

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

MARCH 2005

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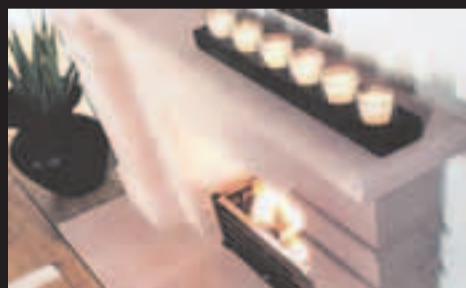
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contents

21



12

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3

SHARON GRIFFITHS

The agony and ecstasy of homemaking

4

INTERIORS

Beautiful bathrooms

6

INTERIORS

Small and beautiful

10

GARDENING

The meadow in a bag

12

FASHION

A shoot for the footballers

14

ME AND MY WARDROBE

The fashion student

15

OUT ON THE TOWN

with McCourt and McKay

16

SHOPPING

The green baby scene

6



17

LIFE COACH

Put a spring in your step

18

GADGET MAN

Surround yourself with sound

19

WINE OFFER

12 bottles for the price of 11

20

MOTORING

A brush with the new Picasso

21

NE CONNECTIONS

Rome direct from home

NEXT MONTH

ECO-CLOTHES FOR LITTLE ONES



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sharon griffiths

“By the time it got to choosing bathroom tiles, I was worried for her sanity...”

“TAPS!” sobbed my friend Mary down the phone. “Now he wants me to choose taps!” Which led me to my theory that doing up a house is a bit like having a baby...

Last year Mary, single and childless, inherited a house in Durham. The timing was perfect – just when she was thinking of moving out of her flat for something with a garden.

Of course the house – 1930s and formerly the home of an elderly aunt who’d done very little to it for the last 20 years – needed a little attention. Well, quite a lot actually. But Mary was lucky. She could carry on living in her flat while the work was done. She embarked on the project with relish and delight.

There were basics like rewiring, new windows, central heating, a wall down here, a doorway knocked through there. But all of it – with the help of a wonderful supervising architect and amazingly nice builders – went through fairly easily.

There were a few agonies over the kitchen. Hi tech? Farmhouse? Shaker? But then she saw exactly the kitchen she wanted in a showroom – limed oak, very simple, classic, she even liked the handles, perfect – and being a decisive person bought it. Just like that. She’s good at making decisions.

Until it came to the bathrooms...

The original bathroom was bleak, basic and tiny. Next to it was a boxroom, which would, the architect agreed make an ideal shower room. So far, so good.

And then maybe because she’d had months of making decisions, her confidence suddenly crumbled.

First of all it was the bath. A bath is a bath, you’d think. But no, there were coloured baths, thin baths, thick baths, long baths, short baths, slopy baths, baths with handles, roll-top baths with panels...

Basins. Victorian? Edwardian? Ultramodern? Japanese style? On a stand, in a unit, on a bench? Big, small? She wandered, bemused round showrooms. Even loos are more varied than you’d ever believe possible.

The decisions began to wear her down. Doing up the house, once a source of delight, started to get to her.

Then for a while, showers and shower cubicles took over her life. The woman who could not bear to walk past a shoe shop had suddenly abandoned the High Street for out of town DIY stores and her talk was

all of bi-fold doors, enclosures and cubicles.

We’ll pass over the time she was choosing radiators. You wouldn’t think that something as simple as warming a room and drying a towel could cause so much angst.

It did.

By the time it got to choosing bathroom tiles, I was worried for her sanity. Kitchen tiles had been no problem, but it took at least a month and countless expeditions before she chose the bathroom tiles. She took samples home, took them back again, took more, took the same ones again, brought them back... Kindly men in tile showrooms began to hide when she came in.

But finally she had regained her equilibrium. The end was in sight. The rest of the house was coming together beautifully – wooden floors, light fittings. Swatches and paint samples lay scattered on window sills, the choices easy, the decorators booked.

Then the plumber asked her about taps...

It was unfortunate, perhaps, that I’d rung just a few minutes after the plumber. I was right in line. I made soothing noises, suggested she asked the plumber to choose. She calmed down – but only slightly.

Not long after that, she moved in. I sent flowers and presumed that she had solved the tap problem. Not to mention the tiles, radiators, shower, bath, loo and basin...

Then finally, there was a housewarming lunch party for a few select friends. At least we would see this house which had taken so much work, so much effort, so many decisions,

It was, is, wonderfully done. We had the guided tour, oohed over the kitchen, aahed over the sitting room, envied the study. We trooped upstairs, adored the bedrooms. Then it came to the bathroom and shower.

They were perfection. The bathroom was small, stylish and classy, very minimalist – even the taps; the shower room fun and exuberant with jolly mermaids and fishes. The rest of us – all no doubt thinking of our chaotic family bathrooms – were very envious.

“All that time and agony was worth it,” I said admiringly.

“Agony?” said Mary, puzzled, “what agony? It’s been really fun.”

As I said, doing a house is just like having a baby. Hellish to go through, but once it’s all over, you instantly forget the pain – and just love the result.

NE window shopping

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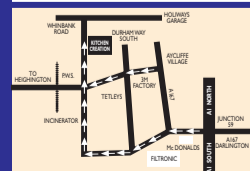
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What a shower!

The family bathroom used to be just that – *the* family bathroom. But home buyers today expect an ensuite and a shower too. JENNY NEEDHAM reports on the rise and rise of clean living

AS the pressures of children, relationships and work combine to make us all busier than ever, the one place we can escape to is the bathroom.

Whether it is lathering up in the shower or soaking in the bath, the bathroom is the place to have uninterrupted personal thinking time.

Personal hygiene is an important part of everyone's agenda today and, on average, around 18 per cent of domestic water consumption in the UK is devoted to bathing and showering.

Showers have increased in popularity throughout the ages and now showering is as popular as bathing. There is already evidence that people in the UK are showering more than ever before and that they are using more ever more powerful showers. Wet rooms are also being designed into the modern home.

Only a few decades ago, a bath a week was considered to be enough to maintain personal hygiene. Today, our attitudes towards personal hygiene have changed. Showers tend to be preferred over baths for convenience, but also as a more hygienic way to wash.

A Mira survey revealed that, on average, more than half of us, some 56 per cent, take a shower each day. The Scottish come top in the cleanliness stakes with 85 per cent taking a shower each day, while top shower shirkers are people from East Anglia, of which only 48 per cent take a shower each day.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SHOWER
CHOOSING the right look for your bathroom is all important as any of your living areas. An up-to-date, clean and modern bathroom will add thousands on to the value of your home and, more importantly, will make your daily ablutions all the more enjoyable.

Find out which type of hot water system you have, as this will guide your choice of shower – combi boiler, gravity-fed or high pressure system. Some showers cannot operate with certain water systems.

Decide where you would like to put the shower. Showers can be squeezed into all sorts of places and many properties now have more than one. Do you want it to go above a bath or do you need an enclosure (cubicle)? What have you got space for? An electric shower is perfect for places where running hot water pipes might be difficult or when you have limited hot water and want a guaranteed supply.

Choose what sort of performance level you would like. Do you need a power shower or if you have a shower with a large head you may need a pump to increase your water pressure.

