

The Northern Echo

**ne**

The lifestyle magazine  
for the North-East

NOVEMBER 2006

*Passionate* about life

northeast  
original

## CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Gifts for  
the girls

Toys for  
the boys

WIN

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shower  
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<p><b>ne</b> magazine</p> <p>is produced by The Northern Echo/ Newsquest Ltd., a Gannett Company, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF (01325) 381313</p> <p>ADVERTISING Gail Hunter (01325) 505 239 gail.hunter@nne.co.uk Chris Kay (0191) 374 0298 chris.kay@nne.co.uk</p> <p>EDITORIAL Jenny Needham (01325) 505082 jenny.needham@nne.co.uk</p>	<p>3 SHARON GRIFFITHS Confessions of a bag lady</p> <p>4 CHRISTMAS A few of our favourite things</p> <p>6 CHRISTMAS Gifts for the girls</p> <p>8 CHRISTMAS Toys for the boys</p> <p>10 GARDENING A little bit of lavender</p> <p>12 CHRISTMAS We three chefs...</p> <p>14 ME AND MY WARDROBE Pat Copeland</p> <p>15 GADGET MAN Boxing clever this Christmas</p>	<p>16 LEISURE Fine dining in great surrounds</p> <p>17 LIFESTYLE Getting the Abbey habit</p> <p>18 INTERIORS The other Trinny and Susannah</p> <p>20 MOTORING A mean, clean machine</p> <p>21 NE CONNECTIONS Let's hear it for Leeds</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WIN! WIN! WIN!</b> SHOWER ACCESSORIES FROM ROMAN LUXURY HAMPERS FROM WAITROSE</p>

**FRONT COVER:**  
Ladybird cream fur trim hat, from £4, matching scarf, from £5





## sharon griffiths

“Bags now have full page adverts all to themselves in glossy magazines

I’VE always been a bit of a bag lady. And I’m not alone. Bags are big business. Once upon a time a handbag was just somewhere you kept your purse and your lipstick. Grannies’ handbags always smelt of face powder and peppermints and had a lace hankie, never used but there, just in case.

Then came the bag as life support system. I moved seamlessly from a sagging woolly Greek shoulder bag, much beloved by students, to a leather portmanteau which held everything I needed for any foreseeable emergency.

I once took part in one of those “What’s in your handbag?” features on local radio and had the studio in hysterics. My bag was like one of those never-ending magic porridge pots. Among the many and varied items that emerged from it, I seem to recall, were a paperback, sea shells, spare tights, perfume, a packet of seeds, toothbrush, corkscrew and an adjustable spanner.

No wonder I started developing one shoulder lower than another.

When I got pushed up for a night out I would use tiny little beaded bags – another favourite – but all evening I would suffer panic attacks and withdrawal symptoms about all the things I didn’t have with me. Who knows? What if someone at the press awards dinner needed an adjustable spanner?

Being a snob, I only ever bought leather handbags for daytime use. Being broke, I took the chance to snap them up on foreign trips – twice the bag for half the price. My mother once bought me a huge black shoulder bag in Florence – bigger than the briefcase she bought for my husband on the same trip. I loved that bag to bits, literally. After ten years and much patching and stitching, it finally died. But I still couldn’t bear to throw it away and used it as part of my filing system.

So yes, when big bags became seriously fashionable, I was ahead of the game.

Not for long.

What is it with bags?

True they are lovely to buy – that smell of leather – and useful, so therefore justifiable. And – o bliss – you don’t have to try them on. One size fits all. No more humiliation in the changing rooms, just the satisfying snap of plastic on upmarket shop counters.

Easier for the manufacturers too. Why bother bringing out a range of clothes in all different size and lengths when you can just turn out bags?

In the last few years bags have got bigger and

bigger and more and more expensive. I thought £500 was madness, now £1,000 is cheap. Tiny stick-like models stagger around hauling bags bigger than they are. It’s not a particularly sexy look – they look more like toddlers raiding their mothers’ wardrobes.

And black or brown is no longer enough. Bags now come in a rainbow of colours – so the super rich buy one of each. But by the time Colleen McLoughlin has got round to using all of hers, they must surely be out of fashion again.

Bags have leapt to the front of the catwalks. Bags now have full page adverts all to themselves in glossy magazines. Aficionados can tell the name, make and model in an instant from the shape, tassels, zips and fringes. And the designs get wilder and more detailed to make them stand out. The latest Versace seems to have strips of woolly fur around it. Seriously stylish, no doubt, except that it reminds me of primary school pencil cases.

Bags are such hot fashion items that you can even lease them now. For around £150 a month you can lease a top-of-the-range designer handbag for a month, then give it back and rent another one.

Does something about that strike you as slightly odd? Especially since if you move in the sort of circles where people buy such bags, they’ll soon sus you out. And if you don’t, then your friends won’t even notice. And at the end of a year you could have spent £1,800 and still have nowhere to keep your lippy.

And away from the big names, there are lots of individual designers making bags that are just as stylish or fun at a fraction of the price.

The rot surely set in when bags started having perky little names. Roxanne, Emmy, Edith, Alana, Gladys, Brigitte...

They stopped being something functional and started being toys, like Barbie or My Little Pony. And they appeal to exactly the same collectors’ instinct that makes small girls collect dolls. They have almost become substitute friends. Sad or what?

There was that glorious moment after the last terrorist scare when all air passengers were reduced to carrying their onboard possessions in see-through supermarket carrier bags. Not much room for one-upmanship there.

But, of course, if we ever get back to those days, the supermarket carrier bags will no doubt have a logo and a tassel – and a £1,000 price tag.

I think I sense a business opportunity.

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

Best-selling crime author Val McDermid, 51, has written more than 20 novels and has seen two of her characters created into the popular television series *Wire in the Blood*.

### Where will you be spending Christmas?

I’ll be enjoying a traditional Christmas at home in Northumberland with my family.

### What’s on your gift list?

I could do with a set of new Bose speakers for my other computer. I’ve got one set already and they’re fabulous, they’re only about three or four inches high.

### What’s the best Christmas present you’ve ever had?

It would probably be a bumper lego set when I was about six. I loved it.

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

I would like to buy this falling down house near the villa where I stay in Italy, near Siena. I would then have somebody come and magically restore it so I wouldn’t have to deal with any workmen and it would be beautiful. The views would be astonishing.

■ The Grave Tattoo is out now. (Harper Collins, £17.99)



Picture: ALAN PEEBLES

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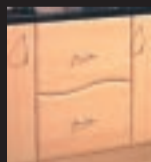
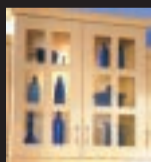
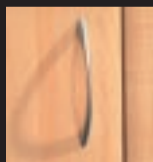
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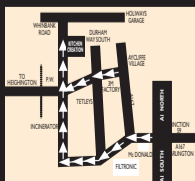


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**C**LAIRE Royle Applique has a wide range of adorable personalised towelling gifts for special little people who love having their names on things. The goods are made of the finest quality, soft towelling, and are personalised and applied by 28-year-old Claire, from Whorlton in Co Durham, in a choice of gingham and vintage style fabrics. Each item is made to order.

Claire Royle Applique is on (01833) 627151 or visit [www.claireroyle.co.uk](http://www.claireroyle.co.uk). Claire will be selling her goods at the Mary Howard Fair at York Racecourse on Tuesday, November 21 and Wednesday, November 22.

**RIGHT:** Claire's Christmas elves



## A few of our favourite things

There are some gifts you've just gotta have this Christmas... and you don't always have to go far to get them



**I**f you're stuck for ideas for your teenage nieces, there are fashion accessories at very accessible prices on [www.missteen.co.uk](http://www.missteen.co.uk). Originally launched as a website where teenage girls could happily chat among themselves, its 20-year-old founder Amy Fettis, of Dunstan, near Alnwick, Northumberland, is now selling a range of bold and bright accessories, all priced at under £10. Amy, who loves shopping for jewellery, belts, handbags and casual shoes, has signed up with two leading fashion houses to sell their wide range of accessories on the missteen website. She also plans to take on board talented local designers as the business expands.  
[www.missteen.co.uk](http://www.missteen.co.uk)

