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is produced by

**The
Northern
Echo/
Newsquest
Ltd.,**
a Gannett
Company,
Priestgate,
Darlington
DL1 1NF
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sharon griffiths

“We’ve come a long way from black boiled eggs and soggy crisps

SOME people measure the progression of civilisation in matters of plumbing. I prefer picnics. True, plumbing tells us a lot about society. In one generation, we have, after all, gone from the once-a-week tub to the twice daily shower which as well as being nice for us, is also quite a relief for those around us, especially on crowded buses on hot days.

But picnics tell us just as much.

It was my sister who made me realise. She was off to a summer concert in some grand gardens and was packing the interval picnic – little Tupperware box of poached salmon, small tub of Hollandaise, another of asparagus, pack of exotic salads, individual pots of summer pudding, strawberries, another tub of clotted cream and, of course, a bottle of wine – all packed neatly, with plates, knives, forks and napkins, into a cool bag that was also a back-pack, with a rug that folded into a special pocket on the base.

“Do you remember,” she asked, as she filled up a last little corner with bruschetta and olives and some feta cheese, “the sort of picnics we had when we were children?”

Ah yes. Only too well.

We were lucky in that our family was one of the few in the road to have a car. It was only a Morris Minor and there were four of us in it – plus the dog – but it still gave my parents plenty of scope for outdoor catering.

First there was the Primus stove. Unthinkable to have a picnic without a decent cup of tea. A Thermos would do, at a push, but freshly boiled water was far superior. So there was the stove. And of course the teapot... Plus a little screw of paper full of tea leaves. And another one full of sugar. The milk was in a bottle that had once held my baby clinic orange juice. Hoorah for the Welfare State.

Our favourite picnic destination was the beach. This being Pembrokeshire there was usually a steep cliff path or a bank of pebbles to negotiate – while carrying the stove, the blanket, the teapot, the shopping bag full of cups, and brown paper carrier bags with string handles, and biscuit tins full of food. When we got to the beach and unpacked everything – setting out the rug, weighing the corners down with pebbles – it wasn’t so much a setting out of a picnic, more a setting up of base camp. The primus stove took an age to boil the water and had to be lit straightaway if there was to be any chance of getting a cup of tea after our swim.

The food was pretty unchanging. There were always ham sandwiches – good chunky sandwiches as my mother believed in proper ham and proper bread. But, of course, beaches being windy places, they always came with that fine layer of sand.

There were hard boiled eggs, which often went black. Very appetising. There was salt – also in another little screw of paper, easy to confuse with the sugar. There were cold sausages sliced up. And tomatoes and maybe even some lettuce from the garden, wrapped up in one of the best linen napkins.

Sometimes there were crisps. Quality control hadn’t quite made it to crisps in the 1950s. Sometimes they were delicious. Often they were soggy. And you had to find the salt – another little screw of paper, but this time blue, and usually damp.

Tins were just transplanted from the kitchen cupboard at home. They contained biscuits or Welsh cakes or solid slices of fruit cake, which I always associated with Christmas and felt strange eating on a beach in the sunshine.

And then when we’d swum and eaten and built a sandcastle and buried our father in the sand, it was time to dismantle it all again, carry it back up the cliffs or over the pebbles.

Now my sister had a picnic that we would have considered the grandest of grand feasts. We had salmon only when one of the postmen went poaching and came furtively round to the back door at dawn. Clotted cream was something that was sent home by people on holiday in Cornwall. And wine was definitely for special occasions only.

And now here was my sister treating such delights so casually and what’s more, packing the whole lot cleanly and tidily in one little back-pack. That’s progress.

And she needn’t even have gone to the effort. Now you can buy instant picnics from supermarkets – ready made salad boxes, terrines, smoked salmon parcels, small sausages, pre-packed puddings. All perfectly done and oh so easy and delicious.

The last picnic I had with a friend in a London park came complete in a box from her local deli – a selection of sushi, tiny, tangy lemon tarts, huge loganberries and a bottle of wine.

It was simple, delicious and utterly different from the picnics of my childhood.

Nigri, nori, wasabi and ginger. We’ve come a long way from black boiled eggs and soggy crisps.

PILE ‘EM HIGH

IF you’re an inveterate shoe shopper and have more Blahniks than Beyonce, recalling what shoes you own, keeping them safe, and storing them nicely is no easy feat. One neat solution is clear shoeboxes which allow you to organise your entire collection, keeping them in pristine condition. These accessories for your accessories can be organised into a neat stackable system, and have a front opening so you can take out your shoes without disrupting the stacking system. They also come with a handle. Just



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GOING TO THE WALL



ARTISAN House wall sculptures are three-dimensional artwork that hang on the wall. Each sculpture is hand-crafted from metal and exquisitely finished under the direction of their Studio Master Sculpture. The piece shown above is called Kaleidoscope, measures 132cm x 84cm and retails at £399. Various sculptures and pictures are available from At Home Furnishings, Cannon Park, Middlesbrough or visit www.mailorderart.co.uk



SITTING PRETTY

THE washable, squashable highchair Totseat has got a new look for summer. It’s just the thing for taking on hols, anchoring a child in safety and comfort in an adult chair. It’s easy to use, fits most adult chairs and is

highly portable – fitting into a pocket or handbag – and comes with a compact, matching pocket bag to carry it around. The Totseat costs £26 from www.totseat.com, John Lewis stores and selected independent retailers.

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How to pull a guy

(and other camping tips)

Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS used to loathe camping as a child, but now believes there's nothing better than a night under the stars

CAMPING used to mean eating little boiled potatoes out of a tin on an orange Tupperware plate. The shower blocks were freezing, grey concrete affairs with grass and mud around the plug hole and 1970s patterned tiles on the walls. If you were lucky, you had hot water long enough to wash the soap out of your eyes. Mostly, I used to dip a flip-flopped foot under the water before whipping it back out again. "Yes, I washed everywhere," I used to lie to my mother when I got back to the tent.

As I grew up, I scoffed at the idea of campers and their stupid one-ring gas burners and tin mugs. It was ridiculous the way it took them half an hour to boil enough water for a single warm drink, and how they would be happy to sit, side-by-side, in their deckchairs, watching the world go by in some mesmeric state.

My brother and I would manage to occupy ourselves, swinging around in old tractor tyres and playing "trumps" (the card game!) on rainy days. But as we hit our teenage years, we became too old to "go off and play" and we were getting thoroughly fed up of little boiled potatoes.

We managed to avoid camping until we hit our late 20s, and then a strange thing happened. I went on a press trip for a week in a caravan with my boyfriend, my broth-

er and sister-in-law and it wasn't big enough for the four of us - so we ended up buying a tent.

The tent we chose was no ordinary tent. It was a fancy kind, one where the tent poles were attached to the hi-tech fabric and which you could throw up in any weather in about three minutes flat.

Then my brother and sister-in-law got one



Lindsay and her brother on the caravanning holiday that convinced her to buy a tent

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A LIFE UNDER CANVAS



THE TENT

Lindsay chose a Khyam Frelander from Field & Trek, after moving up from their little Igloo. The Frelander is a three-berth with flysheet and integral door tent tidy. It's staggeringly easy to erect as the tent poles and groundsheet are integral and weighs just 10.6 kgs. The packed size is 83 x 23 x 23 cm which is why the range is much loved by bikers. It is flame retardant and costs £175.

www.fieldandtrek.com

THE LUXURY

Just because you're in the middle of a field, doesn't mean to say you can't indulge yourself. These real espresso coffee makers, designed for caffeine addict campers like Lindsay's partner Mike, make a delicious cup of espresso in just a few minutes when placed over a camping stove on low heat. £17.99

www.fieldandtrek.com



SEATING

And while you're sipping that espresso and reading all the books you hadn't time to dip into at home, you'll need somewhere to sit in comfort. The Yarmouth Folding Chair is

perfect, especially as it has special pockets to keep your beer bottle upright. £22.99.

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COOKING

The Uno Stove is a self contained portable stove with carry case, automatic push-button ignition and built-in safety device. It runs for up to two hours on a Sunngas P220 cartridge. Gas not supplied. It costs £14.99 from Millets in the Market Place, Darlington or call (01293) 852853 for stockists.

www.millets.co.uk



FOR HAPPY CAMPERS...

This Cath Kidston three-person tent has been exclusively designed by for Eurohike. But it doesn't skimp on substance for style: the tent of all-polyester construction with a rugged groundsheet, the flysheet has taped seams and the breathable inner has mesh ventilation for condensation control and bug blocking. Fibreglass poles mean quick pitching (flysheet first or pitch as one). £59.99 from Millets.

www.millets.co.uk



The four of us now talk regularly about new camping gadgets on the market



Light and easy to erect: the Khyam Igloo beloved of bikers

TOP TIPS FOR BUYING A TENT

FIRST, determine the purpose of the tent. If it's being used for family camping, consider comfort, space and ventilation. If you're more of a backwoodsman type of camper, consider weight, size and durability.

