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for the North-East

OCTOBER 2004

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sharon griffiths

“But a fire... it's warmth, light, a focal point. Best of all it makes a room alive

THE day we moved into our last house, my husband did a very clever thing. It was, of course, a dreadful day – wind blowing, rain pouring down. The move was, of course, later than it should have been. Their removal men had been delayed, so husband had to take ours to the pub and while away a few hours.

Meanwhile, I was doing the last Hoover round of our old house. I was at the queasy stage of early pregnancy. Senior Son was a toddler, normally very sunny natured but, understandably, a bit baffled and tearful as his home was dismantled around him.

Told by my husband that we might as well stay where we were for now, we sat on the stairs – no furniture, of course – and watched the rain... believe me, there is a limit to how many times you can sing *The Wheels On the Bus* and pretend to be cheerful in an empty echoing house.

Eventually, we got the call to say that the other removers had finished and ours had finally started to unload. Off we went – Senior Son in his car seat surrounded by the Hoover, brush, dusters, masses of plants and a bucket. He sucked his thumb anxiously and clung firmly to his teddy.

Instead of the 9am move we'd planned, it was 6pm and getting dark. The driveway to our new house was littered with our possessions – and don't they look somehow sad when they've just been unloaded? My heart sank.

The tiny front hall and kitchen were piled high with tea chests, bin bags, cardboard boxes. There didn't seem to be much organisation and husband didn't seem to have even started on the unpacking.

I was ratty and miserable. The thought of all there was to do made my heart sink. I spotted the big bin bag with all our bedding in it, still in the corner of the kitchen. It hadn't even got upstairs. I made a grab for it and thought I'd better get started. If I could just prise Senior Son's anxious arms from round my knee.

“I'll take that upstairs in a minute, just come here,” said husband, bossily.

“This way,” he said and led me, cold, wet, queasy and miserable into our new sitting room – which the former owners had, inexplicably, decorated entirely in a

particularly depressing shade of dark brown. But it didn't matter. Because there in the hearth a real fire crackled. The wonderfully comforting glow of the flames warmed the room and flickered across the walls. It was wonderfully cheering.

A fire is more than warmth, it's magic. How often do you walk into someone's house or a pub and say: “Oh lovely, central heating”? But a fire... now that's different. It's warmth, light, a focal point. Best of all it makes a room alive and welcoming. Somehow it's a living thing, almost company.

We built a chimney and fireplace in our present house because a fire is one of the simplest luxuries – and also, given our fierce winter storms, often practical. When the gales blow and the power lines go down, how smug we people with real fires are, as we cook our bacon and eggs in the sitting room and then eat them in the warmth and glow of the fire. Bliss.

But 20 years ago when we moved into that last house, it was the first time in my grown-up life that I had had my very own fireplace. And on that cold and rainy removal day, instead of doing the boring unpacking, husband had gone straight to the heart of the matter, cleared the grate and lit the fire. It was a master stroke. By the time I got there it was blazing merrily away.

The only furniture in the room was our sofa, set up in splendid isolation in front of the fire.

We found the kettle in one of the boxes in the kitchen, and the chocolate biscuits we'd got for the removal men. And the three of us – and the small queasy bump – sat in a row on the sofa, sipping tea, eating biscuits and warming our toes luxuriously on our own real fire in our own real fireplace in our own real house.

From the toes up I could feel peace and relaxation creeping over me. Nothing mattered any more. The removal men clattered away in the rest of the house. It wouldn't take me long to make up the beds. The rest of the unpacking could wait. Gallons of white paint would soon cover the brown.

That blazing fire was the perfect welcome. We were home.

SEXY SOCKETS

GATESHEAD businessman Geoff Mitchell was designing luxury kitchens for a large national company when he noticed the lack of choice available to customers when it came to a small, but vital component of the overall design – sockets.

Standard electrical sockets are functional, but after the cost, in time and money, of creating a dream kitchen, there's very little choice. It's usually comes down to white plastic or ... white plastic,” he says.

