill. So in every English-built Mini, which is owned by a German company, there rests a Japanese diesel engine. What a mixture.

The D4D never was the most powerful small diesel around but with 75bhp on tap it's not too

bad. It's also pretty frugal with 50 plus miles per gallon well within its sights. BMW has breathed on it slightly to produce a bit more pulling power and also spent considerable time sound deadening the engine bay.

The result is a motor you would be hard pressed to tell was diesel at all once you are under way. There is very little clatter and chatter, which you would normally associate with such a unit, and once in cruising mode, the Mini One D feels nice and refined.

There's also the added bonus of being turbocharged, so when you do accelerate you do get a nice push in the back, which gives the feeling of power and brisk acceleration.

Keep the revs above 2,000 and there is plenty of poke to overtake in safety whatever gear you are in. But if there is a fly in the ointment, it's the gearing. The D comes with the six-speed box from the supercharged Cooper S, which is great – short throws, nice weighty action – but third gear is incredibly tall. This means at natural on road speeds, such as running in town or turning a corner, the revs tend to drop below the crucial 2,000rpm powerband when you are in third and the engine dies. That means you constantly have to use second gear and have to negotiate the awkward third to second dogleg. A small point but noticeable.

Handling remains the real trump card and while the ride is choppy over the rough, cornering and grip are truly stunning.

The rest is pure Mini and all the better for it. One D looks the same. Real anoraks might be able to spot the fact that the exhaust pipe is hidden behind the rear bumper valance, but otherwise you would do well to notice.

The interior looks like the rest of the range with wonderful trim shapes, textured finishes, the traditional Mini clocks and gorgeous toggle switches. There can be no interior as pleasing to touch and look at. There are literally tens of thousands of options combinations to personalise your Mini. I doubt there are two alike on the UK's roads today.

So with One D, Mini might not be the first to get into the small diesel market but for my mind it has got to be the best.

*For the first time in the
history of the brand,
Mini is now available with a
diesel engine.*

NE connections

PLACES WITHIN EASY REACH
OF THE NORTH-EAST



Pictures: GAVIN ENGELBRECHT

IT IS the sheer sense of immediacy of flying from one's doorstep to the continent which adds to the exhilaration of the visit. One minute you're surrounded by the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Barcelona, the next arriving home to see your jet taking off on its next leg. Which all makes you realise just how much we are part of Europe...

EasyJet, with its new bargain basement flights offers from Newcastle, has opened the door to Europe for the average North-East traveller, bringing us firmly up to date in the cheap travel revolution. There's no longer any need for a long night ride to London's Stanstead Airport with its exorbitant parking rates, in the quest for bargain deal.

Our whistle-stop tour of Barcelona was just that – brief. But it was enough to soak up the flavour of this dynamic city and whet the appetite for more.

On the surface, it's just another urban sprawl, but few cities could be more pleasant on closer examination. Like a rich plum cake, the Catalan capital has something to offer everyone, both day tripper and those planning a longer stay.

One of our first ports of call is Barcelona Football Stadium, which heaves with visitors all year round. For those, like me, with no interest in the game, it's still well worth the visit, even if only to take in the sheer scale of this 100,000-seater stadium.

A positive shrine to football, it boasts what must be the most comprehensive museum to the sport; from the original pencil sketch of the club badge (circa 1924) to the biggest collection of used boots, not to mention a library of biblical proportions for anyone wishing to research the finer minutiae.

Then on to the city's other shrine. Begun

in 1883, Antoni Gaudí's towering Sagrada Família is still a building site to an army of workers, who will take another 40 years to complete it. Gaudí died under the wheels of a tram before he could see the fruition of his pet project. All that remained of his idea is a collection of sketches, and it is a testament to his place in the heart of city that its citizens have been so determined to realise his dream, paid for by anonymous donors.

Gaudí has left his indelible mark all over the city and one can only marvel at some of his designs, inspired perhaps by some exotic mushrooms which found their way into his diet. Certainly a ruler was not one of his favoured instruments. With an exuberant use of coloured ceramic tiles, he converted the facade of Casa Batlló into a battle between Saint George and the dragon. A highlight on the Gaudí tour is Park Güell, which comprises a fantastical network of twisting roads, viaducts and colonnades. The magnificent Palau Güell is topped by about 20 chimneys comprising a garden of sculptures.

Time for some quick fortification. The Catalans are masters of tapas. Gastronomic bite-size treats offer all sorts of foods from seafood to potatoes to mutton, once started it is difficult to stop eating them. Some other local specialities on the menu include blood and liver with onions, veal with wild mushrooms and rabbit with snails, or more the conventional grilled lamb.

Then we're back on the move down La Rambla, which runs from the heart of Barcelona to the harbour. On Sunday afternoons the very lifeblood of the city seems to course down this artery. Dressed in their best, a solid phalanx of humanity lives up to the street's name and rambles without intent past stalls of every description, including the



LEGACY: Gaudí's idiosyncratic influence is seen all over this vibrant city

Gaudí glories

GAVIN ENGELBRECHT hops over to mainland Spain on a whistle-stop tour of one of its most dynamic cities



famous canaries. Who buys them, you wonder? Who cares? La Rambla would not be the same without them.

At the top of the 2km avenue is the fountain known as Font de Canaletes. A legend has it that if you drink its water, someday you'll return to Barcelona. Most travellers will probably come back anyway.

Flights from Newcastle to Barcelona with easyJet depart daily at 9.45am Monday to Friday and at 10.10am on Saturdays and Sundays. The flight to Barcelona takes around two and a half hours. The starting fare is £22.50 each way, but demand has been high. To grab the best fares, it is best to avoid weekends and travel outside the peak summer months.



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