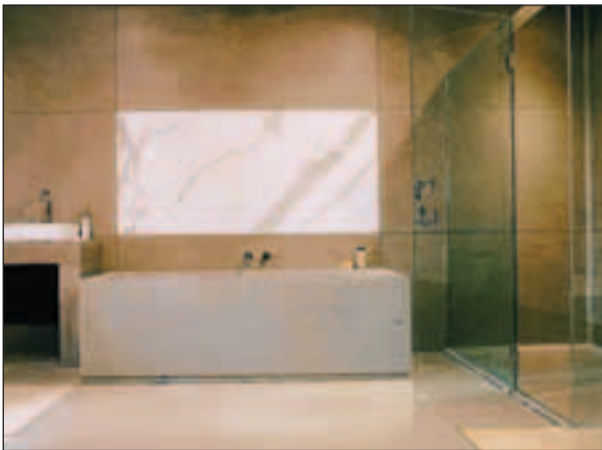
If in doubt consult a professional. Installers will advise you on the most suitable models for your bathroom.

WET ROOMS

AT the opposite end of the scale from the traditionally luxurious bathrooms yet equally popular today is the minimalistic,



From top: Distinction Fina bathroom suite; egg bath and cubic bathtub in Cadaquez, both by Limestone Gallery (020 7735 8555) www.limestonegallery.com; Roto basin and fluorescent wet light illuminated bathtub from Alternative Plans (020 7243 9747) www.alternativeplans.com



uber-trendy wet room. Inspired by continental interiors, these rooms are totally waterproof with their own floor drain.

Recently wet rooms have become very popular with many top designers using them in bathroom makeovers. The concept of the wet room is that the entire room is dedicated to your showering pleasure... you can get as wet as you want in the shower without being restricted to a shower tray or door.

Take advice from an expert if you are thinking of doing this as the tiles on the floor and walls and the drainage will need to be taken into consideration to avoid puddles.



What do you think about in the shower?

WHEN asked for the Mira survey what they think about in the shower, many people said their partners, emotional issues or the practicalities of what they need to achieve in the day ahead. A smaller number of people admitted to thinking about famous people and perhaps worryingly, a few even claimed to think about work colleagues.

Unsurprisingly, Kylie Minogue was the most popular showertime babe, whereas the top men were rugby world cup hero Jonny Wilkinson and the character Dennis Rickman from EastEnders.



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Labour of love: now that all the hard work is done, Phil and Pat Rocket love to sit and relax at their bijoux cottage in the Yorkshire Dales



“It was a building site for a while. We’d come at weekends to work on it and sleep first on the floor, then we progressed to mattresses on the floor

“There’s nothing to do there, and the neighbours don’t give us any trouble,” laughs Phil.

With all the building work complete, Pat began to turn the two up-two down into a comfortable and inviting bolthole. “I spent months at Thomas Watson’s saleroom and the man who runs the antiques shop in Gladstone Street was great at keeping an eye out for things for me,” she explains.

She very quickly learned though that furnishing this house was going to be very different from her pre-war home in the west end of Darlington.

“There were a couple of pieces I bought at the beginning that, looking back, I don’t know where I thought I was going to put them. With a house this size you

almost have to think in miniature.

“I’ve learned to measure every space and not buy anything impulsively but it’s still been a case of trial and error, buying things for one place then deciding they look much better somewhere else,” she explains.

In spite of the dimensions, everything fits perfectly in its place. The rooms contain a lot of furniture yet, due to the carefully chosen size of each piece, they don’t look cluttered.

In the living room, there are two two-seater sofas each with narrow side tables, there’s an extra chair and a small Victorian console table, while recessed shelving provides some extra space for books, accessories and the TV and DVD.

▶ Continued on page 8



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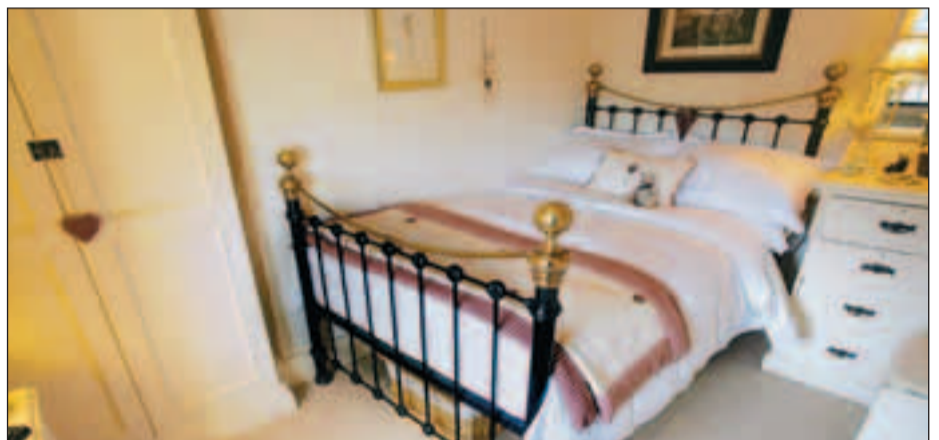
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Small is beautiful

► Continued from page 7

The focal point of the living room though is the fireplace, whose overmantle is also multi-purpose with its mirror and shelf.

The kitchen miraculously contains a table to seat four, a Belfast sink and work-tops, fridge freezer, sideboard, washing machine and even a dishwasher.

Upstairs, at one end of the landing is the toilet with basin and while another cupboard door at the other end reveals a bath.

Both bedrooms contain double beds, wardrobes, dressing tables and cabinets. Pat has kept the colours light, buying dark wood furniture stripping it and painting it cream. The rest of the house is decorated with the latest muted, natural tones of times past.

Pat studied textiles and design at Teesside University and has always done needlework so it's no surprise that she made all the curtains, cushions and other soft furnishings herself and reupholstered some of the old furniture she bought.

When it came to accessories, her job as visual merchandiser at House Indigo in Grange Road, Darlington, put her in the per-

fect place to choose items to complement the furniture and finish off the house.

Owned by sisters Sam Mackenzie and Debbie Westgarth, the shop fills a gap in the region for vintage-look furniture, home accessories and gifts. It stocks Fired Earth paints, pottery ranges from Cath Kidston and Susie Watson, Crucial Trading carpets and rugs, pewterware, Gardenalla lamps, candles by Melt and English enamelware, with many pieces fitting perfectly into the cosy country cottage look.

For those less handy than Pat, House Indigo also provides a made-to-measure design consultancy for curtains and blinds.

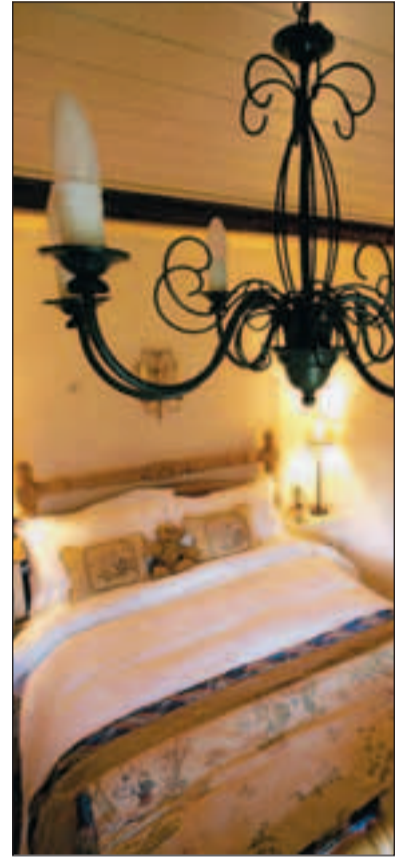
Now the cottage is almost finished – they plan to turn the bedrooms into en-suites eventually – Pat and Phil are able to do what they bought it for in the first place. Sit back and relax.