MATERIAL

- Polyester withstands extended exposure to the sun
- Nylon is lighter weight
- Canvas is durable but very heavy

STYLE

- Cabin tents are big with high ceilings and large windows. Multi-room models are available.
 - Dome tents are smaller, stable and better in varying weather conditions. They are easier to set up and take down
- You also need to consider the type of activity that will be going on under canvas – is it just for sleeping in, or will you be living under canvas? How many people does it

need to accommodate and how much gear will you need to store in the tent? Tent sizes do not include room for gear storage so consider purchasing a larger tent for this purpose. Consider also the ease of set-up in force ten North-East gales.

POLES

- Quality is important
 - Fibreglass poles are durable
 - Aluminium poles are lightweight
- Also consider the quality of other features, such as stitching and seams, zippers, window and door mesh, flooring, tie-downs and stakes.
- Consider also the types of weather you might be out in. Some tents are fully waterproof, others are just water resistant. Does it have a full coverage rain fly? Consider a quality ground cloth for under your tent to protect the floor and to keep it drier and cleaner. This should be the same shape as your tent and slightly smaller.

too and before we knew it we were heading off every other weekend, cooking barbecues and revelling in our new outdoor lifestyle. Now, instead of obstinate stripy deckchairs, our fold-away chairs have pockets which are perfectly sized for a can of lager or (plastic) glass of wine.

"This is smashing," is my brother's favourite saying, often uttered as a barbecued sausage is thrust into his hand.

Even the showers are better (although I have seen some 1970s tiles along the way). They are warmer and cleaner than I remembered. Some even have hand dryers and a couple, astonishingly, have been known to boast central heating.

The four of us now talk regularly about new camping gadgets on the market and take great delight in buying them. When my brother received a self-inflating mattress last Christmas, we were jealous – even though we were the ones who had bought him it.

But perhaps the best so far is the mini camping espresso maker I bought the coffee connoisseur boyfriend this Christmas. I zipped open the tent on Bank Holiday Sunday at 7.30am to find he had it on the stove, with fresh coffee put-put-putting out of the spout into a tiny, enamelled espresso cup. He looked at me as though I'd bought him tickets for the Rugby World Cup final.

"This is amazing, I love it," he gushed.

We love camping so much we have even upgraded our designer tent to a bigger one. It still has the poles attached, but it has a seating

area and little windows. It produces the same feeling I got with my first Wendy house – that it's our den, a place to hide from the rest of the world.

We love going for walks across the hills and calling into the pub with rosy cheeks and windswept hair. We go to farmers' markets and buy too much food for the barbecue, but we eat it all anyway.

The camaraderie is fantastic. Campsites are one of the few places it is still considered relatively normal to chat to strangers – even when your hair is sticking up and you have barbecue sauce on your chin. Your children can make friends with other children in relative safety and play rounders and football and other activities which don't involve their thumbs and a games console.

There are some downsides. Sometimes you get those kind of campers next to you who chuck their empty lager cans into streams and start singing classics like "Come on Eileen" and "We are the champions" at the top of their voices, usually after midnight. But we just resolve never to go back to that campsite again.

The four of us are lucky enough to have stayed in a number of boutique hotels in major cities across Europe. We drive nice cars and live in nice houses.

But nothing generates so many "this is the life" comments as when we're in a field, with a canvas roof above our heads and the barbecue underway. If we were to try them, I'm sure even the little boiled potatoes would taste grand.



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WHEN the first guests walk through the grand entrance of Jesmond Dene House Hotel for a weekend stay, to dine in the restaurant or to attend a function, they'll be following in a long tradition of merry-making.

The mansion, which stands at the northern end of the Dene, just a few miles from the centre of Newcastle, once rang to the sound of chinking glasses and cutlery on china as one of the grandest settings for parties the city could boast.

Its £7m revival will see its reputation for hospitality restored but in the most modern sense.

Having been through various incarnations as a secretarial college, a civil defence HQ, a seminary and a residential school for girls with special needs, it has taken the vision of developer Peter Candler and North-East food guru Terry Laybourne to breathe fresh life into the building.

Says Mr Candler: "When the city council put it on the market three years ago, they certainly had other offers for it but we felt from a conservation and historical point of view that the only appropriate plan was to restore it as a place of hospitality."

"In its day it was the most important place in Newcastle, if not the North-East, for welcoming dignitaries and important people from around the world, and it was designed to impress."

Originally built in 1822 as a family home for Newcastle physician, former city mayor and leader of the Whig party Thomas Emerson Headlam, its heyday came 80 years later.

Designed by eminent architect John Dobson (most famous for designing the city's Grey Street), it was originally known as Black Dene House. An early plan of the house shows a large square central block with wings to the north and south.

Headlam died in 1864 and the house was rented out for five years before being bought in 1871 by Captain Andrew Noble, a business partner of armaments manufacturer Lord Armstrong.

By the early 1900s, with Noble's extensive business and social contacts, the house host-

A city mansion which once hosted parties for the rich and famous is being brought back to life as a unique hotel. SARAH FRENCH sees the transformation taking place

ed a string of famous names and VIPs, including the brother of the Chinese Emperor, Admiral Togo of the Japanese navy, Baden Powell, Rudyard Kipling and Lord Kelvin.

By this time it had undergone major alterations, which will contribute in no small part to the character of the hotel when it opens next month.

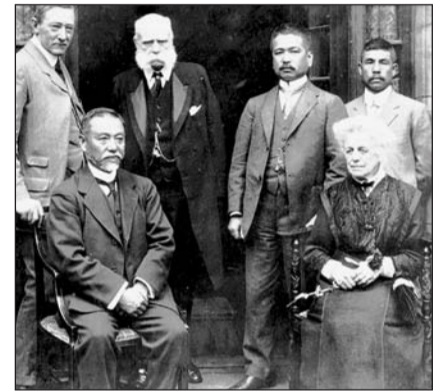
The entrance and reception area lead, on the left, to the former billiard room with its marble columns, stucco frieze and matching panelling, which is being transformed into a lounge for after-dinner drinks and afternoon tea.

On the right is the pre-dinner drinks lounge, which was designed as a dining room by architect Norman Shaw in 1885. Original features like the William de Morgan tiles around the fireplace, the oak panelling and hardwood floors will all add up to create an atmosphere of comfortable sophistication.

This room leads into what was the music room, chosen as the main hotel dining room for its elegance and light, airy feel. A garden room will be added but the original parquet floor will be covered with carpet.

"Wooden floors are more suited to a bistro-style restaurant and this will be very much about fine dining," explains Mr Candler. "We didn't want to twist the use into something that was wholly unconnected with the original house and, in fact, the original rooms lend themselves well to our chosen functions. It's about getting the balance between bringing out the history of the place and serving the purpose of its modern use."

Detailed accounts, written in the 1960s by the grandchildren of the Nobles, have helped inform this transformation. After Andrew



Top: Peter Candler and Terry Laybourne
Above: Visitors to Jesmond Dene House in 1911, including Sir Andrew Noble, Lady Noble and Admiral Togo

Jesmond Dene House Hotel
0191-212 3000 or visit
www.jesmonddenehouse.co.uk

Noble died in 1913, the family continued to live there until 1930.

Mr Candler adds: "The accounts tell us that this is where the family gathered for morning prayers and where grandmama Noble played the organ, for instance. We've got descriptions of the Christmas and New Year parties they had and I hope we will have cards explaining to guests what the rooms were used for."

Next to the 70-cover restaurant is a private dining room for functions seating up to 18 people. This leads out to a staircase constructed during Shaw's modifications and the only two ground floor en suite bedrooms, formerly the library and overlooking the Dene.

When Newcastle City Council acquired the property in 1930 for £11,000 it came with more than 13,000 acres of land, much of which became an extension to the Jesmond Dene Public Park.

The house itself became a secretarial college, being requisitioned by the council in 1938 as the Air Raid Protection HQ. Underground rooms and tunnels were built as air raid shelter for staff.

Today the basement is being transformed into the hotel kitchens which, thanks to the slope the house is built on, are not completely underground, giving kitchen staff a view of the Dene.

Whilst this is very much Terry Laybourne territory - he has spent 18 months designing the kitchen alone - the project is a true partnership between his and Mr Candler's company, Rivergreen.

