

The Northern Echo

**ne**

The lifestyle magazine  
for the North-East

MAY 2007

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england



**SHOPPING**  
Bath and  
beach babes

**INTERIORS**  
The house  
that John built

**WIN**  
A bespoke  
portrait

**WIN**  
A china figurine

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## sharon griffiths

“I went for the third approach – leave it to the experts

**S**O there I was, standing in the kitchen, waiting for the kettle to boil, when suddenly, on the other side of the room, a cupboard door swung gently open. A shelf had creaked off its fixings. And slowly, silently, a pile of a dozen dinner plates arced gracefully into the air and crashed one by one onto the floor.

That, I thought, stepping over the debris to get to the dustpan and brush, is God's way of telling me to get a new kitchen.

And not before time. Our present kitchen was a cheap job done before we moved in here 18 years ago and altered in a ramshackle ad hoc way ever since. Doors are wonky, drawers stick, shelves slope, the large and battered table came from a bigger kitchen in our last house and I bang my hip on it whenever I walk through. It owes me nothing, as my mother would say, and it's definitely time for a replacement.

But where to start?

There seem to be three approaches to new kitchens.

There is the DIY approach where you spend every Saturday and Bank Holiday going round all the big stores eyeing up all the options, buy your kitchen, get it home and then spend another ten weekends putting it together yourself. Hmm... In some cases it works, but even when people know what they're doing – sadly not the case in this house – it seems to take an inordinately long time – months, if not years – and always seems to leave a gap that's waiting for something vital that was faulty, or had a bit missing, or hasn't been delivered yet.

Then there's the Designer Diana approach, named after a friend of mine who lived and breathed her kitchen for six months. There wasn't a work top, a door front, a range cooker or a double drainer within 50 miles of Darlington that she hadn't examined and found wanting. Her old kitchen was festooned with plans, samples and artists' impressions. She could spend hours just talking taps, days talking tiles. It took a lot of time, a lot of money and a lot of inspiration and energy, but the end result was absolutely knock-your-socks-off brilliant.

However, there's a limit to how much of my life or my feeble brain cells I can devote to thinking about door handles. So I went for the third approach – leave it to the experts.

Two friends had recommended the same firm. I looked no further. What I wanted, I said, was a

nice simple classic kitchen, solidly made, decent materials, but nothing overly flash or fancy.

When the kitchen designer cranked up a 15-year-old computer program – “because it still does the job” – I knew I had found the right man.

When he talked about linking two lots of cupboards either side of the window with a fancy flyover and I looked blank, he said: “Ah. I guessed you weren't the fancy flyover type”. How true, how true.

And so we continued to talk drawers and cupboards and fittings. He suggested the hob, the oven, the fridge that would be best, and I didn't query his judgement or even ask many questions.

Choosing the taps – high mixers that I could knock on and off with the back of my hand – took about ten seconds and cost £100. £100 for taps! I felt the need to lie down in a darkened room...

Then we came to worktops.

“You could have wood,” he said doubtfully. “It looks very nice but needs looking after.”

We shook our heads in unison.

So it came down to laminate or granite. And a price difference of £2,500.

Now if someone offered you £2,500 to spend as you will, would your first thought be to dash out and buy granite worktops? Mmmm... No. Mine neither. So, only a little reluctantly, I opted for laminate. “You can always replace them in a few years if you want to. It's what we did,” said the kitchen man, comfortingly keeping my options open.

The tiles were easy. I'd seen just what I wanted in a friend's house. The kitchen man has an account at the tile shop. I just tell them what I want and don't even have to think about measurements or ghastly grout or staggering with them to the car. Easy peasy.

There was the slight problem of the other work being done in the house – new boiler, extra radiators, replacement pipes.

But the boiler man will talk to the kitchen man. They promised they will sort it out between them and they say it will all be done while we are over the hills and far away for our holidays next month.

All in all, the planning, sorting, selecting and choosing has taken me precisely three mornings and no physical effort at all.

Can getting a new kitchen really be that easy? Watch this space...

## WAXING LYRICAL

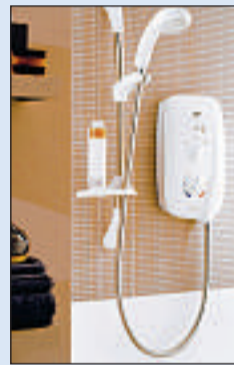
**W**HEN they're sitting on the terrace on a summer's evening, interior designers Colin & Justin swear by On The Terrace candles to create a romantic glow. Akin to making an unforgettable Scotch whisky, each Shearer candle is hand made using over 100 years of experience and a unique blend of the finest waxes to ensure an even and long lasting burn. By mixing natural citronella with the succulent smell of sweet mango, the candles will add a truly exotic aroma to any garden.

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## NE window shopping



KOHLER Mira Ltd has taken top spot in a recent independent Which? report which tested 19 conventional electric showers from across the market. The Mira Showers' Sport 9.8kW and Sprint 9.5kW models came out in first and second place while the recently launched Play electric shower (9.5kW) came sixth. All the showers were tested for force, temperature stability, water use, power use, installation, ease of use, features and noise on a scale of one to five stars. A full copy of the Which? report on electric showers can found on [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk). For full details of the Mira range visit [www.mirashowers.com](http://www.mirashowers.com) or phone 0845-600-6472.

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The bathroom is the best place to indulge in a little bit of 'me' time. LISA HAYNES looks at the latest trends

**A**N inviting bathroom serves a multitude of purposes: pampering and preening, unwinding and relaxing - oh, and keeping ourselves smelling sweet... And besides their comforting qualities, bathrooms are perfect for adding value to our homes too: a recent Nationwide survey revealed that an extra bathroom can slap five per cent on to the price of a property.

But if you don't have the space or funds for a new bathroom, make the most of your old one with a few simple renovations to give it the wow factor. Forget the annual spring clean - give your bathroom a stylish overhaul.

So how do you go about turning your bathroom into a sanctuary to rival a lavish spa?

"Nowadays, rather than being purely functional, the bathroom is considered an area where design is becoming increasingly important," says Georgina Britten of Roca Bathrooms. "The trend for choosing a coloured suite is now long gone and minimalism combined with functionality is currently in vogue. Consumers are finding ways to inject colour into the room in a more subtle and stylish way."

Paul Abernethy, of the family-run Bathroom World in Darlington, says there is a marked trend at the moment for walk-in shower cubicles with glass panels, and for power showers and body jets.

"Lighting in bathrooms is also much more exciting," he adds. "People want lights that change colour and add atmosphere to the room. You can now even buy strips of lights that fit between tiles." For the modern day family one bathroom is never enough, but you can minimise those angry queues outside the door with a cloakroom bathroom that utilises unused space.

"Consumers have become much more design

savvy and realise that small spaces can look just as stylish as larger bathrooms," Georgina explains. "The cloakroom bathroom has evolved, and there is a much greater choice of design-led products manufactured specifically for the smaller bathroom."

"Planning a bathroom must be done meticulously," advises Shelley Hargreaves, senior designer at Ripples Bath. "The bathroom is where you start the day and wind down at the end of it so it must be both relaxing and energising."

She divulges some trade secrets for planning your new bathroom.

■ Well-planned lighting can create stunning effects. Spot lighting can help to create the feeling of space while chromotherapy lighting (coloured lighting that can be changed to reflect your mood) can help soothe the senses.

