

The Northern Echo

# ne

The lifestyle magazine  
for the North-East

DECEMBER 2005

**GIFT GUIDE**

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**Garden goodies**

**Top toys**

**PLUS**

**Talking  
turkey with  
the stars**



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PAGES AND PAGES OF CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS



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Front page picture: red fleece Christmas pudding hat, £3.50; red hooded cardigan, £10.99. Both from Next [www.next.co.uk](http://www.next.co.uk)

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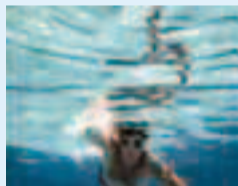
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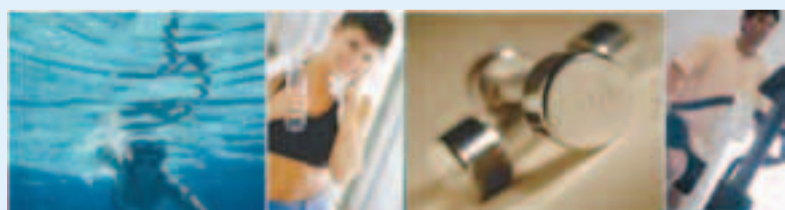


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**6 top toys**

**T**HE Toy Retailers' Association's league of the most desirable gifts for kids for Christmas 2005 has been announced, the ones that are most likely to fly off the shelves or cause overnight queues of frustrated parents taking to their sleeping bags to grab the next shipments in store. Here are six that will definitely get the tills ringing...



**REMOTE CONTROL REVOLUTION** ▲

**Tyco Cyber Shocker, £74.99, from [www.mailordereexpress.com](http://www.mailordereexpress.com)**

Featuring Bi-Geometric technology, the mere mention of which will stun people into silence, this machine can be transformed from an innocent looking ball to an all-terrain vehicle at the touch of a button.



**DYNAMIC DINOSAUR** ▲

**Roboraptor, £89.94, from [www.justtoys.co.uk](http://www.justtoys.co.uk)**

Measuring 32 inches in length, this relative of last year's best-selling Robosapien is a clever beast. Artificial intelligence, fully remote control or free roaming, and the ability to

**NO BORED GAME** ▶

**Monopoly Here and Now, £19.99, from [www.iwoot.com](http://www.iwoot.com)**

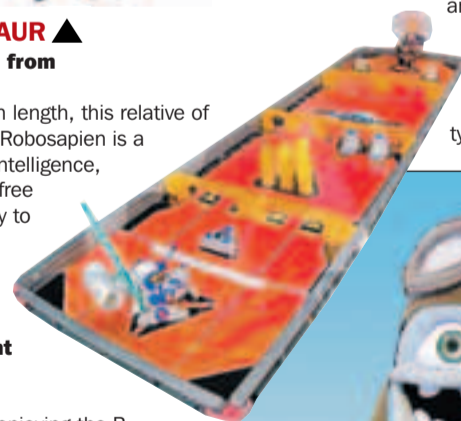
Bringing the classic property game right up-to-date with the inclusion of playing pieces like a mobile phone and rollerblade, including property such as the Oval, London Eye and Gatwick airports, and with property prices in the multi-millions. It has all the appeal of the original game, but is more realistic for the younger property tycoons.



**AWESOME ARENA** ▶

**B Daman Tournament Set, £19.95, from [www.johnlewis.com](http://www.johnlewis.com)**

Any kid who has been enjoying the B-Daman phenomenon will be over the moon to discover this four-foot set featuring ten different games to play. The box is packed with accessories and I can assure you that adults won't be able to resist the temptation.



**SQUEEZE FOR SOUND** ▶

**Crazy Frog Toy, £11.99, from [www.play.com](http://www.play.com)**

If he annoyed you the first time around, you must avoid this latest reincarnation of the most annoying piece of pond life ever invented. The perfect gift perhaps for a friend's child as payback for a minor misdemeanour this year.





## sharon griffiths

**“I like getting Christmas cards. It’s just sending them that’s the problem**

**T**IMING – as in so many things – is everything, especially in the modern etiquette of Christmas cards. Too soon and you’re on your own, alone, before everyone else. Too late and you’ve missed the point entirely.

And anyone who sends their Christmas cards in November with a return address on the envelope is just plain desperate. Unless they’ve just moved, in which case they are very sensible.

And don’t kid us about the post being so unreliable. When your Christmas card arrives, with a first class stamp, two days after Boxing Day, we know you’d forgotten us until you were jolted into action on Christmas Eve when you had our card. We’re not fooled.

I love getting Christmas cards. It’s just sending them that’s the problem. I start off with such good intentions... I have the address book, the phone books, last year’s diary, change of address cards, letters and printed up e-mails to remind me. I have a couple of carrier bags of cards, arranged in neat piles on the dining room table. And then I can easily while away half an hour or so wondering which cards to send to whom...

Snowy scenes of Durham Cathedral or York Minster for Americans; snow, snow and more snow for friends in the sandpit of Dubai; pictures of the Dales for locals exiled in London...

But do you send religious ones to vicars or does that look like creeping? Would they consider a jokey card light relief or sacrilegious? And do you send British Heart Foundation cards to the widow of a friend who died of a heart attack – is that thoughtful or merely rubbing salt into a recent wound?

Do you send very tasteful reproductions of Renaissance paintings just to prove what an educated, sophisticated sort of a person you are or do you send something jolly and rude that will give the recipient a laugh?

Ho hum. So far, I’ve been here for an hour and have written precisely two cards. There’s about another 60 to go. And that’s just my lot. I do my friends and family. Husband does his. Our joint friends either get two, one from each of us, or none – because we each thought the other was doing it.

And you must write something. Now I can knock out a fifteen hundred word newspaper article with no problem, but ask me to write a couple of cheerful pertinent sentences in a Christmas card and I’m left chewing my pen

for ages like a dreamy five-year-old. Hopeless.

Husband is whizz at this and writes very nice and witty messages, but as his handwriting is so indecipherable no one actually gets to read them, which is a bit of a shame really. Still, it no doubt provides a Christmas guessing game for the recipients.

And if I’ve addressed the card to “Sue, John and family”, yes, you’re right. It means I have completely forgotten how many children Sue and John have and have no hope at all of recalling their names.

In these days of quickly dissolved and reformed relationships I think I’m doing pretty well to remember that Sue is still with John, and not any of the half a dozen or so names she’s been linked with on the Christmas card list in the last 20 years. With all its crossings out, new names and arrows, my address book looks like a plot-line for a soap opera.

I have never sent a picture of my children in a nativity play or a Santa Claus hat. Especially not now when they are 6ft 5ins and their staring red eyes are nothing to do with the faulty flash on the camera.

I have never sent a computer printed Christmas letter but I love reading them. Don’t know why they get so mocked. Either you care about the senders, in which case it’s good to hear what they’ve been up to. Or you don’t – in which case you can bin the letter with a clear conscience.

Though there was one tricky moment a few years ago when a letter mentioned “the sad death of Dodie” and I didn’t have a clue if Dodie was a granddad, brother, dog or goldfish and so had no idea what the correct response should have been. Tricky.

Eventually, somehow, the cards will get done. Except of course for those whose addresses I have lost and who aren’t in the book. If you’re ex-directory and don’t get many Christmas cards well, frankly, it’s your own fault.

But just when you think you’ve got it cracked, there’s always one and usually on Christmas Eve too. A card will come from Bev, Brian and squiggle. “One of yours?” husband will say to me. But nope, not mine. It’s correctly addressed but we haven’t a clue.

We put Bev, Brian and squiggle on display with the rest, but every time I look at it I feel uneasy. By this time next year I might just have remembered who they are. Who knows, they might even get a card.

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

**Charlotte Fleming, jewellery designer and owner of E. DeWastney Jewellers in Barker’s Arcade, Northallerton**



beautiful stones. I have probably worn them more than any other piece of jewellery I have.

### Where will you be for Christmas this year?

AT the Keith Moss Gallery in Brotton. The two families are celebrating together this year, which will be a bit different. We will open the gallery and have one very large table in the centre and watch everyone go by. We thought it would be more fun in the gallery plus it is the only area in both our houses that will accommodate us all.

### What do you want for Christmas this year?

Jewellery please! I would love a piece from the Shaun Leane Collection. It is every woman’s wish to receive something beautiful and so very personal at Christmas. If my husband is reading this, the Shaun Leane Hook My Heart necklace would be fantastic!

### What was your favourite ever present?

A pair of diamond earrings bought for me by my mum. They are timeless and

### If money were no object, what would you like for Christmas?

After spending the morning at home watching my children open their presents, I would invite all my family and friends to a celebration at Seaham Hall. The girls would have treatments throughout the day whilst the men relaxed. We would indulge in good food and drink. No one would have to find a taxi at the end of the night as we would all stay over making it a 24-hour celebration. I would also give everyone a gift from the top of their wish list.

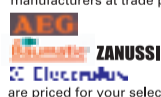


**Right: Sue Godley bracelet, £120; above, Leif Sapphire ring, £3,175. Items start at around £30 for earrings**

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# NE christmas

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

**New York artist Spencer Tunick, 38, has won international acclaim for his images of mass groups of people photographed in the nude.**



**If money were no object, what would you like for Christmas?**

I would like a liver for my Uncle Al and I would bring it to him in a big box which I would make, with lots of ribbon on. He lives at home but he's been on the waiting list for a while now.

**What was your worst ever present?**

Actually it started off as my worst and it turned out to be the best. My mum got me a pair of black ski gloves and I was used to getting toys and I was so angry but then I think I wore them all the time until I was about 25!

● Interview with Spencer Tunick in next month's NE Magazine



# The 'miracle' market



Market maestro Greville Worthington, left, and one of his stallholders, above

As the North's largest Sunday market, the one at Catterick Racecourse is a must for bargain hunters – and a great place to pick up presents, the man behind it tells SARAH FOSTER

**'M**IRACLE' may be a strong word, but Greville Worthington uses it often when referring to Catterick Sunday Market. "It just started – it was a miracle and it's been a miracle ever since. It's a miracle every Sunday," he enthuses. "It's great for bargains, it's such fun and there are so many people there."

For the past 16 years, Greville has been 'outdoor retail curator' of the market. The flamboyant businessman, who owns the racecourse, explains how it first came about. "We needed to get some money into the racecourse coffers – all racecourses have to look to retail activities to underpin their racing," he says.

"Now the market has become more famous than the racing – and the racing has been going since 1763. We get 3,000 at the races and about 15-20,000 at the market. The market is on every Sunday all year round, except for Christmas Day and New Year's Day this year."

With roughly 240 stalls, most of which are weekly fixtures, it's certainly a fair size. Greville says that with its different nationalities, it's a real cultural melting pot. "We've got a lovely mix of Jewish people, Sikhs, Hindus – all sorts of foreign traders," he says. "We've got, for example, people who are best friends on the market whose parents' generation are fighting each other over the Indian/Kashmiri border. We've even got the granddaughter of Gypsy Lee herself."

In terms of what is sold, the range couldn't be more diverse – from food to furniture, clothes to candles, you can buy just about everything. "The market is wonderful for bicycles and garden furniture – much higher quality than Ikea," says Greville. "There are wonderful scented candles, pot pourri, gift sets, perfume, Christmas trees, wreaths and glorious toys. We have wonderful big cars with engines for kids and real working motorbikes, as well as lots of wonderful fashion."

For those whose prime concern is food, the

market provides a feast. Stalls selling fresh fish, fruit and vegetables jostle with fast food outlets feeding shoppers hog roasts, chicken and chips, pizzas, and stir fries. Entry and parking are both free – leaving all your cash for bargains.

Greville says that one of the best things about the market is its lively atmosphere. "We've got an amazing meat auction by Premier Meats – it's like going to the pantomime listening to that guy," he says. "Everything comes to life – it's more exciting than a football match. It's so different from the supermarket."

To bag the best buys, Greville says it's wise to visit often. "I strongly advise people to come every week because if they don't, they won't know what bargains they're missing," he says.

● Catterick Sunday Market runs from 10am-4pm every Sunday at Catterick Racecourse. For more details, call 07702 312456 or visit [www.cattericksundaymarket.co.uk](http://www.cattericksundaymarket.co.uk)



*It's more exciting than a football match*

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RACHAEL POPOW finds something for everyone on a trawl down the high street

**S**PENDING the festive season surrounded by your family is all very well, but it does raise a problem - what on earth are you going to get everyone?