The pair have worked together before, namely on sympathetically restoring the Grade II* listed Aykley Heads House on the edge of



Work in progress at the hotel

Durham and turning it into Mr Laybourne's Café 21 bistro.

But rather than being a hotel with a Terry Laybourne restaurant attached, the reputation of the man who brought a Michelin star to the North-East is integral to the whole concept of Jesmond Dene House.

"I'm involved in the whole of the design process and operational aspects of the development," he says.

Mr Candler, whose Durham-based company has won awards for its restoration of listed buildings, adds: "Although we have our respective skills we both stick our noses into one another's business. Terry has very strong ideas about towel heaters and I'll tell him what I think of his wines."

The food will have the Laybourne stamp, being a showcase of regional and seasonal produce - with fresh herbs grown in the new landscaped gardens, designed by Alan Capper.

Keen to stress that Mr Laybourne's involvement isn't in name only, Mr Candler says: "Terry will spend most of his time here and will have a direct influence. He won't be an absentee chef."

Taking visitors on a tour of the building, Mr Candler saves the best until last. Noble's former laboratory, where he carried out his experiments and tested his scientific theories, is to be an ante-room with bar to the main conference and banqueting room.

The great hall is a stunning room surrounded in oak panelling with high gothic windows and a cavernous fireplace. "There's not much to say about this room, it kind of speaks for itself," he says.

Apart from its history, the location of Jesmond Dene House is what makes it unique - in a semi-rural setting but within in the boundaries of the city.

In characterising the hotel, Mr Candler says the emphasis will be on quality from the service to the interiors - designed by Jill Holst from Ward Robinson - but it won't be pretentious or intimidating.

"We want it to showcase the best of what this region has to offer, from the food to the work by local artists we'll have on display. I hope it will be one of the best hotels in the region - that's certainly what we're aiming for."

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NE interiors



From dresses to addresses

Fashion designer Bruce Oldfield once lived in a Barnardo's home, about as far removed as you can get from the luxurious interiors he has just crafted for an exclusive row of houses in Newcastle

It is probably the North-East's most exclusive residential development: an entire street of Regency properties in Newcastle has been transformed with the help of £17m and the talents of world-renowned designer Bruce Oldfield.

As a little boy growing up in the region, visits to Newcastle were a real treat for Oldfield. Wandering through the streets with his foster mum, he would look up at the buildings in awe, overwhelmed by their size and beauty.

"I couldn't believe how big and grand everything was. From living in Hett, in a two-up, two-down, it was quite extraordinary. I couldn't tell you which streets or which square it was but it was the sheer scale that impressed me and it's stayed with me ever since," he recalls.

Now, thanks in large part to Oldfield's design talents, things have just got a lot grander... and a lot more expensive. The townhouses of Carlton Terrace are priced at between £1.3m and £2m.

The terrace of 14 four and five-bedroom properties, was originally designed by eminent North-East architect John Dobson

in around 1840 and each of the properties have been painstakingly restored to their former glory.

The street in Jesmond is thought to be the only residential location of its kind outside London, Bath and Edinburgh. There is nothing in the North-East that compares with the size and quality of the townhouses.

Every effort has been taken to make the site the most prestigious address in the city. International designers have been brought together to assemble furnishings from around the world to enhance the original splendour of the houses, which, until recently, were run-down office buildings.

The showhouse features several spectacular external features including a double height orangery conservatory at the rear and Romeo and Juliet-style balconies at the front. The whole of the second floor has been given over to a master bed suite, incorporating male and female dressing rooms and a lavish bathroom with Italian two-person steam and shower room - from where you can answer the phone and door and listen to music - and a Zen bath.

Oldfield has been acting as overall director





You're going to have a beautiful shell with period features but with all the spec of a new-build

Bruce Oldfield, left, and the fantastic interiors he has created for Carlton Terrace



of design on the project, which has been hugely successful... in spite of the price tag. The first release of seven properties was a sell-out within days.

Agent Duncan Young of Sanderson Young says: "Carlton Terrace shows the way for other developers. We are now able to offer accommodation and housing within Newcastle comparable to the most fashionable, international squares of London."

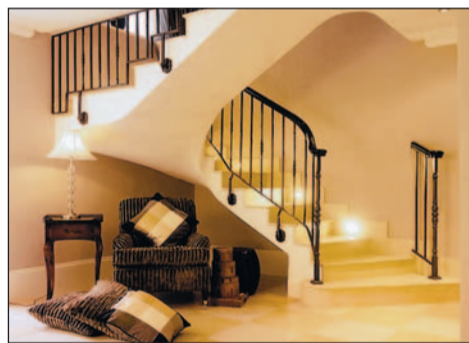
The home has been dressed in "new-glamour" style, complete with lavish silk fabrics and European furniture by Spanish design specialists Imperial.

Rick Wilson, contracts director at Northern Property Developments, says: "The restoration team has gone to extraordinary lengths to make sure the homes are utterly unique. Products have been sourced from all over Europe, including silver birch trees from Germany, and precisely measured Portuguese yew hedging."

Each of the townhouses in Carlton Terrace benefit from a garden mews building, which can be used for a variety of purposes, including a gym or staff quarters, and front and rear private walled gardens designed by nationally recognised garden landscaper Alan Capper.

"They are seriously gorgeous houses, the kind I would want to buy myself," says Oldfield. "You're going to have a beautiful shell with period features but with all the spec of a new-build. We're not creating museum pieces. These are contemporary homes."

After this successful foray into the world of



interior design, Oldfield is looking forward to more, but says he won't be giving up the day job.

"I've been in the fashion business 30 years – God, 30 years of frocks! My emphasis has changed in that time, of course it has. At first, I was motivated by the drive to create an empire and that has been tempered as I've grown older, but I've always liked making proper frocks and I probably always will."

He's currently got another project on the go as well, writing his biography. "It's great to be back in the North-East so I can do some more research into my early years."

The interior design, it seems, is just another chapter...

● **The first phase of 14 properties at Carlton Terrace has been released. Viewings of the showhouse are by appointment only. Anybody requiring further property details should contact Janet Hopkinson at Sanderson Young on 0191-261 7788 or 07712 139 370.**

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NE gardening

Business is booming for an organic box scheme mixing meat and dairy products with home grown vegetables, as SARAH FOSTER finds out



Head gardener John Longmoor in the walled garden

Picture: TOM YEOMAN

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Where the green greens grow

LURKING down a lane off the busy A167 near Durham lies the verdant estate of Croxdale Hall. It is in this quiet setting, concealed behind the bricks of a walled garden, that a thriving business has taken root.

Butterby was established in October 2003 by Edward Richardson, a former farm manager at Houghall College, and the son of the estate owners, Gerard Salvin. The idea was to draw on Edward's experience to develop an organic box scheme, teaming up with other producers to offer a range of different foodstuffs.

When I meet the hands-on half of the partnership, he says there was a clear gap in the market for this type of joint initiative. "I think what I realised was that there was an enormous amount of meat and a few organic farmers, but nothing linking them together, and the thing that was missing was vegetables," says Edward.

The business started slowly, relying at first on bought-in goods before they began to grow their own. Edward says it soon became obvious what it should focus on. "We found as a business that we could get hold of winter vegetables throughout the year so we decided what we needed were fresh summer vegetables. If we could put something in that people hadn't had before, then that's what we wanted to do."

Walking through the gate in the ancient walls is like entering a secret garden. Lying at the heart of the sprawling 1,000 acre estate, the nine-acre walled garden seems to have changed little since Georgian times.



Edward leads me to two large polytunnels, which have taken up residence near the entrance.

With the help of two staff – one employed by Butterby and the other by the estate – Edward grows lettuce, endives, pak choi, peppers and tomatoes inside the tunnels. In outside beds, there's rhubarb, spinach, chard (a green-leafed vegetable), Chinese cabbage, cucumbers and courgettes, and fruit trees shelter by the walls.



Edward Richardson with a delivery of fruit and veg, and below left, checking the tomato plants in the greenhouse
Pictures: CHRIS BOOTH

While the fledgling company is still far from being self-sufficient, Edward says he hopes to build on what it grows. "Next year I would like to see us in a position where we have maybe six polytunnels so we can increase the volume of our own produce and be less reliant on other people's, which would give us more flexibility," he says.

For vegetables to qualify as organic, the soil in which they are grown must have been "converted". This means that for two years, it must have been fertiliser and spray-free, and have been treated with purely organic techniques and materials. Yet in terms of Butterby's development, Edward is prepared to wait. "We want to grow cut flowers from here and put them in the boxes, but we'll have to see how it works out," he says cautiously.