**ABOVE LEFT:** Amy Fettis wearing large shell pendant from her new collection.

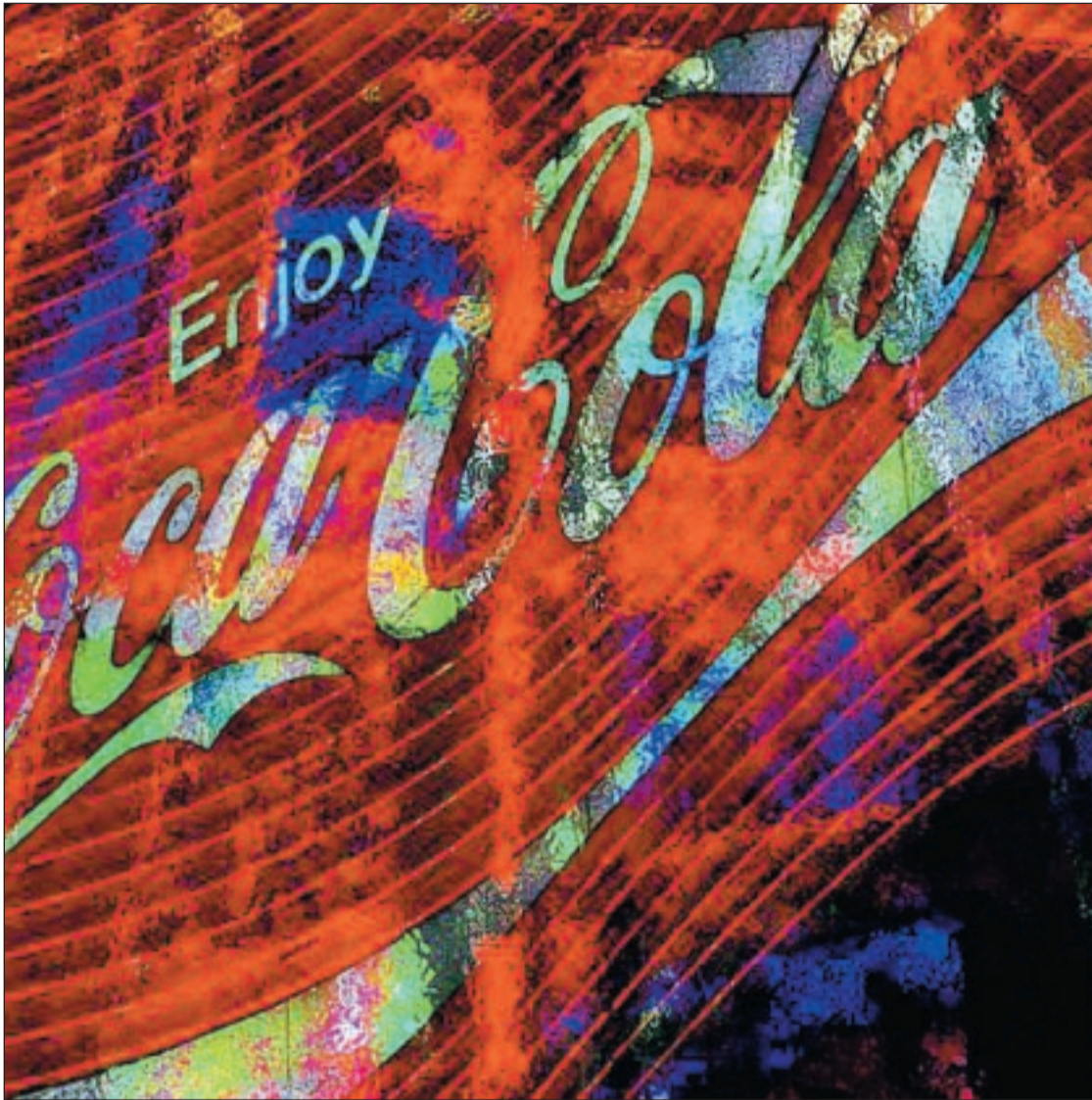
**I**f you want to treat yourselves to something stylish for the home this Christmas, the Gliss stool from Sedini might not fit your festive stocking, but it will certainly fit the bill.

The adjustable bar stool is designed in Italy and manufactured from flexible acrylic. It has a gas-lift mechanism which allows the seat to swivel or to be adjusted in height, and a footrest. Gliss is available in a choice of transparent colours: orange, green, red, grey and clear and retails at £260 including VAT from web-based company Sedini Limited, set up by Roz Henderson of Darlington.

For more information on Sedini, please contact 0870-770-7714, email [customerservice@sedini.co.uk](mailto:customerservice@sedini.co.uk) or log on to [www.sedini.co.uk](http://www.sedini.co.uk).



**I**n her frou-frou Darlington shop, Jenny Davies gets to do what many of us would love to – sell exactly what she likes. And what she likes are all things girly with a touch of the retro feel about them. The shelves are decorated with pretty jewellery, theatrical chandeliers, accessories, toiletries, perfume and it's the perfect place to pick up a pretty Christmas present for mum or one of your female friends, a kind of Laura Ashley meets Kate Moss. OCD is at 28 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington 01325-469880



IF you want to make a statement with your gift this Christmas, how about a striking piece of art? And because it's not always easy to find the right image, [www.ADfineart.com](http://www.ADfineart.com) also offer gift vouchers so the lucky recipient can select their own picture. Ranges of carefully selected images are available from the company's online gallery, offered in eight main categories: Abstracts, Body Formz, Environments, Geometrix, Moods, Nature, Retro and Bookplates. There are various formats to choose from and prices range from £60 to £250. You can also have your chosen image printed and supplied on an English beechwood deckchair for £150.

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

GILLIAN Harbord is one of the stars of the television show *Ladette to Lady*, which has just finished its second series. In a *My Fair Lady*-style social experiment, she was recruited by the programme-makers to teach floristry and morals to the ten wild young women, having taught at Constance Spry's Winkfield Place, a finishing school in Berkshire, and at Eggleston Hall, near Barnard Castle, in the days when it was a school for young ladies.



**Where will you be spending Christmas?**  
With friends.

**What's on your gift wish list?**  
Anything in cashmere!

**What's the best Christmas present you've ever had?**  
A large bottle of Caleche by Hermes.

**If money were no object, what would you like for Christmas?**  
An Aston Martin DB5.

■ Eggleston Hall Coach House Christmas shop is open Tues-Sun 10-4.30pm until December 23. There is ample parking and you can enjoy a cappuccino while you browse the wonderful selection of unusual gifts and mouth-watering specialist Christmas food.



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range of specialist retailers across the North-East and the whole of the UK. For your nearest retailer and to request a brochure please contact Roman on:

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**Web: [www.roman-showers.com](http://www.roman-showers.com)**

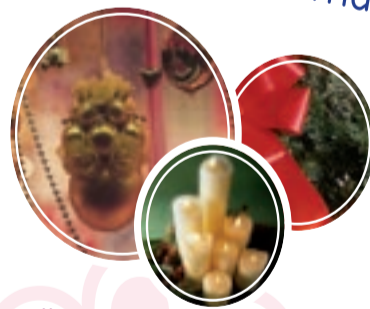
YOU may not be buying a bath for Christmas but Roman has a superb range of accessories. And for one lucky winner all their Christmases could come at once. Roman has teamed up with The Northern Echo to offer one lucky reader the chance to win a bath screen and shower basket.

**To stand a chance of winning, just tell us where in the North-East Roman is based.**

Answers, by November 16, on a postcard or the back of an envelope to Roman Showers/Ne Magazine Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. Usual newspaper competition rules apply.

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The meal most men make of it, you would think it was difficult buying gifts for a woman, so here are some ideas to point them in the right direction



## Gifts for the girls

**S**TUCK for the perfect present for your wife, girlfriend or sister? Fear not – there's plenty in here to inspire even the least imaginative of gift-givers to put something gorgeously girly under the tree.

Instead of tacky black mesh negligees, get her something she'll really appreciate wearing in the bedroom. Figleaves has a gorgeous range of pyjamas, nightdresses and robes ranging from sexy to comfortable. Try Oscar de la Renta Pink Label's sheer white feather-trimmed robe, £66, and pink chemise with feather neckline, £60, for a bit of seriously girly old-style glamour, or go for sexy comfort in a Lisi Valle lace-trimmed black cotton camisole, £75, and matching pyjama bottoms, £68.

The winter lasts well beyond Christmas and little luxuries to make the cold nights

more comfortable are always welcome. John Lewis's sumptuous cream fluffy hot water bottle, £20, will keep you toasty, or visit House of Fraser for Ruby and Ed's fur-lined slippers with their bold felt flower decoration, in white with pink trim or chocolate and blue, £20 per pair.



**SLINKY:** Oscar de la Renta gown

If you're planning to spend the festive season abroad or in a hotel, give her something she'll enjoy using during your trip. The Mary Green satin eye mask trio embroidered with Wake Me for Breakfast, Wake Me for Lunch and Wake Me for Dinner, £48 from Figleaves.com, pictured above, is a fun way of getting her to relax. Spongeables' range of soap-impregnated sponges, from £2.99 at Boots, are available in a variety of fruity, spicy or floral fragrances and last between seven and 30 washes – perfect for using in the poolside shower.

Nothing's more appropriate as a present than jewellery, and this season's styles are all about full-on glamour. Visit the Glitzy Secrets website for a huge selection of glittering gems that'll match this season's elegant evening gowns perfectly, including dangling Victoriana earrings, £21.99, in a mixture of bright blue and smoky dark crystals, and the Flirty Thirties set, £34.99, comprising a vintage-style diamante-encrusted necklace and earrings. Finish off the look with a chunky, colourful cocktail ring, £3.50 each, from Asda.

Not sure about her taste in make-up or jewellery? Play it safe by getting an elegant bag,

**HIDEAWAY:**  
House of Fraser's shoe-shaped jewellery tidies (£14.95 each) will grace any boudoir



**STOCKISTS**

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**John Lewis:** Stores nationwide, call 08456 049 049 for information

**House of Fraser:** Stores nationwide, log on to <http://www.houseoffraser.co.uk/> for information

**Asda:** Stores nationwide, call 0500 1000 55 for information

**All the Trimmings:** <http://www.all-the-trimmings.co.uk> to order

**Glitzy Secrets:** Order online at <http://www.glitzysecrets.com>. Call 0208 303 7161 for information.

**Boots:** Stores nationwide, call 08450 70 80 90 for information

**Woolworths:** Stores nationwide, call 01706 862789 for information

**Molton Brown:** Stores and concessions nationwide, or order on <http://www.moltonbrown.co.uk/> or 0808 178 1188

**Temple Spa:** <http://www.templespa.com> or from Harrods and Selfridges (London branches only)

**Green People:** <http://www.greenpeople.com>, or call 01403 740350 to order. Also available at health food stores nationwide

box or tidy to stash her goodies in. Asda's luxurious black, silver-embroidered satin weekend bag set, £15, contains handy, stylish metallic silver pouches for jewellery, make-up and tools, while Woolworths has a great Fifties-print toiletries bag for just £5.99. Easy-to-lose rings and studs will fit neatly into House of Fraser's fabulous range of shoe-shaped jewellery tidies, £14.95 each, in velvets, silks, satin and animal print with feather or diamante trim.

