

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

SEPTEMBER 2003

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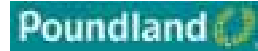
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sharon griffiths

Washing blowing on a line is a fine sight. A thing of beauty, nothing to be ashamed of...

IT'S TIME to treasure your washing line – it could be a new status symbol. Some American friends came to stay. They'd spent three weeks touring Europe, travelling on planes and trains, staying in hotels and pensions so by the time they landed on us they had two enormous bags full of dirty clothes and just one clean T-shirt between them.

Before we'd even poured the first glass of wine, the washing machine was going flat out. It was a lovely drying day – warm, sunny and breezy – but they looked at me oddly when I offered to peg clothes out for them. Instead, they stuffed everything into the drier.

Then they explained. In their exclusive Californian suburb, washing lines are not allowed. The fact that their garden is over an acre and, at the back, divided from its neighbours by a small wood, is not enough. Perish the thought that anyone might stand on a chair, lean out of their window and catch a seductive glimpse of Austen's boxers blowing in the wind.

No. As far as they are concerned, washing lines are for peasants.

I sighed and thought it was such a waste of all that Californian sunshine.

They slept like logs each night they were with us – and not just because of the wine. "Your sheets smell so lovely," they said, and I smirked. My sheets are dried outside. The washing line hangs between the honeysuckle and the lavender, and that – and sunshine – is what the sheets smell of.

Years ago when I worked in hotel on the edge of the Quantocks in Somerset, we did all our own laundry and when we ran out of washing line, we spread the sheets on the bracken to dry. We ended up with a few insects in the linen room, but the sheets smelt wonderful.

Granted, drying things outside is a risky business in this climate. All right for those of us who work at home and can dash in and out, but clearly not worth the hassle for those who are out all day.

Even on grey winter days, I hang washing out. As I watch the rain pouring down I console myself that it will at least smell sweeter. And it does. Fresh air is functional too and helps fade stains. My grandmother hung her washing out even in the snow, being a great believer in the bleaching and sterilising effects of frost.

Washing blowing on a line is a fine

sight. A thing of beauty, nothing to be ashamed of. But not, apparently, in California. Or in some places in this country either.

There are posh houses – gated developments, that sort of thing – where washing lines are only grudgingly allowed, and only if absolutely no-one else can see them. Which is a shame. One thing not displaying your dirty linen in public, but surely, clean washing?

But then I had some brochures from New England. Not just the opposite side of the country from California, but opposite ideas too.

Bed and breakfast in the States is a very upmarket idea, very different from here. Among the extras offered are such delights as "gracious circular porch", "health conscious menu", "early bird cocktails", "colonial style dining room", "bountiful breakfasts" and, lurking in the small print "line-dried linen".

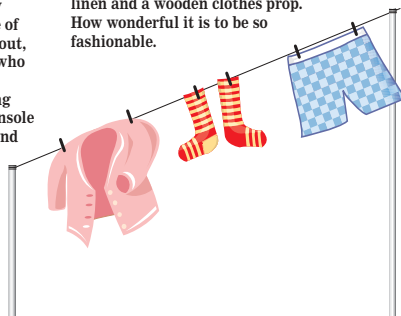
So! "Line-dried linen" is not for peasants, but is clearly a bonus, something special, an aromatic extra – meant to appeal to people who appreciate the finer things in life. Quite right too. And what America does today...

Just as I was considering this with some satisfaction, a rich London friend called in on her way up to a posh wedding in Scotland.. As we sat in the garden with our coffee, she suddenly squawked. "You've got a proper wooden clothes prop!"

Well, yes. Metal ones always collapse and trap my fingers. So I went to the timber yard, asked a nice old man to cut a notch in a ten foot length of timber and brought it home sticking out of the sunroof of the car. I think it cost me £3 and I painted it yellow with the left-over paint from the garage door.

Apparently, according to this rich friend, it is the last word in the authentic rustic look., much prized in central London.

Who would have thought it? Line-dried linen and a wooden clothes prop. How wonderful it is to be so fashionable.



IN THE SWING



IT'S fun, it's funky... and they'll learn a lot too. In response to a survey which revealed children prefer to actively exercise, Ikea has launched a new range of 'play furniture', developed and tested with the help of children aged between four and seven. The collection consists of 33 pieces all designed to help children develop physically and mentally. Some furniture helps to strengthen muscles through climbing, stretching, balancing and exploring, whereas other pieces are designed to build social skills, such as communication and sharing, or to stimulate the imagination. As the range is specifically for children, it also provides them with a space of their own in which to relax and get away from it all. The LOMSK and SVINGA seats are available now at Ikea at the MetroCentre in Gateshead for £39 each.



NE window shopping

FEELING SHEEPISH?

IT might seem warm at the moment but winter is just around the corner, and what better way to keep out the cold than swathing yourself in sumptuous sheepskin. The Celtic Sheepskin Company has a range of adult and children's wear, as well as soft home furnishings. With hats

from £26 and boots from £40, it's a great place to get gifts for others or spoil yourself. For a catalogue ring 01637 851 605 or visit www.celtic-sheepskin.co.uk The mini bag costs £70



Rachael Ibbott



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NE interiors IN ASSOCIATION WITH



NICKY HOLDEN visits No 34, Barnard Castle's award winning Bed and Breakfast, which boasts space, privacy – and that all-important ghost

Pictures: MIKE URWIN

Bacon, eggs, and a big hunk of history

THE great British Bed and Breakfast has long been regarded as the frumpy cousin of the rather grander hotel industry, a depressing world of net curtains, synthetic fabrics, swirly carpets and greasy breakfasts. Increasingly though, a new generation of enthusiastic proprietors is revolutionising the bed and breakfast trade, offering well-priced, characterful and stylish accommodation with the personal touch that the bigger hotels find so hard to get right.

One such promising newcomer is Barnard Castle's Number 34, situated near the banks of the Tees and owned by Ian and Eva Reid. In business for just 18 months, and with no previous experience of the hospitality business, the couple have just won the Les Routiers North East Bed and Breakfast of the Year award.

I was keen to check out what makes Number 34 so special, already intrigued by the delightfully quirky brochure, featuring delicate sepia illustrations by local artist Chris Mouncey, and written, allegedly, by George, who was born

in the 16th century and is Number 34's non-paying, resident ghost.

On arrival, the smart blue door with its elegantly painted sign swings open, and Ian Reid is there to greet me. We walk straight into a large and beautifully furnished room which houses squashy sofas, antique furniture and some of the couple's enormous book collection. "This is where our guests can sit and relax, and where we sometimes serve breakfasts," explains Ian. "We try not to make strangers sit together at breakfast time. Most people don't feel like making polite conversation first thing in the morning". This is the first of many insights into the thoughtful service Ian and Eva provide for their guests.

Oddly enough, the couple had no particular grand scheme in mind when Ian retired from a local government post in Tyneside. "We thought we could run some sort of business," says Ian, "and we wanted to move house." When they acquired their beautiful Grade 11* listed townhouse on The Bank in Barnard Castle, the couple were at first uncertain as to exactly what to do with it. Once a pub, The



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: the exterior of No 34 on Barnard Castle's historic Bank; the warm kitchen; one of the guest rooms; Ian Reid finds a rare moment to relax

Shoulder of Mutton – known by the locals, somewhat alarmingly, as The Bucket of Blood – the property was functioning as an antique shop, and as keen collectors themselves, the Reids toyed with the idea of keeping the business going. They quickly realised, however, that with a few adjustments, Number 34 would make an ideal guest house. “The property is arranged so that we can live comfortably in the oldest, Elizabethan part of the house, and offer our guests plenty of space and privacy in the new bit at the front”, explains Ian as we embark on our guided tour (“new” is very much a relative term,

constructed as it was in 1742).

Heading off up the creaking stairs, the Reid's enthusiasm for lovely old things is much in evidence. Old hats adorn an ornate hall stand, a collection of lovingly polished wooden rolling pins makes an unusual wall display.

The huge guest rooms are a revelation, Farrow and Ball colour schemes, lavish curtains, stone fireplaces, a comfortable seating area, and everywhere you look, something to delight the eye. Two brand new bathrooms have been ingeniously squeezed into the nooks and crannies of this very old

house, with charming and slightly eccentric results (the baths had to be specially sourced, one actually fits along a curved wall). As well as the usual tea-making equipment, guests are pampered with bathrobes, lots of fluffy towels and a complimentary decanter of sherry in their rooms. In the mornings, Ian cooks the breakfasts on the Aga, and Eva artistically arranges the fruit platters.

“We ask our guests what they would like,” explains Ian “and we provide ham, cheeses and pastries as well as the more traditional full English”. Sometimes guests have their

► **Continued on page 6**

“We try not to make strangers sit together at breakfast time. Most people don't feel like making polite conversation first thing in the morning

NE interiors

► **Continued from page 4**
 breakfast in the sheltered terraced garden, which has views over the jumbled roof tops of Barnard Castle to the countryside beyond.
 Back in the sitting room we are joined by Eva, who is greeted with hysterical enthusiasm by Digby, the couple's Old English sheepdog. Eva is charming, smiley and seemingly still full of energy after a day showing German visitors around Darlington, as part of the international twinning programme. Eva is German herself, and the couple offer language teaching and cultural tours to their foreign guests, she explains. "It is an extra string to our bow, and our German guests have been very kindly recommending us to their friends back home. It is all good for business!"
 Also good for business is Number 34's proximity to Blagrove's, Barney's best restaurant, just next door. The visitors book is packed with effusive compliments, and although they have been open for a relatively short time, the Reids are already finding familiar faces turning up on the doorstep. "We have a surprising amount of repeat business," Ian says modestly, "so I suppose we must be keeping the customers happy."
 And ghosts or not, my guess is that it will continue to enjoy much-deserved success.