But before you start tossing a coin to decide who will get bath salts and who'll get a photo frame, remember that there is a perfect present out there for everyone.

Even if you feel like you've exhausted all your gift ideas five Christmases ago, all it takes is a little inspiration - and a trip to the high street.



# Firm family favourites

## GOODIES FOR GRANDPARENTS

WHAT do you get the grandparents who have everything?

Well, giving your grandmother slippers for Christmas may seem a little predictable, but a pair of Ruby And Ed Natural Suede



Slippers with a pretty corsage (£20 from House of Fraser) will keep her warm and stylish. Glamorous grannies can also cut a dash in a turquoise embellished scarf from Boots £10.



And if granddad is normally the one who takes charge of the TV, she'll definitely appreciate a Remote Control Jammer (£2.50) from Lloyds Pharmacy, so she can watch her programmes in peace without him changing the channel.

Green-fingered granddads will be able to listen while they dig with Superdrug's Trowel Radio (£8.99), while those who prefer golf to gardening can practise their swings with House of Fraser's Pop Up Putting Cup £20.



Alternatively, why not treat both of them to a Christmas drink with Debenhams' Port Duo (£12), two bottles of port in a presentation crate?

## DELIGHTFUL DADS (and uncles and brothers)

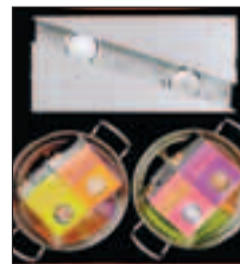
Once granddad is sorted, it's time to turn your attention to your younger male relatives - and luckily, there's lots to choose from.

Armchair football pundits can criticise in comfort from an Inflatable Match of the Day chair (£14.99, Next) or sofa (£24.99) if they



want to get their mates round.

However, for the ultimate lads' night in, there's also the Casino and Gaming Set (£8 Tesco) and the Host Your Own Pub Quiz DVD (£25, House of Fraser) - they'll never need to leave the house to go to the pub again.



Of course, not all men are into such laddish pursuits, and those who prefer eating to drinking are also well catered for this year at House of Fraser. The Indian Food Warmer Set (£15) comes

complete with a selection of spices as well as a tray to keep those curries truly hot, while the Pasta Pronto gift set, below, has everything he needs to whip up an incredible Italian feast.



# NE christmas



For blokes who spend more time in the bathroom than the kitchen there's the Fog Free Shaving Mirror (Next, £12.99), so they can see that they're looking their best, and the Elvis-inspired Rock 'n' Roll Bath Duck (£5.40, Superdrug), a bath time companion fit for the King. *See above right*

And, if all that fails, there's always that good old Christmas standby, socks. No one will be disappointed with Calvin Klein's Socks In A Box (House of Fraser, £20).

### YUMMY MUMMIES

(and aunts and sisters)

There are plenty of ways to spoil a female relative this year.

If you know someone in need of a little pampering, let her unwind with the Spa Ultimate Escape (£11.97) or soak in peace with the Virgin Vie 24 Carat Bathing Liqueur (£12.50).

Girls-about-town can mix themselves a Cosmopolitan with Lloyds Pharmacy's Cocktail Set (£4), before heading out in a mist of Armani's City Glam perfume (£32) which comes in a gift set including a pink belt.

Meanwhile, budding domestic goddesses can whip up a few fairy cakes with Next's House Proud Baking Kit (£6.99), and find out whether or not they are going to be fashionably late again by checking the very chic Audrey Hepburn clock from John Lewis (£29). *See above right.*

However, if the woman in your life prefers to get out of the house and behind the wheel, you can always treat her to the Next Car Print Map Kit (£12.99). The road atlas, pen, notebook and torch mean she'll never get lost again – and the cute car print cover means she'll love it enough to overlook the sly dig at her navigational skills.



### TRENDSETTING TEENS

TEENS and older children can be difficult to buy for – if they've outgrown writing those useful letters to Santa you may be reduced to guessing what they want for Christmas.

However, with girls you usually won't go far wrong with beauty products, and Boots' 1950s-inspired Ms Manicure Manicure Mansion (£8) is ideal. *See picture right.*

Girls who like to while away the hours in their bedrooms can confide their innermost thoughts in the Hip House Secrets Diary (£3) by the light from 40 Clear Flower Chain Lights (£7.98). Both gifts are from Tesco.

Boys can illuminate their bedrooms with Football String Lights (£8.99), while those with a taste for unusual sports can put their circus skills and ball control to the test with Rugby Juggling Balls (£10), from House of Fraser.

Music lovers can keep warm while



listening to the latest sounds on Gap's fleecy earmuff-style headphones (£19.50), and film buffs can amuse themselves turning humble spuds into the galaxy's most feared villains with the Star Wars Darth Tater set (£9.99) – providing dads don't get to it first! *See main picture.*

### PERFECT PETS

FINALLY, don't neglect the family's four-legged members this Christmas. Cool cats will look fabulous in Superdrug's collar, which has the word purr spelt out in studs, and the dog's dinners will look much more appetising in the Dog Bowl Set from Superdrug (£9.99). In fact, even poop-scooping will be slightly more appealing with John Lewis's animal-print, bone-shaped Dog Waste Dispenser (£10).



## Problems getting the right mortgage or remortgage?

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Think carefully before securing other debts against your home. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage. There will be a fee for mortgage advice. The precise amount will depend on your circumstances but we estimate that it will be £495. The fee will only be payable if you are successful in obtaining your mortgage. The overall cost for comparison is 6.6% APR. The actual rate available will depend upon your circumstances. Ask for a personalised illustration.

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# Top buys for under

# £10

You don't have to dig deep this christmas. There are plenty of presents on the shop shelves to be had for less than a tenner

IT'S refreshing to know that not every pressie out there costs the earth. With a bit of canny shopping and budget buying, you can start 2006 with only the tiniest of holes in your pocket – and we're here to show you how.

Give sweet-toothed friends and loved ones a licence to indulge with House of Fraser's wonderful Chocolate Heaven Fondue set (right) for £10, including a tea light, marshmallows and two fondue forks, or the Chocolate Therapy mug set (£6), complete with mini grater, marshmallows and a drink. Yummy!

For fun with tipples of another sort – namely the alcoholic variety – try the Tiddly Drinks set, containing four shot glasses, four counters and a game board, for a mere £3. Alternatively, why not make wine-lovers tipsy with delight by giving them a sophisticated and practical Senator bottle cooler by Emsa, for £9.99? (Log on to [www.addis.co.uk](http://www.addis.co.uk) for stockist information.)

If you fancy trying people's patience, look out for the World's Toughest puzzle (£7) or Safari puzzles (£6) at Hof, or conjure fond childhood memories of hours whiled away pitching your wits against the Rubik's Cube, with a 25th Anniversary edition set for £10, or a cute key ring for a fiver.



Anyone game for some friendly competition will appreciate the stylish Magnetic Backgammon and Chess Set in Silver Case (£10) from Tesco, while girly girls with time on their hands will put a big tick against your choice of pink Retro Zebra Clock (£5.)

Macho men will appreciate the Male Grooming Set (below), a snip at just £3, and anyone who reckons the sky's the limit will think the mini Telescope totally cosmic – a star buy at just £9.97.

Another great place to go for bargain gifts is Lloyds Pharmacy, where you can put putters through their paces with the fantastic Indoor Golf Set (£6), make a huge splash with the Budz Frog Bath Fun (£3.50), and totally bowl the little 'uns over with the endearingly cute Farmyard Skittles (£5).

The wonderfully colourful Little Angels Make Your Own Lip Gloss Set (£3) is perfect for aspiring girly girls everywhere, while making the right decision has never been easier thanks to the quirky Mystic Orb (£4).

Toiletries are always a huge hit at Christ-



Magnetic backgammon and chess set







The loveable cuddly Chad Valley Reindeer



Pink retro zebra clock from Tesco

mas and make ideal secret Santa gifts. Lloyds's Perfect Bath Kit (£6) is a lifesaver for those recovering from the morning after the night before, or anyone simply needing a retreat from their hectic festive schedule. It includes an inflatable bath pillow, relaxing lavender bath foam, bath salts, a refreshing gel eye mask and a scented candle.

Staying on the relaxation theme, why not get some Reflexology Socks from www.presentsdirect.com (0870 420 4366) to help massage away aches and tensions? At just £8.95, lying back, putting your feet up and taking it easy has never been so cost-effective.

Well-loved favourite Dove is sure to be on the wish list for many this Christmas. Although it may seem like a flight of fantasy to pay less than a fiver for the Protective Care Hand Balm, Intense Care Shampoo, Energy Glow Body Wash and Silk Dry Deodorant, £4.99 really is all the Magical Minis Gift Set costs.

If you can stretch your tenner an extra 50p for your nearest and dearest, why not head to Virgin Vie for some truly classy, indulgent smellies from the Connoisseur range, such as the Silk and White Truffle Shower Nectar and Sequin Skin Sparkle at £10.50 each?

Alternatively, help the ladies with their preening and pamper-

ing for all the big parties coming up by getting them the dazzling Gold Dust Hair Sparkle, for just £7.50, or the Perfectly Polished Nail Colour Collection (£8 for a set of three varnishes).

Women with a conscience wanting to wear glamour will appreciate Traidcraft treats (0870 443 1017 or www.traidcraftshop.co.uk), like the Rose Cascade Necklace (£5) and the festive red Flower Necklace and Bracelet Set (£7.50.) The Lilac Bead Pendant (£5) and Bracelet (£4) are really beautiful too and will add a dash of classy ethnic style to any fashionista's outfit, Christmassy or otherwise.

A gadget to delight any DIY fan is the wonderful Pocket Memo Measure (£9.95) from Presents Direct. Flip on the bright LED light, measure up using the 5m steel tape, jot down figures on the integral sticky memo pad and use the flip-up calculator for any tricky sums.

The Original Gift Company has some amazing bargains for under a tenner too, many of which can be personalised for that extra special touch. Show mums and grans how much you love them with picture tea towels, delight ancient history fans with a Hieroglyph Mug or keep an eye on things with the Mirror-Polished Glasses Case, which all come in at a bargain basement £9.95 each.

Finally, for more inspirational penny-saving gifts, head to high street favourite Woolworths and grab some things from the Jeff Banks Boudoir home accessories range, from £4.99. You'll also love the fabulous pink satin photo album (£4.99), the ladies' Faux Fur Cuff Velvet Gloves (£3.99), the light-tastic Giant Disco Ball (£9.99) and the loveable cuddly Chad Valley Reindeer (£7.99). For kids who love dressing up, look out for the Ladybird Pink Fairy Dress (£9.99) or Ladybird Elf costume (left).

With so many amazing gifts to choose from and so many different retailers stocking such fantastic things, the only worries you'll have this year won't be to do with money - they'll be about making your mind up.



## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

**Sam Stern, 15, of North Yorkshire, is the author of *Cooking up a Storm*, the Teen Survival Cookbook (Walker Books, £9.99)**

**Where will you be spending Christmas?**

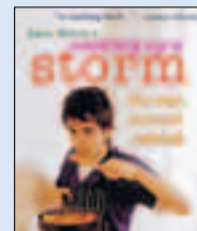
It's always a family Christmas at home. Every year we try and make it a bit more extravagant and tacky so we'll have really cheesy dancing Santas and stuff.

**What was your worst/best Christmas present ever?**

I got this remote controlled airplane one year and the first time I tried it, I crashed it into a tree and it broke. So it was the best present but also the worst.

**What will be on your Christmas dinner table?**

It may be a goose or the butcher does this thing where you can get three birds stuffed into one and we make our own puddings and cakes. Then we have to have vegetarian options.



The new Jamie Oliver? Sam relaxes at home during the school holidays. Left: the cookbook he's produced

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Using something called Tactile Technology, this chair, when hooked up to your games console, DVD player or music system, transforms low level sound into vibrations. You could almost be standing on the terraces without leaving your house or get the buzz of a concert without the crowds.

# 6

## Christmas treats for your home

If you like to get yourselves and your home a treat for Christmas, you can now kit out your home in a way Captain Kirk could have only dreamed of a couple of decades ago. And while irons might not be welcome under the Christmas tree, there are some superb selection hi-tech gadgets around.