Make sure she's the most stylish woman at the New Year parties with a gorgeous, flower-shaped silk Anavogue evening bag, £55 each from online bag and shoe haven All the Trimmings. In a variety of colours, every bag's hand-dyed, so you can be sure nobody else will be carrying one like it.

Give her a break with some pampering products to use after the hustle and bustle of having relatives to stay and getting the turkey cooked, Temple Spa's Quench rejuvenating face mask, £20, contains a moisturising blend of sunflower seed extract, olive oil and mallow to give tired skin new radiance in just ten minutes.

For the environmentally-minded woman in your life, Organic Mandarin, Apricot and Carrot Fruit Scrub, £7.99 for 50ml, and Organic Mandarin, Seaweed and Avocado Vita Min Mask, £9.95 for 50ml, both by Green People, are made from totally organic ingredients and will cleanse and revive stressed-out, oil-prone faces.

Perfume's a classic gift that never goes out of fashion, so surprise her with one of the latest eau de toilettes from Molton Brown, £35 for 50ml. Choose between Black Pepper, a blend of spicy coriander and cumin with patchouli and bergamot to wake up your senses, or Cool, combining the crisp scents of wild mint and tangerine with the warmth of cedarwood and cardamom.



If gadgets are her thing, the compact Booklite, now also in pink, costs £5 at Boots and will allow her to read those new Christmas novels without ever interrupting your beauty sleep. Or make sure she remembers those New Year's resolutions with Boots' handy hot pink touch-screen keyring organiser, £5 – also great for shopping lists, cocktail ingredients and getting phone numbers at parties.



Once you've picked a great gift, don't ruin it by botching the wrapping. Most online retailers and department stores will offer gift-wrapping options for a small extra charge, so check when you purchase your goods.

Alternatively, internet site the Wrapping Company ([www.thewrappingco.com](http://www.thewrappingco.com)) offers a bespoke wrapping service, from £150, for the busy, stressed or those who simply aren't great with the Sellotape. Give them all of your festive goodies and spend the afternoon relaxing in front of the holiday season's TV instead.

**WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS**

Wendy Robertson has been a full-time writer for nearly 20 years. She lives in Bishop Auckland.



**WENDY ROBERTSON:** would like the gap year she never had

**Where will you be spending Christmas?**

I'll be spending it at my house with my son and daughter and their families (one local, one London). Debora, who writes on food matters for RED and other magazines will be cooking in my kitchen, while I sit on a stool, possibly glass in hand, chatting with her about life, the world and everything, as she whizzes up gourmet specials for all of us. It will be nice to have the boys, Angus and Callum, here, as Christmas is rather void without children.

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

This year I'm making changes. I know that over Christmas some children in some families have a hard time not just in the material sense. My preferred charity is the NSPCC, so I'm asking my loved ones to make a donation to that instead of buying me another ill-deserved present. I will do the same for them, except for the boys who will get their usual presents, including at least one book. I've thought hard about this so I don't want anyone to think I'm being too goody-goody.

**What's the best Christmas present you've ever had?**


I'm not really a "thing" person. My best present really is to have my funny,

strange, fascinating family around me or somewhere very near.

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

If you insist, and if you are inviting me to be extravagant, I would like an open travel ticket for the "gap year" I never had, to travel the world in a degree of comfort. (Well, you did ask...) Of course, being compulsive, I would write a book about it.

■ Wendy Robertson's latest novel, Family Ties (Headline, £19.99) takes place in Durham City and Spennymoor in 1991, but looks back in time to the 1940s and 1950s.



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## WIN A LUXURY WAITROSE HAMPER

**W**AITROSE Durham celebrates its first birthday in November and to mark the occasion, the Gates Shopping Centre branch is giving three readers the opportunity to win a luxury Christmas hamper worth £65.

Each hamper will be stocked to the brim with high quality festive food and drink from the branch and guarantees to make this Christmas an even merrier one.

Also in time for the festive season, Durham Waitrose is launching its home delivery service\* (£3 for orders over £50; £5 for under £50), in which you do your shopping in store as usual, and then Waitrose Partners staff deliver it to your door. Alternatively, if you come shopping to Waitrose Durham by car and spend over £30, parking is free.

You can also take the stress out of the festive season by shopping from the comfort of your own home using Waitrose's wine ordering service via [www.waitrose.com/wines](http://www.waitrose.com/wines) and its innovative food ordering service via [www.waitrose.com/entertaining](http://www.waitrose.com/entertaining) that caters for any event, no matter how big. Waitrose's passion for food and reputation for excellent customer service has established it as a favourite destination among shoppers. Earlier this year it came top in Which? Magazine's Customer Satisfaction Survey.



To stand a chance of winning this great prize, answer the question below and send your entry to Waitrose Hamper Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. The entries must be in by November 15 and usual newspaper competition rules apply.

When does Waitrose in Durham celebrate its first birthday?

**■ Waitrose Home Delivery Service is only available to customers with the following postcodes: DH1 1-5, DH6 1,5,8 DH7 7,9,0,6 and DH2 3**



# Toys for the boys



**HOT STUFF:** the Pyramat220

Men are notoriously tricky to buy for, but that's no excuse for socks and after-shave. Here are some of the best gifts for guys around this Christmas

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*The Getaway by Des Brophy*

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**W**OMEN generally know what they like, they know what their friends and female relations like, but choosing gifts for the men in their lives can cause the biggest headache. This year though, you can take inspiration from these great gift ideas – there's not a pair of socks or Toblerone in sight.

For the adrenaline junkie, why not organise an experience that will really get his blood pumping? There are few experiences that can match power boating for sheer exhilaration and the Zapcoat Boat Blast experience, £99 from [www.doghouse.co.uk](http://www.doghouse.co.uk), is sure to knock his socks off. Capable of pulling in excess of 2G in a turn, the acceleration is unlike anything he will have experienced.

If he's not a natural seaman, then stick to dry land. Check out [www.driversdreamdays.co.uk](http://www.driversdreamdays.co.uk) and you'll find a range of thrilling experiences for him to savour, such as cruising in the Italian super car, Lamborghini Gallardo, off-road rally driving and awesome tank driving.

If the man in question is what you might call a little less of an action hero, then his make his couch potato ways at least a little more thrilling with the hottest gadgets around. Get a booming home theatre effect with the Pyramat220, £149.99 from [www.firebox.com](http://www.firebox.com). This beautifully designed seat contains personal surround sound technology so he'll literally be able to feel the action from music, games and videos.

Running with the personal home cinema theme, why not achieve the effect of a 36-inch LCD without the hefty price tag by purchasing the Rimax Virtual Vision 3.0 Glasses £139.95 from [www.paramountzone.com](http://www.paramountzone.com). The Visions have an internal LCD screen plus a set of stereo earphones to complete the wow factor.



For the couch potato on the go – an oxymoron if ever there was one – choose a super slim, lightweight portable DVD player such as the Ferguson LDVD200, £79.99 from Dixons. With a high res screen, digital audio ability and car adapter, it also makes a great gift for any movie buffs.

The outdoors man will love the SL2 Survival Tool, £34.99. Super-tough, compact and lightweight, this tool is indispensable for anyone who's into camping, fishing or hiking. As well as its A grade blade, it comes with remarkable fire steel, waterproof torch, and a piercing rescue whistle, as well as handy belt clip.

For the serious and part time runner, Nike and Apple have created a virtual personal trainer in the Nike + iPod Sports Kit, £19. The kit consists of a small radio transmitter, which is placed in your shoe, which tracks your progress while your iPod nano plays energy boosting music should it feel the need to up your game.

If you're thinking of something a little more traditional, encourage a little of the Beckham magic to rub off on your man by buying him the footballer's latest fragrance, Intimate-



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**SPEED MACHINE:** the radio-controlled Storm Launcher

ly Beckham, from £19.45. And if, like Gold-enballs, the man in your life enjoys taking great care of himself, then choose some luxury grooming products such as Molton Brown's bracing Silver Birch Body Wash, £15 and Re-Charge Black Pepper Body Soother.

It's those special touches which make the man, so treat him to chrome black/crystal clear cufflinks, £55 from Square Mile at Debenhams. Alternatively, choose an exquisite tie from Saladin-Manzetti (www.saladin-manzetti.com), or a luxury holdall, such as the Hidesign Sultan holdall, £120 from John Lewis.

But then again, there's no reason for presents to be practical. If the billion and a half pound price tag for a full-sized original B2 Stealth is a little out of your price range, appeal to his inner kid and buy him the radio controlled Stealth B2 Bomber Flying predator, £69.95 from www.paramountzone.com. Or perhaps the radio-controlled Storm Launcher £99.95, from www.firebox.com. This revolutionary RC Vehicle not only rockets across water, concrete, sand and grass but can also take to the skies.