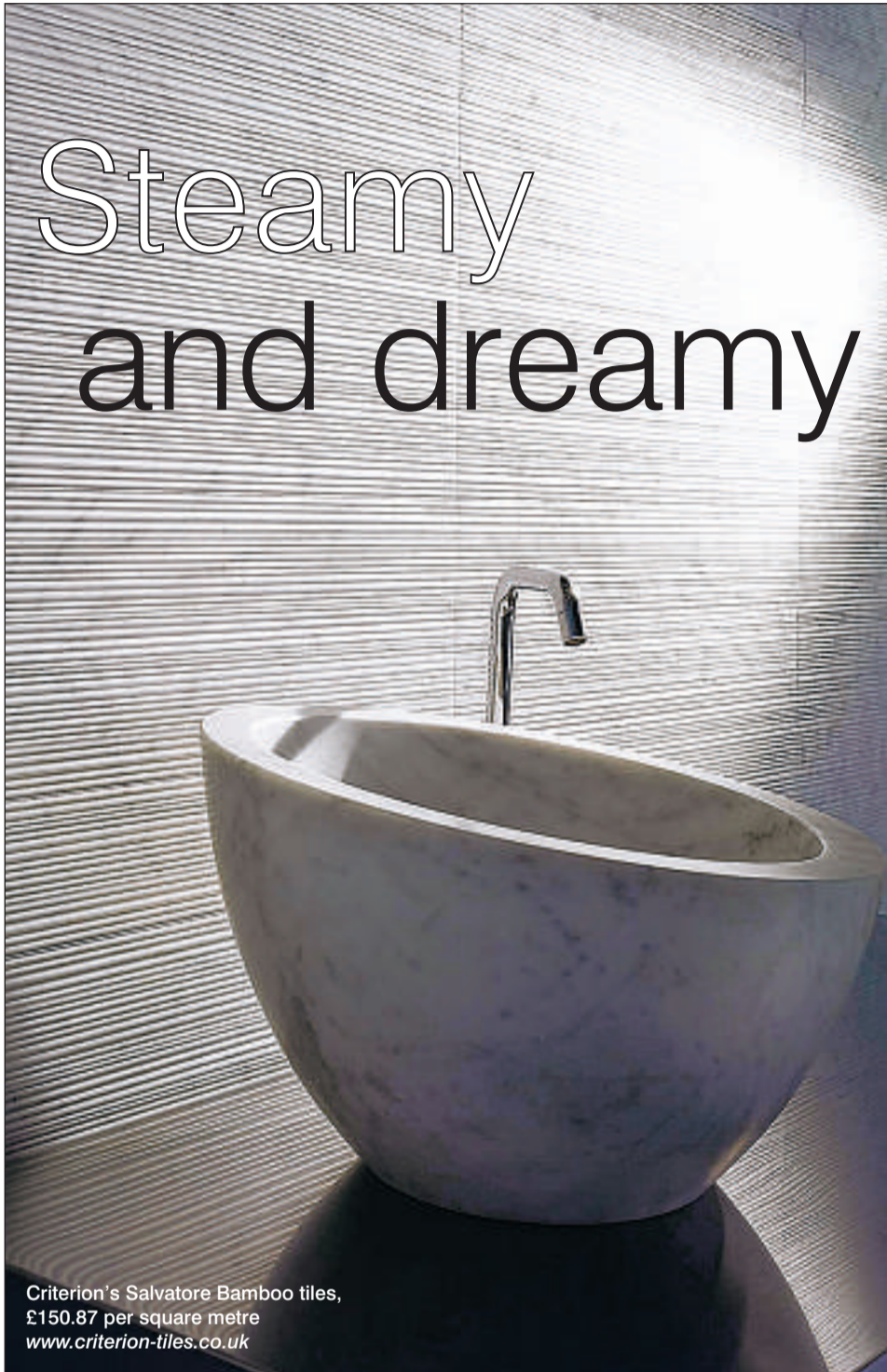
■ Storage must always be considered, as clutter and wet towels will spoil the look of a beautifully designed room. If you're working with a small space why not opt for cut-out squares in the walls, which can be great for storing bottles, while circular towel rails can be used to store piles of towels.

■ If you are working with a large space it's a great idea to use a bath or shower area as a focal point. Having a bath in the centre of the room is a lovely idea. Mirrors can also be used to make a large bathroom look even bigger.

■ Investing in a stylish, modern sink can change the look of a bathroom from drab to fab.

#### TOP STYLES

White suites are back on the bathroom style barometer, according to the experts, but that doesn't have to mean your bathroom is bland. Here are some bathroom style suggestions...



Criterion's Salvatore Bamboo tiles,  
£150.87 per square metre  
[www.criterion-tiles.co.uk](http://www.criterion-tiles.co.uk)



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**  
Next's Vintage range;  
Scandinavian-style bathroom range from Matalan [www.matalan.co.uk](http://www.matalan.co.uk)  
Marks & Spencer's Classic Ceramic collection



**HOTEL CHIC:** Give your bathroom the feel of a five-star hotel suite with refined ceramic fittings and luxury, deep-pile towels.

Try Marks & Spencer's Classic Ceramic collection where you'll find matching mirror, £35, glass shelf, £19.50, towel rail, £15, and towel ring, £9.50. Perfect if you crave a classic, uniform look fit for a flying visit from the Queen.

Prefer a more modern twist on the hotel trend? Try Ideal Standard's Jado IQ accessories - glass tumbler £55.16, lotion dispenser, £97.34, and double towel rail, £76.79.

**VINTAGE ADVANTAGE:** Fancy injecting a little shabby chic character? Take your bathroom back in time with a touch of vintage style. It's a great look if you're working with an older bathroom where modern makeovers will look out of place. Use sumptuous chrome fittings and curved accessories.

Try Next's Vintage range, which includes vintage shelves, £50, wall cabinet, £45, floor rail, £40, maize laundry bin, £30, and ivory wood toilet seat, £15.

A few well-placed accessories will set the vintage ball rolling in your bathroom. Go for Woolworths' vintage accessories: text soap dish, £3, tumbler, £3, toothbrush holder, £3, and lotion dispenser, £4.

**WHITE WONDER:** White fixtures and fittings doesn't have to mean minimal. Create a clean, crisp look with white as a versatile base that will complement any colour scheme, from hot pink to powder blue.

For a take on Swedish chic, look to Matalan's



Shower available from Darlington's Bathroom World [www.bathroomworldtdtn.co.uk](http://www.bathroomworldtdtn.co.uk)

Scandinavian-style bathroom range, including white wicker laundry bin, £20, white bath accessory set, £10, and white bath mat, £10.

Immerse yourself in the white wash effect with John Lewis' Vermont range: towel cupboard, £99, mirror, £40, robe hooks, £17, and toothbrush holder, £17.

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**NE interiors**



**MALVERN HOUSE:** imposing house in the County Durham village of Staindrop

Malvern House in Staindrop has undergone a deal of refurbishment since its incarnation as a B&B, but retains all its Georgian charms. SARAH FRENCH pays a visit

'Give your home a stylish look this Spring'

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**S**TANDING proudly in the centre of Staindrop, Malvern House has the look of a perfect doll's house. It's a unique property, being the only home in the County Durham village to boast a brick facade.

It is believed that the Grade II listed family townhouse was built around 1760 by eminent architect John Carr, who was responsible for many improvements carried out at nearby Raby Castle from 1767 to 1785.

The Yorkshire-born son of a quarry owner and stonemason, Carr was renowned for his work during the 18th Century on a number of historic buildings across the country, including Doncaster racecourse grandstand, parts of Harewood House and buildings on the estate near Leeds, Newark town hall, Leeds General Infirmary, York Assize Courts and Fairfax House, also in York. He eventually became mayor of the city.

It is apt, therefore, that Malvern House has, more recently, undergone a loving and tasteful restoration of its own.

Once run as a successful bed and breakfast business, the property has been returned to a family home during the last two years. The owners have restored most of the rooms to the gracious style of their Georgian heritage with decoration that's sympathetic to the property's history, yet is contemporary too.

It's not clear if the main entrance, which is up a path to the side of the house, is the original; certainly a door on the front would have spoiled the Georgian symmetry of the 12 original sash windows that fill the facade side to side.

The side entrance, though, means that visitors step into a large hallway with a stone-flagged floor and the warmest of welcomes from the wood-burning stove set into an original fireplace.

"We chose a wood-burner because when we go out, we can leave it stoked up. It's lovely to come back to and keeps this part of the house really warm," says the current owner.

The flagged floor leads on past the pine staircase to a back entrance area with a huge cupboard that's home to wellies, coats and other paraphernalia, and to two reception rooms.

The one used by the family as their main living room has been decorated in Fired Earth's

Weald Green, which gives the room a freshness and sets off well the white paintwork, marble mantelpiece and granite hearth.

The sash windows, with original shutters, are higher in this room to give some privacy from people walking by, while still allowing light to stream in.

It's the same in the study-sitting room next door, where a stone fireplace and pine parquet floor make for a relaxed space. "It's a very sunny house," says the owner. "It shines in the front in the morning and most of the day and comes round to the back in the evening."

A formal dining room would have played a central role in the life of its original Georgian owners and still does, providing plenty of space for big family get-togethers.

Off the dining room, steps lead down into a cellar with original stone alcoves for storing wine. The cellar also conceals an original Milner safe, a location that would have horrified the father of Thomas Milner, a pioneer of fire resistant safes in the 1830s.