In addition to vegetable boxes, which cost £10 or £12, the firm delivers meat boxes at £28 and organic milk from 60p. The beauty of the produce is that it comes without wasteful packaging and covers few food miles. It comes direct to customers' doors and thanks to nifty personal PCs, the van drivers know exactly where to leave it and if there are any special requirements. This enables them, for example, to substitute one vegetable for another to satisfy a customer's personal tastes.

Edward says an important part of providing such a personal service is getting customer feedback. "When we listen to the

customers they tell us they dislike going to supermarkets. They like the idea of the produce being local, although from March to June, we have to rely on imported goods. There are certain customers who think we can wipe out the need for going to the supermarket altogether," he says.

The very nature of the box scheme means that content varies from week to week, depending on what's available. Edward says that while this may put some people off, others relish it. He even provides labels and recipe cards for the less familiar types of greens.

One of Butterby's biggest pluses is that it puts the customer in control, allowing them to dip in and out of deliveries at will. "The deliveries are weekly or fortnightly. We take the first box and normally inquire about it on the second week. People take boxes as and when it suits them," says Edward.

The company's success speaks for itself: demand has grown from 19 boxes to a weekly average of 150 in just 18 months. Butterby now serves an area from Chester-le-Street down to Sedgefield, and across from Bishop Auckland to Hetton-le-Hole. While one day, Edward would like to see this expand, he's keeping his feet firmly on the ground. "At the moment, I think we need to fill the gaps in," he says.

● Butterby, Low Butterby Farm, Croxdale, 0191-378 9193, www.butterby.co.uk

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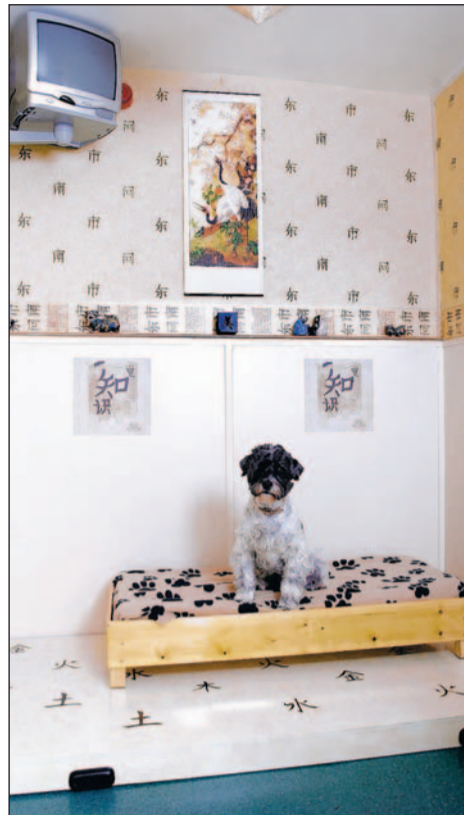
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As families head off for summer holidays abroad, there's always the problem of where to put the pets they're leaving behind. SARAH FOSTER checks in for a visit to a canine hotel which offers the ultimate in five-star accommodation for pampered pooches



Upmarket pad: the Oriental suite



Down at the dog-otel

SITTING in the reception of the Triple 'A' Pet Resort in Washington, near Sunderland, I witness one of the day's first arrivals. It's a large excitable dog accompanied by a smartly dressed man, and pausing to coo over him (the dog, that is), the friendly girl behind the desk proceeds to check him in. She questions the man closely, establishing, among other things, that the dog prefers his tea at 5pm.

Then comes the crunch - the time for pet and owner to part. The dog lets out a mournful whine, hinting there may be canine histrionics, but to everyone's relief, trots happily away for his vacation.

While ostensibly, Triple 'A' is a boarding kennels, it aims to be much more than just that. Based on the philosophy that a happy pet means a happy owner, it strives to offer the same level of care that animals receive at home. This means not just feeding and watering them, but taking them for walks, playing with them and, in some cases, even letting them watch TV.

Sales and marketing manager Cristen Seddon explains that pets' comfort is the prime concern. "When a pet comes in for boarding we do an 18-point health check. They're all weighed on a daily basis as well, which gives a very good indication of the pets' health. They are obviously in a different environment from the one they're used to being in, so we make records of whether they have eaten and how their emotions are so we know how they are coping."

While mainly geared towards dogs, the resort also caters for cats and 'small furrries' like rabbits and guinea pigs, although it does draw the line at reptiles. In addition to the boarders, day clients and their owners drop in for grooming or a training session in the large arena. There's a hydrotherapy pool, although this is currently out of use, and when it's time for doggy heaven, a tranquil garden of rest. Cristen explains that while not actually a pet cemetery, this offers owners the chance to mourn the loss of their faithful friend. "Particularly in the summer, people come and lay flowers," she says.

Dogs' accommodation comes in three categories: basic, or 'traditional' kennels, the more swish 'dog apartments' and the crème de la crème, the newly opened La Maison des Chiens.

First on my tour are the dog apartments, where Adam the Tibetan terrier looks hangdog behind a grille. Cristen pats him affectionately, explaining that he's a veteran of the kennels' day creche facility. "His owner works and it's not good to leave a dog at home for long periods of time - here he gets walks and interaction." Adam's apartment is divided into two sections - indoors and outdoors - and is individually heated, with UPVC double glazing.

There's a TV point but no TV, although he can listen to the radio. "The radio's always on. It gives the dogs that extra comfort," says Cristen.

While less sophisticated, the standard kennels are perfectly adequate, housing mainly larger dogs.



Stateside experience: the Manhattan suite. Left and below: one of the staff at Triple 'A' with a guest



It's designed for dogs that are used to the good life. They're used to having company and nice soft furnishings...

dogs. There's a real trend at the moment for pampered pooches," he says.

Stepping into the smart prefab, it's clearly much more than a mere doghouse. The walls are papered like a hotel's and each of the four rooms has a different style, with psychedelic prints in the Sixties pad and Chinese ornaments in the Oriental room. The sole occupant is a tiny pug, who sits serenely on the four-poster bed in the Elizabethan suite. For £35 a night, spoiled Saffi gets two walks a day and two sessions in the garden, and can watch her own TV. Dinner is a choice of Pedigree or Cesar, or whatever else she prefers.

"Within reason, we will accommodate what people want – unless we think it's unhealthy or unsafe for the animal," says Cristen. But when it comes to pooches' palates, rules can be slightly bent. "We had a dog that came in that we had to give a fresh cream cake to every day. It almost went against our philosophy of looking after pets," Karl admits.

Such is the resort's popularity that it's usually booked solid throughout the summer and already, the newest option seems to be catching on. "It's designed for dogs that are used to the good life. They're used to having company and nice soft furnishings," says Cristen. "I think there are a lot of dogs in the area that are seen not just as a pet, but as a member of the family, and owners want what's best for them."

● Triple 'A' Pet Resort and Care Centre, Follingsby Lane, Washington, 0191-537 7898, www.triple-a-pets.co.uk

There's an unmistakable doggy smell, but the residents seem content, competing to out-bark each other. The cattery is warm and clean, with flip charts recording eating and toilet habits.

With its neat landscaped garden, La Maison des Chiens immediately stands out. The brainchild of manager Karl Shires, it's the latest addition to Triple 'A', which has functioned as kennels for more than 20 years. Karl says the desire to pamper small dogs, exemplified by stars like Paris Hilton, convinced him that there was a market for a premium pad.

"We did some research last year on the types of dog that were coming in and the vast majority were small

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me and my wardrobe



Clockwise from above: white T-shirt, brown cardigan and Weekend FireX trousers; jacket and skirt from the Love Rosa range; Vicki's black suit – her work outfit. All Vicki's clothes are from Oasis as she gets a fantastic work discount!



Vicki Phelps, 25, is manager of the Oasis outlet store at Dalton Park at Murton. She likes to be smartly dressed at work but loves to dress down when she gets home. She is a real outdoors type and loves walking her dog, Levi. She is also learning to paraglide

recall a coloured poncho which Levi the dog now sports on his morning runs.

What's your most expensive outfit?
A Gucci trouser suit in white satin costing £700 – the only problem is I'm scared to wear it, especially at any functions with red wine on the menu, which as you can imagine is very limiting!

What are your favourite shops?
Oasis, of course, and Coast and Karen Millen to complement brands such as Logo and Pilot.

Who's your favourite well-dressed celebrity?
Nell McAndrew has to be my chosen one. She mixes smart and casual while always managing to look great.

Dalton Park is just off the A19 at Murton. Contact 0191 526 5163 or visit www.dalton-park.co.uk

How would you describe your look?
I like to look smart but chic while at work. My key pieces are suits coupled with brightly coloured tops and some great looking accessories to finish off and give that flash of colour, especially in the colours of this year, the greens and blues which go with my blonde colouring.