For fun stocking fillers, take a look at www.iwantoneofthose.com. The Eon Ice, £7.95, is a slick little torch the size of a credit card which emits a stunning bright blue

light from two powerful LEDs. The essential inflatable beer bucket, £7.99 is a must for those perfect picnics, while the Pint Mug, £6.99 is a god-send for the serious caffeine drinkers. If you know someone who believes that have the voice of Robbie Williams, he'll no doubt appreciate the Shower Tap radio, £9.99. Whether you'll appreciate the dulcet tones emanating from the bathroom is another matter.



**CHEERS!:** the Pint Mug; above, the Eon Ice torch

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

**Award-winning Radio Cleveland presenter Matthew Davies will be playing Captain Hook in Peter Pan at Middlesbrough Theatre from December 8 until January 7.**

**Where will you be spending Christmas?**  
I'll be having Christmas at home with about 11 coming round.

**What's on your gift wish list?**  
The Timewaster Letters by Robin Cooper because I love the idea of writing to the boss of one of those catalogues and saying "I've invented a wonder

product using beef." And when they respond, you reply: "Did I say beef? Oh I meant Beale", and so on.

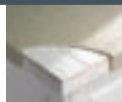
**What's the best Christmas present you've ever had?**  
That's really difficult. It was a Bontempi organ which took about 20 seconds to warm up. My parents put it next to the stairs and my sister rushed down, fell over it and blew it up.

**If money were no object, what would you like?**  
A chauffeur-driven Bentley.  
■ **Middlesbrough Theatre Box office:** 01642-815181



**BAD BOY:** Davies as Captain Hook with Stephen McGeough as Mr Smee

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## NE gardening



**BUSY BEES:** the lavender crop before the harvest

# Out of the blue

A lot of farms cannot necessarily be recommended for their smell. RUTH CAMPBELL visits some aromatic acres on the edge of the Yorkshire Wolds

It is a stunning sight. Just off the A64, in countryside traditionally patterned by quiet lanes, swathes of woodland and lush, green fields full of grazing animals, an unfamiliar streak of vibrant blue suddenly comes into view.

As you get closer, a sweet, pleasant smell fills the air. It is the scent of lavender. That streak – now a huge block – of blue is created by the thousands of vibrant blue plants which make Wolds Way Lavender, the North's main lavender oil distillery and herb farm.

Run by former engineer Steve Jacques and his wife Anne, it is hard to believe that, just five years ago, this was the site of a disused pigery, a patchy scrap of land that was such poor quality no one was interested in using it for farming.

A few miles from Malton and on the edge of the picturesque Yorkshire Wolds, it seems an unlikely spot for a lavender farm: "It isn't grown much in England. This is probably as far north as you will find it grown for the sort of lavender oil we produce," says Steve.

As well as viewing, smelling, touching and buying the plants – "these are the most touched lavender plants in the country," says Steve – visitors can watch the oil being produced in the distillery.

The shop sells everything from lavender bath oils, to muscle rub, honey, top quality aromatherapy oils, toffee and furniture polish, all made using Wolds Way's own oils. And the cafe serves lavender scones, teas and even lavender ice cream.

Steve, 48, who moved from his native Barrow-in-Furness, where he had worked in the

shipyards, to run the nearby Eden Camp war museum 15 years ago, had always dreamed of running a business for himself.

Encouraged by his success as Museum Director at Eden Camp, which was awarded best visitor attraction in the county in 1998, he and his wife Anne decided to look for a plot of land.

Anne, 45, who met Steve when she worked as a tracer in the shipyards in Barrow, was interested in horticulture and garden design and they came up with the idea of a lavender farm.

"I came across this totally derelict pig farm for sale, it hadn't been used for 20 years. Wherever you went, you were deep in pig muck and rubbish," says Steve. "Thankfully, Anne didn't bat an eyelid."

The couple, who have a daughter, Sarah, 16, went straight to B&Q to buy a £3 soil testing kit, discovered the 12-acre site was suitable – luckily, lavender doesn't like rich ground – and put in a bid. Locals must have thought they were crazy.

The Wolds is a renowned arable farming area, with a relatively high amount of sunshine and low rainfall. "But the land here is 12 acres of some of the worst farm land in the area. There has never been anything good grown here at all," says Steve. "At the time, the foot-and-mouth outbreak had devastated the rural economy. Everyone was coming out of farming."

But he felt he could make his business work: "We are within half a mile of the A64, which sees 44,000 car movements a day." And as chairman of the local tourist association, he had a lot of support behind him.

By March 2002, the pig farm was theirs. "We





**CAREER CHANGE:** Steve bought 12 acres and swapped pigs for something much more aromatic

Pictures: RICHARD DOUGHTY

spent the first month just clearing rubbish," says Steve. "I did a lot of the physical work, and I was still working at Eden Camp during the day."

"There were rabbit warrens you could stand up in, we had to plant 6,500 trees to replace hedges. I remember three days before we were due to open, we started on the toilets. All our friends came and helped up until midnight."

They opened on June 1, 2003, changing the name at the last minute from Lavande, the French for lavender. "Lots of farming friends said 'If you use a French name, we're not coming'," laughs Steve.

It has been back-breaking work. "It has been the hardest four years of my life," says Steve. "Now if the toilets are bunged up, it's down to me to sort it out."

To begin with, crows destroyed about 400 plants a day. Now Steve and Anne let the weeds grow through the plants to protect them in their infancy, painstakingly weeding the beds once the lavender has grown.

"It all has to be hand weeded. We don't use any chemicals," says Steve. "It's heavy on staff."

Up until this year, when they invested in a harvesting machine, cutting the lavender down and bringing it in took four to five weeks. "I would cut it down with a big hedge trimmer and it took ten members of staff to gather."

They opened the distillery last year and visitors can now watch the whole oil-making process, from the lavender being brought in on a miniature train, which also offers rides to children, to the extraction of the oil, using a unique wood-fired still and cooling system. This makes use of recycled rainwater from their landscaped ponds.

When they had some of their oils tested recently, the concentration of the scent was comparable to the finest quality lavender used for perfume and aromatherapy oils.

Steve designed and built the still himself, adapted from information he gleaned from an old book dated 1851. It takes about 200 plants to get ½ litre of oil. "It's not as fast as steam – it takes three hours to get every last drop out – but it does work well. And it gives the customer something to see on a day out," he says.

The couple came up with the idea of having raised lavender beds, so that older people and children in pushchairs can get closer to some of the 120 lavender and herb varieties, on the site.

Wolds Way now employs 25 staff and the couple have invested more than £½m. "We have grown year on year, although we haven't broken even yet. We keep reinvesting," says Anne. "It has been a rollercoaster few years, but I have no regrets whatsoever, it has brought us closer together if anything."

Steve points out that the smell of the lavender seems particularly strong after a drop of rain. "The minute you get here, you feel good," adds Anne. "I don't know if it is the smell of the lavender or what, but there is a lovely atmosphere."

■ **Wolds Way Lavender, Malton, tel: 01944-758641, www.woldswaylavender.co.uk**  
**The farm is open from the first Sunday in February until the end of October. Christmas gifts can be ordered via the website. Goodies include: lavender water £3.99, apricot and lavender facial scrub £4.99, cleansing cream £4.45, lavender bag £3.99, incense sticks 99p and a soothing lavender and wheat bag to warm up in the microwave £9.99.**

## WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

SANDRA Geere has moved house 14 times and has had several careers. Now she writes about organic fruit and vegetable gardening, allotments and the numerous health, environmental and social benefits of growing and eating your own fresh, tasty and safe food. She has just set up the Sandra Geere Kitchen Garden Design & Consultancy, specialising in creating sustainable, organic vegetable, fruit and herb gardens in the smallest of spaces and offers a consultancy, design, planting plans and sourcing service to individual clients, schools, Primary Care Trusts, businesses, etc. She also offers talks, workshops and lectures on the benefits of growing and eating your own organic produce. The idea behind the business is that anyone can grow their five-a-day, even if they only have a window box or pots on the patio.

"This is a very personal service and I can offer a package especially tailored to individual requirements," says Sandra. "One of these would make an ideal gift for the person who has everything, for an anniversary, to mark a retirement or for a really original wedding present."

Or for Christmas, of course... Gift vouchers are available.

### Where will you be spending Christmas?

I will be spending Christmas at home in York with my seven-month-old granddaughter Ellie and her parents.

### What on your gift wish list?



Leather gardening gauntlets (for less painful pruning of my gooseberry bushes), Jeremy Paxman's latest book (he can do no wrong in my eyes) and a cheese knife with a yew wood handle.

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

On Christmas Eve when my son was six he drew me a picture of a clown holding some balloons. He gave it to me, wrapped up, on Christmas morning and it has hung on my wall ever since.

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

An end to war.

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# We three chefs...

Cooking for a crowd at Christmas is enough to induce a sense of panic in the most experienced chef. Here three celebrity chefs share their secrets and favourite festive memories with GABRIELLE FAGAN

## MARY BERRY

**What's the essence of Christmas for you?**  
IT means a family occasion. I've never wanted to go off to a hotel or go abroad in the sunshine. To me, Christmas is Christmas at home. We used to go to my mother's for Christmas, now I cook dinner and she comes to us – she's 101 and we do it in a very similar way.