Says Pat: "I've always liked the cosy country cottage look and when we come here we just sit and read, maybe watch television which I never do at home, go for walks and just take things easy. We love it."

● House Indigo is at 16 Grange Road, Darlington, tel: (01325) 381806.



The kitchen and upstairs: Pat studied textiles and design and has done all the soft furnishing in the house



Pictures: SARAH NICHOLSON

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Modern farming methods have seen the end of the days when fields and meadows were awash with the colours of a hundred different flowers and grasses. A trip down the dales this springtime could revive all those memories, says SARAH FRENCH



Right: Robert Tiplady with three-year-old son William and rosettes won for the quality of their hay. In the middle of May all the sheep are taken off to the higher pastures, leaving the meadows to flourish

Pictures: RICHARD DOUGHTY

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One man went to mow

CAUGHT in a squally February shower of howling winds and biting rain, blue skies and butterflies seem a very long way away. But for the sheep on Robert Tiplady's farm the hay they munch through at this time of year serves up a taste of summer.

Wintering on lowland pasture in a valley that's one of the Yorkshire Dales's best kept secrets, the sheep get to graze on the grass that grew there seven months earlier.

But this is no ordinary hay. Bursting with the sweet smells of native flowers and dried by summer sun, it's a special treat from the rye grass and clover they're used to.

Of the 550 acres he farms at Walden near West Burton, Robert keeps 25 acres for seed harvesting. Originally part of a 200 acre farm, the three fields have, for over a century of traditional, chemical-free farming, been hay meadows, where small Timothy and yellow rattle vie for space with Yorkshire fog and crested dogstail. It's estimated that two dozen different flowers, grasses and sedges grow there.

In the summer they provide a gloriously colourful display reminiscent of times past. But their value isn't only aesthetic or rewarding for the sheep.

Five years ago the land's owner Julian Valance won approval from English Nature to harvest the rare meadows and create a seed bank to repopulate other less lush meadows.

Since it's technically illegal to sell native wildflower seeds, tenant farmer Robert still has to apply for permission on an annual

basis. His farm is considered to be a "superb site" by Floral Locale, a national charity charged with promoting the use of native seeds in conservation projects. Its Northern England project officer, Jenny Dicker, says it's vital that a strict code of practice is followed to ensure seeds are harvested in a sustainable way.

Norfolk seed merchant, Emorsgate, which harvests at Robert's farm prides itself on supplying top quality seed that is genuinely wild, which is why it prefers to collect and supply the seed itself.

Late winter into spring is the end and the beginning of the seed cycle. By the time lambing kicks in around March 20, the ewes will be joined by their lambs in grazing the early sprouting grass. By May 15 all the stock will be moved out and taken up to the higher pastures, leaving the meadows to flourish.

The grasses and flowers peak at about a foot high at mid-summer which is when the seed harvest begins, with the cutting of every third field delayed each year until mid-August to allow different varieties to mature.

Emorsgate brings specialist equipment from King's Lynn for the harvest. Nylon





brushes rotate over the top of the seed heads, teasing off the seeds and sweeping them into a collection bin at the side of the harvester.

"We only collect a small percentage of the seed," says Robert. "A lot drops off before we get to it and a lot more gets thrown off during the process."

The seed is raked out onto sheets in the field to allow insects to crawl out or fly away. The machine has insect repellent guards but they still get caught; apart from the obvious wish to be kind to them, keeping the insects on the land is also important to the pollination process.

The seed is then moved to the farm, put through a riddler to remove the chaff and left to dry for a couple of days before it's taken away.

It's a fairly labour intensive process but Robert is helped by his brother Steven and dad Bert, both farmers, and his mum Elizabeth. "We all muck in and do what we can, it's the only way to keep these Dales farms going," says Robert.

With the seed preserved, the grass is cut, baled and stored separately to the rest of the farm's hay, but not until Robert's sons Edward, who's six and William, aged three, have proudly entered a sample into Wensleydale Show.

"Anyone who doesn't know anything about hay can pick it out straightaway," says Robert. "You could put it in a pillow and sleep on it."

After cutting, the meadows are left for a couple of weeks until the grass starts growing again, then Robert returns his Swaledales, Dales bred and mules back onto the land to graze the autumn grass.

That year's lambs are sold and the in-lamb ewes come back down to the meadows for meals of the tasty winter hay. While the grass

from these special fields isn't of the quality to fatten lambs and increase milk yields, it does give the animals some variety. Using the hay as fodder also has another purpose – to scatter the seeds within back onto the land to replenish the meadows.

Meanwhile, the seed is sold commercially by Emorsgate to customers ranging from home gardeners to the Environment Agency. But giving over a patch of garden to meadow grasses is not that straightforward, says Robert.

"The soil condition has to be so right for it to grow," he explains. "You need reasonably acidic soil and very little in the way of nutrition. Nitrogen and compound fertilisers will kill it."

The seed harvest is a bonus to Robert since it means protected fields generate some income. But it's more than that. "These meadows are so rare they're categorised in a similar distinction as the Great Barrier Reef," he says.

"We are privileged to live here, to see these meadows grow, harvested and to be putting the seed back into the system. And when winning a prize at the local show puts smiles on the kids' faces that gives me a lot of job satisfaction."

● Emorsgate Wild Seeds (01553) 829028 www.flower-seed.co.uk

Yorkshire Dales wild harvested meadow mixture (code EM19) costs £5.20 per 100g up to £4,048 for 100kg – recommended sowing rate is 4g per square metre or 40kg per hectare.

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A Legend in Home Improvements



Stylist Steven Buchan offers player Matt Clarke some style advice; below, the lads before the makeover

Fashion shoot

Football players are renowned for their love of designer clothes, but Darlington Football Club's Matt Clarke, Adrian Webster and Adolfo Gregorio also like their casual, urban gear. BBC magazine What to Wear came to Darlington to give them and Darlo FC fan Chris Penman a make-over. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS reports



It may be a freezing, winter afternoon, but the three Darlington Football Club players have managed to turn on the smiles as they're photographed for a BBC magazine in their summer wear.

Players Matt Clarke, Adrian Webster and Adolfo Gregorio and Darlo FC fan Chris Penman are at the Williamson Motors Stadium in Darlington, getting a make-over as part of feature for the magazine What to Wear - a spin-off from the hit show What not to Wear. Fortunately for them, there are no signs of hard-nosed pair Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine - nor any embarrassing clothes or flaws to highlight.

But the four all admit they usually prefer to dress casually and are enjoying sporting a different look - even if it is in freezing conditions.