What's your favourite item of clothing?
I have a fabulous jacket and skirt from the New Love Rosa range at Oasis designed by a new up-and-coming star called Anne Louise Roswald. Her designs are funky, flirty, big bold prints. They are clothes to be seen in.

What has been your worst buy?
Those items that you buy on impulse which look great in the heat of the shopping hunt... but repentance is high. I especially

I especially recall a coloured poncho which Levi the dog now sports on his morning runs



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

MARK Eddy wanted his 40th birthday to be a "life begins" event and decided to start right away by doing something life affirming and worthwhile. So Mark and his wife Charlotte got together with our good selves to organise a ball in aid of Century FM's charity 21st Century Kids.

It was a glamorous affair with 210 guests in a beautiful marquee overlooking the prestigious Wynyard Golf course. Bill Steel was host and guests were greeted with champagne and smooth jazz from the Jazztones. Show stoppers 4 for 1 created a rush to the dance floor belting out popular dance tunes with magnificent harmonic voices, leaving Lightforce disco a revved-up crowd. Auctioneer/comedian Mick Miller had guests roaring with laughter and helped raise a whopping £7050.

MARK EDDY

MARK looked very smart in a Marks & Spencer suit. He is the manager of The Black Bull in Yarm and although he doesn't get much time to shop he usually finds affordable quality and style in Reiss, French Connection and Jasper Conran at Debenhams. Mark recommends using a UV skin protector every day, his favourite being Clinique for men. The CD he is listening to at the moment is by the Razorlights



SAUL KENNEDY & ANDREW TURNER



MARK EDDY

but he also enjoys Robbie Williams and older dance music.

CHARLOTTE EDDY

MARK'S 26-year-old wife looked stunning in a peacock blue dress by Emma Somerset in Harrogate. The dress flowed with individual petal-like details in shimmering chiffon. When not indulging in ballgowns Charlotte likes browsing through Primark for a bargain and apart from that, if she likes something she buys it regardless of the label. Charlotte is a low maintenance girl but when it comes to hair she recommends leaving it to the professionals

SAUL KENNEDY & ANDREW TURNER

SAUL Kennedy and Andrew Turner rebelled slightly over the black tie traditional suit but still looked very smart. Saul wore a Ben Sherman suit, a shirt by Guide in London and shoes by Front. He likes to shop in Leggs in Darlington as it has a good mix of contemporary clothes. Saul doesn't have time to keep fit - his three-year-old daughter does that for him - and he drinks plenty of water to keep him healthy. To keep an uplifting mood Saul listens to 80s and 90s soul.

Andrew, 34, is a senior engineer. He likes to be a bit different and finds Ebay a great way to find unusual items and bargains. Andrew's shirt was by Diesel and although not formal wear, it looked really fab as it had a ruffle detail down the front. His trousers were from Replay and he borrowed his shoes from his mate Saul as he is normally a more casual dresser. He recommends if you have ginger hair you should keep it short, cut it yourself and let your girlfriend finish it. Andrew likes a wide range of music but has recently become to appreciate the stuff his parents listened to like Dire Straits and Simon and Garfunkel.

JOANNE PYBUS

JOANNE, 25, is a retail manager/buyer for View and Van Mildert.

Her experience really showed in her choice of outfit. The colour complemented her skin tone and hair colour and the dress was very well accessorised. The dress and headband was from Van Mildert and designed by See by Chloe, the shoes from &Eve in Yarm, bag from View womenswear and jewellery from Accessorise. Joanne's favourite shops are View, Van Mildert, Top Shop and Primark. To look good Joanne recommends investing in a good fake tan, leave conditioner on your hair for as long as possible and accessorising well with outfits. Joanne's favourite music of the moment is Snoop Dogg, Nelly and R&B.



CHARLOTTE EDDY



JOANNE PYBUS



KELLY SWALES

KELLY SWALES

KELLY is 29-years-old and an area retail manager. She wore a beautiful dress from Elouni in Darlington's Grange Road. She has an amazing figure and although she never diets or goes to the gym, she likes Latin music and salsa dancing, which are great ways to keep fit.

● TV and radio presenter Judie McCourt and celebrity hair and make-up artist Allison McKay, run AM Creative Productions, which specialises in creative and social event management and PR
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Vehicle shown for illustration purposes only. Price includes VAT, delivery, number plates, first registration fee and 12 months' road fund licence. A £95 administration fee is included within the first monthly payment. Finance is subject to status from Smart of Stockton. All information correct at time of going to print subject to change without notice. Failure to repay could damage the customers credit record.

NE motoring



Cute and quirky, mean and moody

While rumours abound about the future of the innovative Smart range, parent company DaimlerChrysler has been reassuring IAN LAMMING that the brand is here to stay

Smart Forfour

FAST, fun and funky, I loved the Smart in all its guises from the minute it stepped on to the world stage. It dared to be different, was a hoot to drive and brought a collective smile to the faces of the population. It still does so today, the only sneers coming from corporate accountants because it doesn't make any money.

The reason for that is that Smarts are jolly expensive to produce but have to be sold at a relatively cheap price in order to persuade the masses they are a good idea. Ask anyone who has one and they will tell you they are. In fact, ask me? I've got a nice little ivory and black Fortwo as a company car and think it's adorable.

The future has been uncertain though because while they have sold 45,000 Smarts in this country, parents DaimlerChrysler haven't sold enough globally to keep the bean counters happy. But Smart executives remain optimistic and even made the journey North to reassure the media that the Smart has a future and a bright one at that. And I believe them because the head of Smart UK is a nice Geordie boy from Gateshead called Jeremy Simpson.

There is, however, some sad and bitterly ironic news to report: the delectable roadster/roadster-coupe is doomed and won't be sold or even made after this year. It is a particularly bitter pill as the UK is by far the best market and sales are up compared with a slump in the sports car segment.

To make it worse still, the last run of Roadsters is the best yet with uprated engines, clutches, gearboxes and specs. They tell me it will be a modern classic and I've no reason to doubt them. They are even producing 400 extra sporty Brabus versions after the factory has stopped production. But the powers that be in Europe have decided that Smart's future lies with the 8ft long Fortwo and more conventional, by Smart's standards, Forfour.

I spotted a Fortwo the other week with a sticker on the back that said "Made by Mercedes" and it's true. To emphasise the point, Mercedes and Smart in future will share brand pylons outside their dealers.

Fortwo reigns supreme in our traffic-choked towns and cities, though our little number has

happily trundled 23,000 miles all over the country on all manner of roads. It now also boasts the cheapest insurance rating you can get, 1E, and is becoming hot property on the second hand market where it is being snapped up by the kids.

Forfour has new models at either end of the spectrum; a cheapo version that drops some of the electronic wizardry and power but gains an extra seatbelt (so should it now be called Forfive?) and a fire-breathing Brabus.

Brabus has a nice little tuning factory in Germany that spends its days giving the various Smarts rather fetching sticky-on sporty bits and a bit more kick in the tail. The UK loves the final product and for the third year running is the biggest customer.

Forfour enters the factory all cute and quirky but comes out the other end all mean and moody with bigger alloys, side skirts, lowered suspension, deeper airdam and a rear spoiler.

It also gets bigger brakes, sportier suspension and the best steering wheel I have had the privilege to grasp. It is pure Formula One car, oddly shaped and massively chunky. It's fabulous.

Add in sports seats and a 1.5 turbo charged four cylinder engine provided by the Mitsubishi Colt CZT and the recipe is perfect for a lot of fun. Brabus engineers have given a poky engine even more poke (up from 150 to 177bhp) making the Forfour a spirited drive.

Ride, handling and road holding are more than a match for the power hike and the Brabus is fantastic fun to drive while remaining practical, spacious and thoroughly modern. It's a great addition to the range and goes some way towards sweetening the demise of the classic roadster.

Whether any of this will make a difference only the buying public can say, but the brand has an 85 per cent customer satisfaction rate so it must be well on the way to success.



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



New face with plenty of character



This is the car that caught the public's attention because of its natty seats. The new Zafira has a lot more than that going for it

Vauxhall Zafira 1.9CDTi

'F'AMILY all right?" asks the little 'dad' in the Vauxhall television advert. "Aye," replies his equally diminutive father figure friend in the driveway. And they certainly will be when they take a look at what Vauxhall has done to the popular Zafira.

The medium-sized people carrier has had a thorough going over courtesy of the technical and styling bods at GM. The result is a car that looks liked a pumped-up Astra and is none the worse for its transformation.