**What's your favourite Christmas memory?**  
It's remembering my own children, doing charades and acting and dressing up over Christmas; they so enjoy Christmas when they're little. Now my twin granddaughters are four and they proudly say grace before the meal and they do it beautifully. It's a children's time.

**What's your favourite Christmas menu?**  
We have the turkey. We've been through having the goose, but a turkey is what everyone likes.

**What's your favourite Christmas recipe?**  
For Christmas Eve, baked salmon with a Parmesan crust that I often do.

**What's your essential Christmas ingredient?**  
One of the ingredients I buy very early are frozen chestnuts – they're now available in good supermarkets and they cut out all that awful peeling of chestnuts when you've just done your nails. And they're very good – buy them early and keep in the freezer as they do run out.

**What's your tip for making preparations easier?**  
Planning and organisation. Getting a nice big sheet of paper and thinking early in December about who's coming, how many there are going to be and what I can do ahead – and do it sitting down calmly. When you've made your lists, you feel a lot happier.

■ Mary Berry's Christmas Collection, by Mary Berry (Headline, £20)

**A BERRY CHRISTMAS:**  
frozen chestnuts are essential





## SOPHIE GRIGSON

### What's the essence of Christmas for you?

FOR me the essence of Christmas is having time to spend with my family, my children, siblings and as many of the vast hordes of cousins as we can squeeze in.

### What's your favourite Christmas memory?

My last Christmas with my mother, discovering Monteverdi's Vespers of the Blessed Virgin together. She died a few months later. Whenever I hear it, I think of her, and what was a surprisingly happy Christmas, although we knew she didn't have much time left.

### What's your favourite Christmas menu?

We're very traditional, very boring, repeating much the same menu year in year out. So smoked salmon on homemade brown bread, followed by turkey (or if I get my way, goose, which I prefer) with a chestnut and apple stuffing, bread sauce, cranberry sauce, Brussels sprouts with almonds or chestnuts, crisp roast potatoes and parsnips, lots of gravy, bacon rolls and cocktail sausages, and finally a flaming Christmas pudding and usually either a mulled grapejuice jelly or lemon mousse.

### What's your favourite Christmas recipe?

I adore Christmas pudding and always make my own several months in advance so that it has time to mature. I love the ritual and drama of the flaming pudding, presented in a room lit only by candle light.

### What's your essential Christmas ingredient?

Wow, that's a tricky one. Possibly fresh chestnuts, but possibly all those warm, mellow spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cloves and so on.

**What's your tip for making Christmas preparations easier?** Plan everything well in advance. Make lists and timetables and stick to them as best you can.

■ Vegetables by Sophie Grigson (Collins, £25)

## PAUL GAYLER

### What's the essence of Christmas for you?

Spending time with the family – plenty of drink, food and a good time. I love seeing everyone happy and relaxed.

### What's your favourite Christmas memory?

As a child I remember mum and dad coming in to fill our stockings in the middle of the night. So we'd know exactly when they'd come in, my brother and I used to tie a piece of string to the door and attach it to my foot. As soon as the door opened we'd feel a tug! Once they'd left, we were up!

### What's your favourite Christmas menu?

I am a traditionalist at heart and do love a good old turkey – but being me, I can't just have one dish. I'll usually prepare a good rib of beef as well.

### What's your favourite Christmas recipe?

I haven't got a favourite recipe, but you can't beat a good piece of Christmas stilton. It's as important as the turkey and in our house we're eating it for weeks after.

### What's your essential Christmas ingredient?

Vacuum packed chestnuts – I get really good quality ones from France and use them in the stuffing.

### What's your tip for making Christmas preparations easier?

Just focus on one main dish, don't try and have three complicated courses. It's better to just do it well and not try to be too clever. After all, you are usually cooking for loads of people and that's a challenge in itself.

■ A Passion For Cheese by Paul Gayler (Kyle Cathie, £14.99)



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With a wealth of experience in the finance business and the Spanish property market, Steve can guarantee you a service that is second to none and whatever you are looking for as your dream home he will deliver, as many of his existing clients will testify.

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## NE my style



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** Matthew Williamson printed shirt and belt, Issa dress, Top Shop camisole, Matthew Williamson jeans and Unisa sandals; Matthew Williamson coat, blouse and trousers and Betty Jackson boots



Pat Copeland owns the designer clothing store Joseph M, on Darlington's Grange Road. At the age of 60, she proves that style is not the preserve of the young

**Describe your look**  
As you get older, glamour is more to do with being immaculate, perfectly groomed and polished; elegant whilst trendy with a distinct twist on today's fashion. A woman who knows her self-worth radiates it. That's the epitome of glamour to me. A smile is your best dressed look and it's free. I like having the confidence to enjoy my own style and have fun with it.

**What's your favourite item of clothing?**  
It has to be Matthew Williamson's fabulous jackets. They're very distinctive. Add them to your jeans, dresses etc

and you can guarantee you always look stunning. They are key investment pieces – timeless and fabulously tailored – and you definitely have the feelgood factor wearing them. Women should indulge themselves more often.

**What's the most you've ever spent on an item of clothing?**  
I think it has to be a pair of sling-back shoes which I got caught on the side of the pedals in my new car, which I bumped – very costly indeed!

**What's been your worst buy?**  
I haven't really got a worst buy. With all my knowledge of fashion plus a discerning eye I try only to buy the items I really love and know will work with my existing working wardrobe.

**What are your favourite shops?**  
Little boutiques which sell delightful clothes – the things I haven't seen before. I love shopping in places I visit on holiday – Rome, Capri, Cannes



etc, and of course Harvey Nichols.

**What's your favourite beauty product?**  
Espa 24 Hour Eye Complex.

**Have you any beauty tips?**  
My first beauty tip would be to use Daily Dermalogica Intensive Moisture Balance and exfoliate weekly with Gatineau Electelle, and if I had time, I should go more often for a facial. My daughters always comment on my skin after having a facial but I can never find the time to indulge.

**Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?**  
It has got to be Kate Moss – she's queen of cool and

glamour, totally understated but she always manages to look fantastic and effortless. She was at one red carpet event recently and she outshone everyone with her simple style. Everyone paled into insignificance and she looked magnificent.

■ **Joseph M, 12 Grange Road, Darlington, 01325-489821.**

As you get older, glamour is more to do with being perfectly groomed

## gadget man



■ Don't miss Burton's Bytes – game reviews in The Northern Echo every Tuesday



Gadget-lovers adore Christmas. What better excuse could there be to stock up with new techno goodies? NIGEL BURTON looks at what's going to be hot this Yuletide

### BEST WAY TO REKINDLE YOUR YOUTH

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# The Box still rocks

### BEST GAMES CONSOLE

#### Microsoft Xbox 360

A CONTROVERSIAL choice because the Xbox 360 isn't the new kid on the block any more. That accolade falls to the ridiculously named Nintendo Wii (pronounced "wee").

The Wii has price on its side and a decent launch line-up of games but the Xbox 360 is still the daddy. It has more power and far more software choice. Of course, the Xbox doesn't have the Wii's innovative "wand-style" controller but if you enjoy playing your games on-line then the Box rocks this Christmas. The Xbox can also be upgraded to high definition standard remarkably cheaply. Around £280.



than standard DVD quality - so what's the point? My advice? Wait for another six months.

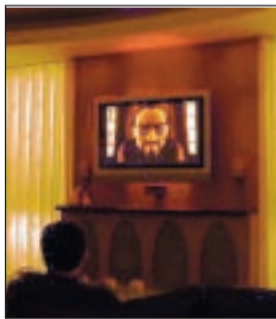
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amBX is shorthand for 'ambient experiences'. Driving the next generation of home entertainment, it delivers new entertainment experiences: surround lighting, sound, vibration, air movement and other effects.

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If you're a gamer, the virtual world reaches out from your screen. You feel the action: the movement of vehicles, shifts in lighting, rumbling explosions, ricocheting bullets, wind in your face. The mix of ambient lighting, vision, sound and tactile sensations mean the gaming experience will never be the same.



### BEST HIGH DEFINITION RECORDER

#### Toshiba Qosimo G30

THIS has not been a good year for either format hoping to replace DVD as the recordable medium of the future.

The Blu-Ray system has suffered from well publicised problems and the HD-DVD camp can only offer the G30, from £1,299.95, if you absolutely must have a high def recorder this Christmas.

The Qosimo is a fantastic laptop computer (full on HD recording, TV tuner, great speakers etc) but it's also very pricy and the HD technology is still very much in its infancy. Nor can you record the Sky high def broadcasts in anything more



### BEST GADGET YOU WON'T FIND IN THE SHOPS

#### Sony PS3.

THE European launch of the much anticipated Sony PlayStation 3 has been delayed until March 2007.

While the rest of the civilised world gets the greatest gaming console this month, British fans will just have to wait. Alternatively they could invest in a Microsoft Xbox 360 or a Nintendo Wii and still enjoy next generation gaming action on Christmas Day. From £35.

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# Fine dining and superb surrounds



**NEW LOOK:** privately owned, the hotel dates back to the 17th century and even boasts a secret passage

An updated menu is just one of the things guests can tuck into at the newly refurbished Hallgarth Manor Country Hotel. SHEILA WEBER drops in

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**B**ROWN and white road signs are just the start of a new direction for Hallgarth Manor Country Hotel. For inside this impressive listed building nestling in the County Durham countryside a major makeover is going on.

The hotel – just three miles from the historic city of Durham – has embarked on a refurbishment programme intended to ensure the Hallgarth is well and truly on the map.