Says Darlington-based Allison McKay, who has coordinated the shoot: "When a friend said she wanted to do sports casual wear I thought the stadium would be great for it and there are so many good-looking lads in our Darlington squad

These guys have got such a strong, style image anyway, it was interesting seeing them have their clothes chosen for them. A lot of the time it's not about making someone look from bad to good but it's about giving them a look they would not normally go for."

What to Wear stylist Steven Buchan adds: "We're going to be seeing a lot of layering this summer - T-shirts mixed with cardigans - and colours too, so we've gone for that. It's a smart/casual look which covers all bases."

But what would the lads think of their new looks?

Adrian Webster, 24, is from Sydney, Australia and has recently signed for Darlington FC as a midfielder

He says: "I like urban wear - combats, trainers, etc., but I like this look too. I'd definitely take the coat and probably the jeans. I go shopping a lot anyway but I might look at different things now

Adolfo Gregorio, 22, is from California and has also recently signed for Darlington as a midfielder.



THE TOP
3

STYLISH
FOOTBALL
PLAYERS

David Beckham
David Ginola
Jamie Rednapp

MATT CLARKE

ADOLFO GREGORIO

CHRIS PENMAN

ADRIAN WEBSTER

"I'm not used to wearing stylish clothes like this," jokes Adolfo. "I'm from California so I usually end up wearing shorts and a tank top. But I like the different colours and the layers - I would never normally put two tops on together but I like it. I do like the English style here, men tend to be pretty in-style and trendy whereas in the states they can't be bothered."

Matt Clarke, 24, is a defender for Darlington FC "I probably wouldn't put some of these things together because when I normally leave the house the lights seem to be off," laughs Matt. "I'm quite eccentric with my clothes and I love Vivienne Westwood. But I like the trainers and the jumper."

Chris Penman is a Darlington FC fan, studying outdoor education at Darlington College. As well as the clothing, he has also had his hair cut and highlighted. "It's not my usual wear," he admits. "I'm into skatewear and I'm usually in baggy jeans. I do like the jeans and would probably wear the jacket but the cardigan's not really my sort of thing."



Make-up artist Allison McKay helps to give the lads a new look for the fashion shoot
Pictures: CHRIS BOOTH

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me and my wardrobe



Clockwise from above:
Mulberry Roxanne bag from Chestnut, Grange Road, Darlington;
chiffon top from Debenhams;
dog-tooth belted coat from H&M, Levi jeans, boots, £20, from eBay;
Miss Selfridge brown T-shirt, £30 belt from eBay, £50 skirt from Zara, necklace from Accessorise

Kate's jewellery, below, is available from kateatkinson83@aol.com. Rings from £8

Kate Atkinson is 21. She lives in North Yorkshire with her parents, two brothers and two dogs. Kate's enthusiasm for fashion and textiles led her to study fashion design at Northumbria University, where she's now in her second year. In her spare time she designs and hand-makes beautiful accessories including beaded jewellery and hand-stitched leather covered stationery. CAROLINE TURNER speaks to Kate to find out the secrets of her style

an impulse buy, I'm not really a big skirt wearer.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

My Roxanne bag. It was a 21st birthday present from my dad. The more I use it the better it looks. I just love it!

What are your favourite shops?

Topshop for catwalk trends; Zara is excellent for unusual pieces of knitwear; H&M because I can't resist a bargain!

Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?

Beyonce because she's ghetto fabulous and always looks effortlessly sexy.

I love all that bling!

How would you describe your look?

Casual, but not scruffy. Jeans with everything, attempting boho chic!

What was your worst ever buy?

A pair of lime green hipsters – need I say more?

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

I once spent £80 on a chocolate brown knitted and velvet skirt. It was a bit of

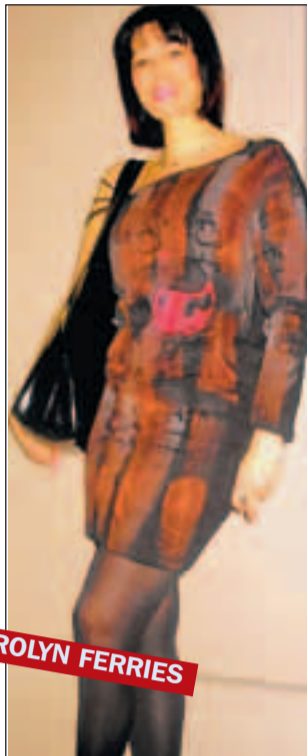


I like jeans with everything, attempting boho chic!



NE out on the town

NE Magazine's style experts scour the social honeypots of the region in search of style and individuality



CAROLYN FERRIES

McCourt & McKay

JOE Rigatoni's have four restaurants – in Hartlepool, Middlesborough, Sunderland and Darlington. Recently, the Darlington branch extended its restaurant from 80 to 145-seating capacity by taking over the basement as well as providing a cool and sassy bar area.

Experience the Flavour of Fun is the motto and we did... as well as a few lovely glasses of Prosecco. Outside it was a cold, dark Thursday evening, but inside Joe's bar the staff greet you with a smile and the atmosphere is light and friendly, with a classy mix of people of all age groups.

CAROLYN FERRIES

CAROLYN is an amazingly young looking 50. She is a lecturer on childcare at Middlesborough College. Carolyn was wearing a dress by Joulani. Her favourite shopping place for something a bit different is Leggs in Darlington and she likes jewellery by Monet and Liz Claiborne. Her ultimate treat would be an outfit by her favourite designer, Vivienne Westwood. Carolyn says she doesn't have any particular diet or beauty regime to keep her looking good, although she believes a positive attitude helps, as well as Yves Saint Laurent make-up.

BOND MA

BOND Ma, 20, is a studying media and marketing at Leeds. He enjoys shopping at Triads and Psyche as they stock good quality brands but he also loves a charity shop bargain. Bond looked very cool and comfortable in his outfit, and although he likes outfits that look a bit different, he believes they only look good if you feel good. He was wearing a hat from a charity shop a scarf by Paul Smith from Psyche, a jacket by H&M and jeans by Levi.

DAVY WARD

DAVY, 31, is a proud new dad. He runs a car sales and property business. He enjoys the food and atmosphere at Joe's. He doesn't have any

particular shop he prefers but does believe in buying good quality clothes and, like the rest of us, loves a bargain. Davy was wearing a jacket by St Martins of York. To work off stress, he goes to the gym and his perfect relaxing tonic is seeing his baby smile first thing on a morning and the gentle rhythmic breathing when sleeping.

MARC ALLAN

MARC, 23, is a recruitment officer. He looked well groomed and slick in trousers by Top Man's London range, shoes by Bertie and a shirt from River Island. He likes the affordable fashion at Topshop but also likes to shop at Psyche and Triads, as well as snapping up the odd unusual bargains at charity shops. Marc attributes his slim figure and looking good to a high protein diet of fish salads and veg and he keeps a healthy glow by using a sun bed twice a week.