Peter Jenkinson

### WONDER WASHER

**Samsung Q1433**  
approx **£499.99**  
[www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)

Crammed with features, this is the smartest way to wash your smalls, and bigs for that matter as it has an extra large wash cycle for duvets. An electronic control panel puts you in charge of all manner of commands, there's a 24-hour delay programme, overheating control, time-remaining indicator and it boasts something called Fuzzy Logic where the machine continually monitors the water temperature for the perfect results.



### HOME HOVERCRAFT

**Airider**  
**£230** [www.airrider.com](http://www.airrider.com)  
Over a decade in development, this vacuum literally floats on a cushion of air and sucks up dirt in the bagless compartment at over 200mph. It is perfect for parquet flooring as there are no rollers to scratch the floor, and as it's so easy to manoeuvre it is ideal for all types of carpet too.



### TECH TALK

**DUALphone £79** [www.boysstuff.co.uk](http://www.boysstuff.co.uk)  
The Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP is the latest craze to be taken up by us Brits. It's a method of using your PC and net connection to make cheap and free Internet calls. Until now, you had to have one handset for your PC and one for your home phone. This handset can be plugged into your home phone socket and PC at the same time, and offers the ability to wander up to 50 metres away.



See page 23 for Gadgetman's pick of the techno-toys

### COOL CREATION

**LG Fridge with LCD TV**  
**£2,399** [www.lge.co.uk](http://www.lge.co.uk)  
Of course, the first thing you notice is the built-in TV. It's a 13 inch LCD TV of the highest specification, has a TV tuner built in and outputs to connect a DVD player, if you so desire. As well as offering a vast amount of storage space it also features something called a Magic Crisper. Now who else do you know who has one of those?



### SCAN AND LEARN

**Beyond Microwave**  
**Around £100** [www.beyondeurope.com](http://www.beyondeurope.com)  
Reduce the likelihood of burning anything ever again with this smart cooking machine. Simply use the pen on the control panel to scan the barcodes on your ready-made meals, (it's pre-programmed with 4,000 and stores your favourites as it's used), pop in your pack and press a button.





# Monochrome magic

I'm dreaming of a (black and) white Christmas... quite unlike the ones we used to know, says SHARON GRIFFITHS

**B**LACK is the new green – when it comes to Christmas, at least. Top London stores are reporting a rush for Christmas trees and decorations in black and white. Not just in London. Not surprisingly, it's a combination that's doing well in our region too – especially on Tyneside.

Each year, Peter Barratt's garden centres introduce a number of colour themes for Christmas and this year's winner is Russian Palace – a rich and exotic mix of black, white and pewter.

"It works well, especially as it has plenty of silver to give it a festive feel," says Angela Barratt, of Peter Barratt's garden centres, who now finds that Christmas is one of the busiest times of the year. "It's a theme that has been very popular on the catwalks and has very quickly moved into the home. Christmas decorations have become very much part of the fashion trend in interior design, with new ideas being introduced each year.

"I know it's not always practical to do a whole house up in one theme, but a lot of women like to do a corner or one small area in just the way they like."

In the southern half of the region, where perhaps there aren't so many Magpie fans, the Cappuccino range is proving popular. "Lots of warm natural creams and browns," says Angela. "We've used a lot of pine cones and twisted willow, which gives it a very rural, natural feel."

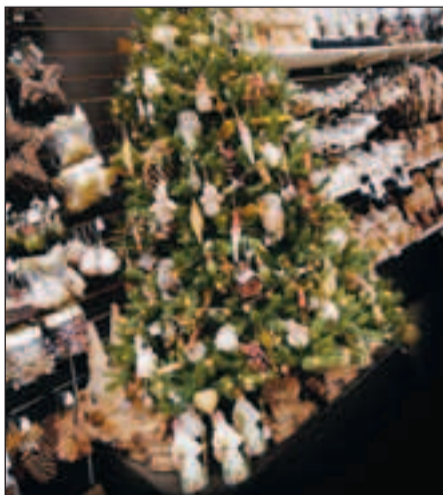
There are also Renaissance themes – ivory and gold, and claret and evergreen – which are a bit more traditional.

Peter and Angela Barratt travel the world to find new ideas for Christmas. Their last trip was to China, to plan for Christmas 2006. It's a long way from the days when Christmas was just a case of a bit of tinsel and a few baubles.

"But it all adds to the pleasure," says Angela. "It's lovely to see young couples coming into the show areas and planning for their first Christmas in their own house. They are just as excited as children."

When Peter Barratt's started, they just did real Christmas trees, now they also have a huge range of artificial and fibre optics trees. Best of all are the trees that come complete with their own lights fixed in place. No more terrible tangles, knotted wires or the painful crunch of a bulb underfoot.

Christmas will never be the same again...



Russian Palace, main picture and centre; above, more traditional Christmas colours

● Peter Barratt's, Yarm Road, Stockton on Tees TS18 3SQ (01642) 613433; Gosforth Park, Newcastle NE3 5EP (0191) 236 7111. Open Monday to Saturday, 9am-5.50pm; Sunday, 10.30am-4.30pm.

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**DERMOT O'LEARY, 32**  
 "We have a lovely routine with my mum and dad and my brother-in-law. At breakfast, we walk along the beach and then come back. Then we cook dinner for the evening. It all normally takes place at my parents' house, but I'm going to spend it this year with my sister in York. It's beautiful there."

**WILL YOUNG, 26**

"Christmas is always a funny time because I work right up to it, and then I'm normally ill on the day - I was last year and the year before that. So I'm already planning on it. I don't know if I enjoy Christmas as much I used to, to be honest. I find it, I think, a bit of a bore. I like buying presents for people throughout the year rather than at a specific time. I like the parties, though, and the Christmas bumper edition of EastEnders. The rest of it I can take or leave."



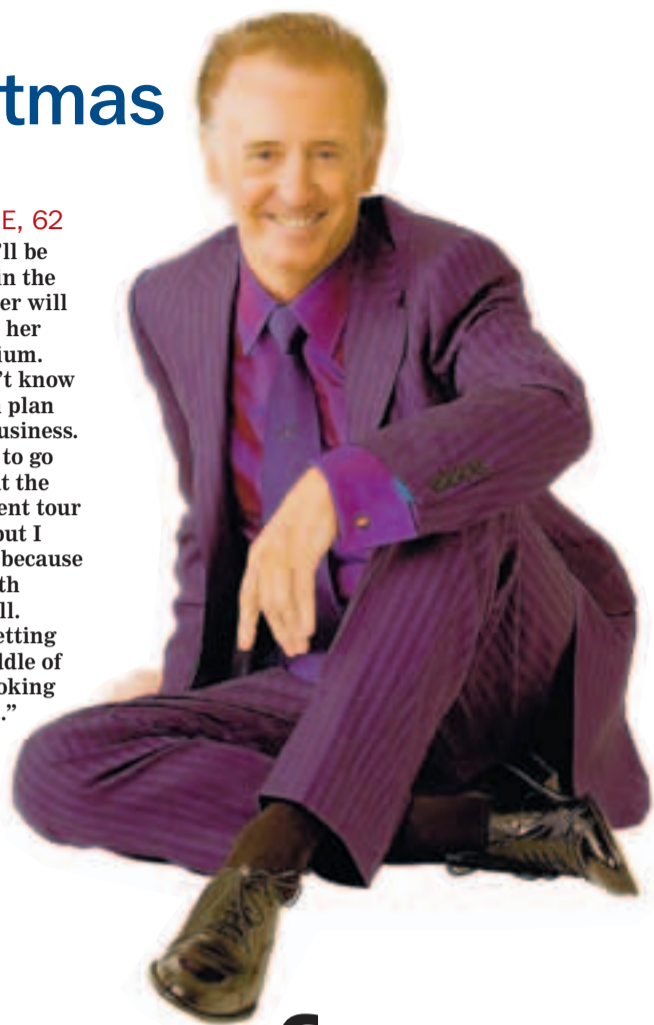
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 "We have a very traditional Christmas, and then I try and find a sporting event on Boxing Day, because it can often be the duller day on Earth. So, I either go racing at Kempton for the King George or go and have a football match or something, just to get out the house."



**NE christmas**

**TONY CHRISTIE, 62**

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# Stars of the season

Will your home be warm and cosy this Christmas?



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Christmas comes but once a year, and when it does, it's a time for everyone to celebrate. But how do celebrities choose to mark the occasion? Is it just a grand excuse to embark on a glitter-packed marathon of making merry, or do they prefer to take the opportunity to cosy up for some quiet quality time with their loved ones? Our insider guide reveals all

**KARL DAVIES, 23**  
(Emmerdale)

"I'll probably just be back in Manchester hanging around with my family and friends for Christmas, but in January I'm taking my mum to New York because she loves to



shop. I thought we'd go when all the sales are on otherwise we won't be able to afford to buy anything. I've never been before. I can't wait."

**JAY HUNT, 40**  
(stylist in *Would Like To Meet and Spendholics*)

"I hate Christmas. I'm not a Christmas fan. It's just not my favourite time of year at all. Easter, count me in for Easter. Lots of Easter eggs and daffodils, I'm happy then.

"But, for the festive season I go to our cottage in the Cotswolds, which is the most perfect, almost jokily pretty, house. It makes even me feel Christmassy. We do the full Christmas dinner. My partner, Margot James, loves this time of year. She cooks and I don't. And we have her family and friends over."



**BRUCE FORSYTH, 77**

I'VE been celebrating Christmas for the last 20 years in Puerto Rico, where my wife comes from. We love to get in the sun for the season. For the first couple of years it was a bit difficult because it didn't feel right to be warm at Christmas, but then you get to love it. The fact that you can go and play golf in 45 degrees on Boxing Day - although they don't have Boxing Day there - that's pretty good.

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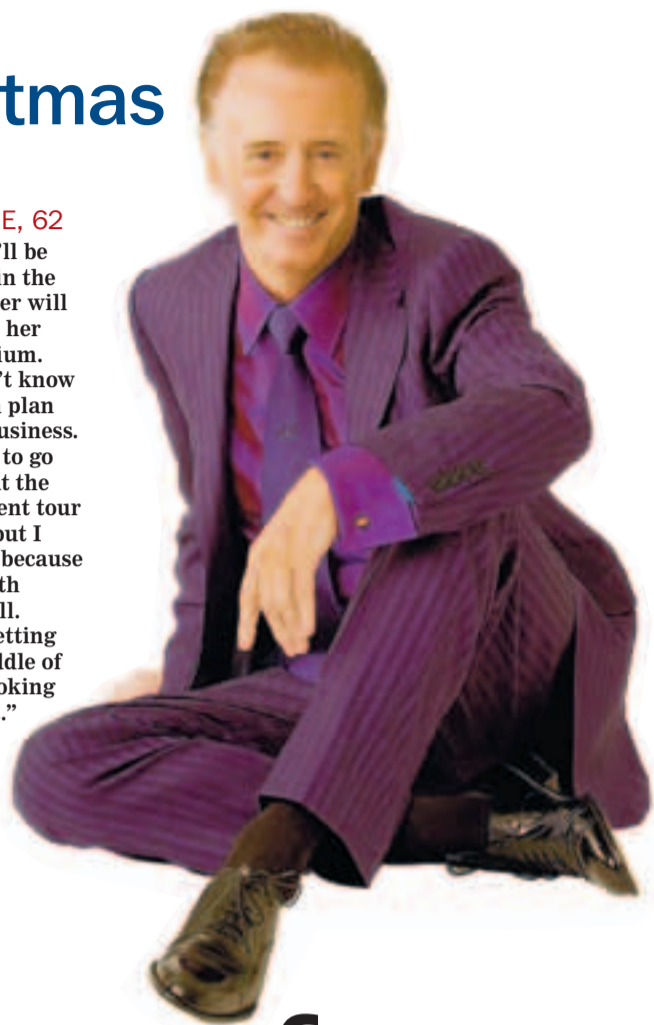
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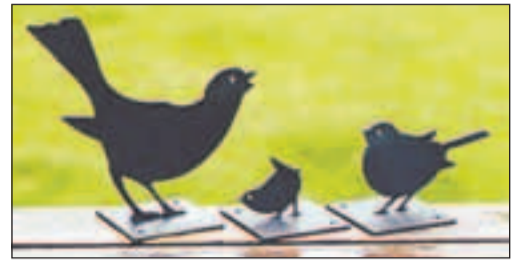
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## NE gardening



Moroccan fire basket; bird and snail ornaments; the Titchmarsh design pack

# Gifts that grow on you

Gardening Correspondent BRIGID PRESS puts hammocks,  
Moroccan fire baskets and warm feet on her Christmas wish list

**A**FTER spending a week assisting my parents choose and test drive a new car, I can definitely conclude that men and women have completely different shopping criteria. Whereas one wanted practicality, reliability and value for money, the other veered towards social status and performance. Needless to say, practicality won out, with the odd luxury extra thrown in for appeasement.