FULL OF CHARACTER: the book-lined sitting room, above, and, left, one of the bedrooms, decorated in rich colours, with canopies over the single beds. Above: rolling pins are used for decoration in the hallway. Below, left to right: the back of the house, a guest bedroom and the cosy end of the sitting room, by the open fire

Pictures: MIKE URWIN



SHEREEN LOW
explains how to jazz
up contemporary
decorating

FORGET period styles and country nostalgia, interior design's new direction is fabulously funky. Think glass brick walls, concrete and rubber floors, colourful furniture and Perspex window shutters, among other materials not traditionally considered for the home.

Elizabeth Wilhide and Joanna Copestick, authors of *New Decorating*, say the time has come for walls and floors to go modern.

"Contemporary decorating is economical in everything but spirit," says Wilhide. "Focusing attention on the basic elements of light, colour, space and texture achieves a new clarity and direction in home design."

"It is a paradox of our century that innovation has been so warmly embraced in some spheres of life, but held at arm's length in others. Sweeping technological changes have transformed our lives; yet all too often over the years these radical developments have simply not been expressed on home territory."

"Homes may be equipped with the latest services and technology, but still decorated and furnished according to the conventions of past generations."

Copestick adds: "Contemporary decorating opens up the home to new and exciting possibilities. Strong colour, characterful texture and clean lines give a clear sense of purpose for functional living – decorating for a new millennium."

The highly acclaimed interior design duo go modern with materials not normally used in houses such as glass and plastic. Glass bricks look great as a permanent room divider, as they combine the structural strength and properties of brick or blockwork with the translucency of glass, and are useful in dividing space while maintaining spaciousness. The bricks let in light, but obscure views at the same time so privacy can be maintained.

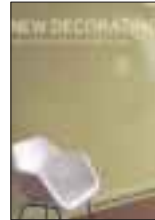
They are also valuable in rooms where there is little natural light. They come in a variety of sizes, colours and finishes, from clear to sandblasted and patterned. They can be quite expensive and should be professionally laid because of their weight and the binding agents used.

If glass blocks are too high-maintenance, why not opt for a semi-opaque plastic dividing screen? Wilhide and Copestick show you step-by-step how to make your own divider – with plastic bought from a hardware store.

When it comes to floors, Wilhide and Copestick feel attention should be lavished on this seemingly unnoticeable aspect in the home. Copestick says: "For generating a sense of expansiveness, the harder flooring materials have the edge. From the chic brutality of polished concrete to the sophistication of a wood strip, a hard floor makes a clean sweep of the interior, creating a bold, uncluttered base that gives a fundamental strength to the rest of the decor."

"Softer materials that are more readily replaced, like carpet and linoleum, are generally cheaper, easier to maintain and more comfortable under-foot than hard floors. But your soft floor does not need to be conventional in appearance – funky colours and patterns, as well as utility or industrial materials, introduce freshness and vigour."

Concrete, leather and rubber are industrial fabrics which are not normally



NEW AGE clockwise from left, glass tiles bring light into a bathroom area; a sculptural concrete wall painted terracotta reflects the natural colours of the outdoors; the book cover; modern materials give this bathroom a funky feel

Fabulously funky

associated with home interiors, but Copestick believes this should change.

Leather is the ultimate in bespoke flooring, and epitomises luxury and indulgence. Being more practical and durable than you might imagine, flooring leather comes in tiles made from tough steer hide, but is still not immune to scratches, nor is it water-resistant.

Rubber, like concrete, is tough, practical and durable due to its industrial use. It comes in sheets or tiles, in various colours, and a number of surfaces such as studded, ribbed or treadplate to counteract its slipperiness – making it ideal for bathrooms and kitchens.

"Contemporary decorating is by no means reticent or predictable. Neutrality can be soothing, even challenging, but there is more to life than monochrome. Colour is vital. Walls are blank canvases ready to be saturated in intense hues."

"Bright, bold and positive, contemporary rooms are brimming with joie de vivre. Living in the moment has never been so much fun," grins Copestick.

New Decorating, by Elizabeth Wilhide and Joanna Copestick (Conran Octopus, £16.99)

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6 OF THE BEST

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IT wasn't too long ago that buying a digital camera would have left you with a piece of kit you needed a small sports bag to carry around. Well, this market certainly hasn't stood still and today there are hundreds of cameras to choose from. However, if you're uncertain about making the move into digital or you just fancy another camera that you don't have to be overprotective about then here is a range of digital snappers for under £100.

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MEMORY MAN Jenoptik JDC £69.90

If you just love taking photos of just about anything and anyone you might just need a camera that lets you keep taking the shots without having to run back to your PC to download the ones you have. This camera enables you to expand the memory up to a whopping 128mb, or in normal speak, more than 800 pictures.



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We all know that feeling of taking pictures when we thought there was enough light, only to find out that the only thing we can see on the picture are teeth and eyes. This camera has five different flash modes to help you get the best snap, whatever the conditions.

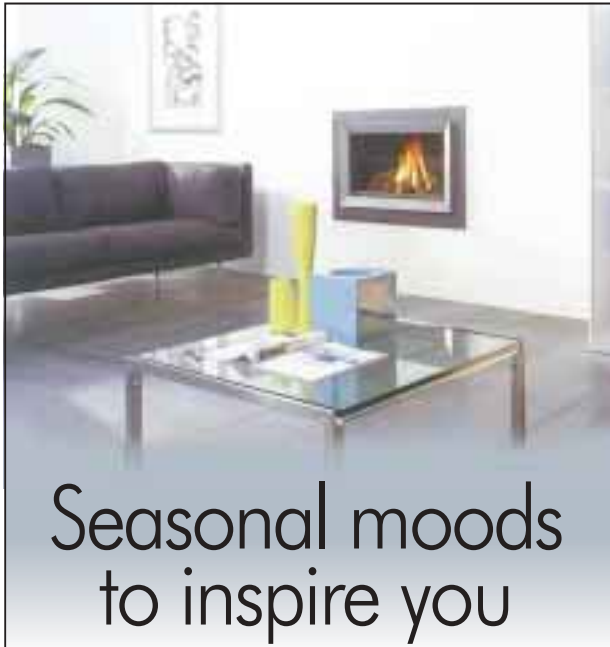


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NE shopping

The glassblowers at Phoenix Hot Glass Studio use traditional skills and tools to create beautiful pieces – and they want members of the public to watch them work.
CHRISTEN PEARS reports



FASCINATED:
Roger Tye

THE heat is almost unbearable but with the furnace at a constant 1,050 degrees, that is hardly surprising. Even with the double doors thrown open, I find it oppressive, but glassblowers Roger Tye and John McGibbon work here for up to eight hours a day.

"You get used to it after a while," says Roger, who owns Phoenix Hot Glass.

There is something almost magical about glass. Looking at a paperweight or vase, it's difficult to believe that something so hard and brittle could once have been so soft and malleable.

"I think people are just intrigued by the process of glass blowing. You can pick up a piece of glass and never really think about how it is made. To actually see pieces being made and fired increases people's awareness and shows them how involved it can actually be.

"As more and more manufacturing is gong abroad, people aren't able to see the manufacturing process. Maybe they aren't interested any more but when they do have the opportunity to see someone make glass, it arouses their curiosity and appreciation. You can come in and watch us and we talk to people as we go along about the process. They then have a story to tell about the piece they buy."

Phoenix Hot Glass is situated on the banks of the river Wear in Durham, just a few minutes from the Market Place. It's part of a growing community of arts and

crafts workshops at Fowlers Yard, a collection of red brick buildings that now house a company that makes metal furniture, a textile artist, a photographer and a microbrewery.

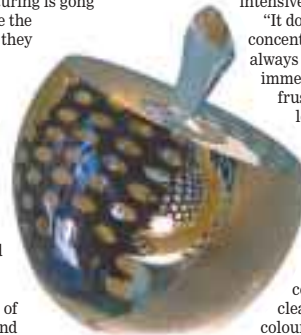
Roger has been fascinated by glass since his days at college in Manchester. He set up a studio in Houghton-le-Spring in 1989 and was later joined by John. The pair moved to the National Glass Centre in Sunderland when it opened but transferred to Durham last year after differences emerged with the centre's management.

Using traditional skills and tools, Roger and John create beautiful pieces that range from paperweights and perfume bottles to bowls and vases. Some are solid blocks of vivid colour, others have a delicate, shimmering iridescence.

Sometimes, it takes longer to add colour and decoration than it does to shape the piece itself. A simple paperweight can be made in minutes but a larger piece can take an hour of intensive work.

"It does require 100 per cent concentration but that's what I've always loved about glass, it's so immediate. I used to get frustrated with ceramics, how long it took to make the piece and then fire it and have it glazed. With glass, it's finished the next morning."

The studio produces a number of ranges, including Dune, 22 carat gold encased in vibrant colour and Inca, pure, clear glass with a touch of colour. But, says Roger,





Glass act

It does require 100 per cent concentration, but that's what I've always loved about glass...

"customers always expect something new."

New pieces and ranges develop as the pair experiment with techniques so the pieces are always evolving.

"I very rarely sit down with pen and paper. Most of my ideas come out of working the glass and looking at things around me, all sorts of things. I often get ideas from particular colours or the shapes of different objects."

But the studio's philosophy never changes. "We want to supply good quality glass that is functional but highly decorative as well. If it's not in use, you can put it on display rather than keep it at the back of the cupboard."

Phoenix is developing close links with Durham University and already make a number of commemorative presentation pieces, such as engraved bowls and plates. In June, they had an exhibit in the Ever Changing Light glass exhibition in the grounds of Crook Hall. They've made commissions for Nature's World in Acklam, Shell, Sunderland Housing and Cable and Wireless.

But Roger and John's real passion is getting members of the public involved. Anyone can come and watch them work.

"Getting people interested in glass is one of the main reasons we moved here. We're working for most of the day so there's always something going on."