As a boy, Thomas was apprenticed to his father in the trade of tinsmith and brazier for 11 years during which time he was not allowed to marry, have a day off or even to take a drink without permission.

The discipline perhaps paid off though because, in 1824, Thomas went on to secure orders for strong boxes from the Duke of Wellington and an official contract to supply the War Office.

Moving towards the back of the house you join a stone corridor, which has all the hallmarks of once being the servants' entrance to the house. It leads up steps into a dual aspect, modern kitchen with free-standing units and clay tile floor. Up another set of steps is a multi-purpose room currently used as a laundry.

Here a second back door leads out onto stone steps going down into a private courtyard and garden area. A two storey out-building is ripe for conversion into accommodation or garden room, and there is a stone-built shed.

An arched feature window going upstairs looks out over the garden; the owner has left it un-curtained to show off the splendid architrave.

► Continued on page 8



The house that John built



**GRACIOUS:** Malvern House has been beautifully restored over the past two years, while retaining all its historic features

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## The house that John built

► Continued from page 7

Six large, double bedrooms and two family bathrooms extend across two floors.

The front bedrooms on the first floor boast features including a working fireplace, original alcoved cupboards and original cornicing.

The bedrooms on the second floor have window seats and beamed ceilings, giving a charming cottagey feel to this grand home. A large, luxury bathroom on the second floor comes complete with a free-standing roll-top bath.

"This is my favourite part of the house. I love the cosy feel with the lower windows and beams, but it's still very light and airy," says the owner.

Her choice of colours is perfect: in the master bedroom, for example, dark antique furniture is set off beautifully against pretty powder blue walls.

A new life overseas possibly beckons for the current owners. There remains some potential for anyone who is keen to continue the refurbishment, but we'd beg them not to alter it too much. It's lovely just the way it is.

■ For more information, contact Fine & Country in Darlington on 01325-488619.



*We chose a wood-burner because when we go out, we can leave it stoked up. It's lovely to come back to*



**OLD AND NEW:** the interior of Malvern House is traditional, yet practical

## NE competition



**TALENTED:**  
Rachel Pearce, above,  
with two of her paintings,  
Tilly, top, and Mitiku



## WIN a bespoke portrait

**T**HIS month NE Magazine has teamed up with portrait artist Rachel Pearce to offer readers the opportunity to win a bespoke portrait drawing to grace their home.

Originally from County Durham, Rachel has been painting professionally for over ten years and now works as a full-time painter and illustrator from her studio at her home in Brighton.

Locally, Rachel is represented by Gallerina gallery in Duke Street, Darlington, and recently enjoyed a successful solo exhibition in the McGuinness Gallery in Bishop Auckland. Sponsored by Durham and Sedgfield District Councils, it showcased 40 of her beautiful fine art floral paintings. In 2005, the Association of Illustrators selected Rachel for a showcase of contemporary British illustration, and recently she was invited to exhibit with The Society of Botanical Artists at Central Hall Westminster in this year's annual exhibition.

As a young female artist, Rachel enjoys continuing recognition for her work, most recently in having been selected by the Society of Women Artists to exhibit two of her portrait paintings with them in their 146th annual exhibition at the famous Mall Galleries in London. The exhibition will showcase a stunning collection of contemporary artwork by talented professional women artists.

Rachel Pearce and NE Magazine are offering one lucky reader the opportunity to win a free bespoke portrait drawing. Rachel will work from a photograph of the winner's choice and the portrait will be on 100 per cent cotton paper, presented in a bespoke mounting.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question: **What is the name of the spaniel that features on the Rachel Pearce website?**



**EMMA:** one of Rachel's drawings

### HOW TO ENTER

SEND your answer on a postcard or the back of an envelope, along with your name, address and contact telephone number, to Rachel Pearce, via the link on her website: [www.rachelpearce.co.uk](http://www.rachelpearce.co.uk)

The closing date is Tuesday, May 29. The winner will be notified by Rachel Pearce and an announcement posted on the website.

### Terms and conditions:

1. The offer is for a portrait drawing and delivery.
2. Open to UK residents only. Entrants over 18.
3. Postal or telephone entries will not be accepted.
4. All photos should be sent via recorded delivery or where possible scanned and e-mailed. Rachel cannot be held liable for any photographs that go missing in the post.
5. All copyright is reserved by Rachel Pearce.
6. Portraits may be used on the Rachel Pearce website or in promotional literature such as leaflets and brochures.
7. Where you require Rachel to take photographs for the portrait, this will be charged at £50 per hour plus additional travel expenses.
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## WIN a stunning fine porcelain figure

NAO, a family run company which is part of the Lladro group, has been creating hand-made porcelain figures for almost 40 years. The collection of beautiful pieces, renowned for their detailed design, expert craftsmanship, and convincing expressions are now sold in more than 900 outlets across the UK.

For this spring, NAO had added 16 stunning new pieces, all of which are perfect for either that special gift or to bring beauty into the home. Among the beautiful, timeless porcelain pieces that have been introduced for this launch is the stunning Romantic Dreams, one of the most beautiful pieces to date. It features a young girl daydreaming into the distance and mirroring the feelings of joy and happiness that can only be experienced when you are in love.

We have five of the figures to give away. To win Romantic Dreams, just tell us in

**NAO**  
HAND MADE PORCELAIN



which Spanish city NAO is made

- A** Madrid
- B** Barcelona
- C** Valencia

Send your answer, together with name, address and daytime telephone number to NAO Porcelain Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. The closing date is Saturday, May 26, and usual Newsquest competition rules apply.

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**NE gardening**



**WILDLIFE HAVEN:** birds love the wildness and abundance of Karen Chaytor's garden

**Location:** Croft-on-Tees  
**Age of garden:** 13 years  
**Favourite plants:** scented roses (New Dawn and Margaret Merrill), peonies, snowdrops, honeysuckle  
**Tools I can't live without:** lightweight wheelbarrow and secateurs  
**Maintenance:** lengthy sessions rather than small bursts, especially in spring and summer.

away from any other inhabitation. That is certainly what the birds think too. Woodpeckers 'chuck' from the top of the large ash tree before swooping down to peck from the feeders in the old apple tree in the main lawn. They compete with chaffinches, greenfinches, bluetits, tree creepers and tree sparrows, but in reality, there is so much fruit to be had in the garden that they will all get a fair share.

**A** DAUGHTER'S wedding has to rank highly as any mother's proudest moment. A clash of elation and sadness as the child leaves the safety and security of her given family to chase her own dreams in the arms of her beloved.

For Karen Chaytor last year, the emotions ran even higher. She had all the usual duties of the mother of the bride, but also took on the task of growing and arranging all the flowers for the wedding in her own garden. Not only that, the reception was held on the lawn, so the garden had to look at its most beautiful on the day too. In February the task seemed quite simple. Buy a few packets of seed, sow them and grow them on ready to use. The hardest part was deciding on which flowers to use.

The colour theme was mainly blue, with hints of creams and a touch of pink, which gave Karen quite a large choice of cut flowers. These were narrowed down quite considerably by the time she had looked at germination time and flowering season, but she hit on cornflowers, nigella, godetia, cosmos, white antirrhinum, white mallow, larkspur and sweetpeas. The seeds were carefully tended, pricked out and potted on over the months, even to the point that when they happened to go away on holiday, the house sitter was charged with the care of trays and trays of precious seedlings.

In the meantime, Robin (the regular gardener), Susan (a gardener brought in to tickle the borders especially for the wedding) and Karen worked tirelessly on the rest of the garden.

This is normally a beautiful garden anyway. It was carved out from the fields behind the revamped farmhouse about 13 years ago and Karen has spent the last eight years slowly re-shaping borders, adding features and consolidating it all so that it meshes together.

It is certainly a garden made for entertaining. A large vine-covered pergola sits on the bricked patio just outside the main door. Honeysuckles and roses scramble up the posts, and pots of petunias, pelargoniums, fuchsias and snapdragons sit underneath. Perched on one of the many comfortable chairs, there is an uninterrupted view of the garden, the fields and the woods beyond.

The hawthorn hedge has been clipped to allow a 'gateway' gap, topped with topiary balls, which links the garden straight into the countryside. You could be a million miles

Apart from the gnarled old apple, smothered in a white climbing rose, there are a few newer apples and a couple of plums on the lawn. Further towards the back of the garden are the cherry trees. There are sumptuous wild ones filled with a deep red juice, sweet Stella with a pinky flesh and the succulent Morello. Gooseberries, red and blackcurrants sit in a bed next to the asparagus, rhubarb and strawberries. The bounty is so overwhelming that the floor is littered with dropped fruit.

