

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

JUNE 2005

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wearing to
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**The couple
who can't
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sharon griffiths

“The only reason for going racing is to have a flutter

A DAY at the races can be a treat – especially admiring the style of the racegoers, a real fashion spectacular. All those stick thin women in bright colours, tottering along, yanking their shoes out of the wet grass, one hand keeping hold of their little concoction of a hat, the other clutching their race cards. It’s wonderful, glamorous stuff.

But it might be more profitable to keep an eye on the boot-faced woman in a Barbour...

Unless you are horse mad, or hold particularly strong religious convictions that forbid you from scattering money to the winds, or are just plain sensible, then the only reason for going racing is to have a flutter.

Which is where the fun begins...

There are a lot of people on race tracks who look as though they know what they’re doing. There are loud-voiced men with straining shirts, beer bellies and tattoos for whom a race track is the only fresh air they get between betting shop and pub.

There are other loud-voiced men in loud check suits, with lots of little tags dangling on their binocular cases. They are not owners, but know a man who is.

And there are a lot of tiny rat-faced men who say nothing and who are good at looking inconspicuous.

All of these look as though they might be worth eavesdropping on for tips. Anybody knows more about racing than I do.

That’s why I have My System.

My System’s easy. I don’t use a pin to select my winners. Nothing so amateurish. Oh no. I just choose names I like...

And before you mock, I would point out that it works. Well sort of.

The other thing which makes going to the races much more delightful is if you can get invited to a private box. Ideally, a private box where they supply you with champagne and nibbles and where you can watch all that’s going on from the window. With luck, you can spend the entire occasion without actually getting near a horse. Always a bonus in my book. And with a private box, there’s usually a Tote handily placed, so you don’t have to queue for ages.

This is where you get to mix with the loud-voiced men in check suits or expensive blazers. All the time they’re waiting to place their bets, they tell you why what they’ve chosen an absolute sure-fire winner. They’ve had a tip.

One of the stable boys. Man on the gate. Man in a bar. Whatever. They try and blind you with science over previous form, about what the going’s like, the jockey’s previous winners, the weight. All sorts of technical details.

And it loses.

Meanwhile, I have backed a horse called One Trick Pony simply because I quite like the Paul Simon track of that name. And it wins.

See?

And so the day goes. In between drinking pink fizz and eating lobster (one could get used to this), I pick names that appeal to me – something about moonlight beaches, because I like them.. Or a name in Latin – because I did it for O-level. Or Far Pavilions, because I like the book.

I win a few places. I lose some. My fortunes are precariously balanced. But then in the last race, because I’ve just come back from seeing the Pope, I back something called Reverence – and it comes second at 66-1. All in all I end the day £39 better off. Not bad, I say.

The men in blazers or check suits have not done as well. They are scowling and swearing and scrunching up their betting slips and throwing them to the floor in disgust. It has, they say, been a disastrous meeting.

I totter past them, ostentatiously counting ten pound notes – all three of them – and pass again a woman I noticed earlier. She has been sitting quietly in a corner, in a sensible suit and an old Barbour thrown over her shoulders. Not for her pink fizz and lobster. No chit chat, jollity or idle speculation. She had work to do.

She has sat making notes, sending her young companion to place bets. And when the race has come on the television screen she has watched expressionless – apart from a brief smile of triumph as the winner is announced.

At the end of the evening, her companion makes a final trip back from the tote counter. There is an impressive wad. The woman takes the notes and puts them in folder that is already bursting.

Leaving the last of her barely touched drink on the table, ignoring the chat and the triumph and the loud-voiced men with their ripped up betting slips, she leaves. She is almost smiling.

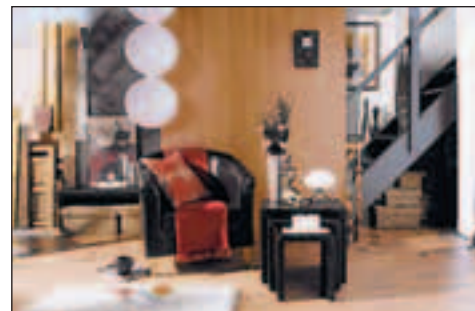
So if you’re going racing this month, forget the frilly fillies – the boot-face Barbour is definitely the one to watch.

● Royal Ascot is at York racecourse from June 14-18; ‘What I’m wearing to Ascot’ – see centre pages

NE window shopping

CHEAP CHIC

THE golden rule for classy interiors this summer is “less is more”. Say goodbye to big bold patterns - the latest streamlined look is a cool combination of neutral tones like stone, cream, beige and brown, with a dash of more daring colour introduced in accent accessories. Leather,



chrome, wood finishes and clean cut ceramics all add up to give your room the cutting edge. To get the look at great prices, homeware company Au Naturale has cylindrical ceramics and simple sculptures that catch the eye. Add dashes of colour and texture with bold

cushions and throws, priced from just £6. Or you can start with a blank canvas and create colour and art for the walls. Canvases start at £4 with paints from £4. Au Naturale is in the Cornmill centre in Darlington or call 0141 552 2020 for your nearest stockist.



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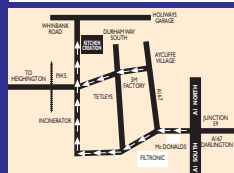
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The Meadowings, Yarm, 1996-1997



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Right and above right: Bridge Street, Yarm, 1991-2000

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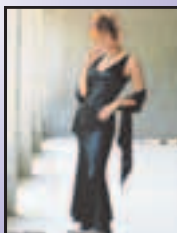
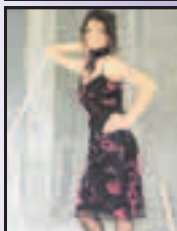
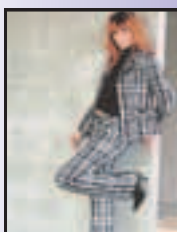
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Jackie and Dave Bassett have lost count of the number of times they have moved house. The ten years they have known each other have been one long round of packing, unpacking, buying, selling and renovating.

The pair, who opened their own business Homes and Finance in Yarm in January, have moved no fewer than nine times in nine years. They even left their dream home after a year.

"When Dave and I met, I had a lovely ivy-clad double-fronted cottage and it was one of the oldest properties in Yarm," recalls Jackie, 42, an independent financial advisor. "I had decorated it and put a new bathroom in. One morning I decided Dave could move in, so that evening there was a knock at the door and there was Dave, with a black bin-bag of possessions in one hand and a toothbrush in the other."

The couple, who now have two daughters - Anna, six, and three-year-old Nicole - were in the house together for just over a year when they started fantasising about their ideal home.

Dave, who is managing director of their estate agents and financial services company, explains: "I had done a few DIY bits and bobs for friends, but I started to realise the only way to get a really nice house was to build one from scratch."

They were chatting about their dream home one evening when they took a tissue box and sketched their perfect property. It was based roughly on a house in Ingleby Barwick they had seen, but couldn't afford.

"I just asked Jackie to tell me what size rooms she wanted. I trained as a draughtsman so I sketched the house for her," recalls Dave, 35. "It had the gables and fancy brickwork of the Ingleby house and all the rooms had double windows. My dad even took the drawing and made us a cardboard house about six inches high so we could see what it would be like."

Once they had secured a plot of land - just under a fifth of an acre - at Deighton, near Northallerton, their confidence grew and their dreams started to turn into reality, but

they put their plans on hold until after their wedding in July 1996.

Just before the wedding the pair moved into Dave's grandma Edith's one-bedroomed flat in Yarm. Edith, who has since died, was ill and living with Dave's parents Brian, 69, and Mabyn, 66.

They were there a few months until Edith recovered and wanted her flat back so they decamped to Jackie's mum Betty's house in Thornaby for six months, while Betty, now 75, was living in America.

"Each time we moved all our furniture with us," laughs Dave. "At my nana's we put all her things away in a cupboard and moved our things in. In both places we didn't have much room once we got all our stuff inside."

From Betty's house they moved onto a friend's two-bedroomed flat in Thornaby for two months while the flat was up for sale. But they hated the flat and went back to Dave's family home in Kirklevington.

"I know we should have put all the furniture in storage but we were skint," laughs Dave, who was training to be a teacher while Jackie worked as a financial adviser for Lloyds TSB in Middlesbrough.

An architect finalised their plans, planning permission was applied for and granted and work began on their dream home, which included a dressing room, an en-suite master bedroom and an en-suite guest room, as well as a massive kitchen, a separate shower cubicle, a utility room and a downstairs cloakroom. The cost of the four-bedroomed house came to about £110,000.

"We built it to our very maximum budget," remembers American-born Jackie. "When we moved in in September 1997, I was pregnant with Anna. We didn't have a kitchen and we washed up in the en-suite bathroom for ages."

We used to lie in bed on Sunday mornings and all we could hear were sheep



'We've moved more times than we can remember'

CHRISTINE FIELDHOUSE talks to a couple who just can't stop moving house, even though they spent years planning and building their dream property



The Gables, Deighton, 1997-1999

"We tried to save money wherever we could. We thought it would cost between £2,000 and £3,000 to decorate the house so we used that money for carpets and did the decorating ourselves."