Pictures: ANDY LAMB

● Phoenix Hot Glass Studio is open from 11am to 4pm, Wednesday to Saturday and the gallery is open from 11am to 4pm, Tuesday to Saturday. Call 0191-384 7773 for more information or visit the website at www.phoenixhotglass.com

NE window shopping



SLEEK AND CHIC

If you want to dine in cool sophistication or sleep in stylish luxury, NEXT is the place this autumn. The store is launching its sleek and fresh autumn/winter 2003 home collection with furniture and furnishings for all areas of the house. For a NEXT Directory call 0845 600 7000 or log on to www.next.co.uk

Pictured above: Berlin electric fireplace, £549; set of three spheres, £24.99; side table, £99.99; maharajah lamp, £49.99

SUCKING UP

WITH the housing market still booming, the phrase "unique selling point" is increasingly being used to describe a feature that puts one house above the rest. VacuDuct claim their central vacuum system can add extra value to a property. Instead of buying a conventional vacuum, homeowners can have a powerful vacuum unit installed which is connected to various inlets throughout the house. They can then simply plug in a ten metre,

lightweight, flexible hose into inlets in various rooms, making vacuuming more convenient and removing the problem of dragging a machine up stairs or around landings. The system costs approximately £500 for a modern 2,000 sq ft house and is designed to run for years with minimal maintenance. For more information contact VacuDuct on 0800 783 6264 or log onto www.vacuduct.co.uk

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NE gardening

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Pictures: CHRIS TINSLEY

Location: outskirts of Stokesley, North Yorkshire
Age of garden: 18 months
Three favourite plants: acer palmatum, sambucus 'aurea', iris sibirica
Tool can't live without: pressure washer
Maintenance: weekend mow and weed, no hired help.
Worst job: yearly trim of the leylandii hedge



A fiery front, but cool behind

YOU could nearly miss the entrance to Nicky Mayes' garden. It is tucked away in a small village just outside Stokesley. A friendly wooden gate welcomes you with an old fashioned squeak, and reveals a lumpy path of original cobblestone wobbling up towards the front door.

The path is lined on one side by an old sandstone wall, tufted with fumitory, valerian and lemon balm. The wall bows in the middle, but that only adds to the cottage-like charm of the garden.

The main front garden lies to the right of the path, the middle of which is lawned, mostly with a spongy moss. The top quarter, nearest the road is packed full of herbaceous perennials. A mature eight foot acer palmatum stands guard in the corner with its back squeezed into the mixed hedge separating the garden from that of Nicky's neighbours. This is under-lit by a yellow azalea and a burnt orange shrub rose. Oriental poppies flutter their papery blooms at the front of the border. The smaller and more subtle yellow Welsh poppies only exaggerate the ladybird crimson of their Far Eastern cousins, and mingled amongst the shrubbery of the deep maroon peony officinalis, the flame orange wall flowers and the purple osteospermums help to create a hot border alive with all the heat of an African prairie.

At the other end of the front garden, on a sunken paved arc near the house wall, stands a wrought iron seat. It invites the visitor not to knock on the front door, but to take a little time out to sit down and wrap themselves in a blanket of warm colours. The evening sun sets directly behind the fiery border, and really sets the garden ablaze. It seems the

perfect location for quiet contemplative sundowners.

The back garden is a complete contrast. One side and the bottom are hedged by ten foot high, thick, but well maintained leylandii. Nicky has used the dark green backdrop created by the conifers to really show off the plants. The borders flow down either side of the garden. They are large enough to have depth and run in sumptuous curves down to a wilder (but managed) area at the far end.

The right hand border, which gets the sun in the early morning and last thing in the evening, concentrates on the more unusual plants, many of which have a deep purple hue in their foliage. Near the house are the smaller hellebores and heucheras. The eyes are then drawn to the round mauve leaves of the smoke bush. You have to walk round the curve here to find a patch of ground filled with the prehistoric looking ligularias, rogersias, cimicifugia and acanthus. Out of the huge mounds of foliage will sprout big blousy orange flowers, tall maroon spiked panicles, even larger spears tufted with white spangled petals and stiff rods full of hooded white and purple flowers.

The drama is suffused by a curved bench gently tucked away at the back of the border. It winds you down and begs you sit and watch the wriggling frogs in the small but clear pond



just beside it. A hole in a mossy covered slab of sandstone allows a trickle of water to playfully tickle the pond's surface. The natural stones around the pond came from a demolished barn that once stood where the pond is now. The gaps in-between are stuffed with small geraniums, ferns, creeping campanulas, thyme and sedum.

The meadow meets the back of the pond. Several established fruit trees fill one corner, but the mix of cultured and wild grasses whirl you round to the other corner in which stands a wooden summer house. The harshness of the octagonal structure is softened by a fringe of contorted willow mingled with Brown Turkey fig.

This border sweeps back up again towards the house. It holds many specimen trees, such as the robinia, the forest pansy and the bright green sambucus. As the sun does not pass behind them, they will not create shade in the rest of the garden. In fact, the sun bakes down on this border most of the day, so the under cover is made up of Mediterranean type plants, such as lavender, phlomis, rosemary and, in particular, a huge, velvety, pineapple broom.

It is a garden still in its infancy, but you can already tell, because it has been planned out so well beforehand, that it will mature into something spectacular.

Brigid Press

Don't miss Brigid in The Northern Echo every Saturday

PLANT OF THE MONTH

JAPANESE ANEMONE (*Anemone x hybrida*)

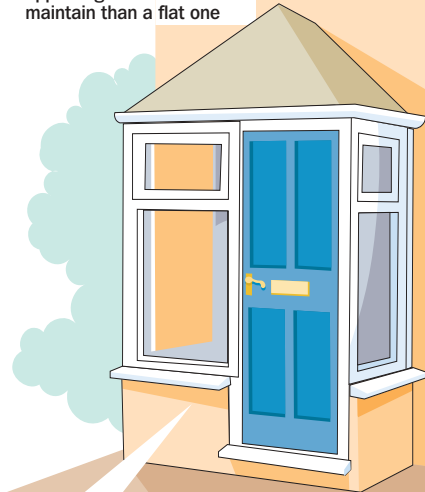
THIS is a vigorous perennial that grows up to three feet high on wiry stems with large deeply divided foliage. It most commonly bears pink, cup-shaped flowers, but can come in a range of white through to deep red. It is a good flower for late in the season, and will grow in sun or shade and does well in clay soil. It does not like to be moved once established. Propagation is best done from root cuttings taken in late autumn. It is commonly known as the Japanese Windflower after its swaying motion in the slightest of breezes. The Latin for wind is 'anemos', from which 'anemone' is derived.



NE d.i.y

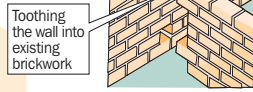
A BIT ON THE SIDE: BUILDING A PORCH

A ridged roof is much more appealing and easier to maintain than a flat one



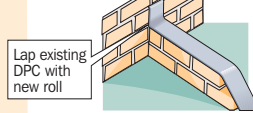
An enclosed porch provides a buffer zone between the warm house and the cold outdoors

Make sure that your porch is firmly fixed to the existing structure of the house



Tooth the wall into existing brickwork

Do not forget to extend the damp-proof course to the porch



Lap existing DPC with new roll

You may prefer to use your existing front door in the new porch and use a lighter glazed door inside

Try to copy existing masonry, cladding or tiles to make your new porch blend in with the rest of the house

Conquering stoops

by RICHARD SPENCER

THEY keep you out of the rain while you fumble for a front door key, provide useful storage for umbrellas and muddy football boots – and even give exotic plants somewhere to grow.

A porch can make your home look special – and can have a variety of important uses.

On wet days they provide somewhere to leave wet shoes and umbrellas which would otherwise be brought into the hall and can also act as a useful “airlock” in winter between the warm house and the cold outdoors. If they have double-glazing, they can also make the hall warmer.

A large porch can be used to park bikes and prams and even the family pet and it can also improve security for your home.

Before you start to plan your porch, check with your local authority. Porches do not usually require planning permission, but you must be sure of where you stand before starting work.

There are several options. If your door lies flush with the house wall, and you do not even have a canopy over it, an add-on porch is the obvious solution. The only restriction is whether you have enough space.

You can either build an open porch, which is a canopy with two side walls, or put up a fully enclosed structure with a separate door, and possibly windows as well. A canopy is cheaper but does not have the obvious advantages of a weather-proof enclosed porch.

If your house already has a canopy over the front door, you can often use this as the basis for the construction of a fully enclosed porch. This will involve filling in the space between the ground level and the canopy. You will need to lay a foundation slab to match the extent of the canopy, unless the existing doorstep is large enough to act as such.

The construction work is quite straightforward, but you must make sure the infilling material is securely fixed to the existing house wall and the canopy. The structure should also be damp-proofed.

If your house has a projecting single-storey bay window alongside the front door, it is worth considering extending the roof of the

bay so that it can act as a canopy across the front door, and then infilling the area beneath the new canopy to create an enclosed porch.

If you have a deeply recessed front door, you can easily create an enclosed porch by filling the front of the recess with a tailor-made frame containing an outer door and, if space permits, a glazed side and top windows.

The secret is to make the porch look part of the original house, so careful attention to detail is important. How you create the porch is a matter of personal choice. Try to use similar materials to those used on the facade, copying masonry and rendering, cladding or tiles as appropriate and also adopting the same door and window styles.

You may be able to use your existing front door as the porch's door, replacing it with a plain or glazed inner door.

As for the roof, copying the style of the house's roof is the best option, and a ridged or monopitch tiled roof is far more attractive than a flat one.

A good idea is to look around your neighbourhood and see what has been done to houses similar to your own.

Once the porch is built, make sure it is secure and seal the door with draught strips. Finally, add a porch light and make sure that the name or number of your house is easily seen.

QUICK FIX

Can I fill the cracks in the rendering on my house with mortar?

Yes, you can make a repair using cement mortar or exterior filler provided the movement that caused the crack has stabilised.