Herbs are an important feature of this garden too. A lavender border leads you up to a raised circular bed made out of bricks that contains every herb you could ever hope to grow in the wilds of northern England. Lovage, fennel and a huge clump of tarragon provide the height, while the under shrub consists of marjorams, thymes, sorrel, rue, rosemary, mint and sage. Karen is an excellent cook, and the availability of fresh herbs supplements her culinary talents.

Karen has three large borders in the main garden which are home to a carefully selected and matched assortment of perennial plants and shrubs. Roses feature heavily, as do alliums and peonies. Hellebores, lungworts and heuchera hug the ground, whilst salvias, aguiligeas, tradescantia, masterwort, alstromeria, and campanula add the splashes of colour.

There are plenty of boundaries and hedges in the garden, but there do not seem to be any separate entities. It all blends in seamlessly. Nor are the hedges plain and simple. A large golden sambucus acts as one full stop. Two varieties of potentilla merge to create an impenetrable, but aesthetic wall of pale lemon and deep yellow petals. Iris and lavender are used to line pathways, nigella and cornflowers to create big bold statements. One side of the garden is bounded by a small meandering stream. There is a balance between the straight lines and blousey curves, which creates a happy, restful harmony.

It must have been this tranquility that Karen's daughter wanted to absorb and share with her guests when she decided to hold the most important party of her life in her mother's garden. She certainly wanted to show off her mother's gardening talents, both in the ground and in the decorations and Karen rose to the horticultural challenge of sending her daughter down the aisle clutching a bouquet of home grown sweet peas, cornflowers and love-in-the-mist.

A final gift, nurtured with a mother's love, to send her daughter on her way to her new life.

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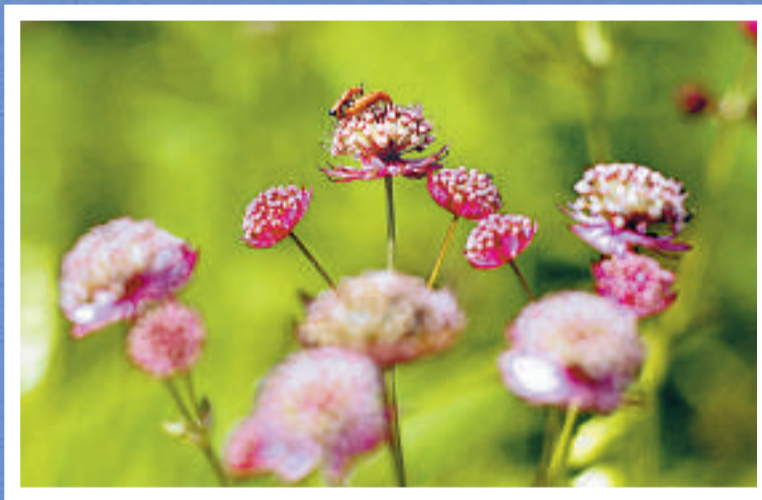
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# Bride and joy

BRIGID PRESS visits a gardener who faced the daunting challenge of growing all the flowers for her daughter's wedding, and of making sure the garden setting was just perfect for the big day



Pictures: SARAH NICHOLSON

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It started off as just a hobby when she received a special gift – now making items with applique is what Claire Royle, *right*, does every day. She talks to Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER about her thriving cottage industry



# Royle

## commissions

**F**OR most in temporary homes, the general debris of their lives is scattered everywhere. Amid the carrier bags and boxes, life may continue unabated, but there's a lingering sense of chaos, of nothing quite as it should be. Not so with Claire Royle's pristine house.

She may have only just moved in, with husband Jeremy and daughter Camilla, who's two years old, but she's already got things shipshape. The spacious house in Barnard Castle will be their base for several months, then when their new abode is ready, they'll all decamp. If the upheaval has been stressful, Claire doesn't hint at this at all.

We meet in Camilla's room downstairs, where there's a photo shoot going on. Camilla bounces on the bed, a blonde-haired cherub dressed in white, and all around are pretty cushions. They are examples of Claire's work, along with what Camilla wears – a cute and snuggly-looking bathrobe. Claire's business started with a present from a friend.

"A friend gave me a towel with Camilla's name on and it was just the most thoughtful gift I'd ever received. It was just beautiful," says the 28-year-old. "It didn't come from this country and I searched and searched for weeks for somebody who did that sort of thing and couldn't find anyone. I'd never seen anything like it before and I thought if I felt that way, other people must too."

The towel in question was appliqued – Camilla's name was spelled in gingham to match the colours of her room. As Claire explains, the term is French. "It means applying one fabric to another, so you've got a plain towel or whatever and my clients now come to me and say 'right Claire, I'd like Isabella' in whatever fabric choice on whatever garment. It's a case of me just applying the letters to the fabrics."

Yet while Claire sounds the seasoned pro, until quite recently, she'd never done this in her life. Originally from Northumberland, she has

a business marketing background, going straight from studying in Edinburgh to work at NE6 Design, a firm in Newcastle. She met her future husband there – he is the managing director – and when Camilla came along it changed her life.

"I always thought I'd go back to work but my job wasn't nine to five and I just wanted to spend more time with her really," says Claire. "When I started out it was all just a hobby – now it's a business and a thriving business and hopefully something that will continue for a long time, touch wood."

What is remarkable is that she taught herself applique. She just set out to learn the skill and didn't stop until she had. "I sat at my kitchen table for six weeks and taught myself how to do it, which sounds really bizarre but that's what I did," says Claire. "I was so determined to master it. Every night Camilla would go to bed and I'd sit and sit and every day I just got better. It was the hardest thing to do."

Once people saw what Claire produced, they started giving her commissions. It seemed they couldn't get enough of her designs. "I told a friend about it and she said 'can I have a look at something that you've done?', so I showed her and she loved it," says Claire. "It was actually just a bath towel with 'Camilla' on and she said 'can you do the same thing for my children?' So I did a towel each for both of her children and then I was asked time and time again to do things for other people."

When Claire devised her range of stock she kept things simple, just like the decor in her home. She started off with children's gifts, including cushions, towels and bathrobes, but has expanded to include some things for adults, as well as housewares. She mainly works with pure white fabrics. "I always think there's something angelic about children in white," she says. "When they've got lovely white soft bathrobes or beach smocks on, all with lovely prints, they look so gorgeous."

The kind of prints that are available again fit in with Claire's own style – she offers classic, vintage patterns including gingham and polka dots. She says most purchases are made as gifts for other people's children. "Probably 90 per cent of people buy as gifts for godchildren, new babies, nieces and nephews," she says. "If they are buying for a gift, I post them out with a card with a message inside from the sender. Most people are busy – they don't have time to go shopping for baby gifts – so this is ideal."

While Claire admits her goods aren't cheap – a bath sheet sells for £32 – she'd rather focus on their quality. In this, her husband has helped out. "My husband's graphic design agency produced a corporate identity, did the website, did all my stationery – everything you need to run a business, basically," says Claire. "Everything looks so professional. Everything is wrapped in crepe paper and then gets boxed up and sent out. People pay a premium so the whole presentation has to be premium as well."

**S**O far she only has the website, but over time, Claire will consider allowing shops to sell her products (she's been approached about this already). She'd also like to take on staff, but there's a dearth of people able to applique. "Lots of people can sew but nobody can applique," she says. "It really is a fine art – I don't know anybody else who can do it."

Until she does recruit some help, Claire will continue on her own and, although her days are pretty full, she says she wouldn't change a thing. "The demand is there and whilst I'm trying to run a home, have a family and run a business it's all a bit hectic, but I'll do this for as long as I can," she says.

■ [www.claireroyle.co.uk](http://www.claireroyle.co.uk)

■ Claire will be at the Elizabeth Finn Care fair at Cartmel Racecourse, Cartmel on November 7-8. Other fairs will be listed on her website.