All told, the corporate Vauxhall look is pretty good. The new faces boast plenty of character and the 3D effect lights give the aesthetics depth and appeal. The buying public probably isn't aware of it but old anoraks like me can see the reason behind it - maximum sales.

Nothing wrong with that, of course; sales mean profits, profits lead to development and we all get better cars. And that's what has happened with Zafira; it's got a whole lot better.

The original caught the public's attention because of the natty seats. Vauxhall calls them Flex7 because they are extremely flexible and there are seven of them - original eh?

It has to be said they are rather good, though. One minute Zafira can be a van with a flat-load bay free from clutter, the next the perches are pulled from within the floor and it becomes a people carrier capable of transporting seven in decent comfort. In between all this there is a bewildering number of combinations as the seats fold, tilt and slide. Flexible indeed.

Zafira also manages to be hugely practical

without having to compromise other areas. It's easy enough to produce a minibus but a minibus isn't necessarily great to drive or look at. The Zafira can perform like a van or a bus but looks like a big car with the driving dynamics to match.

On the road it is truly excellent to drive. The test car's 120bhp diesel is refined, powerful and frugal in equal measure. It has a nice feel to it and the mid range is vast, making it excellent in overtakes as you jaunt cross-country.

On the straight stuff it cruises quietly and will easily return more than 40 miles per gallon. The ride is superb, as are handling and levels of grip. It's a vehicle that is as happy on the twisty roads as it is on the straights.

In town it does feel large and the turning circle definitely could be better. Two o'clock vision is also limited thanks to a thick front pillar, so care needs to be taken when pulling out from roundabouts.

The gearbox has a delightful action being both light and positive and the clutch is light too. Brakes are fine and the Zafira couldn't be easier to drive - it's almost child's play.

Inside, the cabin gets the corporate treatment too and apes the Astra and Vectra. The sense of quality is astounding for the class of car and the plastics feature a nice grain and are spongy to touch but with the overall feeling of solidity.

Being Vauxhall there are dozens of models to choose from with petrol, diesel and trim levels that abound. There's even a hot hatch VXR version packing a 240PS turbo-charged wallop.

The new Zafira has everything going for it and little to stand in its way. It's not only a car little dads can be proud of but all the grown-up motorists too.



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Official Government Fuel Consumption Figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ Emissions (g/km): Zafira SRI 2.2i 16v 5dr: urban 23.9(11.8), extra-urban 42.8(6.6), combined 33.2(8.5), CO₂ 204. 5 star EuroNCAP rating relates to adult occupation protection (vaux27469)

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Vauxhall Choices (credit finance) example Corsa SXi 1.2i 16v 3dr

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Term	39 months	Vauxhall contribution*	£1094
36 monthly payments of	£185	On-the-road price	£10280
1 monthly payment	£275	Total amount payable	£11048
1 monthly payment	£274	Amount of credit	£9186
Final payment to buy ^	£2745	Charges for credit	£767.83

3.99% Typical APR



These two great sporty SXi models now come with stunning summer offers. For the Corsa SXi there's free Sat Nav (Tom Tom GO 300 Portable Navigator), free insurance and now Vauxhall will even pay your deposit. With £99 insurance and £99 deposit for the gorgeous New Astra Sport Hatch SXi. Both models are available with Vauxhall Choices finance at only 3.99% APR so you can now enjoy a sporty drive for less.



New Astra Sport Hatch SXi

- £99 deposit
- £99 insurance***

Vauxhall Choices (credit finance) example New Astra Sport Hatch SXi 1.4i 16v 3dr

Your deposit payment	£99	Deposit	£1317
Term	39 months	Vauxhall contribution#	£1218
36 monthly payments of	£239	On-the-road price	£14175
1 monthly payment	£329	Total amount payable	£15303
1 monthly payment	£328	Amount of credit	£12858
Final payment to buy ^	£4725	Charges for credit	£1128

3.99% Typical APR

3.99% Typical APR

Official Government Fuel Consumption Figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ Emissions (g/km): Corsa SXi 1.2i 16v 3dr: urban 36.2(7.8), extra-urban 61.4(4.6), combined 48.7(5.8), CO₂ 139. New Astra Sport Hatch SXi 1.4i 16v 3dr: urban 34.4(8.2), extra-urban 54.3(5.2), combined 44.8(6.3), CO₂ 151

Prices shown are on-the-road and include any customer savings. Savings shown based on RRP. Models shown have metallic paint available as an option for £335. *Includes £344 from participating retailers. #Includes £318 from participating retailers. ^ Final payment to buy subject to contracted maximum mileage. Conditions apply. Written quotations available on request from GMAC, 19 Chapel Street, Luton LU1 2SE. Finance applicants must be 18 or over. Finance subject to status, a guarantee and/or indemnity may be required. **1 year's free insurance available to drivers aged 19-80 (19-20 when purchased on Vauxhall Choices credit finance only and excludes N.Ireland). Excess applies of between £250 and £500 dependent on age and residence. ***£99 insurance available to drivers aged 25-80. Excess applies of between £250 and £300 dependent on age and residence. Insurance subject to eligibility, status, terms and conditions. Offers are available for orders placed between 05.07.05 and 30.09.05, subject to availability, and are available to private individuals and small businesses 1-24 (purchase only). All other sales categories are excluded. Offers may not apply to all retailer stocks. UK-supplied vehicles only.

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gadget man



Sony NAS-CZ1: coolest looking CD player in ages

Pick of the hottest kit around this summer

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

Summer is traditionally a quiet time for gadgets, but this year the shops are full of tempting kit

SONY DVD RECORDER

CONGRATULATIONS to Sony for being the first to market with a standalone DVD recorder capable of writing to dual layer discs. What does this mean? Even better picture quality or - if you are prepared to accept lower resolution pictures - a whopping 16 hours on each disc.

Other manufacturers will undoubtedly follow suit (Philips announced a similar machine in January but doubt now surrounds its introduction) but, for now, the best DVD recorder is made by Sony. An 80GB hard disk version costs around £400.

PIONEER DCS-333

SETTING up a home cinema system can be a nightmare. The new Pioneer "all in one" borrows a nifty feature from high end amps and it makes getting the speakers balanced an absolute breeze. The Optimal Surround Setup system uses a tiny microphone to measure a handclap in the room where it is to be set up. It compares the sound and calculates the room acoustics - setting everything up automatically and giving the best cinema surround experience. What's more, the DCS-333 costs less than £300.

LOBSTER MOBILES

TRUST the trendies at Virgin to call their phones Lobsters, leading to all the "Is that a Lobster in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me..." jokes. Still these new mobiles do look mighty funky - even if I'll never trade one for my Orange Sony 910i PDA smartphone. Sorry.

NAVMAN M300

GETTING lost is no laughing matter. That's why satellite navigation equipment is so popular these days. The M300 costs a touch under £120 yet comes fully equipped to guide you to your

destination. The M300 is even water resistant so it's perfect for extreme sports types who hit the surf regularly.

SONY NAS-CZ1

IT may have an unwieldy name but this super Sony is the coolest looking CD player in ages. It can even link up to a PC and play MP3 files through its high quality speakers.

BLUE DELTA SMART SCART

IT'S a real problem for people with older TVs - how do you plug all your fancy kit into the back. This handy little device from those boffins at Blue Delta changes one SCART socket into four. It also has a "loop through" facility so you can watch a DVD and record from Sky at the same time. It also accepts high quality RGB signals and is fully automatic. Simply plug your kit in and forget about swapping SCARTs ever again. Price: £35 from www.bluedelta.co.uk.

SKY+ 160

ALREADY the best way to watch telly, Sky has lumped an even bigger hard disk into the Sky+ box so you can store many more hours of recorded programming. You'll never have to watch a repeat again (unless you want to) although the £399 price is a bit steep (older Sky+ boxes cost just £149).

ONE TO BEWARE...

Massive demand has seen the price of DVD recorders fall to bargain basement prices. It's now perfectly possible to pick up a recorder for less than £100 but I'd urge caution before you do. This technology is very difficult to do right and you tend to get what you pay for. I've tried several "cheapies" and all of them had problems with lip-synch, frame drop-outs or system crashes. Better to stick with one of the big names - Panasonic, Toshiba and Sony - than take a chance.



Vintage clothes fan Nadia Clark with some of her finds

Pictures: ANDY LAMB



Vintage fashion is a great way to keep your wardrobe looking both stylish and individual. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS meets a businesswoman whose love for all things vintage has led to a new career

Something old

NADIA Clark is standing in the doorway waiting to greet me and is wearing a shirt which she could have plucked straight from the spring/summer 2005 catwalks.