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ART FACTORY: the upstairs gallery space, above and right; Andy Beiman, far right; the gallery entrance and a flying horse sculpture, below

Taking the

Biscuit

With original art costing from £20 to £20,000, there is something for everyone at The Biscuit Factory. CHRISTEN PEARS visits Europe's biggest space for contemporary art

THE art gallery - presere of a human, a sterile, white space without windows, lit only by halogen. People huddle in little groups in front of the art. The artist's name is never rising above a whisper. Not at The Biscuit Factory... The enormous red brick building is warm and welcoming, flooded with light. You can buy a piece of art even if you only have £20.

At 35,000sq ft, the gallery is Europe's biggest centre for contemporary art offering everything from original oil paintings to modernist sculpture. The first prints to Vietnamese haquer work and ceramics by local artists. We are trying to break down the barriers between the art and the public. The space that makes it very easy for people to come here," says manager Andy Beiman. "When people go to a gallery, they worry whether they'll be able to find something they like. At the Biscuit Factory, we don't have to buy."

Projects such as the Aungel of the North and the BALYIC along with the Biscuit Factory are just a few of the many projects that have been commissioned for art in the North-East.



Picture: BRIAN CLOUGH

We've certainly tapped into a thirst for the arts. A lot of people are coming to us - and not just from the North-East

months interest free credit is also available. "I say these are pieces from £20 to £20,000. Everyone can buy something no matter what their budget," says Andy.

Unlike most galleries, the displays at The Biscuit Factory are not only contemporary but also include some of the most famous works of art ever brought in. Each time someone visits, they'll be able to see a new selection of pieces.

On average, there are more than 100 works on display, including those by John Boyd, Sonia Rollo, Veda Hallows and Richard Kidd.

Regular masterclasses and workshops aim to break down the barriers

between artist and customer, and there are opportunities to watch artists at work.

Ramy and Andy hope the gallery will nurture young artists, preventing a brain drain out of the region.

"The North-East has a strong tradition of artists and some of the best art in the world. It's a shame that so many of our artists find themselves leaving the region to find a better market for their work. There's an incredible buzz about the place."

The Biscuit Factory, Stoddart Street, Newcastle.
 For more information, call 0191-2611109 or visit the website at www.thebiscuitfactory.co.uk

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me and my wardrobe



Radio and TV presenter Judie McCourt lives in London but travels to the North-East every weekend to present two shows on Century FM. Talent-spotted ten years ago while working as an air hostess, she has also worked for Metro radio, TFM and Tyne Tees. Clothes are a lifelong passion.

How would you describe your look?

When friends look in my wardrobe they see an eclectic mish-mash of styles but I'm probably a cool/casual dresser.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

If I'm completely honest it would be a black corset from *Psyche* mainly because it travels well and you can dress it up or down so it's very versatile.

What's your worst fashion buy?

I don't make too many mistakes now because I stick to what I know. My worst buy was a leather basque/corset with trousers to match. It kind of looked OK but I nearly fainted with the heat and tightness. Needless to say, I wore it once.

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

I spent a lot on a white Gucci suit with boots to match. It was more than £2,000.

Where do you shop?

Ever since I moved to Teesside nine years ago I've shopped at *Psyche*. It's fab. The staff are brilliant and they always have loads of different styles which is important for the different jobs and events I'm involved in. I also go to a design house called Greener Lavelle where, if you give them a few days, they can make anything! They do the best corsets and because they're made-to-measure, they're perfect.

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

I have to say Liz Hurley is a style icon of mine. She always looks fab, even when she's at a garden centre. She makes a big effort with clothes which I like and she wears them well.



My worst buy was a leather basque with trousers to match. It looked OK but I nearly fainted with heat



Pictures: CHRIS TINSLEY

When grey hair strikes, you can look ten years younger with the right style and care regime

JUST as we reach the prime of our lives, nature plays a cruel trick and stops their production of melanin, the substance that gives hair its natural colour and softness. Hair can become wiry and coarse.

Hormonal changes can also mean that hair begins to grow through finer and thinner.

Statistics show that half the population are 50 per cent grey by the age of 50. On dark-haired people, the grey is more noticeable and can look hard. Blondes are luckier, as the grey blends with their natural colour, giving them a fairer look.

"The good news," says celebrity hairdresser Trevor Sorbie, "is that you can enhance, blend, disguise or cover your grey hair and, by adjusting the products you use and the way you style your hair, you can maximise its new texture to great effect."

Colour

Hide the first few grey hairs with a vegetable-based or semi-permanent colour in the same shade as your natural colour. The result will last six-eight shampoos, gradually washing out. Or mask up to 50 per cent grey hair with a longer-lasting or semi-permanent colour that fades after around 20 shampoos.

Disguise 75 per cent grey hair with a mixture of low and highlights. On the darker sections, go for lighter shades; on the lighter sections, warmer shades. This can only be done at a salon and will need redoing every three to four months. Replace colour completely by using a permanent colour, that grows out leaving a regrowth (roots will need retouching every four-six weeks.) Choose a shade slightly lighter than your original colour to avoid any hardness.

Should you do it yourself or go to a salon?

The first time you have colour, go to a salon to see a specialist. Ask friends about where they get their hair coloured as this is one of the easiest ways to find a good colourist. If you do decide to colour at home then follow the instructions to the letter and do the recommended strand and skin tests.

Is it better to go lighter or darker as you get older?

Whether darker or lighter shades are better for you will depend on your hair and skin tone. Generally, as we age, our skin tone softens, so this is usually best reflected in the colour, too. Don't forget, if you have a tendency to flush, this needs to be considered on the final colour choice.

I usually love my grey hair but it looks yellow and dirty. What can I do?

Use a specialist shampoo and conditioner to remove unwanted yellow tones from snowy hair. These are normally blue and whilst they look rather alarming, the result is very effective as they tone the hair and add a silvery sheen.

How do I make my hair feel softer?

Grey hair tends to be coarse and wiry so you need a moisturising shampoo and conditioner that softens and nourishes the hair. Trevor Sorbie Professional Rejuvenate, is tailor-made for the complex needs and demands of mature hair. Try Moisturising Shampoo for dry, coarse or permed hair, £4.49, 250ml followed by Moisturising



Glad to be grey

HI-HO SILVER: ageing doesn't mean you have to settle for dull hairstyles

Conditioner for dry, coarse or permed mature hair, £4.49, 250ml. Keep the conditioner away from the root area because, when the hair is white, the scalp tends to be oilier.

How do I make my hair feel fuller?

You need to choose shampoos and conditioners that add volume by coating each hair with a fine film of polymers. After shampooing, towel dry hair and use a volumising spray for mature hair.

What cut should I have?

Hairstyle crisis times seem to be 40, 50, 60 and 70 when women often consider if they should have their hair cut short. There are no rules and, whilst ponytails are not a good look at 60, many women of this age, and older, have long hair which they wear in beautiful chignons and elegant French pleats. However, if your hair texture has

dramatically changed, you may like to try a shorter cut. Discuss with your hairdresser before you restyle, and make sure they show you how to apply the right styling product.

Watch how they style your hair so you can recreate your new look at home. Also, if you have been used to having long hair and only cut it occasionally, remember that a shorter cut will need re-shaping every six weeks to keep it looking good.

What electrical equipment should I use?

Invest in high quality electrical equipment. Always rough-dry hair to remove moisture, then section and clip out of the way. Dry, one section of hair at a time using the brush to smooth and shape. Switch to cold shot at end of drying to "set" the hair into shape before working on next section in same way. For between shampoo pick-me-ups, you can't beat a set of heated rollers.

Diary of a make-up artist

ALLISON MCKAY

THERE are bonuses and pitfalls in every line of work. As a session hair and make-up artist, the highlights are the travelling and working with so many interesting people. Unfortunately, you never quite know where you will be and what you will be doing next week.



This last month has been quite hectic as the majority of shoots have all been last-minute. It has been a case of a phone call and two hours later I am sitting on the train bound for Kings Cross. My bag is always ready and packed for any hair and make-up encounter.

One last-minute shoot was at a studio in Kentish Town, working on the Boots Christmas Make-up Collections. Then I had to whizz over to National Magazine House to do the make-up for Lorraine Candy, editor of Cosmopolitan, for a feature in The Mail on Sunday's You magazine.

But famous or not, now is the time of year we want to hang onto summer... and those hard-won tans.

As the sun fades, it is a good idea to keep your tan looking fresh by exfoliating regularly and applying fake tan, preferably every week. When applying fake tan to the face, I prefer to use a cosmetic sponge to ensure an even coating. Applying Vaseline lightly over the cheeks and mouth can also give a sensual twist to a dewy complexion.

HOW TO ACHIEVE A SEXY, SMOLDERING LOOK

1. Apply under-eye concealer, light-reflective foundation and powder as preferred.
2. Using a white pencil, line the inner rim of the eyes, top and bottom. Apply chocolate brown eyeshadow along the crease line only, starting at the outer corner of the eye and working inwards towards the nose. Be careful not to go too far inwards as this can enhance the size of the nose. Using eyeshadow in a slightly lighter tone, smudge a line beneath your lower lashes.
3. Use a fine brush to apply a line of black eyeshadow to the upper lash line. Smudge it into the chocolate shadow in the crease of the eye.
4. Curl lashes, then apply lashings of black mascara – the lashes should be combed before the mascara dries – and, when it has dried, add a second coat.
5. Using a claret lip pencil, trace slightly outside the lip line. Fill in with the same pencil, and then fill in with a deep red lipstick. Blot, re-apply and cover with a natural lip gloss.
6. Finish by sweeping a light dusting of bronzing powder over the cheeks, forehead and jaw-line area. I find it best to use a white brush for this so you can see if too much powder is on the brush. It is also a good idea to apply a shimmery bronzer to the shoulder area, if visible.

● Allison recently moved back to the North-East from London, where she was a cover girl stylist for top magazines.

DID YOU KNOW?

If you use an anti-ageing cream, you could be making your skin more sensitive to the sun. Products containing alpha-hydroxy acids (fruit acids used to exfoliate the skin) can increase sensitivity to UV rays by up to 18 per cent. Counter the problem by using a sun screen with an SPF of at least 15.