With this in mind, I have worked extra hard to try and find Christmas gifts that would suit both standards. I have searched the shops, trawled the internet and thumbed through the catalogues.

The first item I picked out is purely based on personal experience. How many times do you come in from a chilly morning's session in the garden with toes like blocks of ice? You can't put on too many socks as this only cramps the toes together and makes them even colder. Old shopping bags are good, but crinkle and may be a bit embarrassing when surprise guests turn up. Well, Gifts for the Girls mail order mag is selling **Welly Warmers** at £11.99. These are fleecy inserts made to slip inside the boot. The tops fold over the outside of the welly, preventing them from falling down as you move and the adult sizes come in either a shocking pink or more muted green.

You can't disassociate the garden from the kitchen table. Ripe Gifts ([www.ripegifts.co.uk](http://www.ripegifts.co.uk)) combines the traditional, the practical and the luxurious in the **Gardening Gift Basket**.

For £66 you get a sturdy garden trug which is packed full of gardening accessories, mouth-watering goodies and sumptuous skin care products.

If you need a little visual and technical assistance with re-designing your garden, and you are a confident computer user, then consider searching out **Alan Titchmarsh's Barleywood Garden Designer**. It is available at most electrical and music stores for around £29.99. Once downloaded, you have access to a comprehensive database of more than 1,500 plants, trees and shrubs, with which you can design your virtual garden. Once you have selected your structures, borders, foliage and pathways, you can watch it all grow over the season, and over the years. No more having to move plants because they outgrow their space, or clash with the next plant at certain times of the year.

For a bit of light-hearted entertainment how about a pair of realistic looking **ceramic snails** with which to decorate your lettuce patches? They are available from The Wedding Garden Company ([www.weddinggardencompany.co.uk](http://www.weddinggardencompany.co.uk)). Ten pounds for two.

On a more serious note, bigger pests in the garden might not like this one; it's a **solar-powered mole deterrent**. Instead of having to link it up to an electricity source, or find endless supplies of batteries, this lets you plunge the vibrating pole anywhere it will be effective. As an added bonus, there are no intermittent high pitched noises as with other repellents. From Greenfingers ([www.greenfingers.com](http://www.greenfingers.com)) at £25 each.

My top choice, though, is a **Moroccan fire basket**. This beautifully designed metal basket can be used as a burner for garden waste, as a log brazier to keep you warm on a chilly evening, or as a barbecue. All in all, for £49 you are getting a really practical garden gadget that can be used all year round, and looks good too. The one that I have my eye on is supplied by Greenfingers.com, available on the internet at [www.greenfingers.com](http://www.greenfingers.com).

*There is something  
so soothing about  
just lying and slowly  
swinging in the cradle of  
a hammock*

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS



**Brigid Press is Gardening Correspondent of The Northern Echo. She also presents Ask about Gardening every Sunday on BBC Radio Cleveland 95FM from 1-2pm**



**Where will you be this Christmas?**

I am a fan of big traditional Christmas's, filled with extended families, fairies and food. I love the cosy, cuddly atmosphere, where the scent of spruce, cloves and mince pies wraps its tinsel tinted arms around you and your loved ones. I will be with my family, exchanging presents and partaking in a monstrous lunchtime feast. This year though I shall be

slipping back in time. My mother, in collusion with her brother and sister, have begun having themed Christmases. Last year they went Victorian. This year we are all going medieval.

**What will you be eating?**

We have all done our bit of research, visiting medieval mock-ups, surfing ye olde net and spending hours in local libraries. The food promises to be good and hearty. In those days, venison, rabbit and big hunks of beef, along with various game birds, made up the main courses and dried fruit was added to many of the savoury dishes. Vegetables were plentiful, but there were no potatoes or runner beans. My brother has secretly threatened to come as a late medieval

sailor, returning from foreign lands with a wondrous, newly discovered tuberous root.

**Any entertainment?**

Apart from a brief respite at 3pm (you have to listen to the Queen), there will be no television. We are all going to have to do a turn. Luckily, Morris dancers were well established in that era, so I may get away with shaking a few bells and wielding a big heavy stick.

**What do you want in your stocking?**

Gifts will have to all be home or hand made. I have a mountain of marrow chutney, which could be cunningly packaged, along with some of my simple cider. I have also been saving

spare wax, and candle ends, which I shall melt down, add essential oils, some petals, and pour carefully into some old terracotta plant pots. Apparently, the best medieval gifts were exotic beasts, but the nearest we'll get to that is by taking Ruby the Staffy to the poodle parlour.

**If money were no object?**

I am not a material person, and prefer the act of giving and receiving to the content of the parcel. However, I shall have my fingers crossed that somewhere along the line I get Kate Bush's new album. If money were no object and I could have anything in the world then my dream Christmas present would be to have a cure for Alzheimer's.



**In the swing: the five-person hammock; monster wheelbarrow and welly warmers**

I have a **hammock**. It was one of the first pieces of furniture I acquired when I moved into my new house. There is something so soothing about just lying and slowly swinging in the cradle of a hammock. However, I may have to upgrade. Mine is a one person hammock, but The Mexican Hammock Company have multicoloured family size ones. The Chacmoool hammock is the largest, accommodating at least five grown-up adults, and retails at £78.95. The whole range is available on [www.hammocks.co.uk](http://www.hammocks.co.uk).

You may need one of the Chacmoool hammocks all to yourself once you have finished driving the new **Jeep Monster Wheelbarrow** around the garden. This has got to be the 4x4 of the barrow world. The technical specifications (for the dads) are an eight cubic foot loading tub, twin 16 inch wheels with four-ply

tube tyres set on a reinforced steel axle. It has Jeep-designed bumpers, cross bracing and extra long, easy lift handles. That amounts to a very stable wheelbarrow that will carry heavy weights through the roughest of terrain, and look macho doing so. Mind you, this monster wheelbarrow comes with a giant price tag. I looked one up on Amazon ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)) and it came to £230.

My final recommendation finishes the year off on a happy note. Presents for men ([www.presentsformen.com](http://www.presentsformen.com)) have got some attractive **bird silhouette post finials** which will help protect the fence posts from rain water as well as adding cheer to the garden. They are cut out from steel, and given a black powder-coated finish, so will last for many years. The blackbird is £16.99, the Wren £14.99 and the Robin £15.99.

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Cooking the turkey and all the trimmings for an extended family can be a mammoth task. GABRIELLE FAGAN asks the experts for tips on how to make it easier, and what they'll be eating this Christmas

**C**HRISTMAS is the one time of year that all of us – even the best cooks – find extremely stressful. The focus is on the Christmas Day feast, and getting those dishes perfect is both physically demanding and complex.

Our panel of celebrity chefs, famous cake maker Jane Asher and top TV chefs Phil Vickery and Mike Robinson reveal their culinary secrets here, with hints and tips to help you prepare a sumptuous spread that will earn you everyone's adoration. They also talk to us about their Christmas memories and exactly how they will be spending their Christmas holiday this year.

# Talking turkey

(and other Christmas goodies)



**JANE ASHER**

Jane Asher is a well-known actress and writer and is also renowned for her decorated cakes. Her latest book – the first in ten years, *Cakes For Fun* (Simon & Schuster, £10.99) includes 40 ingenious ideas.



**What's the essence of Christmas to you?**  
 "For me the idea is to gather as many family members together as possible. But then there's the hope of getting good presents and eating too much. My favourite part is actually Boxing Day, when you've done all the hard work, everyone's very full and happy, and you can sit around pulling bits of meat off the turkey and watching Bond films on TV."

**What is your favourite memory?**  
 "The early days, when you believed in Father Christmas and would stretch your toes out and feel the lump at the bottom of the bed. That excitement of discovering a full stocking is very hard to match in later life. There's nothing like it when you're an adult, except sex, I suppose."

**What is your favourite Christmas recipe?**  
 "There are so many good ones. I always make my own cranberry sauce to have with the turkey, because it's so easy – just cranberries, sugar and water cooked together."

**What is the ingredient you could not do without at Christmas?**  
 "It might horrify some people but I often use ready-made stuffings – there are some really good ones out there. And I do spend money on a really good turkey, a Kelly turkey that has been properly raised. It's expensive, but it's worth it."

**Your tip to make Christmas food preparation easier**  
 "Buy ready-made where you can – and don't feel guilty about it."

**Where will you be spending Christmas and what's on the menu?**  
 "We'll gather as a family – our three children and their assorted friends, my mum, who's 91, and my sister and her family. And we'll have the traditional Christmas turkey."

**What is your favourite Christmas menu?**  
 "We're very traditional. I've done goose a couple of times but I always go back to turkey. When you're feeding a lot of people I think it's better to get two small to medium-sized turkeys rather than one enormous one. It makes it much easier to time the cooking – and you get twice as many drumsticks! I cook it upside down – breast-side down first, then turn it over to brown it. I think it does keep it from drying out."





Phil's Christmas Cake and Brandy Parfait

### PHIL VICKERY

TV chef Phil Vickery, of *This Morning* and *Ready Steady Cook* fame, is rated as one of Britain's foremost chefs and is famous for his puddings. His latest book is *A Passion For Puddings* (Simon & Schuster, £9.99). Phil is married to TV presenter Fern Britton and they live with her three children and their four-year-old daughter Winnie.



**What's the essence of Christmas for you?**  
"A big family get-together – trouble is I do the cooking."

**What's your favourite Christmas menu?**  
"The whole works on Christmas Day, then baked ham with pickles and mashed potatoes on Boxing day. This year we are having pickled Bullaces, small round wild plum-like fruits, picked by myself and Winnie."

**What's your favourite Christmas recipe?**  
"The family loves Christmas Cake and Brandy Parfait, one of the recipes in my book. This recipe really came about because the kids will not eat Christmas cake or pudding, but, made into an ice cream or parfait, they love it."

**Is there an ingredient you could not do without for Christmas food?**  
"Looking back, it seems like

Carnation Condensed Milk has always been part of my life. Carnation is simply irreplaceable in all kinds of great puddings, cakes, sweets and ice creams. I've got a few other favourites – mixed spice, mincemeat, goose fat and my own Organic Golden Christmas Pudding." (available from [www.vickery.tv](http://www.vickery.tv))

**Do you have a tip for making preparation of the Christmas feast easier?**  
"Don't drink until the cooking is done!"

**Where will you be spending Christmas and what will be the menu?**  
"At home with the whole family. The menu features a bird within a bird. A quail inside a partridge, inside a pheasant, inside a Guinea fowl, inside a turkey, inside a goose, then roasted and glazed with lemon and honey."

### MIKE ROBINSON

TV chef and outdoors enthusiast, Mike Robinson regularly appears on programmes such as BBC's *Saturday Kitchen*, and in several series for UKTV. His new book, *Wild Flavours* (Cassell Illustrated, £20), is filled with easy-to-make dishes using fresh, seasonal and country ingredients. He lives with his wife, Katie.



**What is the essence of Christmas?**  
"Cooking for a large group of people because that's what I have done all my life. I've worked more Christmases as a chef than I've enjoyed as a participant. I love to make it a beautiful, visual spectacle as well as a delicious meal because this is the biggest celebration of the year."

**What's your favourite memory of Christmas?**  
When I was about eight years old our family dog managed to open the fridge door, get out and eat a 2lb packet of butter. He was then sick in the middle of the Christmas meal, which as a child, of course, I found hilarious. He was in disgrace for ages and I was the only one talking to him!"

**What's your favourite Christmas menu?**  
"I like turkey because it's

traditional but I never buy a large one, rather I'll get two 10lb Bronze Norfolk Blacks because they're full of flavour and not artificially plumped up. I'll follow that with a small Christmas pudding because I don't think people ever want too much of it. I usually crumble up the leftovers and blend them into home-made ice-cream, which is delicious on Boxing Day."

**What's your favourite Christmas recipe?**  
"I like to make what is really my signature dish, Beef Fillet With Shallots And Guinness, (from *Wild Flavours*). It's something completely different to have when everyone's tired of the traditional fare and it's the ultimate comfort

food which warms the soul on a dark and gloomy winter's day."