So Geoff, who has a background in the electrical business, formed sexysockets.co.uk to give homemakers the same degree of choice already being afforded to professional interior designers and architects working on prestigious new building developments.

Sexy Socket's ranges, available over the Internet, include such diverse materials as wood, stone,



gold, pewter and antique brass. Fittings can match features such as laminate and natural wood flooring, panelling, stonework or indeed, any style of interior design that you can create from traditional to ultra modern.

The whole catalogue is available online at www.sexysockets.co.uk

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Burning passions



In the colder months, there's nothing quite like an open fire. Not only does it keep you warm, but it also adds atmosphere to a room. We look at the options

MORE and more people are opening up their fireplaces to enjoy the warmth and comfort of an open fire. There are hundreds of different styles to choose from if you want a living flame and cosy glow that only a real fire can provide.

An open fire provides heat for your home by direct radiation, although some fires are available with a convection chamber to circulate warm air around the room.

And far from being the smutty, smoky pyres of old, the modern open fire, properly fitted and sealed, is cleaner, brighter and more fuel efficient than ever before.

Open fires with a compatible back boiler can considerably increase the efficiency of your home heating system, provide hot water and heat for up to seven radiators. Controllable open fires are also capable of slow burning through the night for up to eight hours on one fuelling and easy slide-out ash pans allow the removal of ash without having to let the fire go out.

Free standing canopy open fires are also available for installation into large inglenook fireplace openings.

It's hard not to warm to the cosy glow and flickering flames that a real fire offers and solid fuel heating also has other advantages. There are low running costs – solid fuel is an efficient and economical method of heating your home 24 hours a day. It can also be a healthy option, greatly reducing condensation and eliminating the household mould often associated with 'on/off' fires. Medical research has also shown that solid fuel heating can reduce the risk of hay fever, asthma and eczema.

Homes with solid fuel heating are better ventilated than those with other forms of heating; the chimney ventilates the home, drawing in fresh air and removing the "polluted" air.

There's wide range of fuels available, from coal to smokeless, while modern pre-set controls keep your home at the desired temperature throughout the day, and whatever the weather, you don't need to worry about supply failures or power cuts.

OPEN FIRES

ALL open fires will burn house coal and some smokeless fuels. House coal is available in various sizes and an

Approved Coal Merchant will give you details about the qualities available. Coal or wood must not be burnt in Smoke Control Areas.

The larger-sized manufactured smokeless fuels are ideal for open fires, while open fires with fan assistance or under-floor draught may also burn smaller manufactured fuels and anthracite large nuts. The Solid Fuel Association Member fuel guide will help you to choose a suitable fuel for your open fire.

ROOMHEATERS, COOKERS AND BOILERS

CLOSED appliances (except gravity feed types) burn a wide variety of manufactured smokeless fuels and Anthracite large nuts. These are smaller than open fire fuels and give a denser fire-bed and a more efficient performance. Multi-fuel appliances can burn open fire smokeless fuels.

If you don't live in a Smoke Control Area you can also burn house coal or wood. Contact your local Environmental Health Department for more information about Smoke Control Areas.

SAFETY CHECKLIST

- **Proper ventilation.**
- **Regular cleaning and sweeping.**
- **Always use the right fuel.**
- **Never leave an open fire unattended without a fireguard.**
- **Always use a securely fitted fireguard when children are in the house.**

For more information, check out www.solidfuel.co.uk



A firebowl from CVO Firevault



Since primeval man struck a couple of rocks together and accidentally ignited his bedding, we have been fascinated by fire. Real fire fan IAN LAMMING explains why

Old flame: Ian Lamming at home with his fireplace

Picture: RICHARD DOUGHTY

NOW this is going to sound sinister, but I have always been mesmerised by fire. Ever since, as a young child, I used to light the companion set brush with the coal fire and play Olympic torches at my grandma's house in East Cleveland. "I can't understand it Harold," she would say to my equally bemused granddad. "The bristles on that brush just seem to get shorter and shorter."