Why real men want cosmetic surgery

Sir Cliff Richard has just admitted trying Botox to keep his wrinkles at bay, and Barry Manilow has been photographed leaving a plastic surgery clinic disguised in a woman's blonde wig, baseball cap and dark glasses. NELL RAVEN finds out whether more men are opting to fo under the knife, and why...

COSMETIC surgery has been a socially acceptable part being a female celebrity for so long that these days it's more often a question of who hasn't, rather than who has, gone under the knife. But with the increasing pressure on male stars to look as good as their counterparts, many famous men are now taking their lead and opting for a quick fix to their ageing problems.

Sir Cliff Richard has admitted in an interview that he started using Botox three years ago to keep his wrinkles at bay. The singer, who turns 64 in October, stopped getting injections because it was making his eyebrows droop, but the experience has not put him off plastic surgery altogether.

He said: "I'm not against the principle of cosmetic surgery. If my career's still going strong when I'm 70 and everything's beginning to sag, yes, I'll have plastic surgery. And I won't care who knows."

Meanwhile Barry Manilow was recently photographed leaving a plastic surgery clinic disguised in a woman's long blonde wig, baseball cap and dark glasses. The 57-year-old singer is understood to have had a complete upper and lower facelift, including the removal of drooping skin from the eyelids and general tightening of facial skin.

According to The Harley Medical Group (HMG), which has ten clinics in the UK and Ireland, there has been an increase in the number of men seeking cosmetic surgery.

Spokeswoman Louise Braham says: "The estimated growth for the cosmetic surgery sector in the past five years is approximately 30 per cent. Of all the patients treated last year, 35 per cent were male, with the average age band ranging from between 22 and 37. One of the major market factors which fuelled this growth is the new breed of British male now opting for a variety of regular treatments and surgical procedures."

In America, the number of men opting for plastic surgery has also risen dramatically. A recent survey by the American Academy of Facial and Plastic Reconstructive Surgeons found men's use of fat injections to soften deep wrinkles jumped 497 per cent last year from the previous year and the use of Botox injections rose 88 per cent.

Alex Karidis, a plastic surgeon at St John and St Elizabeth Hospital in London, says men's choice of surgery differs from women's. "Fat is prevalent in both men and women so liposuction is always in demand. Men concentrate more on their chest, love handles and stomach, while women have fatty deposits in the thighs.

"Eye-bag surgery is particularly popular



THE top five male procedures at the Harley Medical Group are **penis extensions** (at a cost around £3,000), followed by **rhinoplasty** (nose job), **liposuction** (costing £3,540 for the chest), **otoplasty** (ear correction), and finally **botox** (£200) and **collagen** treatments. **Laser hair removal** is also a popular option.

in the 40 to 50 age group. Even if they are inherited, huge puffy eye-bags may make men feel less confident in job interviews. Men don't need facelifts as early as women because their skin is somewhat thicker and more resilient to the ageing process, but later on in life, maybe 55 or 60, men start asking for facelifts. A lot of guys opt for Botox to smooth out their wrinkles - I have it done myself in fact."

Karidis says more men are seeking cosmetic enhancement because society has become more demanding. "In this social workplace men have to look reasonably fit and well. If you are looking for a new job and you know competition is younger and more dynamic, you have to try your best. Society makes it necessary to seek some sort of augmentation."

Lee Kynaston, grooming editor at Men's Health magazine, agrees there has been a shift in society's attitude. "There has been a



FACING THE FUTURE: Barry Manilow and Cliff Richard have both opted for cosmetic procedures

sea change in men's grooming generally. Men's attendance at health spas and grooming emporiums are up by 28 per cent this year.

"Ten years ago magazines had hardly any grooming editorial at all, and now you see stacks of it. You see companies advertising directly to men. Then you have role models like David Beckham, who is a very masculine and plays a very masculine sport, yet takes care of himself. All this has given permission to men to buy into that culture of looking good."

According to an HMG survey, 61 per cent of men opt for cosmetic surgery for 'locker room confidence' rather than 'bedroom confidence'. In other words, men seem to be more concerned now with the impressions of their own sex, rather than with the opinion of women.

Braham says: "Men are increasingly concerned with the impression they make on other men, in the way that women have been paranoid about the behind-the-back whispering of their own sex for years. We have noted that the main difference with men is their utmost concern to have inconspicuous results and the maximum confidentiality."

But although grooming is now more acceptable, men are still more secretive about their surgery than women. Karidis says: "By and large heterosexual men are more secretive about having it done than women - although in the gay community they are a bit more easy-going. Many men think it's still a women-only thing."

However, Karidis expects male plastic surgery to become increasingly acceptable until one day men may even freely admit to having it done. "They are still not going to come out and say it in the pub because they're worried about what their mates are going to say, but slowly the tide is turning."

Of course not everyone is happily jumping

on the bandwagon. Last year in an interview with US Magazine, Robert Redford launched a withering attack on his Hollywood colleagues who try to defy the ageing process by having plastic surgery.

He said: "I'm not jumping on the Hollywood bandwagon and turning the clock back with a facelift. So what if my face is falling apart? I don't give a damn."

He is not the only star who has chosen to wear his age lines and grey hair with pride. Sean Connery and Paul Newman are septuagenarians now and they have opted to age as nature intended.

And despite their lack of plastic surgery, both Connery and Newman still have the ability to make women's hearts go all aflutter - and both regularly feature in "world's sexiest men" polls.

Kynaston says: "If you feel a kind of psychological necessity to get it done because whatever you dislike about yourself stops you from getting things done because you are so self-conscious, then by all means, why not have it done."

"But when it comes to sheer vanity, I am kind of torn. My own personal feeling is that I cannot imagine why anybody would want to book themselves into a hospital to go under a general anaesthetic and get cut open."

"But then again I'm only 36. When I get to 45, I might change my mind."

Fat is prevalent in both men and women so liposuction is always in demand. Men concentrate more on their chest, love handles and stomach

SureSlim is a medical eating plan that rebalances the metabolism. CHRISTEN PEARS reports

THERE are hundreds of people who constantly follow a diet but never lose weight. It can be extremely frustrating and demoralising, especially when a friend or colleague on the same diet sheds pounds. But the diet that works for one person does not necessarily work for all, and overeating may not be the problem. SureSlim is a medical eating plan that rebalances the metabolism by controlling the hormones that determine body weight. It is not based on calories and is not a starvation diet. There are no pills or milkshakes and slimmers are asked to eat three balanced meals a day.

"We look at everything from a medical perspective and we are interested in treating the cause rather than the symptoms. If you have a balanced diet, balanced sugar and insulin levels, everything starts to work properly and you also start to lose weight," says Daryl Whitworth, chief executive of SureSlim UK.

The diet was developed in South Africa in 1996 by a woman who had struggled with obesity all her life. She finally turned to the medical profession, working with doctors to develop an eating plan to control her weight. SureSlim was brought to the UK in 2000 by Daryl and her business partner Alan Styant. Daryl had just moved back to her home town of Consett after 20 years working in London as a stockbroker when Alan told her about a trip he had made to South Africa to try the programme.

They were both so impressed with SureSlim, they decided to bring the diet to the UK. Although they hoped to open their first clinic in Newcastle's Grainger Street, there were delays with the lease and they decided to open in Surrey instead. There are currently 12 clinics across the UK and there are plans to open 60 more in the next year, including two in Newcastle.

So far, more than 3,000 people in the UK have tried the programme, which uses a series of blood tests to establish their problem.

Daryl says: "SureSlim isn't like a normal diet. The eating plan is custom made to suit each client so they know that it's going to work for them. They can still go out and enjoy life while being on a diet."

Before starting the programme, clients undergo a series of tests to check their blood count, cholesterol, kidney and liver functions, glucose levels and thyroid function.

The results are then assessed by doctors who use the information, together with food dislikes, medication and medical history to produce an eating plan which is specific for that individual. Each diet is designed to stimulate or suppress hormones which help rebalance their metabolism, which results in rapid weight loss – a minimum of 10lbs a



DIET GURU: Daryl Whitworth has brought SureSlim to the UK

All a matter of balance

month. Other benefits include reduced cholesterol, improved sleep patterns, lower blood pressure and an end to food cravings.

Clients are supported on a one-to-one basis, at a time to suit them, throughout their weight loss and for two months after they reach their goal weight to ensure they can control and maintain their weight loss.

● For more information, call the SureSlim Helpline on 0870 321 4014 or visit the website at www.sureslimuk.com

PERI PERI PRAWNS

A healthy alternative to deep-fried seafood, stir-frying is a fast and healthy method of cooking. Cooking in a non-stick wok will help to keep fat levels to a minimum. Use this recipe as a quick and easy starter or serve with stir-fried vegetables as a main meal.

Ingredients (serves 2)

130g prawns with or without the shell, according to preference.
Peri-peri sauce
1 large clove of garlic, crushed
Juice of half a lemon
Grated lemon zest
1 tsp. fresh ginger, crushed
1 tbsp. water
1 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
1 tsp. chopped parsley
Pinch of chilli powder or ¼ fresh chilli, seeded and chopped
Herbamare salt or Ina Paarmann's Seasoned Salt
Ground black pepper
Cooking oil spray

Instructions

- Defrost prawns if they are frozen, defrosting very slowly in a colander over a bowl. Dry defrosted prawns with wads of paper towel.
 - With a sharp knife, slice each prawn down the back and remove the innards. Mix the peri-peri sauce ingredients together and place in the microwave for 30 seconds on high.
 - Spray a wok liberally with cooking oil spray.
 - Fry the prawns on a high heat for about one minute until they start to stick to the pan.
 - Add half the peri-peri sauce, stir-fry for a few more minutes and then add the rest of the sauce (they should not be cooked for longer than five minutes).
 - Turn heat off, pile onto a plate and enjoy with a fresh squeeze of lemon juice and vegetables.
- TIP: Keeping the prawns in their shells protects the delicate meat and retains the natural juices.**

LIFE COACH

INTENTION:

A FORCE TO BE HARNESSSED

"BE careful what you wish for". Whoever said that knew a lot about the power of intention. Knowing what you want is very powerful. It is powerful because our thoughts really can create our reality. When we are clear about what we want in life – whether it's a new job, new home or even a new relationship – our minds are so powerful that we begin to seek out what we want perhaps without even knowing it. We

start to become more aware of what we're looking for everywhere we go.