**Is there an ingredient you could not do without for Christmas food?**  
"Goose fat. I always use it as the fat for roasting my potatoes, and I baste the partridges with it because it gives them an excellent flavour."

**Do you have a tip for making preparation of the Christmas feast easier?**  
"I believe people always overcook turkey. So I like to cut a little time off the recommended cooking time but then allow the bird to stand for around 45 minutes to an hour. I cover it in foil and put it somewhere warm, an airing cupboard is ideal."

**Where will you be spending Christmas and what will be the menu?**  
"I won't open my restaurant on Christmas Day so that my wife, friends, and the staff – around 20 of us – can all enjoy a wonderful medieval style feast that will last for hours. I'm going to do roast goose surrounded by English partridges, tureens of casserole pheasant, jugged hare. I catch my own salmon and smoke it and so there will be a platter of that as well."

### JAMIE OLIVER

TV chef Jamie Oliver is best known for forcing the government to do something about the quality of school meals. His most recent TV foray was *Jamie's Italy* on Channel 4, now available in book form (Michael Joseph, £20). Jamie will be spending Christmas at home with wife Jools, and their two children, Poppy Honey, three, and two-year-old Daisy Boo.



of wine over her head.

**What's the essence of Christmas for you?**  
Time off and a lie-in and then a full monty Christmas dinner for family, friends, and all my old mates and pals who've come back to see their mummies. There's got to be a reasonable amount of alcohol and time to watch an episode of *Only Fools And Horses* and the Queen's speech.

**What's your favourite Christmas memory?**  
When I was 11 and I got my first drum kit. But perhaps the one that always give me a giggle is when my nan set her hair on fire, because she put on too much hairspray and went near a candle. My mum poured a jug

**What's your favourite Christmas menu?**  
Traditional fare done properly, but with a few tweaks.

**What's your favourite Christmas recipe?**  
It's got to be my mum's Christmas trifle. If you are going to do it, you have got to do it the real way, like my mum does, by using traditional, tacky ingredients like packet blancmange and tinned mandarins with a good slug of Cointreau. You can even make it the day before you eat it.

**What's your essential Christmas ingredient?**  
Vin Santo, a famous Italian white dessert wine, for drinking and for the trifle.



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## me and my wardrobe



**Above:** Louise is in a white dress from the Monsoon bridal collection, £250; white fur cape, £90 and satin shoes, £75. Bracelet, £8, necklace, £5 and earrings, £8 are from Accessorize.

**Far right:** Amy wears floor length pink evening gown £180. Louise is in floor length paisley dress £150.

**Right:** Amy wears black Victoriana top £35, and skirt, £100 with jet bracelet £22 by Accessorize.

**Amy Stephenson, 22, and Louise Reed, 17, are both sales assistants at Monsoon in Darlington. Here they show off a bit of Christmas party sparkle from Monsoon's autumn/winter collection**

### Describe your look?

**Amy:** It depends what I'm doing but it tends to be very casual at home, usually jeans, and I like to dress up if I'm going out.

**Louise:** It's generally smart casual and I like to keep up with fashion. I like mixing and matching accessories.

### Favourite item of clothing?

**A:** I really like the Monsoon black Victoriana top which I've just bought.

**L:** It's a black mini skirt from Topshop which I've had for donkey's years but I wear it all the time.

### Worst buy?

**A:** A pink cardigan I bought for work – I don't know why I got it.

**L:** Probably a khaki/grey jacket with embroidery all over it

### Most expensive buy?

**A:** Some knee-high Topshop boots for about £90.

**L:** The cape from Monsoon for £125.

### Celebrity you most admire?

**A:** Definitely Sienna Miller. It's a bit of a cliché but I think she wears what she



Pictures: ANDY LAMB

wants and she always looks good.

**L:** As well as Sienna Miller, Keira Knightley – she's very classy but dresses very fashionably as well.

**Monsoon is in Northgate, Darlington. For details of other Monsoon stores log onto [www.monsoon.co.uk](http://www.monsoon.co.uk)**

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

### Where Louise will be celebrating Christmas.

At home in Darlington with my mum and sister.

### What she wants for Christmas.

Probably clothes, and a new watch because I've broken mine!

### And if money were no object?

A nice car, a black Lamborghini.



**Amy wears turquoise dress £125, Monsoon bracelet £16 and earrings from Accessorize £7. Louise wears black evening dress, £125, earrings £10, bracelet £22 and necklace £25 – jewellery all from Accessorize.**

# NE out on the town

NE Magazine's style experts, Judie McCourt and Allison McKay, take to the social honeypots of the region in search of style and individuality



OWEN RYAN

## OWEN RYAN

Owen, 30, is Century FM's programme controller and although he says he's not a slave to fashion, he is very fashion conscious. Owen was wearing jumper from Nicole Farhi, jeans from Gap and Diesel shoes, which he bought in New York. He is a huge fan of detoxing and regular exercise and uses Clinique products on his skin and Kerastase hair products.



CAROLINE DUFF

# McCourt & McKay

As this is the last column of 2005, we thought we would see the year out with some celebrity style and join Liberty X at an intimate and exclusive gig with Century FM at the Centre for Life in Newcastle. It was the first time we had been to the venue and we were very impressed.

Liberty X all looked amazing and what was refreshing was their love for high street labels, though being a successful pop group, they have a team of stylists, and designers who send them outfits in the hope they'll be photographed in them. One thing that stood out was how they glowed. Their skin looked flawless, which they put down to drinking plenty of water.

As Michelle Heaton is from Newcastle, she loves to come back to the North-East to catch up with family and friends and to check out some of her favourite shops.



SCOTT MAKIN

## SCOTT MAKIN

SCOTT is the new face – or should we say 'voice'? – on the breakfast show at Century FM, so when his alarm goes off at 3.30am fashion is the last thing on his mind. Prior to being married with two children, he admits he was a Psyche regular, but now he shops on the high street. Scott was wearing a striped shirt from Linea with Next jeans and shoes. His beauty regime consists of Pure & Simple moisturiser with V05 Hair Gum and Black Code Armani after-shave, which is one luxury he is hanging on to!

## LISA HIGGINS

LISA, a marketing director, loves to shop for clothes. For work, she wears Marks & Spencer Limited Collection and for playtime, she adopts a classic cool look. Lisa was wearing a black D & G jacket with Marks & Spencer vest, Gucci jeans and accessories from Topshop. Her skin is in tip-top condition mainly because she never goes to bed in her make-up and swears by Clarins beauty products. She has her hair cut every six weeks.



LISA HIGGINS

## KYLE CRAGGS

KYLE is a student at the prestigious Italia Conte School of Theatre Arts in London, which means he keeps fit with all his performance classes. His grey T-shirt is from House of Fraser, teamed with G-star jeans from Tucci. Kyle also likes to shop at Van Mildert in Durham and uses Nivea for Men moisturiser and a head clay from Saks Hair & Beauty.



KYLE CRAGGS

MICHAEL MORRIS

## MICHAEL MORRIS

MICHAEL is a student in his second year of his National Diploma dance class at Newcastle College so, like Kyle, he keeps very fit. Michael was wearing a Diesel T-shirt from House of Fraser with French Connection jeans. He uses Studio FX works products on his hair.

## CAROLINE DUFF

CAROLINE looked stunning, posing with the boys from Liberty X. She is marketing controller of Century FM. Caroline often visits her boyfriend's brothers in the states, one in Boston and one in New York, and likes to buy clothes over there. The satin vest was from Urban Outfitters in Boston, the jeans from Gap in New York. She teamed them with a sparkly bolero from Topshop. When the seasons change, Caroline's skin dries out a little so she uses Elizabeth Arden's famous Eight Hour Cream. In fact, she never leaves home without it.

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

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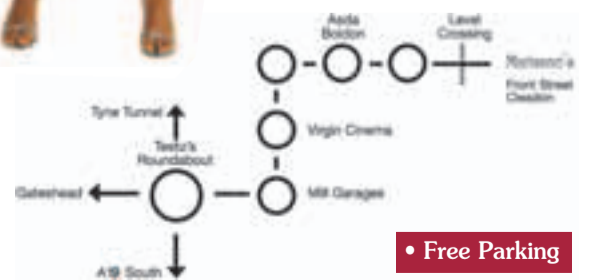
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**NE** christmas

# Beautifully hangover

Our essential party survival guide covers everything from miracle medicines to friendly foods, and banishing those bloodshot party eyes. RACHAEL POPOW reports

**N**O matter how sensible you've been the rest of the year, Christmas is traditionally a time to eat, drink, be merry and party on down to your heart's content.

But there is a downside to all those office dos, boozy family lunches and seasonal get-togethers – sometimes you can be due at the next bash before you've even had chance to draw breath and recover from the last one. Obviously, the very best way to avoid a hangover is just not to get drunk in the first place. If you are going to be drinking, do it sensibly – don't booze on an empty stomach and do try to alternate alcoholic drinks with water or a soft drink.

But if you find that all your good intentions get swept away by a tidal wave of excess festive spirit, all is not lost. There are ways to ensure that you can still look like the life and soul of the party, even if you feel more like death warmed up.

The process begins the morning after. Your first step should be to brush your teeth and tongue to get rid of that furry feeling, before jumping into an invigorating shower to wake yourself up.

Next, you need to turn your attention to your face. Celebrity stylist Ceril Campbell says: "If you came home drunk, then it's highly likely that you will have slept in your make-up. In the morning, take the time to cleanse properly, especially if you've used anything sparkly – you may think you've removed it all, only to find you've still got bits of glitter stuck all over your face."

A good moisturiser will help your face recover – try Afterlife by Lush (£15) which has been specially designed to perk up skin that has taken the toll of too much hard living.

And once you've washed and are feeling revived, you should hopefully be ready to leave the bathroom and face the kitchen.

Many people swear by a fry-up when they're feeling hungover, but there are other, much healthier ways to recover. Ceril Campbell's website, Red Carpet Glamour ([www.redcarpetglamour.com](http://www.redcarpetglamour.com)), sells many natural products to boost your inner beauty, including the vitamin-packed hangover remedy Emergen-C (£17.99 for 36 sachets).

Alternatively, you can take the detox approach and try squeezing a little lemon juice into a glass of warm water to help flush out your system.

Hopefully this will help you face the day ahead, but if you find you're flagging again by the evening, you may need to rely on a few fashion and beauty tricks.

If you're feeling a little delicate, you may decide against experimenting with a new outfit and opt to stick with something tried and tested. But be warned – that trusty little black dress might not be as flattering as you think.

Ceril says: "When you feel bad, the very worst thing you can do is wear black. It does-

n't matter that it's very fashionable this Christmas – it will wash you out and make you look even paler. Go for a colour instead – even a darker shade like brown or green is better than black."

However, while black may be out, she believes other trends can work in your favour, especially when it comes to your hair. "The look this season is very ladylike and Sixties-inspired," she explains. "So if your hair isn't looking great or you haven't had a chance to wash it, you'll be able to get away with it by back-combing it or slicking it back into a ponytail."

Make-up can also be used to freshen up your appearance, but be careful not to overdo it. If you've been wearing make-up during the day, make sure you remove it and start again – don't just apply a fresh layer over the top. A good foundation and blusher will take the edge off your ghostly pallor and put the colour back in your cheeks.

You need to pay special attention to your eyes as they're the biggest giveaway if you're still feeling rough – and wearing sunglasses indoors during December really doesn't fool anyone.

Beauty experts swear by Yves Saint Laurent Touche Eclat for disguising bags and dark circles, but if the £21 price tag puts you off, Boots No 7 Instant Radiance Concealer (£11.50) is a good alternative. Applying some mascara and making sure your eyebrows are looking their best will also help you get that wide-eyed look, but for maximum impact, go for Sixties-style eyes, with lots of dark liner and smoky sockets.

Not only will this add a dash of sultry glamour, a la Brigitte Bardot, it will also make your sunken eyes and black circles look like a fashion statement rather than the result of a night on the tiles.

Then with a slick of lip gloss and some chewing gum or mints in your bag in case your morning breath comes back to haunt you, you're ready to go to the ball looking as fresh as a daisy.

However, it's worth remembering that while these quick fixes may work as a one off, the damage caused by regular binge drinking will be harder to cover up. As Ceril Campbell says: "How you look on the outside is a reflection of how healthy you are inside. And even if your face doesn't show the damage, your liver will."