*I sat at my kitchen table for six weeks and taught myself how to do it, which sounds really bizarre, but that's what I did*

# NE my style



**CASUAL:** skinny-leg blue jeans by Rock and Republic and Black Queen of the Night top by Faith, both from Psyche

**PARTY TIME:** Baby Doll pink and black striped dress with belt from House of Fraser, MetroCentre; pink sparkly shoes from Psyche



Cristina Moreira is the founder of Beauty Angels, which specialises in anti-ageing treatments such as microdermabrasion and Oxygen therapy. She is based at Sedgfield but also operates a mobile service and will visit clients in their own homes



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**Describe your look**

USUALLY go for a classic look. If I like something, I will wear it, whether it's high fashion of the moment or not. I know what suits me and what doesn't. I am not very tall so I always go for heels and like to co-ordinate nails and make-up to add a dash of colour and adventure. I love glitter, glitz and glam downplayed with simple, gorgeous jewellery or vamped up with sparkly shoes, make-up, jewellery and clutch bag. I wear very tailored clothes, which suit my figure.

**What's your favourite item of clothing?**

I have a fabulous pair of skinny leg, white, cropped Victoria Beckham Rock and Republic jeans from last summer, which I adore.

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

Probably those jeans.

**What's been your worst buy?**

A pair of amazing pink shoes that I still love to this day but can't wear because they hurt my toes as soon as I put my feet in them. I can't even take three steps in them. Every so often I try them on in hope but it's no use...

**What are your favourite shops?**

I adore Psyche in Middlesborough. I can always get something I like there and the staff are really helpful and go out of their way to find what you want. House of Fraser, Selfridges and Debenhams are also favourites. I love going to new places and little boutiques are fab for one-off gems.

**What's your favourite beauty product?**

Well, that is quite difficult as I can't really pinpoint one product. My regime includes cleansing, hydrating and treating my skin with Crystal Clear products. I use the Bare Essentials i.d. range of make-up.

I really couldn't do without any of these products.

**Have you any beauty tips?**

80 per cent of ageing is external and only 20 per cent is your own bodyclock. Sun damage, air conditioning, pollution, etc., affect your skin from a very early age. It's never too early to start to care for your skin and it's never too late to start. In my business, I offer treatments to repair damaged skin and also to prevent ageing. Drink more water, eat more fresh fruit and veg, exercise when you can in whichever way you can – anything is better than nothing. Get enough rest and remember... little changes can make a big difference. Too much stress can have a terrible effect on your health so make it a priority to manage the amount of stress in your life Always wear a sun protection factor, even in winter. i.d. make-up foundation has an spf of 15 which is ideal for year-round protection. Finally, less is more when it comes to make-up... remember, you can always put more on if you need to.

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

Victoria Beckham. She always looks great, dresses to suit her figure and as much as people have a go at her for being thin, she carries on regardless. I relate to her because I lost weight after having my children instead of putting it on. Some people are just naturally slimmer and when stressed turn away from food instead of turning to food for comfort. Oh, and I love her Rock and Republic jeans...

**TIMELESS AND CLASSIC:**

tailored suit with a plain black T-shirt from Marks & Spencer  
■ Make-up is a selection by i.d. Bare Minerals

■ Beauty Angels: First Floor, 3 High Street, Sedgfield TS21 2BN; Tel: 0845-603-6687 [www.angelsinc.co.uk](http://www.angelsinc.co.uk)





Brides probably spend longer choosing the dress than anything else, so if there's a chill in the air they'll want something equally beautiful to keep their shoulders warm. SARAH FOSTER finds the perfect cover-up

Hair: Taylor Wood, Darlington

Venue: Headlam Hall Hotel

Wedding dresses: Barbara Douglas at Bridal Couture, contact [www.barbaradouglas.co.uk](http://www.barbaradouglas.co.uk)

Pictures: BLAISE TERHAAR

# Wrap artist

**F**ROM the venue to the transport, outfits to honeymoon, weddings come in many different guises these days as the choices continue to grow. But one feature that will always remain is that it's the bride who takes centre stage on the day.

It is a unique occasion which demands something special when it comes to the outfit, whether it's a traditional white wedding, a small but smart event or an informal affair. If you are searching for something which you want to be sure no one else has, then the exclusive Seda Silks wraps may be the answer.

The hand-painted wraps are bespoke and therefore can be designed to suit the mood and complement the bride's choice of gown. Matched with hand-painted silk shoes and bag, they create a unique collection designed to ensure maximum impact.

Handmade by Karen Crowe, the wraps are available in a range of different silks. The fabric can be feather light crepe de chine or have the luxurious drape quality of heavier silk satin.

The designs are only limited by Karen's or the client's imagination and can be embellished with beading or sequins. Some are lightly padded to give extra comfort and warmth for a luxurious winter or autumn wedding.

Seda Silks' signature style is vibrant with bold contemporary floral designs in peacock blue, emerald green,

fuchsia pink, red or the current favourite, monochrome. These are perfect for a bride who is looking to make a dramatic impact on the day.

For those who prefer something more traditional, subtle abstract patterns in soft pink and baby blue or warm apricot hues reflecting the colour of the wedding flowers may be ideal.

Karen explains: "I think there is a strong market for luxurious one-off pieces for weddings and other special occasions. The wraps, in particular, are perfect for complementing a bride or bridesmaids' gowns or alternatively to create a unique look for the mother of the bride. They are also the perfect gift for bridesmaids or mother of the bride or bridegroom to provide a lasting reminder of the occasion.

"They are unique, hand crafted and based on one-off designs made exclusively to a client's specification. This ensures that on a special day such as a wedding, a ball or the races, you have something which is original and stylish as well as chic. Combined with a matching bag and painted silk shoes, the wraps and scarves provide a luxurious and exquisite finishing touch to any special outfit."

■ For more information on Seda Silks products, visit [www.sedasilks.co.uk](http://www.sedasilks.co.uk) or contact Karen Crowe on 01325 320938 or via [sedasilks@info.co.uk](mailto:sedasilks@info.co.uk)



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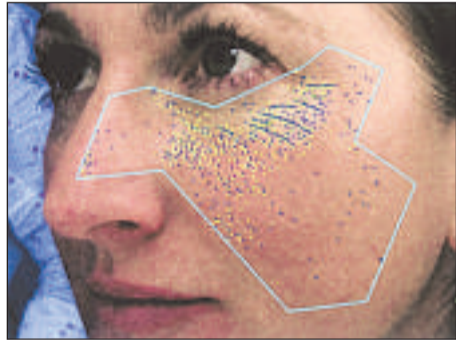
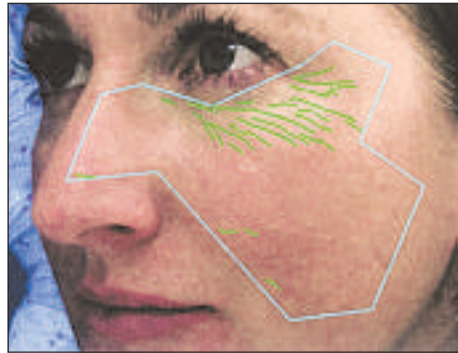
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After a career of filling cavities, a North-East dentist is turning his expertise to the cracks that develop in the skin with time. IAN LAMMING reports



**WRINKLE BUSTING:** Paul Ambler, main picture, works on a client. Right: the Visia face scanner analyses lines and texture



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**A**T 46, Paul Ambler could easily be mistaken for someone years younger and in his line of work, that's the best advert he could possibly ask for. A dentist for more than 20 years, Paul is launching a new business in Darlington in a field which fascinates him – and he's not afraid to experiment on himself.

"Manufacturers' hype is the last thing I believe," says Paul, who is set to open Face Clinique in the town's Woodland Road this month. "I try all the products on myself. I remember using one which cost £80 a pot and it brought me out in spots."

Paul qualified as dentist in 1983 and at one point ran five practices across the North-East. In recent years, he has been working outside the region but has returned to set up a new venture.

His inspiration to enter the beauty trade came with a simple tooth whitening course he went on while working as a dentist. It was then he started to see the business potential of cosmetic dentistry. From there it was easy to bridge the gap with facial aesthetics and he started working in a number of salons.

"The idea with Face Clinique is to combine all of this on one site," he says. "I think we are all becoming more aware of facial aesthetics and what can be done. TV programmes such as Ten Years Younger have helped raise awareness and it is all much more accessible nowadays."

Clients – both men and women – arriving at the newly refurbished premises will enter a relaxing, contemporary world offering all the latest treatments.

These include facials, body wraps, waxing, LED light therapy for acne, microdermabrasion, facial peels, botox, dermal fillers, mesiotherapy for cellulite reduction, vitamin injections for the face, help with fat and water retention and an array of cosmetic dentistry treatments. Clients can also have conventional dentistry, including check-ups.