What really propels this is writing down as clearly and in as much detail as you can, what you want. Then consciously begin to become aware of opportunities that come



your way. Be open to your goals being met, perhaps in a way you never imagined.

Juliette Lee

Juliette is available at www.sunflowercoaching.com

NE slimming

Tips for a flatter tummy

IMPROVE YOUR POSTURE

FEW of us feel confident about our tummy; it's the one area of a woman's body that rarely seems ideal. And years of poor posture only serve to enhance a rounded tummy, since only a strong back will encourage a firmer stomach. Pull it in and stand tall – it'll make a huge difference to your overall shape, as well as that of your tummy.

In pregnancy the skin and muscles around the tummy stretch way beyond belief but with hard work it is possible to regain your shape. It is important to persevere, because by keeping your stomach muscles fit and firm, you will help to prevent debilitating back pain later in life.

Exercise is the only way to improve your tummy. The best exercise for a flatter tummy is Pilates, which helps to stretch and strengthen specific muscle groups.

With all abdominal exercises it is important to breathe correctly. Always take a deep breath in as you do the movement, holding your tummy in as you move. And remember, with all sit-up tummy exercises you shouldn't have to sit up from lying down or you will strain yourself. Research now shows that the smaller, slower and more accurate the movement, the more effective the exercise.

● Don't slouch

Whether you are walking, standing or sitting, you should try to keep your back in a straight line. Try this Pilates stretching technique which helps to adopt a straighter back. Stand against a wall with your entire back pressed against it. Breathe in and pull your tummy right in against the wall as you breathe out. Then slowly roll your neck and upper back downward, as if you're lifting each vertebra off the wall as you roll down. Only go as far as is comfortable.

● Try to avoid carrying a toddler

Otherwise we tend to curve the back and stick the tummy out to support the extra weight, developing bad posture, when we should be pulling it all in.

● Buy the right mattress

Sleep on a soft mattress on a firm base, not a sprung mattress. This is the best type of bed for anyone with back problems.

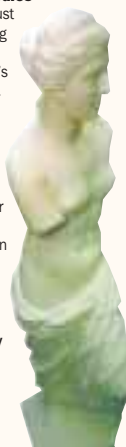
● Instant remedies

Sorry, but there just aren't any. Firming up your tummy takes time, but it's definitely worth it.

● Tighten Up

Look for "knicker grippers", the best high-waisted tummy control underwear with Lycra to hold everything firmly in place.

From Good Housekeeping: Timeless Beauty by Jo Glanville-Blackburn (HarperCollins)



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gadget man



The laptop that just keeps on going...

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

It's tough, it's smart and it runs for an age on its batteries. In fact, we've fallen head over heels for the little Dana, which is streets ahead of the opposition

LAPTOPS are great. There's nothing like taking your computer with you when you're on the move. A decent laptop allows you to remain productive even when you're away from your desk.

Unfortunately, laptops also have very significant drawbacks. They may be fast (the very best usually rival the processing power of a mid-range desk top machine) but they are also fragile. Unless you pay thousands for a "rugged-ised" chassis you can't expect your laptop to survive more than the most gentle of knocks.

Then there's the battery life. Or lack of it. As processing power has increased so has the demand on hard-pressed power supplies. Intel has sought to address this problem with its latest chips but even the most power efficient laptops will struggle to run for more than three hours at a time. Taking your laptop usually means packing a power-supply and hoping there's a plug where you are going.

For a while it seemed as though Microsoft and its partners had the answer. Windows CE handhelds grew and grew until the final form factor made them into sub-notebooks. Devices such as the Compaq Aero 8000 and the Hewlett Packard 820 boasted colour screens and full-sized keyboards.

These devices didn't suffer the usual laptop malaise of booting up times or corrupted hard-drives because they didn't have such a thing. All the software was held on a chip. If the machine became confused all you had to do was reset it.

Unfortunately these hand-held PC pros (as they were known) still had battery problems. Until now it seemed a though hard-pressed mobile professionals and students would have to wait until battery technology caught up with the rest of the laptop.

The AlphaSmart Dana looks a bit like an old Tandy TRS 80, an early type of laptop that ran off its own proprietary operating system using normal AA batteries. The LCD screen was tiny (just a handful of lines) and the whole thing was hardly any bigger than a keyboard.

The Dana looks almost exactly the same. There's a full-sized keyboard (with a nice action) and above it a crystal clear black-and-white screen.

The march of time means this screen boasts

far greater resolution than the old Tandy. It's also backlit and angled upwards for better viewing. Around the back are two slots for expansion memory cards, an infrared port for beaming text to another PC and a plug in cable to connect with your desktop.

Best of all, the AlphaSmart runs on a rechargeable battery that gives a phenomenal 40 hours run time between plug-ins. To put that into context, the AlphaSmart has a better life than the Psion Series 5, itself a paragon of parsimonious power consumption.

Even better, if the battery does fail when you're miles from a power cord it's a simple matter to pop the back cover and drop in three AA alkalines. Thirty seconds after receiving a low battery warning, you are up and running again. Fantastic.

Writing long documents is a cinch. It's just the same as tapping away at your regular desktop. The AlphaSmart is more than just a glorified word processor, though. Thanks to the Palm OS 4, it's a fully-fledged computer. PDA lovers will recognise the operating system. It's the same one as used in millions of Palm palm-sized PCs across the world.

So you get the same software suite (calendar, calculator, desktop diary, alarms, etc.) and the same ability to run any of the thousands of Palm programmes and utilities to be found on the Internet.

That opens up a world of spreadsheets, image editors, games and useful power saving programmes; many of which are free. How many other laptops can boast the same level of compatibility even those running Windows?

It all works tremendously well. In a week of hard use there wasn't a single day when I didn't find the AlphaSmart to be a boon. By the time it came for the little Dana to go back, I was hooked.

It's tempting to call the Dana the ultimate PDA, but doing so wouldn't be doing it justice. If you run a business and need a tough little laptop (the Dana can survive a drop from six-feet, according to AlphaSmart but I didn't put that claim to the test) that runs for an age on its batteries and does everything you need, then your IT department would be crazy to consider anything else.

The AlphaSmart Dana costs £299 and can be purchased online from www.alphasmart.co.uk.



Family affair: Judy Bell with son Justin and daughter Katie. Right: in the factory

When Judy Bell started making cheese in her kitchen 16 years ago she had no idea how successful her business would be. She talks to CHRISTEN PEARS about the award-winning Shepherds Purse cheeses

GEOGRAPHICALLY, the new dairy at Shepherds Purse is only a few metres from where Judy Bell started making cheese in her kitchen farmhouse – just across the lawn, in fact. But in terms of business, it is miles away.

Judy was working as an osteopath when she first became interested in cheesemaking in 1997. Sixteen years on, she's an astute businesswoman whose award-winning cheeses are available in supermarkets across the UK.

"I had no idea what was going to happen when I started out. It was just something I was interested in and I thought I would give it a go," she explains.

"I became aware of the problems some people had with bovine products. There were lots of people out there with an intolerance. At the same time, I became aware that local farmers were beginning to milk sheep. I thought it sounded quite interesting and did some investigating."

She and her husband Nigel farmed four acres of arable land near Thirsk and although things were going fairly well, they were keen on the idea of diversification.

"Nigel thought it was awfully Good Life, milking sheep and making a bit of cheese and yoghurt but the bank manager thought it could work."

They bought some sheep in 1987 and started producing milk. At the time, Judy had never milked a cow, let alone a sheep, so it was a steep learning curve. But she soon got the hang of it and then went on a cheesemaking course. When she came back, she began experimenting with cheese recipes at home and the couple started selling their products to delicatessens in North Yorkshire.

By 1989, they had built up a regular round but the business really started to take off when Judy discovered Yorkshire Pantry, a group of food and drink producers who offer mutual support and promote their products both in the county and beyond.

"Until then I had felt isolated but this enabled me to network with other businesses. I was able to speak to



Picture: RICHARD DOUGHTY

The ewe's Blue

experienced cheesemakers and learn from them. It gave me a lot of confidence and pointed me in the right direction."

One invaluable piece of advice she received was publicise her cheeses by entering shows. In 1989, she entered the Great Yorkshire Show for the first time. Although many people refused to sample the cheese once they knew it was made from sheep's milk, those who were brave enough to try were impressed.

Later that year, they entered the Nantwich International Cheese Show, the biggest of its type in the country, and won the speciality cheese class. They have won dozens of awards since, keeping Shepherds Purse in the public eye and driving the business forward.

After Nantwich in 1993, Judy was approached by Tesco and asked if she would consider putting her cheeses into the store. The supermarket had started selling locally made products in its delicatessens and by March 1994, Judy's cheeses were on the shelves.

Soon afterwards, the buyer at Tesco Judy had been working with moved to Asda but they continued their relationship. As well as selling Shepherd's Purse cheeses, the supermarket asked Judy to develop a Master of Cheese qualification for staff. She trained workers from every store in the country, ensuring they knew exactly what the products tasted like and how to sell them.

But supermarket sales are just part of the business' success. Olde Yorke was on the menu on Concorde, while Buffalo Blue will be on the shelves in Minnesota later this year.

"In the early days, we produced lots of

little cheeses but as the business has grown, we have concentrated on just a few. We have made some quirky ones, like cheeses made to look like Christmas puddings and coffee flavoured cheese but they were just one-offs."