*When you feel bad, the very worst thing you can do is wear black. It doesn't matter that it's very fashionable this Christmas – it will wash you out and make you look even paler*

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Below: Claire Morley of Contemporary in Guisborough and two of the styles designed by the salon for instant party impact

WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

**Bryan McCourt is the director of Collagenics North-East, which specialises in botox and collagen treatments and facial rejuvenation.**



**Where are you spending Christmas?**

Christmas Day will be spent at my parents' house with my sister Judie and her boyfriend Chris. It'll be a very traditional family Christmas day with lots of food, drink and TV. Then it's off to France on Boxing Day for ten days snowboarding in Val d'Isere with (hopefully) a white New Year.

**What's on your wish list?**

My favourite question... I've recently got back into playing golf so maybe some Lindeberg golf wear or some clubs to make me play better! Apart from that, I'm a big movie/music fan so some DVDs or an iPod nano would be brilliant.

**What is the best present you have ever had?**

A personalised number plate for my car was a pretty cool gift but I can't help remembering that feeling of tearing down the stairs and ripping the paper off a new BMX bike. And no, it wasn't last year!

**If money were no object, what would you want??**

Membership to the VIP concierge service Quintessentially (which costs thousands!). They can organise anything from tables at top restaurants to a round of golf at Augusta in America. Oh... and the Aston Martin DB9, of course.

To find your local Collagenics salon, call the area office on (01325) 367367 or check on the website [www.collagenics.com](http://www.collagenics.com). Gift vouchers are available.

# Hair we go!

When it comes to party hair, everyone wants to make an impact – and this season you can because the emphasis is firmly on volume

**I**F YOU want to create a truly fabulous look for your special Christmas celebration and an impact that's designed to dazzle throughout the festive season, think big and add lots of glamour.

Christmas is the time when everyone can let their hair down and have a little fun and it goes without saying that we all want to look our best. And if you put as much thought into how you do your hair as you do into what you're going to wear, chances are you'll get guaranteed wow factor.

"There's a big influence from the Sixties coming through into hair styles this season," says Claire Morley, of award winning hair salon group Contemporary. "The bob is coming back in and you'll see lots of styles with lift and movement that are inspired by that era, but with a modern twist.

"Hair that has lots of movement and texture is very in at the moment, as is big hair with plenty of volume, so if you are planning a spectacular look for a party, think along those lines."

Claire, who works at Contemporary's Guisborough salon and is a member of the salon group's Art Team, says lots of clients are currently going from straight to curly styles filled with waves and movement. And it is easy, she said, to add a touch of glitz and glamour to take your style up a gear from ordinary into party mode.

"You can achieve the look yourself using products like Curls Rock by Tigi which is a spray that you can apply directly to the hair and then scrunch dry or use with a diffuser," said Claire. "The product will give your hair an instant boost and because you can apply it to dry

hair and work it through just the same, you can use it to transform your hair from day to evening quickly and easily."

Soft waves can also be achieved using straighteners – all you have to do is twist your hair around them rather like curling a ribbon to dress a Christmas parcel. If you want your hair flat on the top and then curled into soft waves, simply turn it over your straighteners at 90 degrees. For volume at the top, turn it under at the same angle."

And don't worry if you have short hair.

"Styles like the classic Sixties bob are making a comeback and speak for themselves," says Claire. "You can transform short hair into an instant sexy style by using products like styling wax which add a bit of extra definition."

You can always look to the celebrities for a bit of inspiration when it comes to creating the perfect party hairdo, too. Victoria Beckham, Sienna Miller and Lindsey Lohan favour a loose and wavy look for their long locks which can be easily dressed up.

And don't forget about hair accessories. If you are going straight from the office to the office party, it is easy to add a bit of instant glamour with a little bit of know-how. A lot of fashionistas are picking up on hair accessories, ultra-thin hairbands, in particular, which are fabulous if the hair is lifted behind with a little volume to add extra impact.

● Contemporary salons are located in Guisborough, Whitby, Stokesley, Yarm, Marske, Redcar, Middlesbrough and Stockton. Contemporary's website can be found at [www.contemporarysalons.com](http://www.contemporarysalons.com)



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## ne christmas

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# 6 of the best plug and play

**T**HE trouble with console games is that you need a PhD or equivalent just to start level one. Well, it often feels that way... Why can't we just return to the glorious days of simplicity, where the graphics weren't great but the gameplay was instantly addictive? Do we really have time to digest hundreds of potential button combinations to achieve special moves and unlock secret levels? No, what we want is a little instant gratification – so here's a selection of plug and play games that are ready to play almost as soon as the box hits the bin.



### BE A BLUFFER ▲

**Texas Hold 'Em**  
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Peter Jenkinson

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[www.firebox.com](http://www.firebox.com)  
From the prehistoric land of PCs comes the Commodore 64 box. This black unit is actually more powerful than the original computer. Thirty of the original Commodore games are packed inside, making this a superb value video-vintage box.



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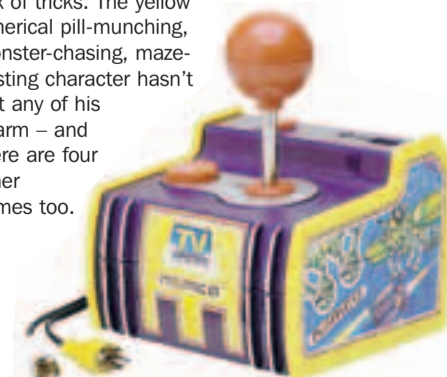
**Sensible Soccer**  
£29.95 [www.firebox.com](http://www.firebox.com)

This will never win any prizes for its graphics, or indeed for its in-depth gameplay but has a good chance of scooping the World Cup for fast-paced frantic fun. One blink and the ball will be snatched away from you

### GHOST HUNTER ▼

**Namco 5 in 1**  
£19.99 [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

Each and every household in the country should get themselves a real slice of nostalgia in the form of this 5 in 1 box of tricks. The yellow spherical pill-munching, monster-chasing, maze-busting character hasn't lost any of his charm – and there are four other games too.



### ORIGINAL OFFENDER

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Anyone who remembers early video-gaming will no doubt have a soft spot for the Atari classics Pong and



Breakout – just about the most standard yet spectacular show ever seen. A must-have to tuck away to show future generations what they are missing.



**gadget man**

# Techno-toys to covet this xmas

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



Educational fun: the InteracTV

The top must-haves this Christmas will be techno-toys, say industry experts. After all, why should adults have all the fun?

**C**HRISTMAS comes earlier for the toy industry every year. While harassed parents prefer not to think about the Yuletide until a few weeks before the big day, toy industry execs have been tinkering with this year's must-have presents for months.

The majority of toy experts agree that this year, gadgets and techie toys are certain to be big sellers. With an abundance of gadgets available for us adults to buy, it was inevitable that today's toys would follow suit. Jackie Jordan, marketing director at Mattel Toys, explains: "Kids want to have the latest in technology, just like their parents. Today's children have grown up with computers and gadgets. They love technology. It's only natural that they would want toys that reflect this."

Which is good news for the gadget man (or woman) – because it makes present buying so much more fun.

So what should you look out for? Industry insiders believe the big techno-toys this Christmas will be a remote control cyber beast, an interactive TV learning console and – that dream purchase for all adolescent boys – a virtual girlfriend (no, it's not what you think!)

A great boys' toy is the awesome Tyco Cyber Shocker – a transforming bio-mechanical beast that's set to rock the remote control world.

Taking its cue from those old toys we had when we were kids – The Transformers – the Cyber Shocker goes from an innocent looking ball into an all-terrain cyber-beast that's virtually unstoppable on dirt, grass and even snow. It has a scorpion-like tail that whips out for extra protection at the touch of a button.

Tyco reckons tests of the Cyber Shocker have seen some of the highest ever anticipation ratings. It also admits that the remote control robot will be a big hit with dads as well as sons. Sadly, my boy will be just seven months old come December 25 so I guess I'll just have to wait a bit longer.

The hottest gadget for girls will be a little animated lady called Pixel Chix. She lives in a palm-sized house and lucky owners get to take control of



Cult: Pixel Chix

her life. She has more than 70 "cool" phrases and expressions. Girls can watch her playing the guitar or brushing her teeth.

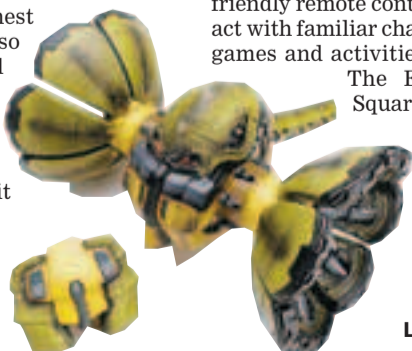
Already a massive cult in the United States, where it has won numerous awards, Pixel Chix takes the Tamagotchi concept to its logical conclusion. If you don't play with your cyber girlfriend, you'll start to lose all those outfits you unlocked at the start of the game. Ignore her too long and she'll pack her cyber-bags. Thankfully there isn't a version for dads with a mum that tells him to do the tidying up or change a dirty nappy!

Proving you're never too young to enjoy a gadget, even toys for the youngest kids have been given a 21st century upgrade.

Take the Fisher Price InteracTV. It's a DVD-based learning system which helps youngsters learn without realising while they watch their favourite TV shows. Using a chunky child-friendly remote control handset, kids can interact with familiar characters as they take part in games and activities in full episodes of Dora The Explorer and SpongeBob Squarepants.

Of course, all this gadgetry could be bad news in the long term.

After all, when they grow up, your kids might want to play with your gadgets instead...



Left: Tyco Cyber Shocker

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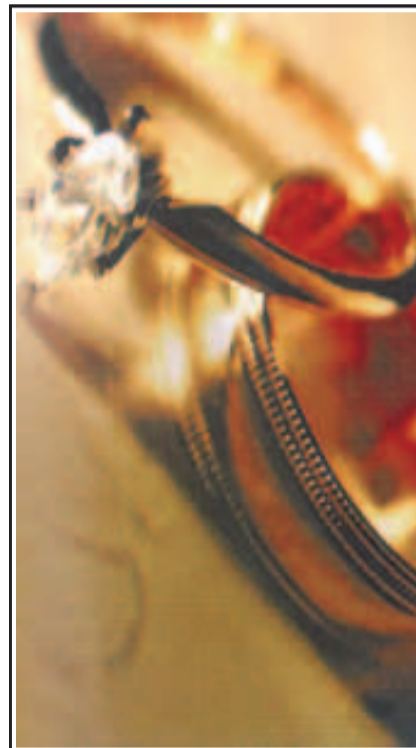
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**NE christmas**



Bringing labels to town: Jo Rankin, owner of Rubber Sole Pictures: STUART BOULTON

**Sole sister**

From cool jewellery to funky footwear, Rubber Sole has all you need for a cutting-edge Christmas, as SARAH FOSTER finds out

**WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS**

Jo Rankin, owner of Rubber Sole

**Where are you spending Christmas this year?**

At home in Darlington. It will be an intimate occasion with my husband, sister and nephew.

**What's top of your Christmas wish list?**  
Peace for all and an end to poverty - I'm an active campaigner.

**If money were no object, what would be your ideal Christmas gift?**  
Two weeks in the Maldives.

**What has been your best ever Christmas gift?**  
It was a Raleigh Poppy bike, when I was ten. It was red with a poppy on it.

**F**OR Jo Rankin and her husband Lee, fashion is fundamental. As owners of the shoe and accessory store Rubber Sole, on Darlington's Blackwellgate, their focus is street style - and this is something they take seriously. "We offer alternative brands - things that major cities sell," says Jo. "If you went to London, Manchester or any big city you would probably see what we are selling. We bring these labels to the town."

Among the shop's bestsellers are brands like Converse, Fly London, Spanish footwear make Art and Vans Classics. Other favourites are shoes by Draven. "They're very underground - they're edgy with a punk twist," explains Jo. She says her styles have wide appeal. "We cater for everyone, from children to those in their 60s. Because everyone wears casual fashions, we appeal to them all."

Now entering its fourth year, the shop has built a solid reputation, scooping two business awards along the way. As well as stylish shoes, it also sells bags and accessories - and all in the same distinctive vein. "We've picked up a lovely knitwear range from Nepal called Kusan," says Jo. "We sell hats and scarves and they're flying out. They're just lovely - really different from anything that we have here."