RACHEL BAXTER

RACHEL, 29, has a radiant personality, which must be an asset in her job as an assistant manager at the Kensington Hotel in Willington. She enjoys socialising at Joe's. Rachel has a passion for fashion and shopping and is inspired by Victorian clothing. Her favourite shops are Topshop, Joseph M and River Island. She was wearing a top and jeans from River Island, boots by Dune and a belt from New Look. On the beauty front, she uses baby wipes to cleanse, Toni & Guy hair products, Nivea Moisturiser and Baby Oil as an eye make-up remover.



RACHEL BAXTER

● Judie McCourt, of TV and radio fame, and make-up and hair artist Allison McKay, run AM Creative Productions, which specialises in creative event management and the production of photographic images for advertising

amcreativeproductions.com



MARC ALLAN



EMILY PRICE



DAVY WARD

EMILY PRIOR

EMILY Prior, 18, is studying PR at Leeds. She was at Joe's with friends and said she liked it there as it has a nice vibe and you could talk without having to shout. Emily looked fab in a jacket by Diesel, a vest by H&M, trousers from Top Shop and a rather nice scarf by Per Una from M&S. Her favourite shops are Top Shop in Leeds and Leggs in Darlington and, as she likes vintage outfits, she can always find something at The Corn Exchange in Leeds. Emily's hair looked great. She has gone to the same hairdresser for years and really trusts her, which she believes is vital.

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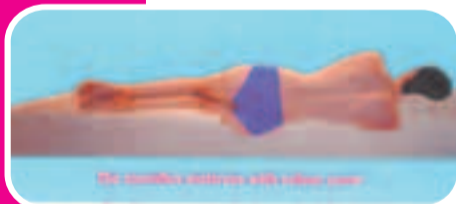


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Putting us in the picture

Displaying the family snaps has suddenly lost its cringe factor with the new trend for personalised pictures. SARAH FOSTER meets Kersty Garrett, a woman who's definitely in the frame

WHILE decorating your home with photographs was once sneered at, marking you out as over-sentimental or self-obsessed, these days, it seems, it's chic. Not for you the mass-produced images sold as art - rather a true reflection of what's beautiful in your life. And if that's your ageing mongrel, well, who is anyone to criticise?

The latest technology means that, far from being restricted to bog-standard prints, you can have them transferred onto virtually anything. From blinds to cushions - even tiles and wallpaper - you can literally make your stamp.

Remember those much-copied Anya Hindmarsh bags bearing snaps of everything from people to pets? Now home furnishing stores are hot on the trend, with the likes of Ikea and Habitat stocking photographic prints. Even Past Times has got in on the act, catering for its niche market by reproducing photo memories on canvas and cushions.

One woman who is at the forefront of the fashion is Kersty Garrett. Kersty, 33, set up Art Kage after her son Joe, now 18 months, was born. Coming from a background in design, she was looking for a way to use her creative talents without the demands of a full-time job. She stumbled on making canvass pictures by chance.

"I've always done pictures for myself and I've always designed birthday cards and things like that. We moved house last August and I wanted a picture of a certain colour for a room. I thought that rather than go out and buy it, I would make it myself," says Kersty.

"I think canvass pictures are quite popular at the moment and I looked at some in shops and thought, 'I'm sure I'll be able to make one of those' and just had a go."

The result was so successful that friends

and relatives began asking if she would make pictures for them. Before long, she was trading on the Internet site eBay. "The first time, I think I put about six on that I hadn't actually made. Four sold in the first week so I thought, 'Oh I'll put some more on'," says Kersty.

She already had a computer but had to invest in a special printer for the canvas. Entirely self-sufficient, she even makes the frames in an out-building at her parents' house. Otherwise, all the work is carried out in her office, upstairs at her Richmond home. "I use a scanner to get images onto the computer. Some are hand-painted, some are computer-generated and a lot are a mixture of the two," she says.

"The printing side of it is quite straightforward - the most work goes into creating the image, which is quite time-consuming."

Kersty's pictures fall into two main categories - those produced from clients' photographs and those from other images, such as flowers or abstract shapes. She currently has a gallery of around 85 such designs from which people can choose, although she's avoiding mass production. "I'm limiting the gallery prints to 50. I'm aiming to get up to a couple of hundred images," she says.

Examples of her work adorn her home, with one of the most striking a montage of her son's body parts. She shows me how photographs can be altered to

favour the subject, or even transformed as pop art or oil paintings. Every customer gets a paper printout of their picture, with the option to have it altered before it goes to canvas.

With the development of her website, Kersty hopes to reach an even wider market. "As I was getting quite a few hits on eBay, I thought I'd have my own website," she explains. "It's an e-commerce website, so people can buy online."

As well as browsing the gallery and buying pictures, clients can upload their photographs - meaning they never have to part with them. The less technologically advanced can simply post their snaps.

Kersty hopes that with a growth in business, she might one day have her own workshop and studio, but doesn't envisage huge expansion. "I would never want to get to the stage of employing dozens of people. I enjoy the creation of something from scratch right through to the finished product, and I don't think I would enjoy it as much if I had someone doing that for me," she says.

Turn tiles into talking points by interspersing plain ones with hand-made tiles incorporating photographic memories. Ceramist Alison Trinder transfers colour or black and white images on to ceramic tiles. Each tile made to order from £30. (01273) 506664



● Pictures start from £35 and can be ordered via the website at www.artkage.com or by calling 0870 766 7476.



Creative: Kersty Garrett with the montage of photographs of her son Joe

Picture: SARAH NICHOLSON

LIFE COACH

THIS month sees both Mother's day and International Woman's Day so I've unashamedly chosen to focus this column on women. Hopefully, chaps, you'll also find something here for you too.



The 21st century is a time of great change for all of us. The balance of traditional male and female roles is shifting. Women, in particular, are transforming and looking for much more out of life. Many women who come to me for life coaching have sacrificed their creativity and passions to fit into a role they feel society created for them. And our world is much poorer for it. Feminine energy with all its gifts of intuition, sensitivity and creativity is sorely needed in our homes and workplaces.

So all you fabulous women out there, it is time to awaken to your gifts; to follow your heart and let some of the wilder side of your nature come through. Take those horse riding lessons, get painting, speak up when you feel passionate about something. And if you feel nervous about letting some energy loose, remember: "Never grow a wishbone, daughter, where your backbone ought to be."

Clementine Paddleford (1900-1968)

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Above: Canvas, 5 Flowerheads, from £195, and opposite page, cushion with Cracks design, from £5 www.clothuk.com. The company can apply virtually any image to any product – furniture, cushions, ceramics and tiles. Why not have grandad's football team emblazoned onto a pouffe, or your mother-in-law printed onto a cushion? The possibilities are endless...

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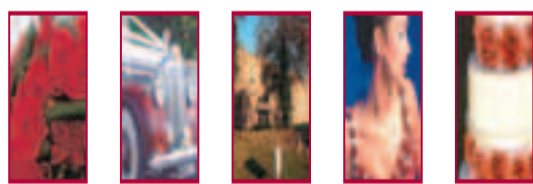
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gadget man

For sounds all around



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



The dream of enjoying your games and DVD movies in surround sound without disturbing the neighbours is already a reality. NIGEL BURTON reports

LAST month we discussed forthcoming technology that would recreate the sound of the cinema with a set of headphones. The good news is that this technology already exists and it works very well indeed.