The current Shepherds Purse range comprises six cheeses, five of which are blue and the sixth is feta. Unlike a lot of blue cheeses, which have an overpowering, bitter taste, these are subtle and creamy.

Celebrity chef Brian Turner is so impressed he has produced a range of recipes using each of the cheeses. Judy first met Brian in 1996 while he was filming a pilot for a programme *Cooking in the Castle* and they have kept in touch.

"He's a great ambassador for Yorkshire food. When we were looking to get a celebrity on board, he was the natural choice. He's developed some wonderful recipes. We cooked them all and tried them all and they were delicious."

Although Shepherds Purse is now a limited company, it is still very much a family business. Judy is chief executive, although she describes herself as "general dogsbody". Nigel is a member of the board of directors, while son Justin is marketing director and Katie is sales and marketing manager.

"We have kept a family feel, which I think is important but we are expanding all the time and the new dairy is a big part of that. My aim is to have Yorkshire Blue in every household in the country. It's one of those cheeses that you can't put down."

• Shepherds Purse Cheeses
(01845) 587220 or
www.shepherdspurse.co.uk

NE food

EATING OUT

SPICE OF INDIA, NORTHALLERTON



FORMERLY Bassetts, the eatery on Friarage Street, Northallerton, is now an Indian restaurant and already appears to be stirring up some excitement in Northallerton, if our visit was anything to go by.

The newly-opened Spice of India was very busy, and although we had reserved a table, being ten minutes late meant it had already gone to more deserving – punctual – clients. Yet no food seemed to come out of the kitchen for at least half an hour. Maybe the excitement of a new restaurant in town had taken even the chef by surprise.

The Spice of India, which has two floors of dining, has the atmosphere of a hotel dining room with brightly-lit chandeliers; yet it is informal in its bustling ambience and casually-dressed clientele.

Unfortunately our table was near the crowded door area, so we were surrounded by waiting takeaway customers for most of our evening.

Starters: The menu includes royal mixed kebab (a sheek kebab, chicken and lamb tikka), tandoori chicken, king prawn butterfly, onion bhaji, aloo chatt, garlic mushrooms and chicken pakora, as well as mulligatawny soup and dhall soup.

We began with poppadoms and went on to a king prawn bhaji on puree and a sheek kebab. My husband Ian enjoyed the prawns but felt the sauce they were in was a little rich. Ironically, my kebab was a little bland.

Main courses: There were some unusual dishes on the menu, as well as the more ordinary jalfrezi, masala, rogan josh, bhuna and dupiaza meals, which are offered in meat, prawn or vegetable options.

My husband opted for Rass Lamb, in which the lamb was cooked in a clay oven to preserve flavour. The sauce, a mixture of spices and herbs with yoghurt, garam masala, coriander leaves, lemon juice and garlic juice, was deemed too spicy and the meat not as tender as it might be.

I went for a medium hot chicken tikka bahar – chicken cooked with onions, tomatoes, mince meat and chick peas, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Pudding: I chose the Caramel Fantastica, a vanilla and caramel ice cream with chocolate balls, toffee pieces and caramel sauce, which was served in its own little brown plastic tray straight out of the freezer! My husband went for Mango Kulfi, which he described as average.

Our verdict: The Spice of India is worth a visit if you fancy a quick bite, or if you want an informal cheap night out with some friends, but it isn't the place for fine food or a romantic night out.

Our table was annoyingly very wobbly, the Bangla lager we wanted wasn't cold enough to be served. Service was friendly, but fairly slow.

The bill for two people, including two lagers and two glasses of white wine, came to £35.15.

Spice of India, 1A Friarage Street, Northallerton, DL6 1DP (01609 777600)

The young pretender

The Mazda revival continues apace after years in the doldrums. Innovative, modern and sexy designs have sent the sales graph shooting off the paper. IAN LAMMING drives the latest, the Mazda RX8

DRIVERS and their sports cars, they love them. Men, women, young and old, some showing off, others making statements, most in denial, but loving the experience none the less.

Generally, if you err on the side of sporty you can expect to have to compromise. Yes, you'll look great and feel even better but your ever lengthening teeth will rattle as the rock hard suspension fails to soak up any of the bumps. As for carrying capacity, well forget the kids, the in-laws, the friends and the shopping – there won't be the room.

On the whole, sports cars are self indulgent. They are expensive buys and don't make any practical sense. They are toys, play things, sheer extravagances – three more reasons why we love them so much.

Trundle down any road in Britain and within minutes you will see MGs, Alfa Romeos, Audi TTs, BMW Z4s, all new, all shiny, all trying to outdo each other, their drivers looking cool and disinterested in anything else on the road.

But when a line of new sports cars passes

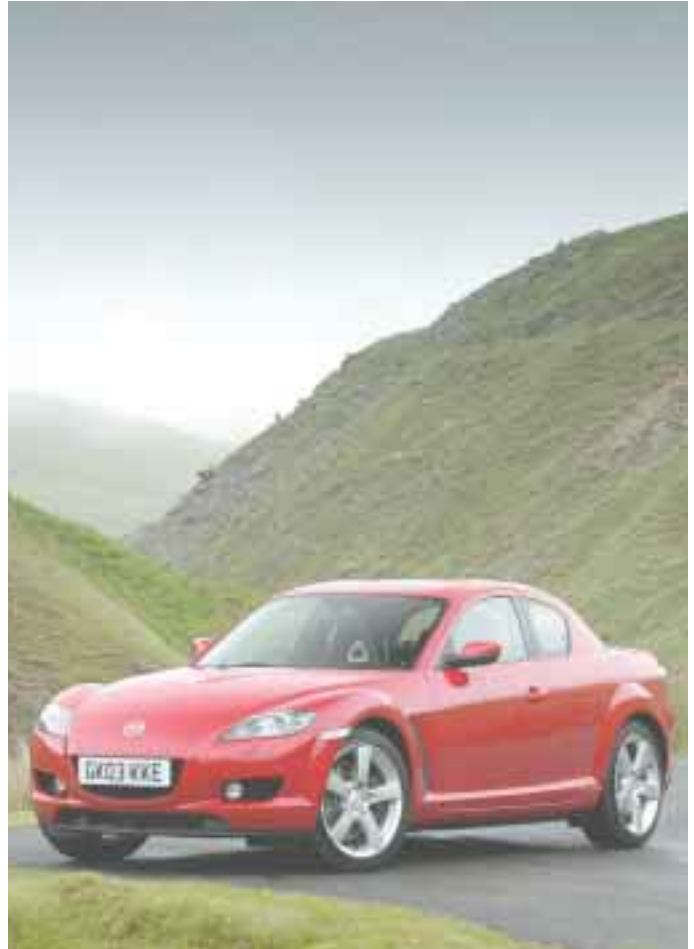
them by on the UK launch of something special, few of the drivers fail to swivel, look and gawp at a young pretender from Mazda. The RX8 is now a reality. It's off the motor show concept stand and on the road. More than 1,000 have already been ordered, 1,500 will be plying their way around the country by the end of the year. And when they do hit the showrooms, people are going to be fighting to get their hands on one. Why? Because Mazda is back, big style, and the RX8 is unique in so many ways.

Unique selling point number 1 (USP1): its engine is like no other on the road. It is fitted with a rotary engine, which is difficult to explain without going all technical. Basically it doesn't have cylinders like conventional engines, it has a big hole with a rotor in it – enough said. The driver won't really care anyway and the only difference is the characteristic flat sound.

The 1.3 litre unit (don't be fooled by that as cubic capacity means little to a rotary engine) is amazingly smooth, free revving and powerful. There are high and low powered versions, the former pushing out

6 It really is a pretty car from all directions, distinctive, fresh, modern, yet harking back to the classic 90s supercar the RX7. Superb proportions, wonderful lines, a genuine stunner and a shape that should not date...

MAZDA RX8



231PS, the latter 192PS. That's power aplenty from either. On paper the entry level model comes with 220Nm of torque, a 60mph sprint time of about seven seconds and a top speed of 139mph. German autobahns willing, your honour. Top spec RX8 gets 211Nm, a six second dash time and top whack of 146mph.

Wind either engine up the rev range – in a controlled and safe fashion, of course – and the RX8 sounds like a superbike on song. Do that regularly enough and your fuel consumption will be in the high twenties. Go steady and it could creep the right side of 30 miles per gallon.

No real compromises with the engine, then, but what about ride? Well, USP2 comes in the form of handling, which is superbly sharp and enjoyable, every bit the sports car, but comfortable too. The electric power steering is razor-like in its ability to cut a new track and there is no cabin roll at all. But what is unique is that this isn't done at the expense of comfort, the RX8 boasting big saloon levels of refinement, making it a pleasure to be in on long distance hauls.

USP3 are the gorgeous looks, aesthetics which change ten times a second depending on the colour, the light, the angle of view, the time of day. It really is a pretty car from all directions, distinctive, fresh, modern, yet harking back to the classic 90s supercar the RX7. Superb proportions, wonderful lines, a genuine stunner and a shape that should not date.

USP4 is practicality. Heavens to Betsy, it's even been touted as a company car, a tax dodger, a fleet vehicle. How can Mazda make such claims? Well it's a 1.3 litre with reasonable emissions, it has four doors – if you look very carefully – is pretty roomy and has a reasonable boot.



Open the conventional front doors and you will see an extra handle on the rear inside edge. Tug that and a second door opens backwards, suicide-style, like on cars of yesteryear. These half doors give better access to the front and rear seats, and, believe it or not, there's a comfortable amount of room in the back, even for adults.

The final USP must be the price. The RX8 looks every bit the supercar. It oozes quality with its deep lustrous paint, top specification and supremely crafted and stylish interior. It's a design that shouts £25,000 at least. In fact ten years ago, the RX7 it replaces was around the £30,000 mark. Yet low and high powered versions cost just £20,000 and £22,000 respectively – two more very good reasons why sports car drivers won't fail to love them.