General manager Carol Carter says the aim is to attract more new business.

“We get a lot of repeat trade and that’s great,” she says. “But we are looking to bring in more new guests and see more people using our restaurant and bar facilities. We want to tell people we are here and what we have to offer.”

Already, the restaurant and lounge have been given a facelift, along with the cocktail area, which sports a rose pink/beige colour scheme, comfortable chairs and views on to the beautiful south-facing gardens.

There is also a new menu. The previous table d’hôte system has been replaced by an a la carte menu offering lots of choice and flexibility for diners. The restaurant is open to non-residents and there is a carvery on Sunday lunchtimes, along with bar meals lunchtime and evening.

The 23 en-suite bedrooms are next for a new look. A refurbishment programme starts in 2007 to equip each room with wireless facilities, flat-screen TVs and bathroom fittings described by Carol Carter as ‘exclusive’. And all bedrooms have views of the surrounding countryside or part of the four acres of gardens and grounds.

All this is complemented by original and traditional features such as the hotel’s grand staircase and crystal chandeliers.

The Hallgarth’s conference facilities are impressive, suitable for one to one interviews or



up to 250 people with full technology back-up.

This side of the business centres on the Cathedral Suite, which is also available for functions such as civil weddings, dinner/dances, banquets and anniversary celebrations.

And residents can get discount use of leisure and fitness facilities at the nearby Bannatynes about a mile away.

Privately-owned, the hotel dates back to the 17th century when it was a residential estate. It even boasts a ‘secret passage’ said to have been created to give monks access to Durham Cathedral and the nearby church of St Lawrence.

Situated just outside the village of Pittington, the hotel believes in catering to people living in the vicinity. There is also a tavern bar – mainly used by locals – which features a dominoes team and quiz night. Meals can be ordered in here.

“We want to attract people from the immediate area and further afield,” says Carol Carter. “Many people just don’t know we are here and we want to ensure we are well and truly on the map.”

“The food is excellent here, attracting very favourable reports, and we aim to attract more people aged 30-plus for meals.”

■ Prices at Hallgarth Manor range from £75 per double room for bed and breakfast to £110 to include dinner. Special offers are available at different times of the year.

The new a la carte menu in the Elemore Restaurant includes dishes such as pan-seared sirloin at £15.50; medallions of venison at £16 and darne of halibut at £13.75. Ingredients are locally sourced where possible and specials are changed daily.

Christmas bookings are now being taken. Festive lunches are available throughout December at £14.95, with six-course lunches on December 25 itself costing £69.95, to include bucks fizz and a visit from Santa.



# Getting the Abbey habit

The new care village at Scorton provides a wealth of choices for elderly people looking for a home with that little bit extra

It can't be very often that there is a chance to buy a home in a converted old abbey. But that is exactly what's on offer at Scorton village in North Yorkshire as five apartments have been created within the Grade II listed St Clare's Abbey on the fringe of the village.

The conversion is part of a seven-acre site, which Gratia Care is turning into a 'care village'. But the abbey homes will be separated from the rest of the development by way of clever design.

Simon Loveridge, managing director of Gratia Care, says: "These are very special homes, sympathetically converted."

The complex features a three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment on the top floor. The rest are two-bedroomed homes. Original features have been retained where possible, such as archway windows and exposed beams, and floor space is generous.

Mr Loveridge says each flat is individual. "They are ideal for people looking for something different," he says. "Lots of new buildings are square and boxy, these have character."

In use of materials, the company has gone all out to blend in with the original structure – which dates back to the 17th century and stone-masons have been brought in to capture the feel of the past.

Gardens are shared and there is an outside maintenance arrangement. Parking spaces have been incorporated and the homes have a separate access road. Prices range from £215,000 to £235,000.

Gratia Care bought the site from the Brothers of St John of God three years ago. A hospital/care facility was built there in 1909 as a 'home for unfortunates' charity, but to adapt it to modern standards called for a massive £15m investment.

"The first thing was to open a new care home delivering modern standards," says Mr Loveridge. That facility is already full, with 60 residents.

There is also a nursing and care home specialising in working with people with Alzheimers. This is split into units of 15 so people can form their own little communities.

"If you can have such a thing as a state-of-the-art care home then this is it," says Mr Loveridge.

Also on site is provision for people with mild dementia and 45 assisted living suites are being developed. Here, people get en-suite accommodation with lounge and kitchenette on a rental basis. Tenants tend to be people who would previously have been in a residential home. Services are provided to their door and there is a formal dining room, coffee shop and cinema on site.

"They have their independence but care is there as part of the package," says Mr Loveridge. "Prices are comparable with those of residential care homes, although people get more space and more freedom. We believe in keeping people in their own homes for as long as possible."

Elsewhere on the complex, Gratia is building 22 assisted living units. Residents can use all site facilities and have the option to buy, rent or have full-time care.

"It gives people choice and if their needs change, they are not faced with moving away

from the area," says Mr Loveridge. "We feel that in many care organisations, the physical aspects are addressed, but the social side is overlooked. We want to change that."

Ultimately, there will be provision for around 170 residents. Staff numbers already total 119 – mainly local people – making Gratia one of the biggest employers in the area.

Mr Loveridge says the care village concept has been around in the America for years but that it has 'taken us a while to catch up'.

"The backbone of our system has been smaller care homes. But as more and more regulations came in, it was harder to make that work," he says.

"Most people going into care homes have done so in reaction to a health crisis and the involvement of hospitals and social services. Assisted living rent/buy is more of a personal choice. People have more control over their own destiny and stay healthier longer if they have independence."

While the Abbey site is very much a community, it is still part of the overall Scorton village.

Some of the accommodation is for couples. "That is an important part of what we do," says Mr Loveridge. "One big problem has been couples being split up."

In assisted living, Gratia provide wardrobes, carpets and such, but leave space for people's own furniture and belongings. If needed, a furnishing package can be provided.

Outside are secure gardens and landscaped areas. There is a Victorian-style conservatory and social activities are high on the list, with residents encouraged to arrange events themselves. A bus is available for outings.

Each unit has a manager and various care workers, depending on the level of need.

Gratia have been building for two years now and completion will take another 18 months.

"So far we have had positive feedback from the Scorton community," says Mr Loveridge. "As there have been care facilities here for around 100 years, people have got used to the idea and we have a big impact on the community as an employer. We try to support local businesses."

He says Gratia have a good reputation in providing high levels of care – especially for Alzheimers sufferers.

"All too often, people don't get a choice as to what kind of care home they go to," says Mr Loveridge. "It is all done on a reaction to crisis basis. People really need to sit down with their families to make proper arrangements. They think it's not going to happen to them, but usually it does. Too many people bury the subject under the carpet but it needs to be discussed in a serious way."

To buy assisted living units costs from £195,999 for two-bedrooms and £159,000 for one-bedroomed accommodation. Mr Loveridge says these prices are competitive with local market conditions.

Rents, he says, are on a par with residential homes in general.

"The whole subject of care needs to be viewed in a common sense way," says Mr Loveridge. "Ask the question: would you put your gran here? It's an easy question to answer. It's a home from home."



**ROOM WITH A VIEW:** The outlook from the living area of one of the new flats overlooking the chapel. Below, the former hospital at Scorton which is being converted into assisted living apartments.

Pictures: RICHARD DOUGHTY



**OPEN PLAN:** Left, the kitchen area of a flat at the former St Clare's abbey

## Outstanding location Outstanding care

Gratia Care Ltd is delighted to announce the opening of a brand new purposely designed care home, which provides specialist nursing and dementia care in the outstanding location of Scorton, one of the prettiest villages in north Yorkshire

This new care home forms part of the existing Abbey Care Village, and boasts a standard of accommodation and care which more than exceeds expectations.

Set in delightful landscaped gardens, the new facility also offers the benefits of existing on-site amenities such as a restaurant, coffee shop and cinema suite providing a stimulating social life for those who wish.

All accommodation is in beautifully appointed single rooms with en-suite facilities, providing every comfort and a homely and private living space. All rooms have points for

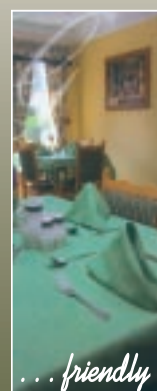
satellite television and are fitted with individual phone lines to help residents keep in touch with their loved ones.

The Abbey Care Home has been designed to be a real home from home with intimate residents' lounges and separate dining facilities throughout the building which encourage social interaction in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

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To find out more about the Abbey Care Home or Gratia Care Ltd and our availability, please telephone us on (01748) 811971 or write to us at:

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# NE interiors

## 'People call us Trinny and Susannah'

Interior designers Pam Wright and Fiona Lawson are experts at giving their clients the champagne lifestyle on a lemonade budget. They share some of their secrets with RUTH CAMPBELL, including their desire to work for the Beckhams

**T**HEY are known as the Trinny and Susannah of the interior design world. And when you first meet Pam Wright and Fiona Lawson, it is not hard to see why. Dressed in stylish jeans, high heels and fashionable, fitted shirts, they look like real gurlies, in the nicest sense of the word. Suddenly, Fiona clocks Pam's trendy dark blue open-toed high wedge heels and lets out a shriek: "Snap. We've both worn the same shoes. I knew this would happen one day," she laughs. The shoes, which they bought together while on a buying trip for their interiors shop in Masham, say it all. Although they look like expensive designer footwear, they're actually from the discount clothing store Matalan and cost just £8.99.