Dave adds: "We managed to do far more of the work than we ever imagined. We threw ourselves into it, and fitted windows, built walls, fitted bathrooms. It was a gorgeous house and there were 200 square metres of living accommodation. The bedrooms were enormous. We had everyone over for Christmas that year so we got our kitchen in by December 10."

But the dream home hadn't led to a dream life – and Jackie found village life too quiet.

"It was a perfect house. Every bedroom was designer in the end and we had colour schemes for each room. It was gorgeous," says Jackie. "But there was just a church and a village hall and I felt isolated. I was brought up in Thornaby, with buses going past my window every few minutes."

Dave adds: "We used to lie in bed on Sunday mornings and it was silent outside. All we could hear were sheep in the distance, and they were so far away we couldn't even see them. It was a hassle driving to and from work, friends never called in for coffee. If anyone came for a meal, they had to get a taxi – there was no public transport – or they stayed over."

"But the house itself was great. When we had Anna christened, we had 70 people in the house without feeling overcrowded."

After just a year there the two had decid-

ed to sell their Deighton home when they bought Dave's grandma's ground floor flat. They then bought a second flat in the same road and lived there while they did up another of their properties – a two-bedroom house at number 10 Bridge Street, Yarm. They went on to buy two more adjacent houses and lived in two out of the three – the third was leased.

In September 2001, while expecting their second daughter, they moved into their present home, a 1930s £146,000 semi in Thirsk Road, Yarm.

"We fell in love with the house," says Jackie. "It had a lovely feel to it. Completion took just two weeks and we went back to being broke. We had two flats and three houses and this house but we had no money. When I look back, I don't know how we did it."

The house presented a few problems such as damp, a major gas leak and woodchip on the walls, but by now, these were a mere challenge for the Bassetts, even a heavily pregnant one.

"The house hadn't been touched for years," laughs Jackie. "Under the wallpaper in the bedrooms there were children's drawings of war planes with bombs falling, and rhymes about Hitler."

The pair have installed a new kitchen, bathroom and conservatory, as well as central heating and a damp proof course. They have decorated their daughters' bedrooms, but still want to work on their own bedroom and a small room leading off the conservatory. With its white and cream décor, the whole house has a light airy feel.

But are they here to stay or do they still have itchy feet? They now own five properties in the Yarm area.

"If the Deighton house were here, it would be just perfect," they say together.

Then they muse about building another house in the garden.

"I would love to see this house extended," confides Jackie, while Dave adds: "I don't think it's the right thing to do at the moment..."

The jury's out, but you can bet their home won't stay the same for long.



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Marc Farrington takes a break amid his designs in Gallerina

Pictures: SARAH NICOLSON

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If you want to make a design statement, look no further than Marc Farrington's innovative furniture. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS reports

It was while he was playing with a few LEGO bricks that designer Marc Farrington had the idea for his creative seating range. "I was admiring the different combinations of shapes and colours and the ease with which they pulled apart and stuck together," he says. "I thought wouldn't this be great if it could work on a larger scale?"

Marc's furniture is certainly eye-catching and thankfully does not resemble a giant LEGO kit. Instead, the seating looks like a furniture equivalent of Northern Ireland's Giant's Causeway, with clean lines rising up and down.

The beauty of Marc's Personalised Interior Landscaping System (or PILS for short) lies in their versatility. One of the blocks would look fantastic on its own, say, in a boudoir, pulled up towards a dressing table covered in pink. But clustered together in a living room via the interlocking velcro strip, they become a striking design feature.

The PILS on sale at Gallerina in Duke Street, Darlington, are upholstered in tan-coloured snake leather and cream suede, the latter so soft you cannot help but stroke it. Indeed, Marc is busy doing just that so it looks just right for the photographs.

"I'm a bit of a perfectionist," he admits with a grin. I think they look great but the important thing is that they're sturdy, comfortable and reliable. You can mix and match so many different colours and textures, it all depends on the imagination of the customer.

"They've got architecturally clean lines so they don't interfere with a scheme you have going on in a room. There's also something quite appealing about the basic shape - the best designs I feel are the basic ones. I think that's where I'm trying to come from."

A former pupil of Barnard Castle School,

Marc, 23, left Leeds Metropolitan University last June with a degree in interior design. But he always wanted to work for himself and after a visit to a trade and craft show, he realised there was a big market in furniture. It was his parents, who live near Barnard Castle, who gave him the support to set up his company, NEU-K Creative in August last year.

"They said they would give me free accommodation, free food and free workshop space for a year to try out my idea to see if it works," he says. "Fortunately it's gone really well."

Marc sought start-up advice from Business Solutions Bedale before creating the first PILS. The basic box constructions are made out of MDF and they are covered in foam before being upholstered in a wide variety of materials and colours, from pink cloth to dark brown leather. They also come in five different heights, ranging from 450 millimetres to 850.

Marc tested the first ones in his bedroom. "I slept on them and sat on them and played my Playstation - although I don't have time to play that any more, I tend to work 15-hour days now," he laughs.

In line with his entrepreneurial spirit, his designs for the future include launching his own advertising agency in June, using "experimental advertising methods". Although when pressed on what they might be he adds cheekily: "I could tell you but I'd have to kill you".

For now, his PILS look set to grace the homes of the style-conscious.

"I feel really passionate about them," he says. "And I think the more upbeat you are about the product, the more you will influence others to feel the same."

● The PILS range starts from £198. For more details contact Gallerina on 01325 363635 or Marc on 07919 341141 or email neukcreative@aol.com



Three-seater Verona from Furniture Village, £699; Cambourne sofa, from £1,700, and Denbigh footstool, £375, from Laura Ashley

Sofa, so good



Hayward sofa from Sofa Workshop, £499; Marks & Spencer Bologna two-seater, £999



Isola sofa £3,330, ottoman £1,080, from Poltrona Frau

LEATHER sofas used to be reserved for gentlemen's clubs or stark bachelor pads where the only other item of furniture was a massive television. No wonder, because until a few years ago they were just too ugly, dominating, and down-market in design.

Today, all that's changed and we're having a love affair with leather, confirmed by the latest survey on consumer spending habits which revealed that leather sofas have replaced upholstered couches in the nation's affection.

Perhaps it's not surprising because designers have embraced and lavished care on sofa bodies making them appealing, comfortable and covetable. They also possess every celebrity's dream quality – they look better as they age.

They're completely in tune with our current desire to be surrounded by natural materials. Leather sofas grace and soften the atmosphere of any room with wood or stone floors, and work equally well in modern or traditional surroundings.

Deceptively tough customers, they can happily withstand the scuffs and knocks of everyday life which makes them family-friendly, and they're even stain repellent.

Paul Staden, marketing manager at Sofa Workshop, agrees that leather's luck has turned. "Leather sofas have come a long way since the ubiquitous black leather sofa with chrome legs that was the must-have for the bachelor pad," he says. "People now regard them as aspirational items and associate them with a stylish, successful lifestyle. The brown saddle tones are the most popular."

If you haven't succumbed to leather's charms we've rounded up some of the best to tempt you to play 'hide and sleek'.

CHOOSING A LEATHER SOFA

- As a general rule, the softer the leather, the better the quality.
- Avoid sofas that are not structured and a composite of many different panels of leather stitched together. (Check the back

Leather sofas are the top seating choice for the nation's homes, according to the annual survey on consumer trends. GABRIELLE FAGAN hunts out some of the best

and sides – a single panel of leather means the whole hide has been used, not a collection of offcuts.)

- Sofas treated to look vintage, with a battered, lived-in feel, can give a softer look.
- Inspect stitching detail carefully – ideally it should be fine and unobtrusive.
- Leather has natural oils that protect and preserve it, so regular dusting and vacuum cleaning in crevices and seats is generally all that is required.

LEATHER LINGO

- Tanning makes a hide supple and soft. Vegetable tanning gives more body than standard mineral tanning.
- Aniline is a naked coloured leather with minimum finishing, allowing grain and markings to be seen. Semi-aniline means dyeing has evened out the natural markings.
- In full grain leathers the top of the skin has not been altered in any way. Leathers with corrected grain have been lightly buffed to remove minor blemishes, and embossed with an artificial grain.
- Nubuck involves buffing the top side of the skin to raise the fibres and give a velvety effect.

“People now regard leather sofas as aspirational items and associate them with a stylish, successful lifestyle

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NE interiors

The man who fixed the Royal draughts

Sash windows are a great feature in a period home and can even add value to a property, but what if they're not in the best of condition? Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS gets some tips from Royal window renovator Stuart McKay

THERE can be few jobs bigger for a window renovator than the imposing facade of Buckingham Palace. But the royal residence is where Stuart McKay found himself working, draughtproofing the rattling vistas of Princess Anne and the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson.

"I'm not sure how many there were exactly, but there were definitely a lot of windows," laughs Stuart, 44, who worked for the Royals while living in London. "There was nothing wrong with them as such, they were all hardwood, but they were a bit draughty, so we went in to draughtproof them."

Stuart spotted a niche in the market when he sent up his window business 17 years ago to renovate and draughtproof traditional sliding sash windows.

Counter-weighted, sliding sash windows have been around since the 1670s and originated in Holland, but it was in England that the mechanisms were perfected, borrowing from clock pendulum technology to create a window which would open at any position. It wasn't long before the counter-balanced windows spread through the former British Empire to America, the West Indies and Australia.