I don't do rough, which is why it's taken me so long to brave the Andes



For years South America has been a popular destination for young grimy backpackers seeking adventure on a budget. Now you can travel much more easily from the North-East – and in complete luxury. IAN LAMMING reports

Visas are not required for EU citizens.

Travellers with a history of asthma or heart problems, and those over 60, should ask for advice from their doctor before travelling.

The best time to visit Peru is during the dry season between April and September. Daytime temperatures can reach 20C+ but evenings are chilly.

COLOURFUL: a mother, daughter and baby llama. Far right: a classic view of Machu Picchu



A GAGGLE of British backpackers chatters relentlessly like the dawn chorus waiting for the first rays of sun to strike the ancient ruins. They swap tales of derring do, the experiences they have encountered while completing the gruelling 30 mile Inca Trail, spoiling the moment for those around.

The lost Inca City of Machu Picchu is the reason I am in Peru, the yuppie year-outers are the reason I have never been before. And after watching the sun rise over the stupendous city walls, burning away in seconds the pre-dawn mists, it's off for a hearty breakfast to the Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge, the only hotel at the ruins and run to exacting standards by Orient-Express. Sanctuary indeed, leaving the Rough Guide travellers to their grime, insect bites and stained garb.

Me? I don't do rough, which is why it's taken me so long to brave the Andes. I'd much rather see the world in comfort and convenience, which is why the Orient-Express trip is suiting me fine. In fact from Day 1, everything is splendid. From the North of England it couldn't be simpler. Fifteen minutes down the road gets me to Teesside International Airport to board a nice little KLM Fokker 100 passenger jet. Fifty minutes later I'm in Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam, the Dutch gateway to the world, enjoying the nice shops and coffee bars. Board a KLM wide-bodied MD11 (worryingly called the Amy Johnson – I hope we don't disappear) and it takes three movies, three tasty meals, an ice cream, two chapters of my book and 40 winks to reach Bonaire in the Dutch Caribbean. A quick fuel stop there and it's on to Lima.

Swathed in perpetual fog, Lima is no thing of beauty but the coast is being developed, it's unthreatening and there are some really good shops, markets and restaurants.

Sanctuary is again provided by Orient-Express, this time in the form of the Miraflores Park Hotel, an establishment so posh you can even order your own bath butler to run, scent and test the temperature of the water.

"Orient-Express has opened up a whole new market for Peru," says PR manager Joanna

Boyen. "There are people who will not come unless they get their creature comforts and it has opened it up to the older people who might have been nervous about altitude sickness."

Floor-to-ceiling marble, copious amounts of wood, tasteful furnishings and sumptuous bathrooms with dustbin-lid showers abound in Orient-Express hotels. But when the next destination is Cusco they are surpassed by a unique feature the group offers its customers.

The brand new Lan Peru Airbus climbs to 30,000ft on its trip from sea level Lima to mountainous Cusco – but it descends less than 20,000ft to land. At more than 11,400ft the air contains 30 per cent less oxygen than we low level folk are used to. The effect is insidious and 45 minutes after breathing in the first lung full, the first swoon tells me something is wrong. The altitude takes its toll and could ruin a holiday for the worst affected. Dizzy spells, nausea, headaches, heavy limbs and even nightmares can result. In the worst cases it can lead to pulmonary and cerebral oedema.

Orient-Express' beautiful Hotel Monasterio, a delightfully converted 16th century monastery, offers a unique answer – sleep in a room into which oxygen is piped constantly throughout the night. The result is an atmosphere the same as at 8,000ft, saturating the blood with enough O to last you 12 to 14 hours the following day. Guests are also encouraged to drink coca tea, a narcotic brew from the same leaf that proves so popular with many popstars' noses.

Monasterio is sheer delight with cloistered corridors and restaurants, a wonderful chapel, walls hung with original works of art, while the whole place echoes to Gregorian chants.

Dizzy heights of the Inca kingdom

There's an air of calm in a mad but loveable city. The food is good enough for a Michelin star, the service even better. The clay pantile roofed city of Cusco is crazy. Already high from the altitude and coca tea, a 12-year-old boy called Kevin Costner sells me knitted finger puppets of llamas, while leather skinned, toothless grannies pose for pictures with the real thing.

Drive by bus 15 minutes to Poroy and the early morning train to Machu Picchu arrives on the stroke of seven. The Vistadome offers a fishbowl view of one of the great railway journeys of the world. Operated by Orient-Express-owned Peru Rail, it may not be posh enough to carry its moniker but the route is wonderfully scenic through mountains, by rivers and along part of the Inca Trail. It pulls into the ribbon development of Aguas Calientes where buses take travellers on a precipitous 1,500ft ride up to Machu Picchu.

The 31-bed Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge lies just outside the gates of the national treasure and is comfortable and cosy rather than opulent, which is more in keeping with the serenity of the surroundings. It does its best to blend in – it's even painted a natural shade of green – and is run along "green" lines with all water and rubbish being recycled. The service is superb, the scenery breath-taking (metaphorically this time as it lies just 8,200ft above sea level) and when the day-trippers have toddled off home the ancient Inca citadel is yours alone – by torch and moonlight if you want. No one really knows why Machu Picchu was built and abandoned by the Incas. The climb up the overlooking mountain of Huayana Picchu is exhilarating and the ruins are beautiful and moving. It's somewhere everyone finds peace,

even the babbling backpackers, and it's with heavy heart that I leave its boundless charms.

A night in the oxygen back at Hotel Monasterio charges the blood for the train journey to Puno and Lake Titicaca. Still Peru Rail, but first class this time, in armchair comfort, with silver service and an open saloon car. It's only 358 miles across the high plains but it takes nine hours, not that anyone minds, and in the company of friendly Cuban travelling companions and on-train Peruvian performers the time slips by.

In Puno the air is even thinner at 12,700ft but the view of the world's highest saltwater lake is superb and the bird life is fascinating. Unfortunately at 3am the altitude sickness strikes and I have to phone reception for help. My head is about to split open and the porter arrives with narcotic tea, a Panadol and a cylinder of oxygen. Fifteen minutes under the mask sorts my head out a treat but it is prudent to cut the trip short and return to low-lying Lima the next day.

US shipping magnate Jim Sherwood bought the Orient-Express name because of his love of trains. The hotel business was little more than a hobby, a pastime that has grown into 41 luxury hotels worldwide, that now swell his coffers more than the Sea Container business on which his wealth was founded. Highly individual, the hotels offer a level of service, luxury and quality that hark back to years gone by and certainly in Peru are a welcome change from the traditional budget hostels.

So where can't I rough it next?

● The most convenient route to Lima for independent North-East travellers is with KLM from Teesside or Newcastle via Amsterdam with a short re-fuelling stop in Bonaire. Domestic flights can be booked at <http://www.lanperu.com>

● Orient-Express runs an 11 day, ten night package with departures on Thursdays and Saturdays throughout 2003. Prices start at £2,315 per person including Iberia economy flights from London Heathrow to Lima via Madrid. Call the brochure line on 0870 161 5060, or reservations on 0845 077 2222. For more information about Orient-Express trains in Peru visit www.perurail.com

NE puzzles

CELEBRITY WORDMATCH

Find a word that can follow the word on the left and precede the word on the right. When you have filled in all the answers, the name of a celebrity can be read from top to bottom in one of the lines.

ROAD					BEANS
ROYAL					TREE
RABBIT					DRUNK
PRIMARY					BLIND
OLD					BRIDGE
STOOL					HOLE
STICKY					KEEPER
RED					SIGN
FILM					FLAT
BODY					CLIMES
LUCKY					SCHOOL
CROWN					CHARMING



CELEBRITY STARES

Name the star pictured on the left

ANSWERS
Celebrity wordmatch: The missing words are: runner, family, punch, colour, ballet, pigeon, wicket, indian, studio, warmer, charm, prince and the celebrity is Nicole Kidman
Celebrity stare: George Clooney

WORD wise

The word may sound familiar, but do you know what it means?

KRIS

- A Malay dagger
- B Hindu god
- C A kind of shrimp

ANSWER
 A: Malay dagger

IMPOSSIBLE PUZZLE

Each letter in the sum below stands for a particular but different digit, so what does it all add up to?

E	A	T
C	A	K
K	A	T

SOLUTION
 KATE IS 5739

£500 worth of Sp. menswear from M&S up for grabs

corner

WE all know about the great strides that have been taking place in Marks & Spencer womenswear. Now it's the men's turn. Sp. is the exclusive new menswear brand from M&S – a smart and up-to-date collection that offers a quintessentially British style for men who are lads as well as dads. Lying somewhere between the Autograph and Blue Harbour ranges, the style is modern and urban and includes everything from suits to cord jackets and smart, printed shirts to casual knitwear, as well as a selection of accessories.

The collection is divided into four themed sections: At the Dogs, At the Races, Playing Pool and Watching Football, and offers a stylish, versatile wardrobe that will take you from work to play.

Team a striped jumper with a cord jacket for a relaxed weekend with the wife and kids or a sleek leather blazer with a floral shirt for a night out with the boys.



Brown leather moccasins, £45

Spencer is offering NE readers the chance to win five sets of vouchers worth £100 to spend on Sp.

To enter the competition, simply answer this question: what is the exclusive new menswear brand at M&S called?

Send your answer, along with your name, address and daytime telephone number to Sp Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington, DL1 1NF, by the end of the month.



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**Thursday 18th December, Friday 12th & 19th December
Saturday 6th, 13th & 20th December, Monday 22nd December.
All dates £28.50 per person**



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Held in our new Prince Bishop Suite enjoy our finest cuisine together with first class entertainment from top theme bands. Our resident DJ Geordie Paul will be your MC for the night to keep you dancing until the early hours.



Thursday 11th December The Mersey Beatles

Best Beatles tribute we've seen in a decade. Resident at the Cavern and back at Redworth for a second year. An electric evening is guaranteed.



Thursday 18th December Forbbidden

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Superb Lancashire based 70s disco band that's certain to have you boogieing. The dance floor will be staying alive but will you survive the disco inferno?

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