The technology is called Dolby Headphone and, despite the name, it isn't actually a set of cans for your ears. It's a processing technology that works with any set of headphones. Of course, the audio quality improves if you use better headphones, but even inexpensive headphones can provide excellent Dolby Headphone imaging. Here's how it works.

As the sound from each speaker in a stereo system reaches your inner ears, it is modified depending on the size and shape of the room as well as the physical properties of your head and outer ears.

The manner in which the soundwaves bounce around enables your brain to localise the sounds and integrate them into a soundfield that appears in front and around you as they would be at a concert.

Headphones, on the other hand, feed the sound directly to your eardrums.

Using powerful digital signal processing technology, Dolby Headphone electronically imparts to each audio channel-two on stereo programs and up to five on surround programs-the sonic signature of a corresponding speaker properly placed in a carefully defined acoustic environment. In other words, Dolby Headphone creates up to five virtual loudspeakers. As a result, the listening sensation is much more natural, with sounds appearing "out-of-head".

Dolby Headphone works with any stereo program source, from CDs to MP3 files, and with any multichannel program source, whether Dolby Surround, Dolby Digital, PCM, or MPEG encoded.

It can be included in almost any product that normally provides a stereo headphone jack, such as PCs and laptops; A/V receivers and processors; DVD-Video and DVD-Audio players; auto-entertainment systems; MP3 players; game consoles, portable stereos; TV receivers; cable and satellite receivers; VCRs; and multimedia speaker systems.

It's also available as part of DVD playback software for computers, and is used for in-flight entertainment programs on several airlines.

Dolby Headphone is a unique signal-pro-

cessing system that enables your stereo headphones to portray the sound of a five-speaker, surround-sound playback system.

With Dolby Headphone, sound that is supposed to be in front of you is in front of you. Sound that is supposed to be all around you is all around you. It no longer sounds like it's all happening inside your head.

The big question is: how well does it work?

I tried a set of Dolby Headphone equipped cans made by Thrustmaster. On sale now for a shade over £100, the outfit consists of a set of headphones and a tiny decoder box that plugs into your DVD player, games console or TV.

The decoder looks so small and feels so light I must admit to being sceptical that it could perform the trick of fooling my brain into hearing sounds from different parts of the room. Boy, was I surprised.

A quick spin of a blockbuster movie like Armageddon and I was convinced. At the start of the film a giant rock moves slowly towards the earth.

Wearing the Thrustmaster earphones I felt the rock behind me before it appeared on screen. The sound then travelled past my head and into the screen before the whole lot exploded in a cacophony of deep bass as the meteor hits the earth.

Listening to the beach scene in Saving Private Ryan, I flinched each time a bullet whistled past my ear. Likewise, plugged into an X Box for a bit of first person perspective shooting action, I could tell where my enemies were before I saw them based entirely on the direction of the sound.

Dolby Headphone is currently available on the Thrustmaster products and some software DVD players used on laptops and PCs. Sony and Pioneer also sell surround sound headphones that decode a Dolby signal.

If you live in a small house and enjoy the thrill of being at the cinema, I can't recommend this technology enough.

For more details of the Thrustmaster T510s log on to www.etectera.co.uk . We also have a set to give away. To be in with a chance of winning just tell the name of the technology used in Dolby Headphone. Send your entries to Gadget Man Comp, Priestgate, Darlington, DL1 1NF. Entries should arrive no later than the end of March.



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Our featured red in this case is the Domaine de L'Ameillaud 2003 from the Rhone Valley. The Domaine de L'Ameillaud (pronounced Am-ay-oh) is made by Nick Thompson, who used to live in Middleton St George. He worked in the steel trade but upped sticks to France in 1982 where he bought this vineyard in Cairanne.

Robert Parker, perhaps the most famous wine critic in the world, said of the wine:

"It is a delicious, round, generous, Provencal red for drinking within two to three years. Praise indeed for a North-East lad.

Both the whites are made from the Sauvignon Blanc grape which, Chardonnay apart, is probably the most famous of all white varieties. This is the grape, which makes both Sancerre and Cloudy Bay.

The former, from the Loire, is typically reminiscent of grass, gooseberries and minerals whilst New Zealand and Chile produce Sauvignons with tropical fruit aromas.

Wherever you find Sauvignon, the high acid level in the grape will make your mouth water and even the top examples are meant to be drunk young, not aged in a cellar.



Order Form Northern Echo Easter Wine Offer

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WOMEN – particularly the 'Bridget Jones' generation of single, working women – are sending wine sales soaring. More than a billion litres were drunk in the UK last year, a record according to a Mintel survey, with seven in 10 naming it as their favourite tipple. Between 1999 and 2004 wine sales in the UK rocketed by more than 30% from £5.8 billion to £7.6 billion. Mintel spokesman James McCoy says working women with time and money to spare for luxuries like wine played a significant part in boosting sales.

● Fed up with those fizzy drinks and filling smoothies for lunchtime refreshment? A new drink may tickle the taste buds and also help boost energy and resistance to winter ills.

Vitsmart, from Boots and Waitrose, comes in a choice of different flavours and aims to target different health needs. They're named Defence, Regenerate, Relax and Calorie Controller, and drinks, £1.29 a bottle, are available at selected Boots stores and Waitrose supermarkets.

● Horlicks is becoming the ultimate trendy nightcap, with stars like Gwyneth Paltrow and Colin Farrell reportedly

enjoying a mugful to aid sweet dreams. Sales of the soothing liquid are going through the roof (up 13% on last year and highest point ever in the brands history) and the company believes it may be because in our stressful times restful sleep is more elusive. Horlicks is available in two formats – Original Malt, priced from £1.23, and Instant, available in three flavours: Malt, Malted Chocolate and Hot Chocolate, priced from 40p per double sachet. For more information about how to aid restful sleep, visit the Horlicks website at www.sleepbetter.co.uk

RULES FOR RISOTTO

- 1 Do all the preparation before you start cooking the rice.
- 2 Have stock ready, make a little more than you need, and keep hot over a gentle heat while you make the risotto.
- 3: Almost anything can be cooked into a risotto. Add right at the beginning if it needs cooking for more than 12-20 minutes, otherwise stir in at the end.
- 4 Always use Italian risotto rice.
- 5 Today it is fashionable to stir in precooked vegetables to give a contrast between mild creamy rice and the added ingredient.

GUILTY chip lovers everywhere, including Davina McCall and Kate Winslet, will be delighted to know that a portion of chips (175g) contains fewer calories than a doughnut and five times more Vitamin C than a bunch of grapes. These cheering facts were revealed as part of National Chip Week. If you want to know how to make the perfect oven chip – or find other comforting information-- you can visit www.lovechips.com



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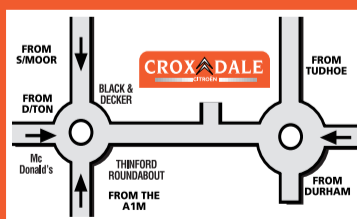
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NE motoring



Citroen Picasso: good interior space, practicality and visibility

Painting an impressive picture

IAN LAMMING has a brush with the new Picasso and likes what he sees

THE digital display for fuel reads low. Just one shaded section remains then it's into the red and borrowed time before the necessary fuel stop. In situations like this, most cars would only be able to travel 30 to 50 miles before running dry so this test drive is going to have to be short. Then I realise the Citroen Picasso has a trip computer that will tell me exactly how many miles there are to go before I splutter to a halt.