At the time Stuart set up his business, the tendency was for homeowners to rip out timber frames in poor condition and replace them with plastic. But his methodical work paid off and soon saw him working at period homes of the rich and famous in London - including that of actor John Thaw - and, of course, that other well known homeowner - HM The Queen. Stuart says he never saw his Royal employers, but it didn't stop him receiving a grilling by security every morning.

"They would ask you questions about your own grandmother that even you wouldn't know the answers to," he laughs.

He eventually moved to Hurworth, near Darlington, in April 2002 with wife Allison, and children Hayley, 13, and Jack, nine. He admits to being unsure as to whether the business would be a success in the North-East, but he is finding people are just as keen to renovate in the north as they are in the south.

"In London 50 to 60 per cent of the houses in London still have box sash windows but I wasn't quite sure how it would work out up here," he says. "But more and more people are realising that sash windows can add value to an old property and that they can be renovated at a fraction of the cost of double glazing."



Sash windows: UPVC detract from the character of older houses

Stuart has always loved old houses (he has spent almost three years renovating his own property) but says many people are too quick to put in double glazed windows without realising they can have their sash windows draught-proofed or repaired.

"I think sometimes some of the salesmen convince people there's no other option, but there often is," he says. "When you see an old house and there are UPVC windows in, to me it detracts from the character."

Stuart has worked on a vast range of properties, from Tudor buildings dating back to 1470 to a recent renovation project at a manor house in Hurworth which dates around the 1720s. Typical problems which can be fixed include broken sash cords; windows which have been painted shut (a common problem), rattling windows and rotten sills. He can also double glaze sash windows and windows which are beyond restoration can be remade exactly as they were - which means the plastic ones can be ripped out in favour of the wood.

"They say the windows and the door are the eyes and smile of a house," he says. "I think there's nothing better than seeing a period property with sash windows."

● **Stuart can be contacted on 07980 588065 or stuartreedmckay@tiscali.co.uk**



SASH SAVVY

Stuart's top five tips for keeping sash windows in good condition:

- 1.** Spray WD40 on the pulleys now and again to keep the windows moving freely.
- 2.** Rub candlewax on the sash cords to maintain a smoothness.
- 3.** Windows should be painted every three to five years to protect them and stop them rotting.
- 4.** Ensure all windows are fitted with good, quality locks.
- 5.** Keep windows clean by rubbing with vinegar and old newspaper.

By Royal appointment: Stuart McKay renovated the sash windows at Buckingham Palace

Pictures: ANDY LAMB

JUST WINDOW DRESSING

When you've had your windows restored, all that remains is to dress them. Here are some tips from top designers...

NICKY HASLAM

"I think people have begun to think of windows as works of art. A window is like a modern painting and curtains compose the frame. If you take them up as high as you can, they give visual height to a room and draw attention to the ceiling. Curtains should hang just to the floor, and I try not to use tiebacks because I think they are now cliches."

TIP: Be imaginative with trimmings. Haslam uses crystals, shells, leather or gaudy braid, and particularly likes large tassels.



Jane Churchill curtain fabrics enliven a child's room without being too twee

NINA CAMPBELL

You can get pattern and excitement from cushions and upholstery, but I think the expanse of curtain fabric needs to be more restful. When I do use patterns, I use walling to match. I love the feel of fabrics: damask, velvet, chenille and printed linen. I also love floaty fabrics that let the light come through such as sheer linen or silk taffeta, which I often use unlined."

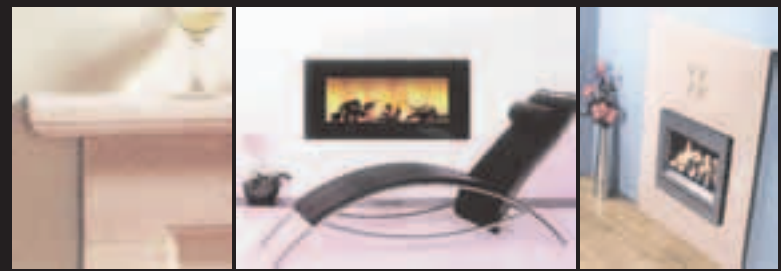
TIP: Remember that grand curtains only look right on grand windows, smaller windows need simpler treatments. If you have to compromise on cost, choose a good curtain maker and a less expensive fabric.

KELLY HOPPEN

The way I think about curtains has changed. Years ago it was about using masses of fabric to cover windows, whereas today it's about light. People are more aware of light now, they want curtains that are sheer and translucent, not lined and interlined. I'm definitely not a pattern person, but I will border fabrics and make bands across them. An expensive silk can look wonderful bordered with grey flannel or wool.

TIP: Use one colour for a curtain but several different fabric textures such as silk and leather to make plain curtains look interesting.

As an alternative to traditional curtains Hoppen has designed Japanese style screens, with interchangeable fabric panels that attach with Velcro, or shutters covered in fabric such as suede or felt for use in children's rooms.



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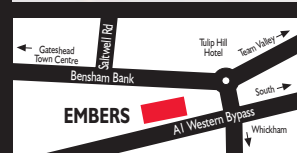


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NE gardening

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It's not a glamorous business, composting. But in a world where we produce so much waste, it's well worthwhile. JENNY NEEDHAM talks to the couple who run the country's largest community composting scheme

What a lot of rot!

THE buds are bursting open, the tendrils are twining themselves tenaciously around any available support, and the branches are stretching themselves up towards the bright sun-filled sky.

Then along comes the gardener, with his hedge cutters and his eye on a well manicured plot. Before long, the hedge has had its trim, the gardener steps back satisfied... then spies the mountain of cuttings piled up in the aftermath of the job.

What on earth is he going to do with that lot?

There are options. He could pile them into his car, scratching the interior, and take them down to the council tip. He could try to burn them, but if they're too green, the fire's unlikely to take hold. He could pile them into the far corner of the garden and try to forget about them.

Or he could call Rotters...

Now the biggest community composting scheme in the country, the Barnard Castle-based company makes a weekly collection of garden waste from its members and will make one-off collections for a fee from other households. Then they turn the lot into compost.

Set up by Martin and Jill Bacon in 2002, Rotters now has 800 fully paid-up members and covers 5,500 houses in the area. The business nestles on a site owned by the Water Board down a bluebell-lined lane just below Deerbolt Young Offenders' Institute in the town.

"It was Jill's idea," says Martin. "We've always made compost on the site, basically for our own needs, because we used to grow a lot of wild flowers and trees. We had four or five compost bins at the time and Jill suggested looking at community composting, taking in people's kitchen and garden waste."

A pilot scheme was run in 2002 when 100 houses in Bowes agreed to hand over their waste, garden stuff in hessian sacks and kitchen waste in white plastic buckets. Unfortunately, because of the new rules and regulations in the wake of foot-and-mouth, the collections of kitchen waste had to be stopped.

"In Germany and across Europe they still collect kitchen waste happily, but post foot-and-mouth DEFRA put new legislation in," says Martin. "They said, for example, that if we picked up a lettuce, it could have been in a fridge and could have brushed up against a chicken and it could have become contaminated, and could cause a big outbreak of something nasty," adds Jill.

So garden waste it had to be. It's collected in converted, electric milk floats, which they picked up for a couple of hundred quid

– "that one over there was last used to transport the baggage at Humberside airport," says Martin. Huge piles of compost-in-the-making sit steaming in the spring sunshine, but, surprisingly, there's absolutely no smell.

"That's because it's turned regularly to get plenty of oxygen into it," says Jill. "People have the wrong idea about compost and the free compost bins that were given to householders in some areas put a lot of people off composting for life."

"There are no instructions," says Martin, "so they just fill them up with grass cuttings and rubbish and expect compost to fall out of the bottom. One of the reasons it turns into a stinky horrible mess is that they don't turn it to get oxygen into it. With home composting we recommend using paper to keep the smell down, but one of the biggest problems is being able to shred it small enough to rot down in the first place."

The shredder at Rotters makes quick work of the job and garden waste that arrived just days ago is soon "cooking" nicely, the bacteria in it working hard to bring the temperature up to 74 degrees centigrade. After 12 weeks it is sieved off and left to cool for another four weeks, before being bagged and sold.

"When we first set up, we thought one of our biggest problems might be getting rid of the finished product but last year everything we took in in 2003 was turned over in the winter to compost and we'd sold out by May 2004," says Martin. "Luckily, we kept on top of it and managed to find enough material to keep our customers satisfied."

The couple's green credentials were established early with their choice of careers. Jill used to work in the Forest of Dean as as-

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WHAT TO COMPOST

- Shredded paper and torn card
- Rabbit/guinea pig bedding
- Dead cut flowers
- Unprepared garden produce
- Soft hedge clippings
- Fallen leaves
- Grass cuttings
- Weeds (avoid persistent weeds and weeds in seed)
- Old plants

DO NOT COMPOST

- Meat or any material prepared with meat
- Plate scrapings (raw or cooked)
- Fish and cheese
- Cooked leftovers
- Coal ash
- Cat and dog litter



Martin and Jill Bacon, left and above, with the compost they make in Teesdale

sistant countryside warden and, since the age of 20, Martin had worked for the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. They aspire to an eco-friendly lifestyle, but like most of us, don't always find it easy. "We try to live a green lifestyle but we live in the Stang Forest in West Hope and unfortunately the council doesn't provide the recycling services up there," says Martin.