Face Clinique will also offer hi-tech computerised skin analysis. This provides a figure for wrinkles, pores, colour and texture as a percentage, comparing a client's skin against thousands of others of their age and skin type. The average is 50 per cent. Scores above are better than average, scores below are worse for their age. The scanner also gives a score for UV damage and signs of porphyrins - bacteria which cause spots and acne. This scan then provides the basis for a personalised treatment plan.

"Clients can then pick what they would like to have done – they choose the way they want to go," says Paul. "We will show them what we can do, but they are in charge."

After treatment, clients will be scanned again to show how well the treatments have worked and where maintenance is needed.

Paul has chosen his treatments carefully and will be working with Dermalogica and prescription products. He also hopes to employ a nutritionist to help clients keep their insides beautiful, along with a dental hygienist. In the future he hopes to complement treatments with a raft of alternative therapies, such as reflexology.

"This is so much more rewarding than pure dentistry; there's no comparison," he says. "The impact you can have, not just on people's appearances, but on boosting their confidence, is astounding."

"It's a case of building up trust with clients in this business and you need to see them face to face to give them the right information on what we can do and let them decide if they want to use us. The results will speak for themselves, as will the repeat business."

■ **Face Clinique has just opened on Woodlands Road, Darlington. There will be an open evening from 6pm to 9pm on May 24, at which visitors will be presented with a voucher worth £25 towards computer skin analysis.**

■ **Appointments can be made by contacting Face Clinique on 01325-381888.**



**EXPERT ADVICE:** Watermill Properties staff members Emma Hiles, Joanne Chapman and Adele Laverick

## Live and let live

**W**ITH rental and buy-to-let markets booming, more and more people are jumping on the bandwagon. But mistakes can still be made, so if you wondering where the best places are to buy, how to look after the property and of how to go about it generally, there is expert help at hand.

In the five years since it was set up, the team at Watermill Properties has established a wide network of sources supplying the right kind of buy-to-let properties throughout the North of England to give the best possible returns. They specialise in flat fronted terraced and ex-local authority houses, but can find a suitable property to match whatever criteria a prospective landlord may have, be it one to three-bedroom flats or houses for multi-occupancy.

The company provides a comprehensive service and clients who decide to make use of it can rest assured that everything is considered and taken care of with the utmost professionalism, with everything geared toward taking the stress out of becoming a landlord. Not only will the team at Watermill Properties supply all the details a prospective client needs to know and provide advice on how to proceed with their buy-to-let purchase, the company also provide a list of a number of trusted local businesses and ancillary services, such as solicitors, furniture suppliers, electricians, builders, as well as letting agencies to help new landlords make their investment yield the best possible returns and make the whole purchase a pleasant experience.

Although a relatively young company, Watermill Properties is looking to the future. It believes that bricks and mortar offer far less risk in the long term, providing as far as possible a safe haven for clients' investments, but warns that people toying with the idea of becoming landlords should realise that buy-to-let is a long-term market and not a get-rich-quick scheme.

This philosophy is reflected in the company's ethos that there are enough companies out there geared towards quick sales, no matter where the property is and what condition it is in.

It is consciously setting itself apart from that. For Watermill the focus is on the long-term relationship with its clients, rather than on the quick sale.

And so far this focus has stood the company in good stead, as apart from providing investment opportunities, it also takes on the role of landlord itself.

Another side of the business involves buying houses and renting them back to the owners, which is something a lot of people have made use of, in particular the elderly, as a way to release some equity from their home and to supplement either their income or pension.

An added bonus of this scheme is that the people who are already living in the property are the best to look after it.

In its role as landlord, Watermill Properties is keen to establish a friendly relationship with all its clients. To this end the business is a member of the National Landlords' Association and has pledged to abide by the association's code of conduct.

In fact, the company prides itself in offering much more as a landlord than the usual standards of looking after rented property. Every house is kept in tip top condition, which is a big bonus for tenants, especially if they are older. And if there is an emergency, the company have a range of specialists to call on to have any kind of repair work done straightaway.

For those who have decided to release some or all the equity tied up in their home by selling it to Watermill Properties, there are a number of options geared towards each client's personal circumstances.

Options offered by Watermill are, for instance, the buy-back option, a scheme where the company buys a home from an owner, who has the right to buy it back if they wish to.

Then there is the low-rent option, in which the owner sells only part of the house to Watermill Properties, benefiting from the released capital, but only pays a minimal amount of rent.

Option number three is the share-in-equity scheme, which pays a bonus at the end of a specified period of time should the house price increase during that period.

However, prospective tenants do not have to choose any one of these options, as the team at Watermill is happy to mix and match schemes or work out an individual option to the greatest benefit of all parties.

After all what is right for one person, might not work for the next.

■ **Anyone considering entering the buy-to-let market, can either visit the Watermill offices at Collina Avenue, Defender Court, at the Sunderland Enterprise Park, telephone 0191-549-2626 or email [info@mulberry-first.com](mailto:info@mulberry-first.com). There is also an information pack available to download on [www.mulberry-first.com](http://www.mulberry-first.com).**

JENNY LAUE visits a company which aims to take the hard work out of being a landlord



**RIGHT:** valuations consultant Claire Botsford  
Pictures: DAVID WOOD

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There's so much choice when you're arranging a wedding nowadays, that all the fun can be taken out of it. All the more reason, then, to let someone else do the legwork

**M**ORE and more wedding consultants are setting up in business to take the strain off the bride-to-be and now Matfen Hall in Northumberland has taken on an expert to advise on everything from flowers to favours, service to serviettes.

Emma Howey, style and fashion consultant of Style Dilemma, offers the bride the opportunity to have herself or her wedding totally styled.

And the service isn't just aimed at the bride. For anyone organising their wedding at Matfen Hall, there is a range of mix and match packages available including Style the Bride (and bridesmaids), Style the Groom, Mother-of-the-Bride and Groom, indeed any member of the bridal party, including wedding guests.

Says Deirdre Charlton, wedding coordinator at Matfen: "Your wedding day is one of the most important days of your life and all brides want to look fantastic. Increasingly, I am seeing more and more influences from celebrity weddings with wedding couples wanting their weddings totally themed. Emma can provide them with onsite professional advice to make the whole process much easier."

The costs of a basic, one-off bridal consultation to discuss ideas and themes is £75. From there, a number



**STYLIST:** Emma Howey with a bride-to-be in the Great Hall at Matfen

of packages are available for selection dependent upon individual requirements and budget.

A complete Style the Bride package costs from £300. This includes:-

- 1½ hour bridal consultation at Matfen Hall to discuss ideas and to ensure Emma is fully briefed.
  - Five hours spent by Emma researching, sourcing and reserving that special dress/outfit specifically for you.
  - Five-hour personal shopping trip with Emma to try suggestions and recommendations.
- Contact Emma or Deirdre on 01661-886500 or email:Deirdre.charlton@matfenhall.com.

**NE lifestyle**

# It's only natural

Concerned for the welfare of her daughters, Joanne Urquhart-Arnold made the choice to go organic. Now through her business, she's helping others do the same. She talks to Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER

**T**HE front door opens and Joanne Urquhart-Arnold smiles wryly. "Here comes trouble," she says, and seconds later, two little girls are in the room. Their granny kisses them goodbye and off she goes, leaving four-year-old Abbie and her sister Lauren, who's two-and-a-half, to the allure of television

Like any mum, Joanne loves her children more than anything, and it was this – and wanting the best for them – that made her choose to go organic. She started with food then added non-food items, like clothes and skin care. Now based on what her family uses, she's launched a business, Pure Organics, selling only natural products. As Joanne explains, having children made her re-assess her lifestyle.

"When you're pregnant, it makes you much more aware of what you're eating and what effect it can have on your body. It all started off from there," she says. "When I had my first child I didn't really want to give her the

processed food that was on the shelves, so what I decided to do was start making my own food. To be honest, with the second it wasn't even an option to go down the pre-prepared food route."

As she thought through her daughters' diets and started giving them organic, a new awareness seemed to dawn. They might be eating well, but could external things be harming them? "I started doing some research last February and discovered that there was an emerging market in the US for organic non-food products, meaning skin care, clothing and toys," says Joanne, who's 33 and lives in Tanfield Lea, just outside Stanley. "I found out that the benefits of organic food translate to non-food stuff as well. A huge proportion of what we put on our skin – I read somewhere that it's something like 60 per cent – is absorbed by the body. There's also some research that says that certain chemicals that are in food and also in non-food products can change the sex of frogs. It really started making me think. In a way, I suppose I became obsessed by it a little bit."