Scroll through the computer by pressing the end of the wiper stalk and the readout offers a variety of information before coming to rest on DTE (distance to empty). At first I wonder whether it is in kilometres as it appears far too high - 174.

But no, that is the miles to empty figure and scrolling back through the trip computer to reach the average miles per gallon setting I realise why - this reads over the 50mpg mark.

This particular face-lifted Picasso boasts Citroen's new 1.6 HDi diesel engine. I won't bore anybody with the technical ins and outs of this direct injection diesel, mainly because I don't understand them myself. It is more than enough to say that it works very well indeed.

Not only is it frugal - official figures put economy at 68.9mpg on the extra urban cycle and 57.6mpg on the more realistic combined - it is powerful and refined. The four cylinder unit turns out 110bhp and 177lbft of

torque. What that equates to on the road is more than enough power to accelerate briskly, overtake in perfect safety and cruise all day along the motorway, for huge distances between fill-ups.

It doesn't need to rev hard as the power is available from low down the range. In fact, maximum torque comes in at a lowly 1,750rpm. If this is painting an impressive picture then that's as it should be as the Picasso is a truly excellent drive. It is relaxed in nature, stress-free and the sort of car you could drive all day long on a variety of roads without the merest hint of fatigue.

The dash mounted gearbox is well-weighted and slick, the brakes are powerful and the ride is the perfect balance for comfort and accomplished handling. The Picasso rounds bends with aplomb, with perfect body control and bags of grip. It is as happy on the twisty stuff as the straights and loves towns too.

The other major factors in its favour are interior space, practicality and visibility. From anywhere in the cabin the Citroen is more of an observatory than a car offering lofty seating positions and acres of glass. The view is superb, high above the traffic, hedges and walls that normally spoil the vista.

There's plenty of room to stretch your legs and a big boot for the luggage. The seats fold and tilt and there's even a little fold-away shopping trolley in the boot and aircraft-style fold out tables on the back of the front seats. Plump for the options list and you can even have a fridge.

The Picasso has been popular since it was launched thanks to its value for money combination of keen pricing and abilities. Add in the fantastic fuel economy of the HDi and it has just become a grand master.

● Test car provided by Croxdale Citroen, of Croxdale, Co Durham.



There's plenty of room to stretch your legs and a big boot for the luggage



Main picture: early evening in the Piazza della Rotonda. Above: the view from St Peter's

Rome from home

The film *Oceans Twelve*, starring George Clooney and Brad Pitt, has sent British tourists scurrying off in their thousands to Rome. And with direct flights from Teesside, it's never been easier. JANE HARPER reports

A SHORT break to Rome is now easier than ever with the launch of a new flight service from the North-East. Daily flights from Teesside to the Ciampino airport started in late January, so Rome is an attractive option for anyone looking for a city-break.

Steeped in ancient history, the Eternal City has a modern twist with a wealth of shops and restaurants designed to cater to visitors on any budget.

Ciampino airport is 12 miles out of the city centre, but central locations are easily reached by catching the Cotral bus outside of the terminal and connecting with a subway to Stazione Termini.

The city operates two Metro underground lines, both of which run through the Termini. Tickets on the Metro cost just one euro each, and those intending to make a lot of journeys can take advantage of daily passes.

Founded in around 750BC, Rome is a paradise for history enthusiasts.

The Colosseum is an essential stop, but with a lack of information or signs inside the actual structure, visitors are recommended to take advantage of one of the guided tour companies which can be found outside the attraction, in order to make the most of the experience.

The Roman Forum is another fascinating attraction, made all the more accessible by a decent guide. Built over a period of 900 years, the Forum was the commercial, political and religious centre of the city from the Republican era until the fourth century AD.

With the decline of the Roman Empire, the Forum fell into disrepair during medieval times, but its classical beauty provided the inspiration for hundreds of Renaissance artists and architects.

Visitors can see the bathroom of the legendary Vestal Virgins, the only example of a Christian church built inside a pagan temple, carvings of the mythical Nike figures, and Julius Caesar's tomb, which still has flowers laid on it each day.

Stepping out of Rome for a day can also be an enjoyable experience with a visit to the Vatican City with its breathtaking architecture and priceless artwork. Tourists can also enjoy an audience with the Pope on one of his regular visits to St Peter's Basilica. Admission is

granted by free ticket, available from tour groups or some hotels.

Visitors to the Vatican are reminded of the dress-code which requires arms and legs to be covered, and is enforced on even the hottest summer day.

St Peter's is an architectural marvel. The biggest cathedral in the world, it also houses fascinating items such as a Michelangelo's Pieta sculpture of Mary and Jesus, and the perfectly preserved body of a former Pope, who is soon to be made a saint.

The inside of the cathedral is immense – it is big enough to house a 20-storey building – but its size has been purposely disguised through clever optical illusions. Sculptures and wall designs closer to the ceiling are much bigger than ones at ground level, reducing the sense of height.

The Vatican museum is a mecca for art lovers, with lengths of corridors filled with priceless treasures, leading towards the awesome Sistine Chapel, with Michelangelo's intricately painted ceiling and imposing Last Judgement taking up the entire back wall.

The Vatican is extremely busy during the summer months, and visitors are advised to set aside a whole day to make it through the crowded museum. The crowd can move quite swiftly in the off-season, but even then it will still take several hours to navigate the corridors.

For visitors who have had enough of history and art, designer fashion stores can be found around piazza di Spagna, while via Nazionale and via del Corso has many mid-range high-street shops. The market at via Sannio, near San Giovanni metro is good for second-hand clothes, while traditional market produce can be found at the Campo de' Fiori, piazza San Cosimato in Trastevere or piazza dell'Unità, near the Vatican.

The neighbourhoods of San Lorenzo and Trastevere are well-known for reasonably-priced restaurants, while those in search of nightlife should head towards the Testaccio area.

● **Until July, flights depart daily from DurhamTeesValley Airport at 8pm, arriving in Rome just before midnight. Internet prices start from £14.99 one-way. www.ryanair.com 0871-246 0000**

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HOROSCOPES are always giving us hints about our personal and working lives, about money or emotions. But our star signs, and the personality attributes that come with them, also have a bearing on how we like to decorate our homes. Leading window blind supplies Cosiflor have provided this quick guide to our design preferences, according to our star sign.

CAPRICORN

PRACTICAL, industrious Capricorns like things that are sturdy and made to last (so they'll appreciate non-fade, washable fabrics). Not surprisingly, they're drawn to quite sombre and safe colours, indigo, dark brown or black will satisfy their cravings for a lasting value.

AQUARIUS

AQUARIANS love anything weird or unusual and they'll go into raptures over high tech gadgets, so they're bound to be enthused by electrically-operated blinds. Violet or light blue



are likely to be favourite colours.

PISCES

SENTIMENTAL Pisceans often need to be uplifted and encouraged, one reason why they go for white, lilac or sea green. They're also quite materialistic so they'll love telling friends all about the tremendous value for money their blinds are.