The couple have two boys - Matthew, 14, and Philip, ten - who are very much part of the business and when I visited, Jill's father had also been roped in to help out. It's very much a family and community affair.

There are 20 people working at Rotters now, six full time, some on the government's New Deal programme, volunteers and people from the charity, Groundwork West Durham, with whom Rotters is in partnership. Rotters is a non-profit making organisation and trustees have been brought in to oversee its transition into registered charity

As well as composting, Rotters has just started an organic garden to encourage everyone who goes down there to eat organic fruit and veg. "I don't know if we'll produce enough to sell on at the market, but it's a thought for the future, growing things in our own compost," says Jill.

Another sideline is charcoal. Any branches thicker than a couple of inches are put aside and made into charcoal on site.

"One of the problems in this country is that 60,000 tonnes of timber go to landfill every day and then we go and buy 99 per cent of our charcoal from Indonesian rainforests," says Martin. "If people want to have a barbie, it is so much better for the environment if they use British charcoal. They need to check labels carefully, though. Lots of charcoal sold in major stores has

British flags on, but it's actually Indonesian charcoal bagged in Britain.

Martin is also developing ways of making bio-diesel on site, a fuel that has zero emissions. "A customer pointed out that it was all well and good having electric vehicles, but that the power to run them comes from nuclear power stations, and he has a point, so we are looking into alternatives," he says.

In the meantime, the electric vehicles will continue to do their collections from gardeners who want to be that little bit greener, to be taken back to Rotters, a name thought up by Jill.

"I wanted to call it Rotters Independent Traders and have little yellow three-wheelers advertising the business," laughs Martin.

A well-worn joke maybe, but then, there's nothing wrong with a bit of recycling...

● Rotters is situated down a lane on the right at the entrance to Deerbolt Young Offenders' Institution in Startforth, Barnard Castle. Tel: (01833) 690022; email: rotterscomposting@yahoo.co.uk
Collections: Barnard Castle, Mickelton, Cotherstone, Egglestone, Lartington, Romalldkirk, Middleston-in-Teesdale, Barningham, Whorlton, Boldron, Stainton.

The £12 annual membership includes a weekly green waste kerbside collection with up to three bags emptied and returned each week. The fee also includes a free delivery service for compost, from £1.50 per bag, and barbecue charcoal, for £4.50 per bag. For £15 a trip, local pickups of large quantities of green waste can be arranged and commercial green waste can be taken direct to Rotters for composting at £42 per tonne.

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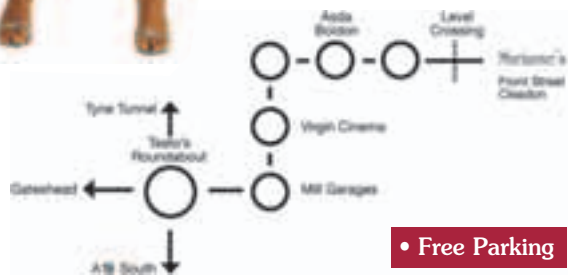
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What I'm wearing to Ascot

It sounds a glamorous existence, being the wife of a successful racehorse trainer. But Deirdre Johnston is as actively involved as her husband Mark when it comes to ensuring their North Yorkshire yard runs smoothly. And they must be doing something right: in each of the last eight years, the yard at the historic Kingsley House in Middleham has produced a minimum of 100 domestic winners.

The Johnstons are hoping for more winners this week, one of the biggest weeks in the racing calendar, as Royal Ascot begins tomorrow, at its temporary home on the Knavesmire at York.

Every morning, Deirdre rides out four lots of horses on Middleham's gallops, spends three to four afternoons a week at different races, and supervises some of the office work. But when the hard and dirty work's done, she also loves nothing more than to dress up for the big race meetings (even though she can sometimes be found in a beautiful two-piece suit saddling up the horses, or in her heels legging up the jockeys!).

"I do like to feel glamorous, but I have to be very practical because I often have to saddle up the horses to help Mark," she says. "If I'm saddling up I tend to go into the saddling box, take the hat off because the horses don't like it, saddle up, then pop the hat back on and brush myself down.

"I stay away from anything too short or tight and I have to have a hat which stays on my head and shoes that aren't so high that I can't walk in them. I like classic styles. I wear a lot of suits and trousers and jackets with nice cuts and fabric and I also like to wear something a bit different."

At Royal Ascot last year, Deirdre wore one of her favourite outfits, the top hat and tails number (main picture). She got the jacket from Betty Barclay and teamed it with a classic pair of black trousers and a beautiful specially designed hat. It was a look which saw her featured in the glossy pages of Horse and Hound magazine and on television.

"There were quite a few comments about it. It was such great fun to wear," she recalls.

Deirdre, 42, also loves colour, and she has selected her Ladies' Day outfit for Royal Ascot in her favourite colour - yellow - although she is keeping the exact design under wraps. "I love bright colours and I've worn bright orange before but I also like black and white as a combination," she says. "I like being a bit different and adventurous - but without being mutton dressed as lamb."

As for the buying bit, with a busy training yard Deirdre is often short of time. Her favourite stores include Emma Somerset in Harrogate and Upstairs, Downstairs in Ripon. "I love it because they know me and they'll make me a cup of coffee at the same time," she says.

For the past two years, she has had her hats designed and made by milliner Clare Workman of Aberfoyle in Scotland, an arrangement which also suits her busy schedule as it means she doesn't waste time hunting for headwear. Her favourite labels include Betty Barclay and Gerry Weber - but she isn't a designer label snob.

"I wouldn't even know who half of them are by," she laughs.

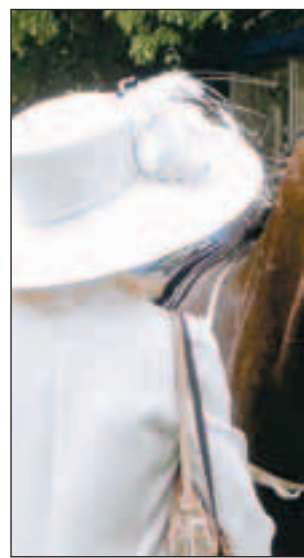
"Fortunately, I know what I like quite quickly. It doesn't have to be expensive and it doesn't matter if it's off the peg, just as long as I like it."



MAIN PICTURE: Top hat and tails... Deirdre in one of her favourite race day outfits, a Betty Barclay jacket and trousers - a practical choice should she need to help saddle up the horses

ABOVE: a cream shift dress and matching coat and hat, the kind of classic style Deirdre loves

Pictures: CHRIS BOOTH





As one half of a thriving racehorse training team, Deirdre Johnston likes to look stylish for the big race meetings. But her outfits also have to be practical, as she tells Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS

ROYAL ASCOT AT YORK

THE five-day Royal Ascot meeting starts at York tomorrow (June 14). About 60,000 people a day are expected to descend on the city's Knavesmire course. The famous meeting has been moved while its Berkshire home for the past 300 years undergoes a £185m redevelopment. Deirdre's husband, Mark Johnston, has a superb record at Ascot. He has been the top trainer at the course over the past five years, and has been the leading trainer at the Royal meeting on a couple of occasions. His record at York has been less impressive, but we'll just have to see what happens when Ascot and York are joined together...



The Johnstons' stables in the beautiful countryside at Middleham in North Yorkshire. Left: Attraction, which will be running at York



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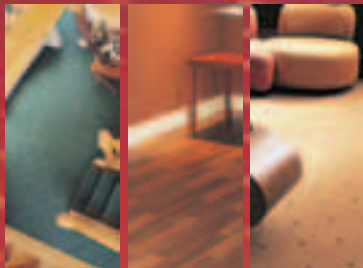
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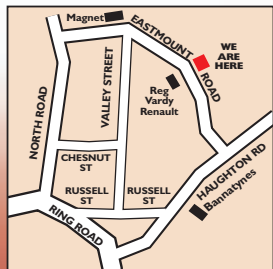
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NE fashion



Navy 4 You suit, £149.99; Hugo Boss pale blue shirt, £79.99; Giorgio Armani silk tie, £59.99 Jeffery West black shoes, £179.99

The surfer look may be popular, but Suzanne Mudd longed for her son Darren to 'smarten himself up a bit' in time for his university interviews. Department store Psyche, in Middlesbrough, stepped in to give him a new look. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS reports

DARREN Mudd is sitting in one of the chairs at Psyche's hair salon, with a towel around his shoulders and his freshly washed hair slicked back. "I wasn't too keen when I found out," he admits, shooting a smile at his mum Suzanne, who wrote to The Northern Echo nominating him for a make-over. "But it's a change, it's nice."

An hour earlier Darren, 23, had walked into designer department store Psyche in Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough, in his jeans, white T-shirt and black jumper, his stubble and long hair honed during a season spent surfing in Newquay before a spell in Austria. Suzanne, of Crook, County Durham, admits she was a bit concerned when he decided to head off to Newquay for the summer season, but she says it's the best thing he's done.

"He just grew in confidence and he made loads of friends and is now looking at going to university," she says.