Another big seller is handmade jewellery by Newcastle-based designer Kate Tessa. "That's gone from strength to strength," says Jo. "Every piece that she does is individual and unique, so you can buy a necklace and walk around knowing that you won't see anybody else with it."

To meet demand for its quirky goods, the shop is moving to new and bigger town centre premises. Jo says its mail order side has also taken off. "We're doing a lot of mail order at the moment," she says. "We ship to all over the place - Tokyo, the States and Australia."

With prices starting at £20, the shop has something to suit most budgets and in a pair of its striking footwear, you'll certainly stand out.

● Rubber Sole, 35 Blackwellgate, Darlington (01325) 461118, [www.rubber-sole.com](http://www.rubber-sole.com)  
Open Monday-Saturday, 9.30am-5.30pm.



Above: girls' shoes and the retro favourites, Converse All Stars





Mary Leckenby prepares aubergines for one of the Rosebud Preserves pickles

Pictures: MIKE GIBB

*I like to get out on a morning and look at the lovely view and be in my own community. It's part of what we're selling when people in America buy a pot of our jam*

to make jellies for the United States, is her pride and joy – a 200 litre, digitally-operated pan, imported from Italy. Despite its size, its three steel paddles are gentle on fruit, as proven by the whole gooseberries bobbing about in a jam mix. The pan, its gas supply and sophisticated extraction system have transformed the efficiency of the production, as has the depositor machine, which fills jars automatically.

A board on the wall lists all the products with a key to indicate where stocks are getting low. A 'needed-now' asterisk next to the damson jam explains why kitchen supervisor Brenda Cundall prepares to load bagfuls into the pan, while five stars next to beetroot and horseradish relish suggests an emergency.

"People love it," explains Elspeth, "but it's only good made fresh and it's not the right time of year for beetroot."

With other seasonal ingredients like the wild crab apples, elderflower and rowan berries, Elspeth returns to her childhood. She and some of her team of nine ladies and two men "pick like mad" straight from the hedgerows of the Yorkshire Dales to store up enough to last the year. Everything else is carefully sourced and stored. Mangos, plums, red and blackcurrants, gooseberries, strawberries and raspberries come in mixed palettes a tonne at a time and are blast frozen to ensure a year-round supply.

The herbs come from down the road at Sandhutton, near Thirsk. The same supplier will grow beetroot for Rosebud this year, while the rhubarb comes from Wakefield and the damsons are Cumbrian. The quinces are grown in Essex and the organic green tomatoes come from Lancaster.

Wherever possible, Elspeth sticks to a single grower with whom she builds up a strong relationship. The oranges come from a certified organic grower in Seville; Elspeth buys a couple of tonnes in January and they're washed, dried and frozen in North Yorkshire.

Whilst not registered organic, there are no additives or preservatives in Rosebud Preserves. Natural pectin and lemon juice in the jams, and sugars and vinegar in the chutneys, bottling while the products are hot and careful storage combine to create a natural set-

**● Rosebud Preserves are available via mail order (01765) 689174 and they also have stalls at farmers' markets. If you want to pick up some tasty presents or stock up for the festive season, the Country Life Guide to Farmers' Markets has a list of markets in the North-East and throughout the country, detailing when they are on. For a free copy visit your local tourist information centre or send an sae with postage to the value of 62p to: The Country Life Guide to Farmers' Markets, PO Box 49, London SW19 5AT.**

ting process. From the kitchen, the jars are put on trolleys and rolled up the ramp into the labelling area to cool. The labelling is done by hand using high quality, cream paper labels, no self adhesive stuff here.

The jars are then stored in boxes from A-Z, a system devised by despatch supervisor Barbara Wallis, and packed at a rate of 20,000 a month.

The business has evolved and grown gradually in 15 years but does Elspeth pinch herself over the slick and professional operation Rosebud has become?

"I have grown with it so it hasn't been a shock for me but I was really excited on the days that we moved departments into their new homes and set up the new equipment. That was really thrilling."

Despite their growing size and popularity, Elspeth is determined Rosebud will stay where it is.

"We could move onto a trading estate tomorrow and it wouldn't affect the integrity of the product and might even make the business more efficient."

"But this is a nice environment to be in. I like to get out on a morning and look at the lovely view and be in my own community. It's part of what we're selling when people in America buy a pot of our jam. It's who we are."



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Contemporary meets colonial: the Raffles restaurant; below, one of the extensive bathrooms and a bright sunny bedroom

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

**Emma Wilson, sales and marketing manager at The Croft hotel**

### Where will you be for Christmas?

I come from a really large family and it's not always easy for us to all get together. Christmas is the one time of year when we manage it effortlessly. It's a real treat as we are very close. The celebrations and parties normally start Christmas Eve and by New Year we have been to everyone's house.

### What is top of your Christmas wish list?

Lots of new shoes and bags. I'm a typical girlie girl and I never seem to have enough of either.

### What's the best present you've ever had?

A few years ago my boyfriend bought me a private number plate.

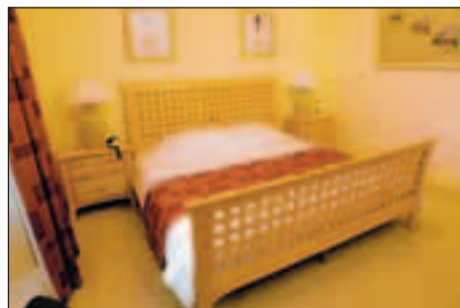
### If money were no object, what would you like?

I would love a brand new white Mercedes SL55 with pink interior. My dream car to say the least.



With the party season upon us, the restaurant is busier than ever. Along with special Christmas nights, it's hosting a lavish New Year's Eve dinner. "New Year's Eve will be spectacular," says Emma. "There will be a five-course gourmet meal with a magician, piper, live band, disco and canapes. It's going to be great."

With its steady weekend custom and spreading fame, it's hoped that for Raffles, the New Year will bring new trade. Enhanced by the revamped bar, Emma says it's bound for even greater success.



*“He's come from a restaurant rather than a hotel background. Eventually, he's looking for rosettes and he'll get them*

● The Croft (including Raffles), Croft on Tees, Darlington DL2 2ST (01325) 720319, [www.croft-hotel.co.uk](http://www.croft-hotel.co.uk) or [www.rafflesuk.com](http://www.rafflesuk.com)

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ADVERTISING FEATURE

## Darlington Wealth Management launches new office

Peter Marriott, Martin Burgess and Mike Hill (pictured), Principals of Darlington Wealth Management, have opened an office in Darlington. They have recently become Associate Partners of the renowned wealth management organisation, the St. James's Place Partnership. Previously they all worked for a well-known building society based locally in Darlington for approximately 8 years each.



The St. James's Place Partnership is an elite group, made up of many of the most experienced, able and highly regarded professionals working in financial services today.

Focused solely on face-to-face advice, the Partnership is well-established as one of the UK's leading wealth management organisations.

All three Principals have over 80 years combined experience in the Financial Services industry. Previous history includes both Mike and Peter working for CIS Ltd for 12 and 18 years respectively. Martin worked for Lloyds TSB for 29 years.

Darlington Wealth Management are based at Valley House, Valley Street, Darlington; which offers client parking facilities and is also within comfortable walking distance from the town centre.

They have the expertise and specialist knowledge to help you to:

- o Build and preserve capital
- o Manage cash and borrowings
- o Gain financial protection against risk

Mike Hill commented, "We feel that this is a very positive move for us and the invitation to join the prestigious St. James's Place Partnership was too good an opportunity to miss. It is an exciting prospect to be able to offer both new and existing clients the expertise and exclusivity of top performing St. James's Place Fund Management as well as the best of breed providers and mortgage advice". **To take advantage of this excellent proposition, please contact Mike, Peter or Martin on 01325 466 166 OR e-mail them at [dwm@sjpp.co.uk](mailto:dwm@sjpp.co.uk).**

*The St. James's Place Group stands behind and guarantees the advice given by Darlington Wealth Management when recommending any of the products and services provided by companies in the St. James's Place Group.*

## INVITATION FINANCIAL SURGERY

Darlington Wealth Management are inviting you to come and discover the benefits of their professional financial advice.

They are holding financial surgery sessions on Thursday 8th December 2005 and Thursday 19th January 2006, based at their offices - Valley House, Valley Street, Darlington between the times of 09.30 - 18.30. Each surgery will last approximately 30 minutes and is free and non-obligatory.

Please ring us on 01325 466 166 or e-mail us at [dwm@sjpp.co.uk](mailto:dwm@sjpp.co.uk) to reserve your session or to find out more.

**DARLINGTON WEALTH MANAGEMENT OFFER  
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The Oriental bedroom, one of the revamped rooms at The Croft

# Croft (but not the original)

With a major refurbishment, the name isn't all that's changed at Darlington's Croft hotel, as SARAH FOSTER finds out

**O**N stepping into The Croft, on the outskirts of Darlington, you're instantly transported to the past. The large reception and majestic staircase are remnants of a bygone age and the feel is of heritage and tradition. From every feature, it's clear the hotel has an atmosphere all its own.

For the past 12 years, The Croft has been owned by Malcolm McKee. Its advancing age had meant it was starting to decline, so last year, he spent around £1m on a facelift. The results are dramatic. Not only has the hotel changed its name (from the Croft Spa), it has overhauled its image. Where once it was looking a bit tired, it's now the height of modern chic, and with more work planned to transform the bar, things can only get better.

Emma Wilson, sales and marketing manager at the hotel, says it's come a long way. "We would describe ourselves as a small boutique hotel with an eating out restaurant," she adds.

Some of the most dramatic changes have been to the guest rooms. There are 20 spacious suites, some with a theme, such as feng shui or Manhattan, and the bathrooms are stunning - almost large enough to get lost in. Emma says they've proved a massive hit. "People are quite surprised by the rooms - we've had lots of positive feedback. We've got pretty much every large company in Darlington staying with us," she says.

Like most modern hotels, The Croft has a health club, complete with state-of-the-art equipment and a sauna and steam room. Yet according to Emma, its real selling point is its restaurant. "The restaurant is probably our main focus. It's something we're very proud of," she says.

Based loosely on the Singapore hotel of the same name, Raffles is where contemporary meets colonial. Its lion statues and lush greenery recall the Raj, and yet its menu is up-to-the-minute. Emma says a key strength is the chef. "He's come from a restaurant, rather than a hotel back-



Then and now: renamed The Croft, top, and the Croft Spa pictured in the 1950s

ground," she says. "Eventually, he's looking for rosettes and he'll get them."

Open for lunch from 12-2pm and dinner every night, Raffles serves what's referred to as 'contemporary English cuisine'. "It's food that looks good on the plate," Emma explains. "One of our signature dishes is mini joint of James Wright's gammon, which is posh gammon, egg and chips. One of the chef's favourite desserts is a basil-infused creme brulee with homemade lavender shortbread."

## NE motoring



Mercedes ML350: just about everything has been improved

# Back up the ranks of the 4x4s

If it's a long, long way to lunch, the Mercedes ML should definitely be on the car-buying menu, says Motoring Correspondent IAN LAMMING

**W**E have all jumped in the car to meet a friend for lunch, haven't we? Nothing unusual in that... until I mention it to others.

"Let me get this straight," they say. "You jumped in your car and went to meet your friend for lunch, had lunch then drove all the way back in a day – from Edinburgh. Are you mad?"

No, not when the car is an ML350, Mercedes' latest posh off-roader. One hundred and thirty six miles there courtesy of the A68; 162 miles back thanks to the old A1.

The omnibus of the Archers followed by Desert Island Discs pretty much got me up there; less than three music CDs got me back. In the middle, a spot of lunch at Harvey Nicks with my chum and that's a good day out, I'd say.

Such a journey wouldn't have been great in every car, of course, and one of those would have been the old ML; a car that handled so badly that I once felt car sick while actually driving it, thanks to the yacht-in-a-storm body roll.

No such troubles with the latest version to grace our roads, particularly when it is fitted with air suspension which is simply superb. Press the little button on the dash so the "sport" light illuminates red and the big ML will handle like any saloon, and a good one at that. Opt for "comfort" and it takes on the persona of a limo. This one thing alone is sufficient to make the new ML worthy of the badge at last.

But it doesn't stop there. Mercedes has improved just about everything on this car to catapult it right up the ranks of 4x4s.

It looks a lot better – similar yes – but much improved thanks to subtle styling changes which completely alter proportions and aesthetics. It looks much bigger, wider, lower, purposeful – in fact, nicer in every way.