And my older brother Stephen and I would play another game too – smoke the roll-up – except this had nothing to do with tobacco and Rizla papers. No, he would roll up his Dandy and I would prefer the mildness of a good Beano.

By the grace of God, both the house and our lungs survived such recklessness and very soon we were hurled into an era of naked flame-free modern gas fires; efficient but no fun at all.

Thirty years went by before the opportunity arose again to have an open fire complete with logs and flames – and companion sets – but while those halcyon days have returned, there isn't a Beano in sight.

Today, real fires are not just popular again, they are positively trendy, and at times like these there is only one thing to do: have one of the trendiest. For that my partner and I turned to avant-garde fire specialists CVO, who turn out some of the world's most bizarre and contemporary fires from workshops in North Yorkshire.

Chatting over our likes and dislikes, we actually helped design our own. What we ended up with was something clean and simple, modern and minimalist.

The centrepiece for the living room is an inglenook; basically a hole in the wall. This is lined with solid bronze and a black riven slate-look plinth and matching hearth. On this rests a shiny black pressurised concrete fire bowl and, sitting atop like a regal crown, a bronze grate.

From new, the whole thing looked glorious, shiny, stunningly new and far too nice to burn nasty sooty logs in. But fire has a strong pull on the curiosity and eventually a match was put to kindling which finally ignited said logs.

The effect was magnificent. The flames exploded into life, the chimney drew and the fire roared. I had expected a lot less, anticipating the fire to be nothing more than a shiny trinket to be admired and soon dismissed. But it was real, alive, the flames dancing on the shiny bronze, reflecting and radiating forth from the depths of the fire. And it was hot too, giving off an amazing amount of heat and forcing us to turn the central heating off.

As the logs burned, little piles of ash began to form, falling artistically from the air holes in the bottom of the fire bowl to form white pyramids on the hearth. And as the fire burned towards extinction, the bowl comforted with a rosy warm cosy glow.

Next morning, in the cold sooty grate, there were just memories; recollections of the flaming spectacle that had been our first fire in three decades; a slightly pained reminiscence of my brand new fireplace despoiled forever – or was it?

Yes, I've another admission to make. As a child I soon learned to be anally retentive, and obsessive tidiness has remained with me into adulthood. So the morning after the night before it was time to do my scullery maid bit and become probably the only man in the world to polish his fire.

The regime goes something like this. Take a spent copy of The Northern Echo – if ever there was an argument not to go tabloid this is it – spread it on the hearth and tip the ashy contents of the fire bowl into it. Sweep the plinth onto the pages and with a damp cloth remove any residue from bowl, hearth and inglenook.

Then the really sad bit; polish the bronze with Mr Sheen before using the Echo to make paper chips and laying the fire with fresh sticks and logs. The grate will never recover its beautiful lustre, not without an acid dip at least, but the rest of the fire looks pretty unused, unspoiled and ready to be shown off.

And the companion set? Well, I haven't trusted myself to invest in one yet because I just know the brush would end up becoming an Olympic torch. Some habits just continue to smoulder.

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No 23 Westbrook Villas: a link to Darlington's railway heyday

Victoriana rules



In a world of whitewashed walls, neutral colours and bare surfaces, it's a brave person who admits to being a fan of Victoriana. SARAH FRENCH meets the owner of a property in Darlington who is proud to pay homage to the era which made it the town it is today

BUILT on banking and the railways, Darlington's prosperous past has bestowed some fascinating historical and architectural gems on present and future generations.

The imposing Victorian public buildings that characterise the town centre are evidence of a thriving town 150 years ago.

Step away from High Row and you don't have to go far to find the grand homes on elegant streets where the top railwaymen and other leading figures lived. One of the finest but perhaps among the least well known of these is Westbrook.

Hidden from the view of traffic streaming up and down High Northgate, this leafy street of Victoria villas once marked the edge of town with only the locomotive works, railway line and fields beyond.