But with the surfing lifestyle came the surfer's look - one which, according to mum, does not mix well with his first job interview or a university interview, hence the letter to The Northern Echo.

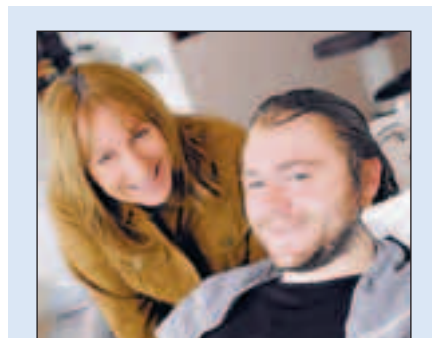
Despite Darren's initial hesitance, once Mike Baxter, a department manager at Psyche, has finished dressing him in a navy blue 4 You suit, complete with Hugo Boss shirt and Giorgio Armani silk tie, the look is impressive. He also bears an uncanny resemblance to pop star Brian McFadden.

"He looks 100 times better," says Mike. "First impressions count so much, especially when you're going for a job interview."

Proud mum Suzanne is also looking on as Darren is fitted for his suit.

"He looks great doesn't he?" she says, beaming. And he does.

Darren, whose favourite shops include H&M and Top Man, is also pleased with the look. He is hoping to study music indus-



Darren with his mother, Suzanne

SUZANNE'S LETTER

Hi. My name is Suzanne Mudd and I would like to nominate my son Darren for a make-over because he recently got the travelling bug and took to having the dressed-down look. Or the "just don't iron your clothes look"! He is 23 and used to like designer clothes, shoes, etc., but as from this year he's taken to the surfer look (he spent the season in Newquay)... I think he would look great in a Hugo Boss suit, ready for his first big interview...



try management at London or Manchester universities so his new suit will come in handy for any interviews.

He may even get mistaken for Brian McFadden when he's in London.

"My friends have said I look like him," he laughs. "But I think he looks like me."

I think he would look great in a Hugo Boss suit, ready for his first big

NE out on the town

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



McCourt & McKay

THE River Lounge and Restaurant, formerly known as Emadi, is situated on Yarm Road, Yarm, just by the banks of the river Tees. The restaurant offers a hearty menu with exquisite presentation and the downstairs Lounge houses a comprehensive list of cocktails, champagnes, wines, spirits and beers. The surroundings are very stylish, the service impeccable and the music kept to a non-intrusive level, giving an atmosphere of ambient calmness which makes socialising here a very pleasurable experience. It's definitely one of our favourites.

SOM EMARDI

SOM is a director of the River Lounge and Restaurant and is currently studying for a Master's Degree in finance and investment, which doesn't leave much time for shopping. When he does, he goes for quality and his favourites are Cruise in Newcastle, Bakers Menswear, Saville Row and Versace in London.

Som always looks smart and this was no exception. He wore a Prada T-shirt, Gibson suit and Paul Smith shoes. To keep up his smart appearance Som recommends low maintenance short hair and rubbing Pure and Simple on his hair and scalp to keep it well moisturised.



DUNCAN BANNATYNE

ALLISON MATHEWS

ALLISON, 42, is a facial aesthetics nurse for Collagenics. She is wearing a pair of Levi jeans from House of Fraser, and a top by Diane Von Furstenburg from Elan in Darlington's Grange Road.

Allison likes to shop in Darlington as she says Leggs, Élan, and Chestnut in House of Fraser all carry a good selection of quality stock. To stay looking young, Allison recommends lots of water and Botox. To relax, she puts on her favourite R&B CDs.

DUNCAN BANNATYNE

DUNCAN, a fit-looking 52, is a company director. He is also a regular on TV – star of Dragon's Den and Mind Your Own Business – so image is quite important. New Bond Street in London is handy for his new pad and luckily for Duncan, it is also home to his favourite labels.

He was wearing a Louis Vuitton shirt and shoes and trousers by Dolce & Gabbana.

To keep fit Duncan recommends visiting a health club for a workout four times a week and investing in a good personal trainer. As for grooming, Duncan rubs a bit of Atrixo hand cream on after shaving.

ANTONY LEWIS

ANTONY is 34 and an accounts manager for Intermedia Web Development.

He looked very well groomed, wearing a Crombie jacket, an Italian shirt and Diesel jeans. Although Crombie is his favourite label, he likes to shop in House of Fraser, The House in Yarm and Psyche. To keep fit he plays rugby and to protect his skin from the scrum, he recommends Elemis shaving products, Nivea and Dax wax for his hair. The music Antony is listening to at the moment is Hed Kandi, R&B, deep house, classical and Amp Fiddler.

JANE ANDREW

JANE was celebrating her 25th birthday with friends at the River Lounge, which she



ANTONY LEWIS



ALLISON MATHEWS



SOM EMARDI



JANE ANDREW & KATE HOWARD

described as the coolest bar in town. She is 25 and works in business administration.

Jane was wearing a Mango top, Topshop jeans and Faith shoes. She is not a fashion snob and will shop anywhere from New Look to Prada. To keep her skin glowing, Jane uses Nivea oil-free moisturiser and she recommends washing your face morning and night, however tired you are. Her favourite CD of the moment is Snow Patrol.

KATE HOWARD

KATE is 26 and was at the River Lounge with her sister Jane.

She spends a lot of her time with her boyfriend in London so her shopping sprees are generally in the capital. She was wearing a top by Pink Soda and Big Star jeans. Her favourite CD is Death From Above 1979.

Kate is a huge fan of exercise, which she believes is good for body and mind, and Nicky Clarke Colour Me Red hair products.

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

amcreativeproductions.com

Picture of McCourt & McKay

www.ericthephotographer.co.uk

Hair: Claire - Saks at David Lloyd, Gosforth

NE beauty

TREATMENT: Skin Consultation

WHERE: The Beauty Room

WHEN I'm invited by Sharon Payne to undergo a skin scan at her beauty salon, I know it's not going to be a cheering experience. I'm not mistaken. The scanner, making a pitstop in Darlington on its national tour, is a revolutionary device from Paris-based cosmetics company Darphin. Instead of having to take a therapist at their word, it allows people to see their skin imperfections for themselves. The client puts their face into the machine and in the ultraviolet light, can see in a mirror exactly where the problems lie.

In my case, this appears to be everywhere. Looking in the mirror, I see flakes of dead skin, the pinkish dots of blackheads and, most alarmingly of all, patches of dark purple around my eyes. All in all, I look as if I've been beaten about the face. Following my assessment, I'm treated to a facial, but after what I've just witnessed, this hardly seems adequate. Sharon puts things into perspective – at least my skin is "youthful" and naturally quite clear – but if I really want to make the most of it, I should cleanse, tone and moisturise daily.

As the owner of three County Durham beauty salons, Sharon is well used to giving advice on people's skin. She says that, like me, clients often have no idea about their type or how best to look after it. While 60 per cent of the skin's condition is predetermined, a significant 40 per cent is due to how we treat it. Sharon says it's important that the products we choose give us maximum benefits. "At the end of the day, we are all working hard for our money and we need to make our money work hard for us, and these products have to work hard. If I buy a jar of moisturiser I would expect to get six months out of it," she says.

But it's not just about lotions and potions. Sharon says there are many simple and inexpensive ways to improve the skin's condition without recourse to the bathroom cabinet. "One of the best things, without question, is vitamin C. It's fantastic for the skin," she says. "Fresh air is wonderful. There are lots of things you can do to improve the skin, like turning your heating down because too much heat is normally very drying." She offers the following ten tips:

1. DRINK PLENTY OF WATER

"If you can drink three to four extra glasses of water a day, that will help to purify the skin."

2. CLEANSE, TONE AND MOISTURISE

"I always say cleanse, tone, and moisturise your skin daily – those are your three essentials."

3. EXFOLIATE

"Try to exfoliate your skin twice a week. This will help to keep your pores nice and clean, which will hopefully in turn stop you getting things like blackheads and spots."

4. NEVER WASH YOUR FACE IN HOT WATER

"Always use tepid to warm water – this will stop broken veins."

5. AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE

"Try not to do this as you are touching things that are dirty and grimy and putting this onto your face."

6. REDUCE THE JUNK

"Cut down on tea, coffee and fast foods. If you eat lots of chips and greasy foods, it has to come out somewhere."

7. EAT LOTS OF FRUIT AND VEG

"These are great for clearing the skin."

8. MAKE TIME FOR YOUR SKIN

"Try to have a bit of 'you time'. Have a facial once a month, which is a good workout for the skin, leaving it deeply cleansed and hydrated."

9. PUT ON A FACE MASK

"If you can find ten minutes, try to do this once a week."

10. USE CUCUMBER ON YOUR EYES

"Rest it on them for a few minutes. Cucumber is fabulous for the eye area."

Sarah Foster

● Sharon runs branches of The Beauty Room at The Hall Garth Hotel and Blackwell Grange, both in Darlington, and The Manor House Hotel, in West Auckland. For details of the skin scanner's next visit, ring (01325) 307999.