Get the tape measure out and you will find that it is bigger in most directions and the benefits stretch inside as well as out. There is more room for passengers, more for luggage, more car to stand on the drive.

Inside is a delight too. The dash oozes quality and could have come from an SL sports car. In fact, if it wasn't for the fact that you are seated so high up, you would forget you were in a roughly tough off-roader at all. It's pure luxury.

Never has The Archers sounded so good, thanks to the Harman Kardon hi-fi; the air temperature is beautifully controlled by the climate control; the sculpted leather seats cosset the body and support mile after mile; the seven speed automatic gearbox and silky smooth V6 engine make driving long distances a breeze.

That engine produces a mammoth 272bhp which happily and unobtrusively cruises at the legal limit while quaffing petrol at the rate of 24 miles per gallon. Call on its huge reserves of strength and it responds in a way that seems almost indecent in a vehicle this size. Safe to say, it has more than enough power to overtake slow moving vehicles on the A68 in perfect safety.

Surely Mercedes hasn't managed to iron out all the faults from the old ML? Is this the perfect off-roader? Well, nearly, but not quite, though I do have to nitpick.

On a couple of occasions when creeping in traffic the automatic gearbox would thump alarmingly into the lowest ratio; but, strangely, only sometimes, so I'm not sure what that's about.

Also, unless you go for the optional extra bi-xenon lights, things are going to be a bit dull at night, and there are no headlamp wash wipes. As an example, you can happily drive along on full beam and no one even flashes you.

And although lights are something you should not be skipping on if you drive a lot at night, these small faults leave next to nothing else to grumble about.

If your mates do live a long way away from home, particularly up north where the weather is inclement, there can be no better vehicle than the Mercedes ML in which to meet them for lunch... however far the restaurant.

## The sky's the limit this Christmas



**A**T Cleveland Flying School, based at Durham Tees Valley Airport, the sky really is the limit. With expert tuition, you can get a pilot's licence and even learn to fly a jumbo jet. Yet for most, a fun experience is what it's all about.

"We offer training right from the very beginning up through private pilot licence level right up to commercial pilot, so we are basically training people who want to fly recreationally or who want a job flying," says Alan Wrigley, head of training at the school. "We are actually able to offer every type of flying course that's available in the UK, but the majority of what we do is recreational. I would say that it's about 75 per cent recreational and 25 per cent potential professional pilots."

According to Alan, the school attracts all kinds of people. "We get all walks of life – it's so inclusive," he says. "Some people start doing it recreationally then decide they want to do it as a job, and some people only ever come once – they love it and they have done what they wanted to do."

With prices starting from £69 for half an hour's tuition in a two-seater plane, lessons are within most people's budgets. Alan says that with the school's long history and rigorous standards, safety is guaranteed. "There has been training at this airfield since the Second World War," he says. "The company as it now stands has only been here for two years but our club history probably goes back 30 years. All the instructors have to go through a rigorous training course and testing and they are regularly re-tested. It's very, very safe."

Those wanting to take passengers can have their lesson in a four-seater plane, from £89, and flights can be

For those struggling to satisfy the hard to buy for this Christmas, a flying lesson could be just the thing. SARAH FOSTER finds out what's on offer at Cleveland Flying School

taken up to six months after booking. Alan says that whatever the package, the student gets to grips with the controls. "The person who goes flying really does get a chance to control the plane and usually comes back with a good idea of how to do it," he says.

While due to an increase in fuel prices, all options will cost an extra £6 from the New Year, any bookings made before that will be honoured at the present rate. Alan says that lessons make the ideal Christmas gifts. "Many, many people buy them as Christmas presents – you can get a gift voucher from us written out in the name of the recipient," he says. "I would say a person hasn't got everything until they've got some flying experience."

● Cleveland Flying School, Durham Tees Valley Airport (01325) 332855.

### WIN A FLYING LESSON

The flying school is offering one lucky reader the chance to win a half hour flying lesson in a two-seater plane, worth £69, with the option of paying extra to upgrade. To have a chance of winning, just tell us when training started at the airfield. Send your answer on a postcard or the back of a sealed envelope to Cleveland Flying School Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Darlington, DL1 1NF, to be received by December 14.



You can learn to fly in the Bulldog, the aircraft that RAF jet pilots used to do their basic training in



Wigwam gang: kids get ready to mosey down to the OK Corral

## Away days for little indians

**I**NSTEAD of the usual games and toys this Christmas, why not treat your children or grandchildren to the gift of a Wigwam holiday with the family? A two-night break for a family of four between January and March costs in the region of £70 at the Northumbria Wigwam Village near Berwick upon Tweed.

Visitors can choose their preferred wigwam such as The Lone Ranger, OK Corral, Buffalo Bill or Hiawatha. The interiors have wooden floors, robust sleeping platforms and a central dais that can be dismantled if more daytime space is required. Outside there are individual car parking spaces, a shower and toilet block and children's play area. Other facilities include a licensed restaurant, licensed shop, country and coastal walks, interactive art centre, quad bike trekking and fishing.

● For more information contact John and Christine Whiteford on (01289) 307107 or visit the website [www.northumbrianwigwams.com](http://www.northumbrianwigwams.com)

## NE christmas



### Getting in the swing

**F**OR those who want to improve their golf in 2006, lessons at Matfen Hall in Northumberland might be the answer. Ten lessons with head pro John Harrison – the coach to Ken Ferry, winner of the 2005 Open at the K Club – are available for £300. Each lesson is 45 minutes long, which includes initial computerised swing analysis in the new golf academy at the hotel. All students are given a DVD analysis of their swing to take home with them. A digi-card of 15 baskets of golf balls, with 45 in each, to be used at Matfen Hall's new driving range costs £30.

Call the Matfen Hall Golf Shop on (01661) 855711

**C**OUPLES who love to be pampered might enjoy a His and Hers joint day of pampering in the twin treatments suite at Matfen Hall, the only spa in the world to offer Versace Skincare Treatments. Day packages, which include a minimum of three treatments, lunch in the Juice Bar and full use of all of the spa and leisure facilities, start at £118 per person.

Gift cheques are available by telephoning (01661) 886500

## Up hill and down dale – a real experience

**I**F YOU'RE looking for a gift for the person who seems to have everything, why not buy them an experience instead? Deepdale Off Road has gift vouchers which are valid for one year and allow the recipient to book their drive on a convenient day. All vouchers are valid Monday to Friday and can be upgraded to a weekend event. And just so you don't feel too lonely behind the wheel, they allow two people of your choice to share the driving.

Absolute beginners are welcomed, as are more experienced off roaders. The qualified instructors show you how to get your wheels muddy and how to get the most out of your vehicle.

Former dairy farmer Graeme Gill turned from four legs to four wheels six years ago on the 20 acre site at Smartgill Farm, Barnard Castle. He has taught drivers from the age of 17 to 76.

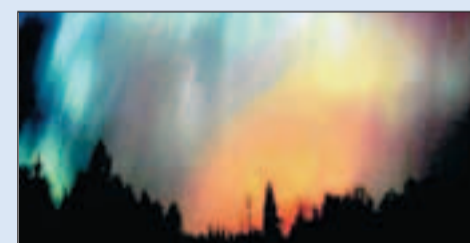
"I love every minute of instructing but I have had some experiences that could be described as character-building," Graeme reveals. "And a lot of them have been with a man behind the wheel. Women tend to stand back and examine the challenges. In my experience they also listen a lot more to the instructors and consequently end up driving a lot better."

● Deepdale Off Road can be contacted on (01833) 630 802 or at [www.deepdaleoffroad.co.uk](http://www.deepdaleoffroad.co.uk)



Off roading can make an exciting Christmas gift

### A heavenly treat



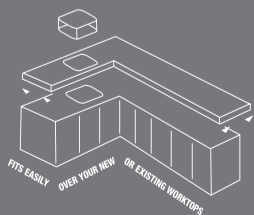
**F**OR those keener to see the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) than an old man with a beard this festive season, Explore's five-day Lapland Ice Adventure starting on December 21 and running through to March 2006 includes ice fishing and reindeer sledding, plus a night in the famous Icehotel in Jukkasjarvi from £775.

The same operator also offers a four-day Icelandic Escapade, with guesthouse accommodation, and a superjeep ride into spectacular volcanic landscapes from £575, including flights, until late-March.

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The Worktop That Fits On Top

# The chic of it

Three whole floors of fashions and homewares make this the season to be stylish at Psyche, as SARAH FOSTER finds out

**W**ITH two top awards under its belt – as FHM’s best store and Drapers magazine’s retailer of the year – Psyche’s reputation speaks for itself. The huge store, on Middlesbrough’s Linthorpe Road, has long been a favourite with the fashion-conscious, but as menswear manager Steven Illingworth points out, it’s not just for label junkies.

“We do menswear, ladieswear and childrenswear and in each department, we do things like tailoring, evening wear and casual wear,” he says. “We do sell expensive items, but we try to keep the prices down.”

As a so-called “destination store”, Psyche is much more than just a clothes shop. “We have three floors and we also do homeware,” says Steven. “There’s an art gallery on the first floor and we have our own bar and café as well. Basically, you can get everything you need.”

Such is its profile that it has starred in a TV documentary, *The Secret Life Of The Shop*, which may soon be repeated. Steven

says it’s the perfect place for presents.

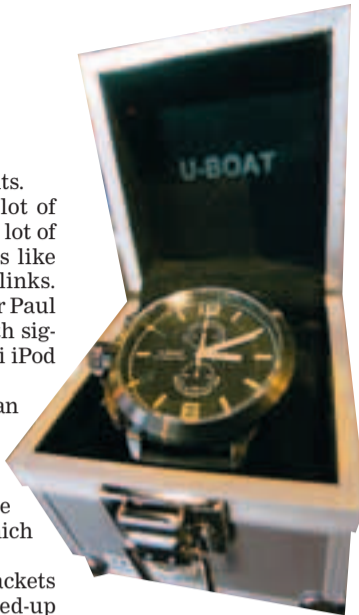
“At this time of year, we sell a lot of gifts,” he says. “Obviously, we sell a lot of clothes, but people also buy things like scarves, watches, wallets and cufflinks. The big thing this season is a leather Paul Smith iPod holder in the Paul Smith signature stripes. We do it for the mini iPod and the regular sized iPod.”

Another must-have gift is the Italian U-Boat watch. “They’re exclusive to us and they have a huge face,” says Steven. “They start from £294.99. Among the cheaper presents we are selling are a lot of stripy scarves, which start from £29.99.”

Winter warmers include stylish jackets by Armani and Boss, and for clued-up women, a Norman Longstaff handbag is the season’s stalwart. Also selling well are Patty Anne drainpipe jeans and Paul Frank dressing gowns, and with rails of clothes to choose from, kids needn’t be left out.

With so much on offer, the only problem could be an overstuffed stocking.

● **Psyche, Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough (01642) 888333, www.psyche.co.uk. Open 9am-5.30pm, Mon-Fri; until 9pm on Thursdays, until 6pm on Saturdays and from 11am-5pm on Sundays.**



Clockwise from above: Psyche interior; beaded clutch bag £19.99; U-Boat watch £484.99; Paul Frank nightwear bear £19.99, gown £59.99

# ne directory

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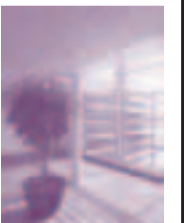
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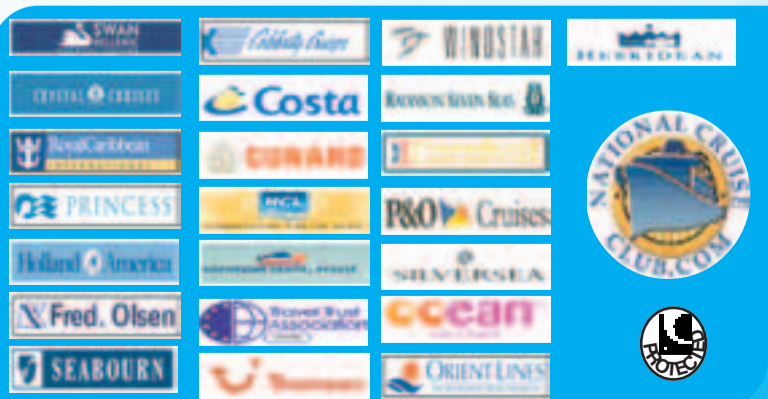
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