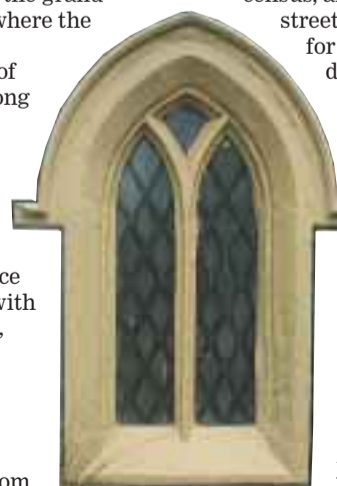
The properties were developed for Darlington's middle-class, wealthy professionals, many of whom

were connected with the Stockton and Darlington Railway. Set into the high wall at the back of the villas were coal drops where laden wagons would deliver their loads to each property.

Double fronted number 23 was the first villa to be built in Westbrook in 1861, on land that was previously pleasure gardens owned by Henry Pease. The house replaced the original Westbrook Cottage, which appears in the town's first census, and is the biggest in the street, its prime location chosen for its elevation and views down to Cocker Beck.

It lies almost at the end of the lane, virtually hidden from view by a giant beech tree whose decades of growth form a vast umbrella over the garden. Next to the tree is an original, wooden gazebo which rotates.

The property's owner also owns the last two properties in Westbrook, numbers 24 and 25, which she runs as a guest house. Although too big for her now, it's number 23 that's



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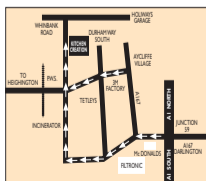
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The interior is decorated to match the period of the house; above right: the gazebo

her pride and joy. It's one of the prime residences in Darlington's railway heyday, and she has spent the past 16 years preserving and re-stocking the house to recreate a little piece of the 1860s in 2004.

A curator from Beamish Museum or the National Trust should take a walk up the grand stone steps and into the hallway, which is set with the original floor tiles along its length. To the left is the living room and to the right the parlour. From the blood red velvet curtains to the bottle green sofa, the dark wood sideboard and numerous pieces of glassware, the rooms pay homage to the Victorians.

Beyond an original corniced arch, a door provides a clue to the villa's past. Carved above the original engraved glazing are the initials R E with a larger R in between. The current owner believes they refer to Robert and Elizabeth Robinson, the couple for whom the house was built in 1861, although Betty Inns writing in Claire Bulman's book 'Darlington' interprets them as an E, A and R for E.A Robinson. Mr Robinson is believed to have been a chemist with a shop on High Row and would have been an important figure in the town.

Continued on page 8 ►

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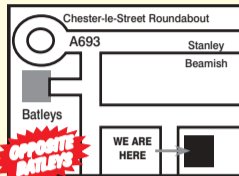


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NE interiors

Victoriana rules

► Continued from page 7

The Robinsons certainly had servants. As well as the main staircase, with its original stained glass window on the half landing, another smaller staircase leads up from what is now the kitchen to an anteroom to one of the upstairs bedrooms.

The original kitchen was below stairs, with a door leading out to the garden. Now used as a games room, it boasts the most original features including Gothic windows, a floor of black and red tiles, the original stove and a cold storage room.

Upstairs, three of the five bedrooms have authentic fireplaces while the bathroom still has its original wrought iron sink.

Number 23 was so neglected and the garden so overgrown that the current owner wasn't even aware of the stone steps leading to the front door.

It begs now to be a family home. With its numerous rooms, staircases and cellars, it's hide-and-seek heaven, while the private, quiet cul-de-sac makes it safe for children.

Westbrook as a whole is of such historical and architectural importance that it has been designated a Conservation Area. Those who live there are very proud of it. Shirley King developed a website about the street after learning how to use a computer at Darlington College of Technology. On the site, which receives thousands of hits from around the world, she notes Westbrook's association with a number of important and interesting characters.