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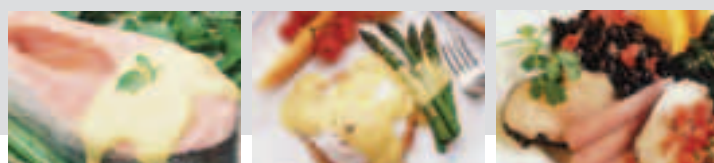
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Les Langley: giving an old building a new lease of life

Setting sail

Having established the successful Atlantic Bar and Club in Darlington, entrepreneur Les Langley has branched out into the restaurant business. SARAH FOSTER takes a tour of the Atlantic Bar and Grill

On a rainy summer morning, I step into the newly opened Atlantic Bar and Grill, on Darlington's Coniscliffe Road. Two women are perched on stools in the cosy bar area and a smiling staff member, who I later learn is Annie, offers me a cup of coffee. Minutes later, the restaurant's owner, Les Langley, arrives, looking dapper in jeans and a jacket. Between answering his mobile phone, he offers to show me round.

Going through the doors to the conservatory, I'm instantly impressed. The long dining room is bathed in light from the glass roof, which is softened by white voile, and the colour scheme is warm and earthy, blending terracotta, wood, and brown leather. On the walls are black and white photographs – some of musicians, but by far the majority, of ordinary looking people. Les explains that they're patrons of his other business, the nearby Atlantic Bar and Club. "They were just people who were in the club and we took some pictures and told them we were going to put them in here when it opened. It's become a great talking point and people who are not on the walls have asked if they can be. I think it would be an idea to change them periodically," he says.

The main entrance to the conservatory is over a wooden bridge, which Les says was inspired by one he saw in London. In fact, the whole of the decor is largely his vision, although he's pretty modest about this. "Looking at this place now I'm really pleased with how it's turned out, but if you had come in before, it would have been blatantly obvious what needed to be done. Everything about it was hard and cold. It was just a case of trying to give it a bit of warmth," says Les, 38.

Proceeding to the back of the room, we reach what he classes as the restaurant proper. Unless they ask otherwise, this is where evening diners are seated, while the conservatory is used mainly for lunches. The richer colours reflect the more formal tone, although it still seems quite relaxed, with more photographs on the walls. Les says that while the place is meant to be stylish, it's also family friendly. "We have portable DVD players and when parents come in with young children we give them a choice of DVDs and the parents are happy straight away," he says. There's also children's entertainment from 5 to 7pm on Saturdays, and they have their own special menu.

This sort of insight, says Les, stems from being a single father to Tara, seven, and four-year-old Robbie. Having managed bars and nightclubs since 1988, it was their mother – his late wife – who encouraged him to open the first Atlantic in Darlington's Duke Street. Expand-

ing into the restaurant business was a brave decision, but the experience of his bar/nightclub enterprise gave him confidence. "The club has been open two years gone April and it's very successful. That was the reason behind the restaurant's name," says Les.

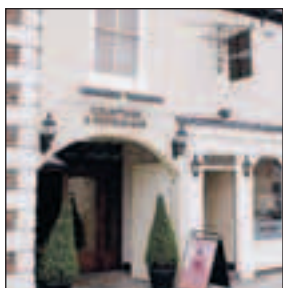
He got around his lack of culinary expertise by "attempting to surround myself with experienced people", and despite the loss of his manager three days into trading, this seems to have worked. "We've got some really strong staff here to be honest. We've got a girl called Annie who's come to the forefront and started to deal with staff issues and things like that. She's been really good," says Les.

He says he wanted to make the menu as diverse as possible to cater for all tastes and budgets – and it certainly is. Starters range from soup to smoked chicken and apple salad, and the usual pizzas, pastas and burgers are livened up by options like smoked haddock and red pepper risotto and pan-seared tuna burger. Hearty meals like oven roast breast of duck sit alongside lighter sandwiches, and there's also a Sunday lunch menu.

Les admits that it's hard work juggling two businesses when one is just getting off the ground. "I'm here permanently at the moment. It works quite well because after I've finished here I can go to the nightclub. I'm working 15 or 16-hour days," he says. Luckily, he has a "fantastic" mother-in-law, who lives with him during the week then takes the children home with her at weekends.

While he says he never planned to open a restaurant, but merely saw the building and recognised its potential, Les wouldn't rule out another business. "I certainly wouldn't discount having somewhere else. I don't think it would be a restaurant but I wouldn't mind going for another bar," he says. "I know Darlington best and I would always feel comfortable setting up a business here but whether there's room for me to do something else I very much doubt. I might try somewhere like Barnard Castle or Norton High Street."

Whatever he does next, it seems he's found the recipe for success.



● Atlantic Bar and Grill, 38 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington (01325) 382200. Open 8am-11pm, Monday to Saturday and 12-10.30pm on Sundays.

NE shopping

Fly London Kiss wedge, £64.99



Onitsuka Tiger Mexico '66, £64.99



Shoe shop Rubber Sole aims to bring street style to the footwear fashion-starved North-East. SARAH FOSTER meets one half of the husband and wife team behind it

JOANNE Rankin and husband Lee had worn out plenty of shoe leather travelling the country when they had an idea: why not set up their own footwear fashion store in the North-East? The problem was that the kind of cutting edge styles they loved could only be found in London, Leeds or Manchester, and while they often went to these places, stocking up on their favourite brands, they couldn't help but wish they didn't have to. When they carried out research, they found that they were far from being alone.

"We did some quite extensive street surveys and it came back that the majority of people in the age group that we were aiming at were doing the same as us, so we knew there was a gap in the market," says Joanne, 32.

She and her husband took the plunge and almost three years ago opened Rubber Sole, on Darlington's Blackwellgate. It helped that Lee had a business background, but the couple still had their work cut out transforming the old office building. "We were up until 4am on the mornings before the opening," remembers Joanne.

Stepping into the shop, you would never guess that they had decorated it themselves. The feel is young and vibrant, with bright stencils on the walls, and the finish impeccable; the wooden floor and ornate ceiling exude class. With her choppy hairstyle and monochrome outfit, Joanne looks like she belongs. She admits that there's a lot of her and Lee in the business. "My husband works up in Newcastle so he's suited and booted Monday to Friday but when he takes his suit off, he's very casual. He wears a lot of vintage, one-off pieces from charity shops and things. You wouldn't see me in anything conventional either," she says.

Taking me on a tour, Joanne points out the different styles. The shoes sit on shelves in neat clusters according to brand, and there's only one of each design. This, says Joanne, is part of the shop's focus on exclusivity. "We want to be different and offer something a bit more creative. We don't repeat the same lines to keep things fresh. We don't stay

For funky feet

stagnant at all. We go to London two or three times a year to do research. They're always six months ahead so we find that we're ahead of most people in this area," she says.

As a lot of what they sell is handmade, Joanne and Lee order six months in advance, and have already chosen next summer's sandals. They're shown whole ranges by shoe company reps, and it takes skill to spot new trends. "You've got to go with your instinct," says Joanne.

One of their top brands is Fly London, a step up from trainers but not as structured as shoes. Picking up a comfy looking mule, Joanne says proudly: "Gwen Stefani has been seen in this shoe." On the shelf above are more colourful designs in fabrics like tweed – part of the Roadhogs range – and below them, T-bar Art shoes in butter-soft leather.

The all-time favourites, says Joanne, are Converse All Stars. "Converse was established in 1908 and they're the number one American sneaker but I think they've been popular in every generation. For kids at the moment, they're the 'in' shoe. They think they're brand new," she says.

Alongside the familiar long-nosed adult boots sit brightly patterned children's versions – some tiny enough for babies. Joanne says that these have been a huge seller. "They've absolutely flown out so we've trebled our orders. Mums and dads come in for themselves and kiddies get shoes to match," she says.

Some of her personal favourites, which she's wearing on the day we meet, are Havaianas flip flops from Brazil. Simple but chic, these have a tiny Brazilian

Vagabond Holiday, £59.99



logo, with its colours subtly repeated around the sole. "These were huge in London last summer and it's sort of filtered through. I think in Brazil all the girls are wearing them," says Joanne.

Another distinctive brand is Onitsuka Tiger. "We picked this up three years ago, then Quentin Tarantino used the shoes in the Kill Bill movie. The yellow and black ones that Uma Thurman wore absolutely flew out," she says.

FOR most of the names, there are shoes for both men and women and while many are quite flamboyant, Joanne says that people of all ages love them. "When we first opened, we thought our target audience was going to be 12 to 35 but we got that so wrong. We've got customers who are young teenagers but also lots and lots in their 50s and our oldest customer is 73. People are really casual now and I think everyone's a generation behind."

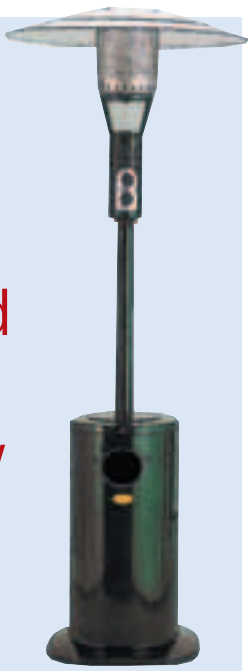
As well as shoes, Rubber Sole sells accessories, including belts and one-off jewellery. Such has been its success that it has been recognised with two awards and this year, Joanne and Lee hope to build on this by expanding – either within the same building or by opening new premises. With prices starting at £20 and going no higher than £80, they hope to ensure that everyone can wear something fabulous on their feet.