Just like TV's Trinny and Susannah, who put together knockout looks from high street stores, Pam and Fiona know how to get the very best for what you've got or, as they put it: "the champagne lifestyle on a lemonade budget".

Thanks to drastically reduced circumstances, Fiona and Pam, who admit to being slightly eccentric, have had their share of both. Once, they both lived in huge, rambling converted farmhouses with Agas, a multitude of bedrooms and acres of land.

Today, they both live in tiny, rented cottages: "It is a challenge, but we've just rolled up our sleeves and got on with it," says Fiona. "Before my divorce, I used to have the big farmhouse with a 40ft kitchen, three bathrooms and 23 acres. I was demoted from driving a Porsche to a Peugeot 205 with the door hanging on with a bit of string."

Pam, whose income plummeted after her hus-

band stopped work, once lived in a huge old Georgian farmhouse with attached pig farm and barn which she transformed into a luxurious home. She adds: "My house is now so small, it's like a doll's house, none of my old furniture will fit into it. We have had to do it up on the cheap. It's been a challenge."

Needless to say, both their cottages look stunning and elegant, the perfect advertisement for their considerable design skills and an excellent example of just what can be achieved on a tight budget.

They pride themselves on being able to make a house look as luxurious as the Palace of Versailles without spending a fortune: "I get a real kick out of getting hold of a fabric for £2 a metre and making it look amazing, really luxurious," says Fiona.

Unlike some interior designer types, Fiona and Pam - who prefer to call themselves "home stylists" - aren't playing at this business. After opening their shop last July, they clearly work incredibly hard and have a huge client portfolio to prove it.

Currently, they are refurbishing houses all over Yorkshire and County Durham. They are also working on the renowned Blue Lion restaurant in East Witton and the White Swan in Middleham and add that they are "sworn to secrecy" about a number of well-known clients.

Fiona is quick to stress that, although they may be known as Trinny and Susannah, they are not quite as brutal as the famous pair: "We try as much as we can to work with what the client wants, it is their home and their taste. Their home is part of their personality."

Locally, they have made their mark on every-

**FIONA: My favourite room**

"IT'S our little snug room, right, where everything is done on the cheap. I painted the ceilings as well as the walls dark red so it's all boxed in. We just dive in here in the evenings and relax, it's even got a bed settee. We love it. The huge 8ft by 5ft mirror is from my old house. It was a bargain for £200, but fits perfectly in here and makes the room look more spacious. We have a huge TV as my second husband is American. The ancient looking "paintings" on the wall are just photocopies blown up. I put crackle glaze and soot on to make them look old and framed them. The large painting is a self-portrait of my grandmother Mica Sidi, an artist who studied with Picasso in Paris. She was about the same age as him. She wouldn't exhibit or sell, and led a fantastic, bohemian life. It's very special to me."



**TOP TIPS**

■ Try boxing a small room colour wise, painting the ceiling the same colour as the walls and carpet. This looks really good in a dark colour like raspberry, everything blends. There are no rights or wrongs but if you put a bold colour on one wall only it highlights it, it can stand out too much.

■ Lighting is very important, you can change the whole mood of a room by using lower wattage peach tone bulbs. Peach gives a really soft light without being too harsh. The warm glow changes the look of the whole room.

■ Mix old and new. You can pick up great bargains at junk shops. One of my favourite items is an old plant stand with a crack down the middle I got from a junk shop for 50p. I cut off the legs and it makes a great coffee table. You can make lovely footstools from old tables.

■ Dress up your bed with soft drapes of fabric hanging above the bedhead. You can use muslin or something cheap and gather it together at the top in a crown.

■ You can make sumptuous curtains from cheaper fabrics, dress them up with tassel tie-backs and trims.



thing from tiny terraced cottages in Masham to the grand function room in Bedale Hall. The room, which was once painted in sickly colours with grey linoleum on the floor, has been transformed, with huge gilt mirrors and sumptuous fabrics. "It looks more like the Ritz in Paris now," says Fiona.

It is clear they enjoy what they do: "Even when we arrive on building sites, they say: Here come Trinny and Susannah. I suppose it's because we're two women, stylish, working together in design," she adds. And, in true Trinny and Susannah style, they have a laugh together. Fiona recalls another occasion, when the pair were mistakenly locked in a castle after the family went away and the housekeeper forgot they were there. "It was a really spooky castle and had a fabulous wine cellar. Pam said, if we have to stay here, I'm sleeping in the same room as you..."

Aged 49 and 63 respectively, both Fiona and Pam, who is a grandmother, look at least a decade younger than their ages. While Fiona trained at art college and used to work as a muralist, Pam's design skills were honed doing up homes of her own. Her first assignment was from friends who had seen what she had achieved.

"They bought a cottage and were going on holiday for two weeks, they just threw me the keys and said: 'Do it'. I called all my girlfriends, it was like one of those make-over shows. Then these friends bought a massive wing of a stately home and wanted me to do that. It just grew from there."

The two, who met at a dinner party 15 years ago, first went into business together more than three years ago, hand making luxurious French-style bedheads in Fiona's garage and then at an old sawmill in West Tanfield. "It was a freezing cold workshop, like a scrapyard, where they used to do shotblasting. We tarted it up and put in bedrooms." The business soon expanded, leading them to open their shop and develop the design business from Masham.

"It is a great location, very boutiquey," says Fiona. "People come for miles. People who want to do up holiday cottages stop by. We are so much cheaper than in London. I have seen a mirror we sell for £300 going for £2,500 on the Fulham Road."

As well as offering home styling services, they sell fabrics, chandeliers, lamps, mirrors, rugs, footstools and other items of furniture. "We aim to find things we can sell for reasonable prices but that look amazing," says Fiona.

Their business is doing better than they ever imagined. But their dream job would be to do up a house for Posh and Becks. "I would love to go on a money-no-object spending spree," says Fiona. "Zebra skin rugs, 12 inch thick Footballers' Wives carpets, the whole bang and caboodle. And then change it all every year. That would be great."



**PAM: My favourite room**

"I LOVE this little, intimate dining room, with its rough, dark red painted walls. The quirky moose's head above the fireplace was a gift from a friend, because my nickname is Moosey, short for pamplemousse. We knocked out and exposed the fireplace. The old oak Jacobean furniture and raw silk curtains are from our old house. The shelf unit in the corner was originally the front door. I got the deer oil painting at Tennants' auction in Leyburn. We also have a few hunting scenes as my husband was master of the Catterick Beagles. My favourite thing is the old mirror. I couldn't afford to buy it when I saw it in a gallery 15 years ago but I loved it. We went to York Races for our wedding anniversary and I put some money on a horse and won £600, exactly the cost of the mirror. It was meant to be."

**TOP TIPS**

- Use mirrors to create light and space. Remember you are creating a home, not something that looks interior designed. Keep it simple, don't over-design. The best homes look like they have evolved.
- Placing furniture is important. When you live with things, you don't notice them after a while. By moving them to another room or another position, it can really show something off and make a big difference. You see it afresh.
- Live in a place for a while before you decorate. It might be tempting but don't rush it, stagger things.
- If you don't have one, put in an open fire. This is the soul, the heart of any home, it is really important.

■ Lawson Wright Design, Silver Street, Masham 01765-688180



*I get a real kick out of getting hold of a £2 a metre fabric and making it look amazing*

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## NE motoring

# Meet a real mean, clean machine

Motoring correspondent IAN LAMMING finds the Lexus GS450H a dream to drive – without the guilt of guzzling gas

**R**EADY. It's not a question, it's an instruction and it flashes up on the dashboard of the first high performance hybrid on the market. Block capitals and in simple white on black it inhabits the top left corner of the dashboard of the Lexus GS450.

It appears when you press the round button marked 'power' and is the only discernible thing to happen when you do. There is no noise, no engine start up, nothing but this five-letter word.

It seems a trifle odd then to let off the handbrake (particularly as you use your foot by the way), engage whichever gear takes your fancy (whether that's D for forward or R for reverse) and press the accelerator.

Oddly, the car moves, proving that it is indeed ready. Who definitely aren't ready are the passing pedestrians who jump out of their skins as the large luxury saloon glides off without so much as a squeak from any moving part. The walkers aren't ready either

as I crawl at hiker-pace behind them down the drive of our Lakeland lunch stop as they don't realise we are there. When they do they leap from their boots and gaiters.

Ready or not the world must embrace this latest piece of Japanese technology. The fume-filled atmosphere and depleted natural resources are certainly ready for a vehicle that uses electricity to drive the wheels and the driven wheels to provide the electricity in a thoroughly Earth-friendly fashion.

And motorists will be ready too for a car that is a magnificent drive; that provides performance but not at the expense of the purse; that provides luxury without compromise; limousine comfort with sporting prowess.

It does this by harnessing a silky smooth 3.5 litre V6, which on its own is a fine engine, to an electric motor. The former turns out 286bhp unaided, the latter is a 190bhp support act. Combined, it produces a car with a sub-six second to 60mph performance but one that will easily return 30-plus miles per gal-



**SILKY SMOOTH:** the Lexus's engine is harnessed to an electric motor

lon and low emissions, a fabulous achievement.

This is no milk float, rather the creme de la creme of motoring. Under electric power it is completely silent, an unnerving feeling at first, particularly at the traffic lights where you think you have stalled. On the hoof the petrol motor kicks in when needed and when real power is required both work together to provide as much pull as you could ever need for the given situation – it's stunning.