And so Joanne started making changes – nothing drastic, just simple steps to greener living. And although she now buys different products, like laundry balls instead of washing powder, she claims she hasn't gone too far. "Don't get me wrong – we're not tree huggers," says Joanne. "We're an average family and we just try to do little bits and bobs."

Convinced she couldn't be unique in wanting organic products for her family, Joanne established Pure Organics, which offers gentle skin care treatments for adults and children, as well as toys and children's clothes. It doesn't just sell natural products – it's also ethical. "I get supplies in the main from the UK, particularly the skin care stuff, and all they're all certified organic manufacturers," says Joanne. "The clothing is imported from India and it's manufactured using ethical methods. It's not just about being organic – it's about making sure that however the product is manufactured, the individual is treated well."

To give a snapshot of the business, Joanne has mounted a display. There are stuffed animals and soaps; a host of moisturising creams. She opens one brown-packaged pot, which could be given as a gift, and lets me try what it contains. It smells of massage oils and feels quite silky on my skin. She says organic is much kinder to the body. "My mam has lupus and she always used to have a problem with her skin," says Joanne. "She started using the organic soaps I've got and now she doesn't have the itching anymore. Also, my husband has had athlete's foot and as a result of using the calendula soap, that's completely gone."



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**GREENER LIVING:** Joanne Urquhart-Arnold and her range of natural products. Below left: four-year-old daughter Abbie in organic cotton clothing

Pictures: DAVID WOOD

*Don't get me wrong – we're not tree huggers. We're just an average family and we just try to do little bits and bobs*

Her fabrics, too – on both the clothing and the toys – are very gentle on the skin. Unlike in non-organic versions, there are no chemicals involved. “An average T-shirt, if it's conventional cotton, will have had 150g of pesticide used on it in its growing stage,” says Joanne. “Some of that will come out in the production process but some will actually remain in the garment. Certainly with a lot of toys, children tend to put them in their mouths. I know with a lot of the conventional toys I bought, the fibres were constantly coming off and the girls would get them in their mouths.”

While she is clearly enthusiastic, Joanne is wary of expansion – with a full time job at Derwentside Council, she knows she has to keep a balance. Yet if the circumstances were right, she'd dearly love to grow the business. “Certainly with the way the States have grown and the way the UK market has started to pick up momentum, that should transfer to the business growing organically, if you'll pardon the pun,” she says.

■ [www.pure-organics.co.uk](http://www.pure-organics.co.uk)

**SPECIAL OFFER**

Pure Organics is offering ten per cent off all purchases made by readers of The Northern Echo until the end of May. Just log on to the Pure Organics website and use the gift code 'MOTHER'. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other.

**WIN PURE ORGANICS GOODIES**

The Northern Echo has teamed up with Pure Organics to offer two lucky readers the opportunity to win £40 worth of organic and natural skin care products. Each will receive a Trevarno Organic Soap Selection Box, a Trevarno Organic Hand Cream, Natural Rosemary Shampoo & Body Bar, Trevarno Organic Eye Cream and a Spiezia Organic Rose, Geranium & Lavender Soap. To stand a chance of winning, just tell us where the organic non-food industry has taken off. Send your answer, with your name, address, and telephone number, to Pure Organics Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF, to be received by Friday, May 25. Normal Newsquest rules apply.

**F**URNISHING your home with cardboard furniture and cushions made from old shirts sounds like a suggestion from Blue Peter, but today's eco-friendly home products are bang on trend.

Oliver Heath, former presenter on TV's Changing Rooms, says eco-chic enthusiasts are leading a style revolution.

“People are waking up to the fact that not only are there a great variety of environmentally friendly products for interiors out there but many of them are good looking and highly desirable,” he says.

“Eco-friendly products are dumping their dull, ugly, worthy image so there's absolutely no need to compromise your sense of style just because you want a green home.”

Heath has founded EcoCentric, an online retail company which is full of design-led and affordable green goodies for the home from fluffy Bamboo towels, £9, to pure wool throws, £79.

Not only are specialist 'green' home shops and companies blossoming but the high street is also getting in on the ethical act.

So you don't need to wear open-toed sandals, dress in sackcloth and live without luxury to prove your eco credentials – stores like Habitat sell organic cotton towels, B&Q and The Pier have furniture made from sustainable wood and other chains are selling green and Fair Trade ranges.

**IS IT GREEN?**

- It's made using little energy or uses little energy like an eco light bulb.
- It's recycled or recyclable such as a designer cardboard chair.
- It comes from a sustainable, renewable source such as timber certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or a certified organic farming source for materials such as cotton.

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NE motoring

# Triumphant trio

Honda's bid to dominate the motorcycling world continues unabated in 2007. IAN LAMMING explores how the Japanese manufacturer's tendrils extend into every niche

**T**HREE bikes each share the same badge. They are all Honda fours. They are all 600cc. Yet their appeal couldn't be more different. It's not enough for Honda to be the best when it comes to sports bikes; it also has to dominate in the world of streetfighters and budget commuters. Honda wants it all and does a fine job of getting it, thanks to some clever manufacturing and marketing.

The badge is the rider's guarantee that the bike will be beautifully built and will never let them down. The rest is a matter of choice and style.

At one end of the biking spectrum is the CBR600RR, an all-out race replica. At the other is the CBF600N, which is more likely to be spotted getting you to work and back rather than to bikers' favourite Sunday haunts. In the middle is the new Hornet, a naked streetfighter with an Italian designer label.

In common is the 600cc four cylinder motor, in various states of tune, offering a variety of power across their very wide rev ranges. After that, things start to change.

Race replicas like the latest Honda CBR600RR are designed to thrill on the race track, but they are no less important to the owner when they aren't.

Sports bike riders love to park and preen at biker hotspots. They also enjoy enduring the winter in the garage polishing their two-wheeled pride and joy.

The CBR RR looks the part, every bit the race bike replica with tiny

proportions, a sharp fairing and massive rubber. There is also the obligatory under-seat exhaust, which increases ground clearance and looks mean and moody. From any angle this Honda screams "sports bike" and should really carry a race number.

The rasping four cylinder engine, with its dizzying red line, offers blistering performance, particularly over the 7,000 rpm mark. It growls, it snarls and it hurls the diminutive 155kg bike down the track at vision blurring speeds.

When the bends approach, as they do surprisingly rapidly, there are equally stunning brakes to scrub off the speed.

At slow speeds in town, the automatic steering damper ensures there is plenty of feel coming through the bars. At greater velocities, things get a good bit tighter as the damping feeds in, making the CBR immensely stable.

Through any chicane, the CBR is happy to flick from side to side in an instant, like a skier attempting the slalom, enjoying immense angles of lean and massive grip thanks to superb tyres and suspension.

It is what sports bikes are designed to do, of course, and the RR is as accomplished as any on the market.

Flick over the page in the glossy brochure and there's the new Hornet, Honda's designer Latin label.

Honda handed over the new Hornet to Italian designers who have turned what was once a budget bike into a Latin streetfighter. It looks fantastic with its acutely swept exhaust ending in a stubby silencer, its swooping lines, its bold headlamp and tail. No longer can the Hornet be called



**HORNET:** budget bike transformed into a Latin streetfighter

bland and its bold new look has extended right through to its performance.

This time the engine donor for the Hornet is the CBR600RR. It has been tuned for better low and mid range but none of the excitement has been knocked out of this superb four cylinder motor.

Handling and brakes are just as good too and the Hornet encourages an exuberant riding style with impressive angles of lean available to the rider. Most importantly, it is ear-to-ear grin-inducing fun.

But it is good sometimes to remind yourself of the basics, of the unadulterated delights of two wheeled transport.

The Honda CBF600N does just that. It is plain and simple to look at, with clean lines and all the constituent parts. Like all Hondas it seems to fit like a glove and the three-way adjustable saddle leaves your legs just the right distance from the pegs and the ground.

The wide bars are a comfortable stretch,

the controls obvious and easy to use. The way the rear indicators are faired into the tail cowl is the only wild style feature to speak of; otherwise, N is a plain and simple motorbike designed for those with plain and simple needs.

But that's not to say it's dull to ride, because it isn't. It fires into life first push of the starter and has the typical Honda rasp. Pull in the light clutch, clunk it into first gear and you are off at a surprisingly brisk pace.