- Rubber Sole, 35 Blackwellgate, Darlington (01325) 461118.
- Everyone who registers on the website at www.rubber-sole.com is automatically entered into a monthly draw to win £50 towards a pair of shoes.



Pictures: SARAH NICHOLSON

WIN a patio heater powered by the new BP Gas Light



BP Gas Light is a revolutionary lightweight gas bottle, designed to make it lighter for you to carry and easier for you to use. It's perfect for entertaining in your garden or your patio, whether you are having a barbecue or taking the edge off a chilly evening with a patio heater.

Because the bottle is semi-transparent, you can view the gas level at a glance and the BP Gas Light is far lighter (half the empty weight) and more attractive than its steel counterpart. The bottle is made of corrosion-proof fibreglass reinforced material, which means it won't rust and leave horrible marks on your patio. The ultra solid handle is easy to grip, while offering total protection of the valve. The BP Gas light can be easily connected to most patio heaters and barbecues. The new BP Gas Light is on sale at £45 (£30 hire fee, £15 gas cost) via the website www.bplpg.com or call 0845 300 0038.

To win your very own BP Gas Light, and a top-of-the-range patio heater simply answer this simple question. What is the difference in weight between the new BP Gas Light and a steel cylinder? A. The same B. Half the weight

Answers on a postcard or the back of an envelope to NE Magazine Patio Heater Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. The closing date is June 20, 2005.

Competition rules:

BP Terms and Conditions: The prize draw is for one winner to receive a BP patio heater and a full BP Gas Light bottle. The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. No cash alternative will be offered BP. The promoter reserves the right to alter, amend or foreclose the promotion without prior notice. The winner will be drawn randomly from correct entries. BP staff, their immediate relatives, their agents, or anyone connected with the prize draw may not enter. The prize is not transferable. Winners must agree to participate in publicity of the event and to have their photograph used in localised advertising and on the BP website.





The Elonex Lumina: expensive, but it incorporates a huge range of home entertainment and computer facilities... and looks good too

EVER wanted to capture a special summer memory but not had your camera handy? Now there is no excuse as Lloydspharmacy has come to the rescue with an exclusive Halina Digital Camera that is small enough to keep in your handbag or pocket - and it's under a tenner. With this simple-to-use 8MB digital camera, your photographs can be easily edited, using the software provided, on a PC. For glossy prints, simply take your camera or CD with your pictures on along to your nearest Lloydspharmacy for processing. The camera is available at just £9.99 from Lloydspharmacies nationwide from June 22 until the beginning of August.

gadget man



Microsoft gets serious about the home

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

Not content with taking over the office, Microsoft now has designs on your living room. The column takes a look at the new generation of entertainment PCs

It was inevitable really. With Windows now ubiquitous throughout the office environment, Microsoft has turned its attention to the home.

We saw the first inklings of this in the Xbox games console. It used PC parts, but in a new way - to create a consumer appliance that nestles beneath your TV. Now Microsoft is getting serious. The new generation of media-savvy PCs do far more than play games on your telly.

The days when the PC was so ugly you hid it away in the spare room are over. Microsoft's grandly named Media Centre PCs have been designed from the outset to be at the heart of your home entertainment system.

The thinking is fairly logical. Today's PCs are powerful enough to do most of the things we usually associate with relaxation - playing music, television, slide shows and recording our favourite programmes are all well within the scope of even a quite modest computer these days.

What the PC lacked was a friendly interface. We may have grown used to Windows and its foibles but how is someone who has never used a PC to know that the way to turn a Windows computer off is to click on the Start button?

The new generation of Media Centres hide this unfriendly interface behind a slick veneer that looks just like a TV or video menu system.

Take the new Elonex Lumina. It may cost more than two grand but, at first glance, it looks just like a fancy flat panel TV. The PC gubbins are cleverly concealed within the main chassis of the 32 inch monitor.

And despite the lack of space, Elonex has crammed in a 200GB hard disk for storing and recording TV shows. That's ten times the capacity of a Sky+ box.

There's a built in Freeview receiver and DVD discs are inserted via a little slot in the side. The wireless keyboard incorpo-

rates a pointing device, doing away with the need for a mouse, and you even get a 5.1 surround sound socket.

No wonder consumer electronics manufacturers are including some PC features on their products as a way of hitting back. Both Philips and Panasonic have DVD player/recorders capable of streaming data to other screens throughout the house, just like a good PC can.

But what if you already have a PC - can it be upgraded to this new specification?

Pinnacle's new PC TV device is a slot-in receiver/decoder built for laptops. You slot the card into the side of your PC, fire up the software and seconds later you'll be enjoying digital freeview.

The little box of tricks enables your PC to record your favourite shows, skip the ads and replay the highlights. Even better, the media manager allows you to burn your favourite TV programmes to a disc for keeps.

I tried it and, after a bit of tweaking to get the best reception, it worked a treat. Even better, because it is so small, you can just leave it in your laptop bag and enjoy TV wherever you may be. It's a media centre in the palm of your hand.

Pinnacle PCTV is just the ticket for salesmen and travellers everywhere and is available from leading PC stockists.

If you fancy a full-blown media centre PC, you'll need a sizeable investment (around £1,000 minimum) to get something worthwhile.

● For more details of the Lumina click on to www.elonex.com.

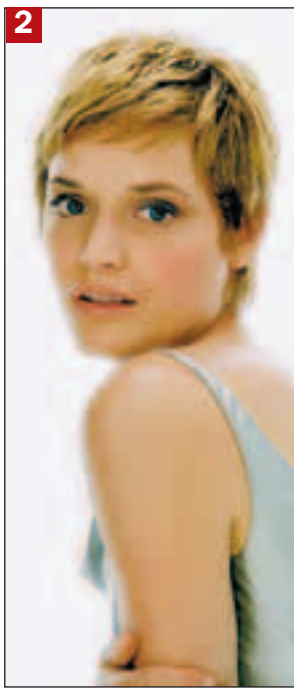
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Pumping up the volume

Fringes don't have to be straight, undone locks are so now -- and add a little lightness for the latest summer looks

DUST off your diffuser and brush up on those 1980s scrunching techniques – mega volume is back, from the slightly dishevelled to massively mussed-up. It's a trend that was obvious at some of the most influential designer shows for summer, including Frost French, Gaultier, Burberry and Marni.

As for up-dos, they were teased to epic proportions at Boyd and there were attractive beehive shapes to be found at Dolce & Gabbana. It goes without saying that the A-list has embraced the trend and newly super-sized celebs – purely in hair terms – include Gwen Stefani, Kelis, Salma Hayek and Penelope Cruz.

Whatever your hair type, you can encourage greater volume by using cleansing and conditioning products specifically designed to increase the dimension of each individual hair – particularly useful if you're in the fine-to-normal category.

Create additional abundance by blow-drying with your head upside down so you can blast away at the roots and also sweep a vent brush through each section.

Fringes are also in this summer, but they don't have to be straight. Undone locks are very now.

The Saks Art Team, headed by Andrew Barton, Saks International Creative Director, has identified the four most-wanted cuts for summer in the Reality collection.

"The collection has been influenced by what women tell us they are looking for when they visit the salon, how they want to feel with their hair – sexy, trendy, funky, classic or just plain and simple," says Andrew, who has been used as a hair expert on C4's makeover show Ten Years Younger. "Women want a look that's easy to manage and as far as I'm concerned, every woman has one thing in common – the dream of great hair every day. My clients don't have time for bad hair days.

"Colour is the real buzzword for this year," adds Andrew.

"Women generally feel sexier and healthier with a little lightness in their hair somewhere, whether it be tipped, chunky, sun-kissed or global colour."

THE LOOKS

1. Long Cut + Sun-kissed Lights

THIS face framing, casual hair cut oozes sex appeal. It's full of texture and movement to make any wearer feel very feminine and incredibly cool. It can be worn tousled, ironed straight or gently curled. The Sun-kissed Lights effect gives the hair an overall natural glow of contrasting blonde shades.

Perfect for: Sienna Miller, Joss Stone.

2. Short Cut + Tip Lights

AN update on the eternal classic urchin cut, this look is dramatic, striking and gorgeous. It draws attention to the cheekbones, highlights the contours of the face and is feathered softly around the hairline. Feminine yet sporty, it never fails to flatter the neck and jawline.

Perfect for: Kate Moss, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kiera Knightley.

3. Bob Cut + Chunky Lights

This is an old classic with a new twist, updated with textured lengths to give the hair-cut separation and a modern vibe. The Chunky Lights are achieved with spring-fresh blonde shades.

Perfect for: Cat Deeley, Sarah Michelle Gellar

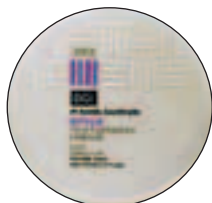
4. Mid-Length Cut + Global Lights

THIS clever combination of shorter and longer lengths gives maximum versatility and face framing softness. It's wearable yet versatile. Pin it up, kick it out or wear it sleek with the help of straighteners. The Global Lights effect ensures that the hair shines with health and vitality.

Perfect for: Heidi Klum.