All that power requires a stable platform and the GS scores highly there too. It's a large car but handles like the best coupes and the steering, adjustable ride and grip are peerless. Brakes are massively powerful too, making the Lexus one of the easiest cars on the road to control. It fair bristles with hi-tech gadgets. Firstly, it recognises your approach and unlocks the doors without having to take the key from your pocket. At night it also

lights the way and illuminates the interior. Engage reverse and the centrally mounted screen becomes a television showing you what lies behind and even guiding you home with some very useful markings.

When you are stationary or moving forwards, the same screen operates the satellite navigation, climate control, audio or trip functions at the flick of a digit. Cossetting leather seats adjust electrically of course and there is plenty of room in the back for passengers.

Only the boot lets the side down, truncated I imagine by the electric motor hidden in its lack of depths. Otherwise the car is flawless and beyond reproach in terms of the environment too. As a concept it takes the motoring world to a new plane and while the public might not yet be ready for the ultimate clean vehicles powered by hydrogen, they most certainly are for hybrids like this.

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For more information or to arrange a test drive of the IS 220d call Lexus Teesside on 01642 808000.

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Low Lane  
High Leven  
Tel 01642 808000

[www.lexus.co.uk/teesside](http://www.lexus.co.uk/teesside)



Top Manufacturer for Quality, Reliability and Customer Care in the UK. BBC Top Gear Magazine Motoring Survey 2002-2005.

Auto Express Driver Power Survey Lexus Best Manufacturer 2002-2006.

Model shown IS 220d Sport with metallic paint £27,478. IS 220d prices start from £22,243 to £31,863 OTR. Prices correct at time of going to press full tank of fuel, one year's road fund licence and first registration fee. BBC Top Gear Magazine Motoring Survey 2005 based on the results of questionnaires from 36 manufacturers. Auto Express Driver Power Survey 2006 based on the results of questionnaires from 46,423 motorists.

IS 220d Sport fuel economy figures: extra-urban 45.6mpg (6.2L/100km), urban 29.7mpg (9.5L/100km), combined 38.2mpg (7.4L/100km).

**MILES OF STYLE:** the car's interior

**LEXUS**  
The pursuit of perfection



JENNY NEEDHAM dips into Leeds for a weekend and finds herself hooked

# Leeds calling

**W**HEN the journalist Keith Waterhouse, then nobbut a lad, gazed down from Leeds Bridge onto the River Aire in Leeds back in the 1930s, he was amazed by the vivid palette of factory dye swirling around below.

Now the waterfront of his youth has been cleaned up and the area gentrified. Warehouses have been converted and new apartments built along its banks in the heart of the city centre. The river is free of dye and the colours it now reflects back are the frontages of smart hotels and restaurants, cafes and smart cars and milling throngs of people on a night out on the town.

From the waterfront window of our hotel, itself a converted warehouse, we can see big, fat fish lazily gliding through the unpolluted water. Lots of them. The brochure for 42 The Calls says each riverfront room has its own fishing rod should guests feel the need to catch their own supper. We couldn't find a rod, but there's little doubt, my husband being a fairly nifty fly-fisher, that breakfast, lunch and supper could have been duly hauled from the teeming waters down below.

Instead, we dressed for supper and walked the five yards down the street to Brasserie Forty 4, an informal venue favoured by the city's fashionable set. Still in the mood for a spot of fishing, we plumped for octopus salad, pan-fried scallops and salt cod fritters, which were utterly delicious. Being a good Northern lass, I ordered hand-cut chips to go with these and jokingly bemoaned the lack of mushy peas to the waiter. Five minutes later, pea and mint puree was produced. How good is that?

The Calls is on the doorstep of the city centre of Leeds and being a Friday night, it was buzzing. Clothing was minimal, noise levels were not and everybody seemed to be having a good time. We stayed at one of the bars just long enough to remind ourselves of how old we were getting, then wandered back to the hotel via a quick stroll over Tetley's Brewery Wharf bridge and back again.

42 The Calls opened in 1991, when an 18th century riverside cornmill was converted into a refreshingly different boutique hotel. The corridors are lined with original artwork and some of the mill's old machinery, beams and metalwork have been incorporated into the new rooms.

Rooms are luxurious without being in any way pretentious. Decor is calm and restrained – taupe

and neutral with a flash of red – and the beds are comfort itself. The bathroom was immaculate with nice little touches like Molton Brown bubble bath and shampoo and soap frogs perched on fluffy white flannels as if ready to spring into the bath.

The rooms have all the modern conveniences but it's the extra little touches that say so much about a hotel. There are two packs of Smarties on the bedside, fudge for when you get peckish, a bottle of mineral water and glasses for the thirsty and best of all, real milk in the fridge for tea in the morning.

Breakfast is taken in a room overlooking the river, and it's delicious. Freshly pressed orange juice, freshly baked bread, fruits, yoghurt, cereals... There are at least ten sausages to choose from for the full English breakfast, though the menu does warn that the game sausages may contain shot.

Fully refreshed, we wandered into town. The main shopping areas – the Victorian Corn Exchange, now home to an eclectic mix of little shops, Briggate and the splendid Edwardian arcades – are just a step away. And, of course, no stay in Leeds would be complete without a trip up the escalator at Harvey Nicks, the upmarket store's only branch outside the capital – and with the capital's inflated pricetags.

Leeds has a lot to offer – good shops, good restaurants, buzzy nightlife – and all just a stone's throw from the North-East. And at the end of the day, 42 the Calls is the perfect retreat from the heat of the busy streets. There are theatres, museums and galleries. And if you take your own rod, you might just get a spot of fishing in too...

■ 42 The Calls, Leeds LS2 7EW. Tel: 0113 244-0099; e-mail: hotel@42thecalls.co.uk; www.42thecalls.co.uk. A double room costs from £150.



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north east  
england

# Six of the best home cinema systems

OVER the past couple of years the market for home-cinema systems has almost doubled, with one in eight households now owning one.

The choices to enjoy a cinematic experience are plentiful, with a burgeoning number of boxes being manufactured to satisfy our craving to eat popcorn at home.

Experience the joy of sound seeping into every corner of your front room and the audio action attacking you from every direction with our selection of the six best set-ups.

## CUT OUT THE CABLE

Wireless Philips HTS9800W around £700 see [www.philips.co.uk](http://www.philips.co.uk) RUNNING the cable from your DVD player and amplifier to the rear speakers of a surround sound can cause havoc with the aesthetics of your living space.



This piece of kit cleverly transmits sounds to those over a powerful radio link to a mains powered receiver.

## STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

**Samsung HT-P1200**  
£629.99 from [www.play.com](http://www.play.com)  
YOU'LL need an ample-sized living area to welcome this cinema kit into your home as its towering speakers and bulging subwoofer are of generous proportions.



Packed with features and delivering a sound that suits its sizeable frame you'll literally be lifting the roof.

## BOOM BOX

**Yamaha YSP-1000**  
£799 from [www.superfi.co.uk](http://www.superfi.co.uk)  
THIS multiple award winning system comprises 42 separate digital power

amplifiers driving 40 "sound beam" drivers and two woofers which all work together to give an amazing surround sound from just one box.

Guests will gaze in awe and search the room for your hidden boxes but soon give up and simply sit back and enjoy this piece of technical wizardry.

## SMALLER SYSTEM

**Logitech Z-5500**  
£399.95 see [www.logitech.co.uk](http://www.logitech.co.uk)  
FOR something suitable for a smaller room or perhaps the perfect piece of kit to get the very most from your PC-based film watching, this Logitech system is compact yet delivers 500 watts of sound.



The digital control centre lets you plug in up to six devices and access them all individually.

## BUDGET BOXES

**Pioneer DCS-353**  
£239.98 from [www.empiredirect.co.uk](http://www.empiredirect.co.uk)  
WITH colour coded sockets offering one of the easiest setups on offer and a rather pleasing price this is a solid choice for the first timers.

Decent all round sound delivery through five speakers and crisp images – definitely punching above its price bracket.

## MONEY TO BURN

**KEF KHT5005.2**  
£1,299.99 from [www.prcdirect.co.uk](http://www.prcdirect.co.uk)  
YOU may well have to stay in a few extra nights to have this system in your life but the superior sound, high quality design and the chance to charge visitors for experiencing this top-end system may well pay off.

Using a new type of driver called UNI-Q KEF claim this set can deliver a broader range of frequencies from a single source, making it just the ticket for keen audiophiles.

# NE directory

## Entertainment

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will be switched on  
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in MARKET PLACE, THIRSK  
at 6.00pm  
Winners will be announced on the Children's Painting Competition  
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Darlington Bond Scheme helps anyone homeless or on low income secure private rented accommodation by standing guarantor for the security bond, while the tenant pays 12 equal monthly instalments to the Landlord - 01325 467617

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# NE directory

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# Autumn sale



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**Oxford**

Distinctive reclaimed furniture for a dramatic and rustic look.  
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**FROM  
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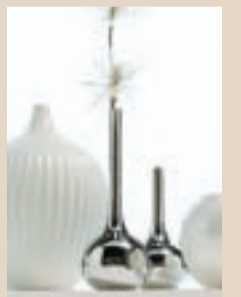


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Elegant bedroom collection in classic distressed white finish (Many pieces available).  
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