It is a beautiful sheer top, featuring a bold, tropical print, which she has teamed with a pair of black knee-length shorts from Topshop and black suede 1940s heels from Portobello Market in London.

"Oh this," she laughs, tugging at the shirt. "This actually used to belong to my dad. He used to wear it all the time in the 60s. It's all hand-painted, you can't even get them like this these days."

It comes as no surprise that 26-year-old Nadia, of Sunderland, loves all things vintage. But what is surprising is that she initially followed her head instead of her heart, opting to study law at Northumbria University before working for solicitors Ward Hadaway in Newcastle.

"As much as I had a great time, my heart wasn't really in it," she admits. "I'd always loved fashion and when I was at Ward Hadaway, I would do a bit of personal shopping for people there and I loved it."

A career in fashion came when Nadia's dad, Peter, developed prostate cancer. Thankfully, he is now on the mend, but the experience imbued her with a "life's too short" attitude and she gave up her legal work for a job as a style advisor with Topshop.

"I knew pretty much straight away that fashion, and especially vintage clothing, was where I wanted to be," she says. "I've always liked to dress differently. My fashion nightmare is to go somewhere where someone else has the same outfit on as me. That's something you're never going to find with vintage clothing".

As well as her dad's 1960s shirt, Nadia also raided her mum's wardrobe for vintage finds and every time she went to London or abroad, she would bring back suitcases full of clothing from markets and vintage shops.

With her burgeoning collection, she launched her own mail order company, Joe Prince Vintage, in April, selling vintage wear from the decadent 1920s to the disco-themed 1970s and early 1980s. Her workshop, based at the Sunderland Enterprise Park, is packed with her finds, from a handmade 1970s tropical print dress (£120) and off-white sequined 1950s prom dress (£100), to a kitsch early 1980s lemon dress (£35) and a delicate 1920s peach silk and lace bed jacket (£45), which would look fantastic with jeans. One piece, a beautiful 1920s metal dress (£200), was actually found by her mum in a vintage store in the 1960s. For the men, she

has an array of trendy slogan t-shirts and jackets.

Many of her pieces have been handmade but there are a number of recognisable names on the rails including Biba, Christian Dior, Diane von Furstenberg and Halston, who used to design for Bianca Jagger and the Studio 54 crowd. She also has a fabulous collection of accessories, including big sunglasses, beaded handbags, belts and hats.

The successful way to wear vintage, says Nadia, is by adding an individual bag or belt to a look, or mixing high street and designer items with vintage skirts and tops. "You can get it wrong if you go head-to-toe vintage," she shudders. "You can look really horrendous."

And even though the pieces are up to 80 years old, they can still fit in with fashion today – like her dad's 1960s print shirt.

"I try to see what's on the catwalk and buy accordingly so people who are really into their fashion still feel in fashion," says Nadia.

Key looks for the future could come from film re-makes of old favourites such as the touted big screen remake of the glamorously kitsch American soap Dallas.

"We could all be wearing shoulder pads again soon," laughs Nadia, who sources a great deal of her collection in America.

Sourcing is a part of the job she loves most, hearing the stories behind the gems she picks up. One American society doyenne who threw fantastic cocktail parties in Texas had some fantastic pieces which Nadia snapped up from the 1950s and 1960s. "It's fantastic to hear about the people who owned them," she says.

Nadia sells clothing in a range of sizes, although she tends to stay away from trousers for women. "With women's shapes changing over the years, it's hard to get good fit in trousers now," she says.

She also offers a personal shopping and styling service where she can help in wardrobe overhauls – a bit like Trinny and Susannah, but much nicer – working with whatever budget they can afford. Her clients so far have ranged from an 18-year-old wanting a new wardrobe to a 40-year-old divorcee in desperate need of a new look. She also does gift shopping, for people who have the money, but not the time, to find special gifts.

It is a long way from her days as a solicitor, but Nadia has no regrets about making the leap.

"I love fashion and it's fantastic to be able to have a career in it," she says.

● Visit Joe Prince at www.joeprince.co.uk or contact Nadia on 0191-5166868



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Dubai rides high for hols in 2006

If you want to be ahead of fashion in the holiday game in 2006, get the brochures for Sri Lanka, Kenya and Tanzania (including Zanzibar) with new five star hotels on the way; and Namibia, with wilderness camps and lodges offering exclusive accommodation in truly remote settings. That's the advice of market leader Kuoni, in its latest survey of what's "hot" in long haul.

Closer to home, says Kuoni, Morocco's private riads and stylish hotels are all the rage with affluent jet-setters.

In 2005, says Kuoni, the big star is Dubai – thanks to high-quality hotels coupled with flights from airlines including Emirates, British Airways and now Etihad, via Abu Dhabi. Emirates, the Dubai-based airline, recently confirmed plans to build a new £115m, five star luxury hotel in Dubai, set to open in 2008.

Second place in Kuoni's long-haul favourites league goes to Thailand, and third to the Maldives – both showing rapid and admirable bounce-

backs from the horrors of the Boxing Day tsunami.

There are also big rises for Oman, up to number eight, Bali (up from 19 to ninth) – and even the Caribbean, where Barbados in particular has made huge strides in regaining premium business.

Mauritius takes the number one slot as the favourite place for weddings – followed by Sri Lanka, Antigua, Australia, Tobago and St Lucia.

For honeymoons, Thailand takes pole position – followed by the Maldives, Dubai, Mauritius, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The survey has been compiled for the launch of Kuoni's World Class 2006 brochure, which includes free flights with British Airways from eight local airports – Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Isle of Man, Jersey, Manchester and Newcastle – to connect with international flights from London.

Call (01306) 747 001 or visit www.kuoni.co.uk/worldclass

Don't be left empty-handed when disaster strikes

Now is the time to make sure your home and its contents are protected while you're away on holiday. SARAH FRENCH reports on where to begin to get your house insurance in order

A HOME and everything inside it are the most valuable items most people will ever own, so insuring them is a must whether you're an owner or a tenant.

While the winter throws up its fair share of crises, from burst pipes to roofs blown off in the gales, the summer presents a new set of potential problems, from burglary to DIY disasters.

With the array of home policies on offer these days and confusion over the value of homes, how can you be sure your property and its contents are covered adequately if the worst happens?

The buildings part of your home insurance – known as 'building sums insured' – is the easier part to work out.

Veronica Ryan, retail operations manager at BiB insurance brokers in Darlington, says: "The main thing to remember is that when you're asked to estimate the rebuilding costs of your home this does not mean its value in terms of what you paid for it or how much you think it's worth. It literally means how much it would cost to rebuild it."

The best answer is to ask a builder or surveyor to estimate this for you.

If you have a mortgage with a building society they will advise you on how much to insure your property for because they have a vested interest in it.

Veronica says the name of your lender should also be listed on your insurance schedule. "If you change your insurance company or your lender you should also provide your mortgage provider with a copy of your insurance schedule," she adds.

Some building societies will tie you into their home insurance policy for a year and some may charge a fee if you move to another insurance provider. Brokers have access to a full range of policies and providers who will often pay the fee for you to get your business.

Standard buildings insurance covers all the main perils including fire, flood, storms, earthquake, lightning strikes and explosion as well as damage caused by vandals, subsidence, falling trees and aerials. Various add-ons are available such as accidental damage cover, which would cover your property if you were in the loft and dropped something through the ceiling or you cracked the bath.

There are various ways to qualify for premium discounts including having a home alarm system, high grade locks, being in a Neighbourhood Watch area and being a non-smoker.

If you decide you want to work from home or if you're planning a long holiday, you must inform your insurer as it's likely you won't be covered under your normal policy.

When it comes to contents insurance, we all have to become amateur valuers to work out what everything costs.

First you need to separate off items which will be covered by your buildings insurance – in simple terms anything you can take away constitutes contents, so a fitted kitchen or non-free standing bathroom fittings fall under buildings insurance.

Estimating the replacement cost of the contents of your home is the tricky part. Unless you've kept every single receipt it's unlikely you'll get it right, and even then you need to consider the current prices of replacing everything with new, not what your old stuff cost you.

Brokers can't tell you what the value is, but some insurers offer a "bedroom rated policy" based on the number of bedrooms in your property. This usually amounts to cover worth £35,000-£50,000 based on a typical family home.

"It may be sufficient to cover everything you have but it's still worth doing the exercise of totalling up everything and working out its value

based on new for old," says Veronica.

If you're lucky enough to have silver collections, expensive antiques and original artworks it might be worth considering a "high net worth policy".

But if your most precious items extend to a few pieces of valuable jewellery and one or two paintings, you can still take out a normal home contents policy as long as you list the expensive items separately.