ARIES

NOT surprisingly red is the favourite colour of those born under the fire sign. They also like metal objects. Being quite arty, they also appreciate sleek, well designed objects.

TAURUS

WHEN it comes to decorating Taureans are likely to go for mix and match and co-ordination in a big way.

Romantic and earthy, the Taurean colour palette is likely to feature greens, creams and ultramarine. They like rich fabrics such as silk and leather and also small, delicate items (their flower is a daisy). So more decorative chintzy fabrics might be right up their street.

GEMINI

FUNNY, but mercurial by nature, Geminis need their space so conservatories or loft rooms with lots of windows are ideal for them. Silver is a favourite shade, along with yellow and orange.

CANCER

HOME-LOVING Cancerians will also be drawn to bright, sunny yellow and orange. Needing constant reassurance, lots of affection and fuss, the average Cancerian will want

a warm, comfortable environment suitable for all the family to enjoy.

LEO

LEOS love to make a big show of things so window treatments are going to be a focal point. Attracted to golds as well as reds, oranges and bright yellows, our Leo is going to make sure his conservatory is the talk of the neighbourhood.

VIRGO

VIRGOS have a meticulous attention to detail. Blue, dark brown and beige are going to feature prominently in a Virgo colour scheme.

LIBRA

LIBRANS are quite old-fashioned by inclination and with a penchant for gardening, they will love bringing the

outdoors in with a great conservatory and lots of green and blue in the colour scheme.

SCORPIO

INTENSE and passionate, Scorpios love lots of mystery and secrets, so the more nooks and crannies about the house, the better. Maroon, crimson and dark reds are likely to get a look in alongside blues and greens. Scorpios do have a penchant for nautical themes.

SAGITTARIUS

FRIENDLY Sagittarians love entertaining so you'll find their conservatory extensions are often dining rooms and their choice of new windows often the more exotically-shaped. With indigo and purple their colours of preference, the results will be stunning.

NE directory

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sharon griffiths

“By the time it got to choosing bathroom tiles, I was worried for her sanity...”

“TAPS!” sobbed my friend Mary down the phone. “Now he wants me to choose taps!” Which led me to my theory that doing up a house is a bit like having a baby...

Last year Mary, single and childless, inherited a house in Durham. The timing was perfect – just when she was thinking of moving out of her flat for something with a garden.

Of course the house – 1930s and formerly the home of an elderly aunt who’d done very little to it for the last 20 years – needed a little attention. Well, quite a lot actually. But Mary was lucky. She could carry on living in her flat while the work was done. She embarked on the project with relish and delight.

There were basics like rewiring, new windows, central heating, a wall down here, a doorway knocked through there. But all of it – with the help of a wonderful supervising architect and amazingly nice builders – went through fairly easily.

There were a few agonies over the kitchen. Hi tech? Farmhouse? Shaker? But then she saw exactly the kitchen she wanted in a showroom – limed oak, very simple, classic, she even liked the handles, perfect – and being a decisive person bought it. Just like that. She’s good at making decisions.

Until it came to the bathrooms...

The original bathroom was bleak, basic and tiny. Next to it was a boxroom, which would, the architect agreed make an ideal shower room. So far, so good.

And then maybe because she’d had months of making decisions, her confidence suddenly crumbled.

First of all it was the bath. A bath is a bath, you’d think. But no, there were coloured baths, thin baths, thick baths, long baths, short baths, sloped baths, baths with handles, roll-top baths with panels...

Basins. Victorian? Edwardian? Ultramodern? Japanese style? On a stand, in a unit, on a bench? Big, small? She wandered, bemused round showrooms. Even loos are more varied than you’d ever believe possible.

The decisions began to wear her down. Doing up the house, once a source of delight, started to get to her.

Then for a while, showers and shower cubicles took over her life. The woman who could not bear to walk past a shoe shop had suddenly abandoned the High Street for out of town DIY stores and her talk was

all of bi-fold doors, enclosures and cubicles.

We’ll pass over the time she was choosing radiators. You wouldn’t think that something as simple as warming a room and drying a towel could cause so much angst.

It did.

By the time it got to choosing bathroom tiles, I was worried for her sanity. Kitchen tiles had been no problem, but it took at least a month and countless expeditions before she chose the bathroom tiles. She took samples home, took them back again, took more, took the same ones again, brought them back... Kindly men in tile showrooms began to hide when she came in.

But finally she had regained her equilibrium. The end was in sight. The rest of the house was coming together beautifully – wooden floors, light fittings. Swatches and paint samples lay scattered on window sills, the choices easy, the decorators booked.

Then the plumber asked her about taps...

It was unfortunate, perhaps, that I’d rung just a few minutes after the plumber. I was right in line. I made soothing noises, suggested she asked the plumber to choose. She calmed down – but only slightly.

Not long after that, she moved in. I sent flowers and presumed that she had solved the tap problem. Not to mention the tiles, radiators, shower, bath, loo and basin...

Then finally, there was a housewarming lunch party for a few select friends. At least we would see this house which had taken so much work, so much effort, so many decisions,

It was, is, wonderfully done. We had the guided tour, oohed over the kitchen, aahed over the sitting room, envied the study. We trooped upstairs, adored the bedrooms. Then it came to the bathroom and shower.

They were perfection. The bathroom was small, stylish and classy, very minimalist – even the taps; the shower room fun and exuberant with jolly mermaids and fishes. The rest of us – all no doubt thinking of our chaotic family bathrooms – were very envious.

“All that time and agony was worth it,” I said admiringly.

“Agony?” said Mary, puzzled, “what agony? It’s been really fun.”

As I said, doing a house is just like having a baby. Hellish to go through, but once it’s all over, you instantly forget the pain – and just love the result.

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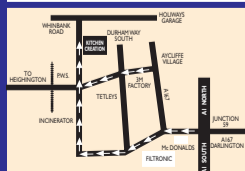
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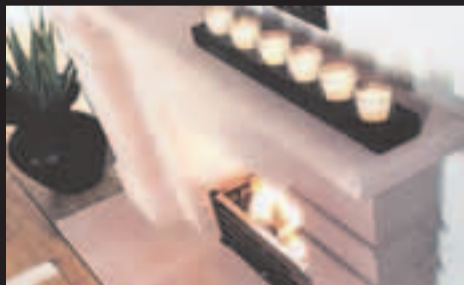
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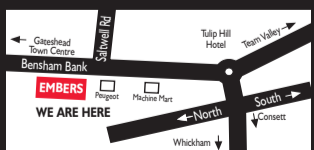
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contents

21



12

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3 SHARON GRIFFITHS
The agony and ecstasy of homemaking

4 INTERIORS
Beautiful bathrooms

6 INTERIORS
Small and beautiful

10 GARDENING
The meadow in a bag

12 FASHION
A shoot for the footballers

14 ME AND MY WARDROBE
The fashion student

15 OUT ON THE TOWN
with McCourt and McKay

16 SHOPPING
The green baby scene

6



17 LIFE COACH
Put a spring in your step

18 GADGET MAN
Surround yourself with sound

19 WINE OFFER
12 bottles for the price of 11

20 MOTORING
A brush with the new Picasso

21 NE CONNECTIONS
Rome direct from home

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