The motor pulls strongly and has been tuned for mid-range rather than top end, though there are a few tickly vibes to deal with through the footpegs at around seven grand. Suspension, too, gives no impression that this is a budget bike; it soaks up the bumps with aplomb and handles the bends extremely well.

So, three bikes, three styles and three very different markets, but the common denominator is that all these 600s are set to dominate in each.

**CBR600RR:** looks mean and moody



**CBF600N:** gives no impression that it's a budget bike



It has a reputation for hosting the great and good and **CHRISTINE FIELDHOUSE** found stunning Simonstone Hall more than lived up to expectations



**STUNNING VIEWS:** Simonstone Hall has many charms. Left: Jack and his father dip their toes into Wensleydale waters

**K**ATE Winslet honeymooned there, Jeremy Clarkson dined there and aristocrats shoot there, but we're not talking about an exotic island that takes two days to reach. This well-kept secret is Simonstone Hall and it's right on our doorstep – just up the road from Hawes in Wensleydale.

Once a hunting lodge, Simonstone Hall is now a gorgeous country house and must surely be a strong contender if ever there were a competition for the British hotel with the most breathtaking views. Set even higher than Hawes – itself the highest market town in Britain – Simonstone Hall looks out over stunning Upper Wensleydale, with undulating countryside whichever way you turn.

It's well-known among the sporting elite. Former England cricket captain Nassar Hussain has stayed and Arab princes and aristocrats are regular visitors to the adjacent 14,000 acres of grouse moors during the shooting season. TV presenter Angela Rippon also dropped in while filming in the area.

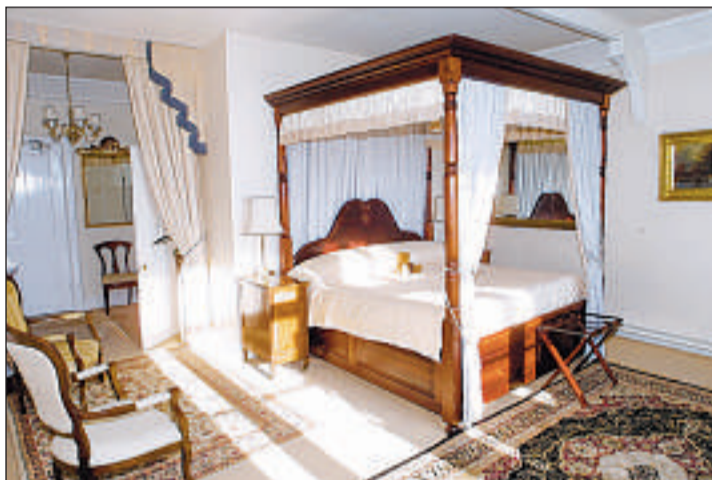
The 18-bedroom hotel hit the headlines back in 1998 when Titanic actress Kate Winslet and her first husband Jim Threapleton checked in for a two-night stay. The pair, who played backgammon in the bar, were on their way to Scotland for the second part of their honeymoon. Now a popular wedding venue, newlyweds get to sleep in the same room as the now-divorced Kate and Jim, obviously with fingers crossed their marriages fare better.

Luckily, being superstitious, my husband Ian and I didn't sleep in Kate and Jim's room. Instead, we had a stunning room, with a gold-draped four-poster bed, which was so high we couldn't even see our son Jack's camped from our slumbers.

With mahogany furniture, antique artefacts, an ornate chandelier, walls decked with olde-worlde prints and those to-die-for views from our windows, we felt we'd found a haven of cosiness and tranquillity. Where necessary, the fixtures and fittings were up-to-date, and our bathroom was both elegant and luxurious.

But it was the little things that made Simonstone Hall so special. The trademark teddy on the bed – named Philpot on his label – held the remote control for the television, much to Jack's delight. The collection of books on the little window-ledge bookshelf was neither intellectual nor pretentious. The whole experience was a bit like my yoga

# Wensleydale wanderings



class, urging us to slow down, breathe and relax.

Afternoon tea on Simonstone Hall's sunny terrace, with the sound of the waterfall at Hardraw in the background, must be one of the top ten things to do in the Dales. Later, for dinner, you can be as formal or casual as you like. The restaurant is a sumptuous room, with elegant chandeliers, huge mirrors and a traditional menu perfect for romantic meals and important occasions, while the Orangery and bar are more bustling, and obviously the place to pick up local gossip.

Even when we miscalculated our timing and were still rambling over the fields when we should have been reporting to the restaurant for our 7.30pm table, the staff were just happy we'd been so engrossed exploring their lovely area we'd lost track of time. A children's menu was produced to keep Jack happy in the restaurant.

There is lots to do in the surrounding area. The Hall is adjacent to the Pennine Way so

footpaths are well-marked and the highlight for Jack was paddling in the river. Hawes itself – the setting for Darrowby Cattle Mart in TV's All Creatures Great and Small – is lively and bustling, with a sprinkling of tea rooms, outdoor pursuits shops and craft galleries, its narrow streets packed with day trippers, walkers and bikers.

After the heartiest of breakfasts, Wallace and Gromit fan Jack chose The Wensleydale Creamery and Visitor Centre for our sight-seeing trip. There, wearing plastic hats, smocks and wellies, we were given a behind-the-scenes tour of the factory, made famous by the cheese-loving cartoon pair.

The tour lasts more than an hour and held Jack's attention from the moment it was mentioned that slugs were used in cheese-making in the old days. Fortunately, the process – a recipe handed down through generations – is more hygienic these days. We went on to sample varieties of Wensleydale cheese and later buy some – slug-free, I hope

– in the shop. The Creamery also has a small outdoor play area and a bustling restaurant, which serves everything from morning coffee to jacket potatoes to a Sunday roast.

Having followed in the footsteps of all our favourite film stars, we set off home, considerably more chilled than when we'd arrived, though there were tears when we said goodbye to Philpot. But Jack figured Hawes must be a good place because so many sheep choose to live there. Ewe just can't argue with that.

■ **Bed and breakfast at Simonstone Hall starts from £110 per room per night, with dinner, bed and breakfast from £160 per room. Tel 01969-667255 or visit [www.simonstonehall.co.uk](http://www.simonstonehall.co.uk)**

■ **The Wensleydale Creamery and Visitor Centre in Gayle Lane, Hawes, is open from 10am every day. Visit before 2pm every day except Monday to see cheese being made. Contact 01969-667664 or visit [www.wensleydale.co.uk](http://www.wensleydale.co.uk)**

**T**HANKS to the promise of generally warmer summers and products to keep you warm on cooler evenings, the garden has become an extra room and people are starting to treat it that way by buying good quality, quirky furniture and accessories.

"This year we have seen more people buying from us saying that they want their gardens to be different," says Jason Hadlow, owner of Simply Dutch at Leeming Bar. "Also, people realise they need to buy garden furniture that is in context with the rest of their house – miniature pieces are very unfashionable."



**The main trends for summer 2007 are:**

1. Eco-friendly furniture is a big trend as we become more environmentally aware. It's often big and chunky and, as well as looking good, it is very durable. Simply Dutch has a Vietnamese reclaimed wood range made from old fence posts and cartwheels.
2. Pavilions and breeze houses which enhance a garden but also provide shelter from either the sun in the heat or the rain. These can cost anything from around £300 up to thousands.
3. Durable cast iron and powder-coated aluminium. The Tea for Two set, pictured above right, costs from £65, but you should keep it away from your decking when the weather's wet or it will drip onto it and stain.
4. Wrought iron is popular, especially the coloured sets for your garden. "Make sure you invest in a Make Me New kit, which has the correct paint to touch up any dents or scrapes," advises Jason.
5. Teak furniture is a good buy



but only if you buy quality teak furniture for the garden as it bleaches very easily. Use teak oil to maintain its quality and colour. Full sets of real teak garden furniture can cost around £2,000 but last for life.

6. Chimineas. Patio heaters are so out of fashion now. Chimineas give off a lot of heat and look good too. They start from £100.

[www.simplydutch.co.uk](http://www.simplydutch.co.uk)



IF you want something to really get the neighbours talking, the Dutch House stocks this eccentric African Pot House. It costs about £5,000 but has proved popular with restaurants and country hotels – the Frenchgate Hotel in Richmond has one – as it is heated and furnished. And with the smoking ban coming in, it will no doubt prove popular with tabbers too...

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# NE directory

## Entertainment and Leisure

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# NE

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