"As a rule of thumb anything worth over £1,500 should be noted," advises Veronica. "As long as the sums insured is adequate for your contents and any extra special items, you don't need to insure the valuable pieces on separate policies. However, you do need to specify them to your insurer."

She also recommends keeping all receipts and serial numbers for electronic and electrical items and taking photographs of items in situ as proof of ownership.

A popular extension to a typical contents policy is known as "all risks" or "personal possessions" cover. This will cover personal belongings, clothes and valuables you take out of the house, for example on holiday, or are taken by students to university.

Veronica says: "If you have this extension to your contents policy you may qualify for up to 15 per cent off your travel insurance so it's worth telling your provider. That's where a broker can help because we will cross reference all your policies and tell you where you can save money."

If you lose your camera abroad, however, it's not possible to claim twice on your personal possessions and travel policies since each claim form will ask you to declare any other cover you have in place. Losses rarely covered by contents policies include damage caused by pets, bikes left unsecured outside and damaged computer games.

Finally, Veronica advises against having your buildings insurance with one provider and contents with another.

"A lot of claims cover both," she says. "For example, if your home is flooded you'd be making two claims if you had two policies – one for the building and the other for carpets, furniture and other contents. For a start you'll have to pay two excesses and two separate insurers might argue over who is responsible for what."

● BiB (01325) 353888.

Website bargains for latecomers

HUNDREDS of thousands of packages are still unsold for summer 2005, says the website Latedeals.com – and 53 per cent of families who haven't booked yet will find a last minute deal on the Internet.

Latedeals.com packages range from basic self-catering to luxury suites in five star hotel – with a search facility which enables you to prioritise your search according to price, airport, departure date, tour operator, destination, accommodation board basis and grade. See how the site works by clicking the "demo option" on the home page of the website at www.latedeals.com.

Another self-catering specialist, HolidayRentals.com, has a new last minute section – divided into next week departures and two, three and four weeks ahead. Its three price categories are below £500, below £1,000 and below £1,500. The site includes 12,000 properties, ranging from a central Parisian apartment to luxury villas in the Canaries.

SAMPLE MENU

STARTER

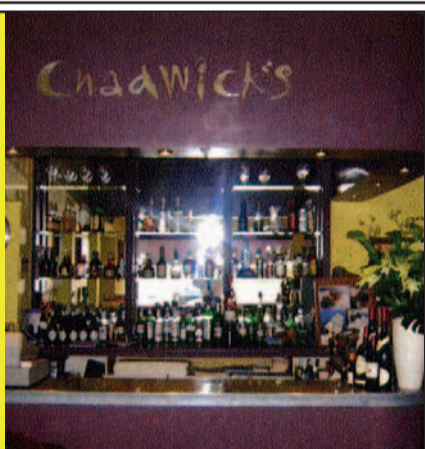
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Stunning scenery. Right: the cable up to the Table



Cape crusaders

IAN LAMMING heads south to Cape Town for some sunshine, and finds echoes of home everywhere he goes

FIVE movies, four meals and three naps after leaving the North-East and you arrive at the southernmost tip of a different continent. Go any further south and you may not fall off the edge of the world but you won't hit land again for 4,000 miles and even then it will be the polar ice cap.

Yet walk through the door of your luxury suite at the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town and, strangely, you don't feel far from home, despite being 6,300 miles away.

Switch on the TV and, lo and behold, Middlesbrough are playing Newcastle. Flip channels and there's Darlington MP Alan Milburn; again and there's a documentary about Darlington's infamous cannibal killer.

It's a small world.

Even the headquarters for the Orient Express group that owns the Mount Nelson is back in London and the hotel has played host to a fair few Brits in its time, including Winston Churchill and Lord Kitchener.

That said, the "Nelly", as it is affectionately known in Cape Town, had become a bit decrepit until Orient Express got its hands on it. The clientele were equally aged.

Orient Express had its work cut out changing all that and has done a rather splendid job, somehow retaining all the charm, character and pink paintwork while blending it with the modern and the trendy. It now attracts the likes of Donald Sutherland, Oprah Winfrey, Samuel L Jackson, Tiger Woods and Jean-Paul Gaultier.

This bastion of colonial days now has what is reputed to be the best afternoon tea table in the world with a happening champagne cocktail bar that is a magnet for the world's beautiful young things, especially on a Friday night. I include myself in that of course, and despite being teetotal, I did become addicted to the chocolate strawberry shortcake cocktail.

The stomach gets off to a fine start with breakfast on the terrace in the morning sun and against a backdrop of Table Mountain. Walking through the pristine gardens offers the first glimpse of what Cape Town has in store. The mountain backdrop to the hotel is simply stunning; all sense of scale is lost on the monolith. It dominates the skyline no matter where you are, even 11km out in the bay from Robben Island, Nelson Mandela's infamous prison home and now just a day trip away.

Now a museum and nature reserve, the island is truly atmospheric and while the seals after

which it is named don't exist, there is a colony of African penguins and you should spot some springbok.

Back to shore and Table Mountain begs you to conquer its heights, well at least from the safety of the cable car which carries you to 4,000ft above sea level.

Once on top you can wander forever, taking in the glorious views of Clifton's beaches down below, while the geckos and dassies (small furry creatures whose closest relative, strangely, is the elephant) play happily beneath your feet. The sky is clear and blue in typical Cape Town fashion but a cloud does loom overhead in the form of safety warnings. According to the locals, rapists, vagabonds and thieves lie in wait and it's always recommended that journeys are made by car, however short. Take plenty of cash to pay for taxis.

Even the city centre is threatening and not worth the worry but the tourist haunts such as the Clocktower, Victoria and Alfred Waterfront and Stellenbosch Botanical Gardens are safe and not to be missed.

Venture further still to Cape Point nature reserve, either on an organised tour or by hiring a car, and you won't be disappointed. The scenery is breathtaking; white sand beaches, sheer cliffs, azure sea combine with wildlife such as ostrich, bontebok, eland, baboon, springbok, snakes and, if you're lucky, zebra, to make for an unforgettable trip.

Travel up the east side of the Cape to Boulders Beach at Simonstown and you can add more delightful but vocal African penguin to your mini safari.

Grab lunch en route, choosing some superb local seafood which tastes as good as it sounds - kingclip, musselcracker - it's no wonder the great white shark chooses the cool waters of the Cape of Good Hope to make its home.

A decent night's sleep sees the happy traveller back in Europe - KLM flies direct to Cape Town from Schipol, Amsterdam, just a short hop from Durham Tees Valley airport. And because there's very little time difference, you land curiously free of jetlag, despite the 12-hour haul back home.

For more information on the Mount Nelson visit www.mountnelsonhotel.orient-express.com, e-mail reservations@mountnelson.co.za or telephone +27 (0)21 483 1000

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If you are experiencing a difficult period, ask yourself what you are learning from the experience? Difficult as this may be, it is through adversity that we learn courage, strength and compassion for others. Often it's not until we have experienced difficult times ourselves that we appreciate what someone else is going through.

Trusting that there is a reason for all things in life takes faith in the process of life itself.

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is."

- Albert Einstein

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competition

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THERE'S nothing better than sitting down to a beautifully laid dinner table. According to celebrity designer, Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, pictured below, one of the most important items on the table is cutlery. "I love designing cutlery," he says. "Historically, the fork has been one of the most civilising influences in Europe, and as such, has an incredibly rich tradition of indulgent design. I find it bizarre that these days the British still stick to patterns inspired by our grandparents. Let's keep the British tradition of cutlery design alive and innovative."

Arthur Price has been helping lay the nation's tables since 1902 with its beautiful collection of cutlery and tableware. The cutlery manufacturer now has a store in Debenhams in the

MetroCentre where you can explore the very latest designs. To celebrate, we've teamed up with them to offer one lucky reader the chance to win a set of Arthur Price Orb cutlery, designed and signed by Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen. Whatever your budget or lifestyle, Arthur Price has a bespoke collection of seven cutlery ranges offering over 60 individual designs for you to choose from as well as a wealth of table top accessories and gift ideas including stylish photo frames endorsed by Lord Lichfield and the smart Present Day gift collection – a range of modern and stylish gift ideas for him or her starting from just £5.

To be in with a chance of winning a set of Arthur Price Orb cutlery signed by Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, simply answer

the following question:
Which leading brand of cutlery manufacturer have we teamed up with to offer you this prize?



To enter, send your name, address and answer on a postcard to Arthur Price/Northern Echo Competition, c/o Weber Shandwick, 2 Jordan Street, Manchester, M15 4PY.

Terms and conditions: The closing date is August 19, 2005. One entry per household please. The judge's decision is final and no cash alternative is available.



Llewelyn-Bowen: loves designing cutlery

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