Natural highlights

COCONUT oil, wheat protein, monoi oil, fennel seed... just some of the natural ingredients included in the new Daniel Galvin Jnr range for Marks & Spencer. From £4.25 for Colour Care shampoo, the range also includes heat protection spray, texturing cream and gloss serum.



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NE motoring



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Have home, will travel

The kitchen sink is the least of the luxuries you can pack and take with you when you take off in a modern motor home. IAN LAMMING reports

WHEN it comes holidays, I've always believed it is better to go five star than rely on something powered by four - but now I'm not so sure.

Say the word "caravan" and I'm likely to shudder, memories flooding back of tinned food and plastic water carrier tasting tea, of tinnitus-inducing rainstorms rattling on aluminium roofs and hole in the ground toilets on under-developed foreign sites.

But they were caravans and these are motor homes, a form of domiciliary transport sexed up by Formula One drivers. Okay, their super-duper mobile homes may cost upwards of £250,000 and feature Jacuzzis and saunas for the lovely pit lane poppies whose heads are turned. But the common or garden varieties, available to you and me, have also come a long way from the orange and white VW camper vans of hippy days gone by.

Holidays cost a lot of money, posh ones even more and there are no guarantees on what you get. What might look great on the website or in a brochure can be a value-for-money disaster and many people are choosing to cut the risk by taking their homes with them.

For the past 40 years Cleveland Motor Homes has been keeping a careful eye on the industry, building up stock and expertise to suit all tastes.

Size, specification and prices boast a staggering range from 16ft to 30ft long, from £25,000 to £72,000 and all drivable on a standard car licence.

Fit and finish are exemplary, with stainless steel and wood, quality fabrics and contemporary bathrooms. They even have en suites.

Pay your money and take your choice. There are air conditioning and refrigerators, drop-down satellite televisions and DVD players, hi-fis and computers. The galley kitchens are well-equipped, the beds are full size and comfortable and the living accommodation cleverly designed and spacious. There are even electric steps that lower at the push of a button.

Motor homes are completely self-contained with their own clean and dirty water reser-

voirs, gas and electricity. The real plus is that you can go anywhere and stay anywhere you like.

Where bylaws prevent you pitching a tent or parking a caravan, the motor home boasts the same rights as a conventional car. So you can either head for an official site or just stop by the side of the road. How's that for freedom?

When you aren't behind the wheel, there are no laws preventing you from parking them at home, whereas caravans often have to be put into official and costly storage.

Motor homes will fit on a ferry or Le Shuttle - then the world really is your oyster. They are easy to drive with powerful diesel engines ranging from 2.0 to 2.8 litres and, unlike a caravan, come free from the worry of having to reverse a trailer.

They also pack the biggest boot I've ever seen. Large enough, in fact, to store two motorbikes or scooters and catalogue after catalogue of accessories.

"Many people are retiring early and investing in a motor home," says Cleveland Motor Homes director Neil Jackson. "They then just take themselves off for months or years and, in effect, take their homes with them. Let's face it, if you are going away for a long time, you want all the comforts of home."

● Cleveland Motor Homes, Teesside Airport; enquiries@clevelandmotorhomes.co.uk; www.clevelandmotorhomes.co.uk; (01325) 333111.



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Historical gem: medieval gems line the canals

Chocs away

FRANCES GRISS and her girlfriends make a break for it and head for Belgium in search of shops... and chocolate

IN a moment of stress, the thought of a weekend away from the children and husbands, eating drinking and doing girlie things sounded too good to be true.

More in hope than expectation, I scoured holiday brochures for a possible destination and canvassed support among friends until it was decided that four of us would visit Bruges in Belgium, travelling by train all the way.

The hotel had been chosen and dates picked when a thin holiday brochure landed unexpectedly on the doormat with a good offer for three nights at the Hotel de Tuilerieen, a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. We booked.

So early one Friday morning this spring the four of us headed for the station leaving children in the capable care of their fathers, who were desperately hoping the shops in Bruges would be closed.

Everything went like clockwork from the moment the train pulled in (on time) to the moment a mad Belgian taxi driver dropped us outside the hotel, a 15th century house by the side of a pretty canal.

Inside it was more than we could have dreamed of. We were shown across a courtyard to a old outhouse at the back which had been converted into more rooms. My friend Linda and I were shown into a spacious room with a settee, other seating, desks and a queen-sized bed. We were congratulating ourselves on a fantastic choice when Lou and Heather, revealed that their room was twice the size with its own dining table, two sofas and a separate bedroom. To cap it all, the breakfast was lavish, featured champagne and hot chocolate crepes, and has been voted the best breakfast in the Benelux.

Reluctant as we were to leave the hotel, we set out to explore the city, which is the best preserved medieval city in Europe. What would be an architectural gem anywhere else is just another house here. Street after street looked as if Bruges were still in its heyday as a medieval trading port.

Everything is mellow with the age of centuries, but not the dirt. The whole of the city

seems very clean and well kept. Prices in the shops were very reasonable and we took full advantage, especially in the many chocolate shops, which were particularly hard to resist. Opposite the hotel was a weekend flea market.

No visit is complete without some sort of organised tour and we indulged in two. The first was a boat trip around some of the famous canals, a great way to see some of the more interesting buildings. Oddly, many of the bridges seemed too low to actually take a boat underneath, and you had a strong urge to duck even under the higher ones. Our second tour was a slightly indulgent trip in a horse-drawn carriage.

It is almost compulsory for visitors to Bruges to climb the 366 steps to the top of the 13th century belfry. Mercifully, there are places to stop and rest on the way up while you examine the mechanism which sounds the 47 bells.

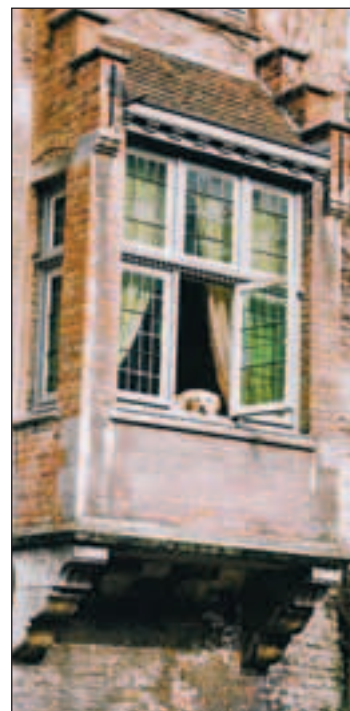
Below is the Markt or market square, which is lined with restaurants. We chose to eat in the cheaper backstreets.

We did our fair share of museum and church visiting, but there was much more we could have seen if we had had the time. On our third and final morning there was time for a dip in the hotel pool, another luxurious breakfast and one final round of chocolate shopping before heading back to the station and home.

As the Eurostar crossed France to the entrance to the Channel Tunnel, we experienced the one blackspot of the entire trip – a two hour delay caused by French protestors on the track. Flying would have avoided that particular problem, but we would undoubtedly have come across another.

As our children ran along the platform to greet us we gave thanks for friendship and returned to the real world.

● We arranged our own travel to London with GNER and by taxi to Waterloo. The Eurostar and hotel accommodation was booked through Leisure Direction Ltd, tel 0208 324 4050. The package cost around £270 each for three nights.



ABOVE: Linda Fawcett, Heather Bell and Lou Brown outside one of the many beautiful buildings in Bruges

LIFE COACH

THE POWER OF CHOICE

HOW much of your life have you consciously chosen? A big question and one that deserves some thought. Essentially, much of life is about choice. Making the best of life is making the best possible choice given circumstances. We are not always in control of what comes our way in life but we can choose our responses to it. Decisions, however, are made with actions. It is only by actively doing something differently that we make different choices.

Sometimes life has to get very painful before people make different choices, be it career, relationships or lifestyle. Have you made the best possible choices in your life so far? If not, why not?



“To cap it all, the breakfast was lavish, featured champagne and hot chocolate crepes, and has been voted the best breakfast in the Benelux

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Renewed Mobility offers their customers the opportunity to invest in these valuable mobility aids with financial security. They have a unique buy back policy which allows their customers, or their customers' families, to sell the scooters or stairlifts they purchased back to the Company if they are no longer of use. Providing the equipment has not been damaged beyond use or repair, Renewed Mobility will come and collect the product and pay a good price for its return.

The buy back policy is valid for 36 months on scooters originally bought from Renewed Mobility and five years in the case of stairlifts. There is a charge for administration and collection but the Company repurchases their products for a good portion of the original price, so this doesn't prove to be a financial burden.

The products the Company purchases back from their clients are then used as demonstration models, broken down for spares or sold off in their quarterly auctions. The spares are needed for Renewed Mobility's repair service where, if a customer's scooter breaks down, the Company will be on hand within 48 hours to fix the problem and they will also provide a replacement model while the repairs are being carried out.

Company Director, Saul Black, likes to deal directly with his customers and will always make himself available to talk on the phone. He is also careful to vet his sales team who are instructed to stick to the facts and never spend more than an hour and three quarters conducting a sale. The Company offers its own in-house 0% Finance deal which is available to anyone who has an account with a bank or building society and requires a 50% deposit and a repayment over 12 monthly instalments. The scooters available include models from Electric Mobility, Euro and Sunrise Medical and Renewed Mobility supply a wide range of other products all over the country.

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