William Bell, the architect behind the clock tower at Bank Top Station, designed numbers 5-7 Westbrook. A Miss Jackson ran her girls school from number 10, while her brother, the Reverend Christopher Jackson, had a similar establishment for boys at number 18, complete with a schoolroom in the back lane. They were two of a number of small, excellent schools in Darlington in the mid-1860s.

Hayden Foster, a hero of the First World War who was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry, wrote letters home from France and Belgium to his parents at number 9, while Number 12 must have been the envy of the street with its indoor toilet and bath enjoyed by its architect owner Thomas Hodgson.

Number 11 was home to William Hobson, head of passenger services for the Stockton and Darlington Railway, who worked directly under George Stephenson. William's son, Victor William Garribaldi Hobson, was the most celebrated artist in a group that developed in Westbrook thanks to Samuel



Original features: lovely coloured tiles in the hallway and a period fireplace

Elton, the first head of Darlington's first School of Art at the Mechanics Institute, who lived at number 21. Their work is displayed at Darlington Arts Centre, Manchester City Art Gallery and Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle.

Transport brought the wealth on which Westbrook was built in the 1860s just as distribution and communications are today providing jobs in Darlington.

Work is continuing at West Park to build modern homes for the people who will be employed by firms like Argos Direct. But for a home with a link to Darlington's past that is packed with character and original features, there are few that can beat number 23.

WHY LAURENCE LOVES... CARPETS

If your rooms need changing, Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen has designed a new carpet collection for Brintons. There are ten Axminster broadloom designs in the range, with five co-ordinating runners. Says Laurence: "Carpet is a civilising influence on a room; it softens acoustics, brings patterned detail to the floor and seduces the soles of the feet with voluptuous little tickles. For years we've been too hard on our floors; now is the time to indulge them, to let them show you just how sexy they can be."

The new range features subtle geometric patterns, elegant swirls and curlicues, and dense embroidered patterning in light neutral palettes. It costs of £55 per square metre and £37.50 per linear metre for runners and is an extra heavy domestic use, woven Axminster. www.brintons.net





Peridot: simply packed with beautiful things for the home

Treasures for the home, sweet home

Tucked away on Sedgefield's main street is a shop filled with treasures, from bespoke French-style furniture to opulent chandeliers and silk cushions. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS looks around Peridot

IT IS hard to keep focused in Carmel Streich's eye-catching premises. Her interiors shop Peridot is packed with a cornucopia of goods, from luxurious mauve bedspreads and matching cushions to embroidered silk handbags, notebooks and little purses all displayed on French-style furniture made by a local craftsman.

Even after several turns around the shop in Front Street, Sedgefield, in County Durham, there is always more to find. Pretty Chinese silk boxes sit alongside colourful bejewelled tealight holders. Venetian glass photo frames are nestled between opulent candle sticks, feminine perfume bottles and striking silver jewellery.

Carmel admits she indulged her feminine side when she opened her business in August 2001. And she is always re-arranging the shop's colourful interior to make room for the new stock which she regularly sources from across the world.

"I've always loved colour and pretty things and I think it's great that colour is making a come-back rather than everything being about white," she says passionately.

"I love that you can come in here and order a £1,000 piece of bespoke furniture made by a local craftsman, or pick up something exquisite like a beautiful embroidered purse for gift. A lot of people come in and say they have to go around a few times in case they miss something."

The bespoke furniture on display fits in nicely with the trend for French chic. Examples around the shop include a cream blanket box embossed with cherubic imagery to

elegant cream crackle-glazed mirrors. Carmel says they take orders for anything from bookshelves and side tables to chaise longues and sweet little love seats.

"The bespoke side is good because we can make things for people who come in looking for furniture to be made for a particular alcove, or from a picture they have seen in a magazine," she says.

The shop, which was named after the birthstone for August, also offers a traditional and contemporary picture framing service with thousands of prints to choose from.

"It's important to me to offer something a little bit different," says Carmel, who has studied interior design and loves to fill her shop with one-off pieces.

"We get to know our customers very well and often when we're sourcing we'll pick up something and think of a particular customer. Often they'll come in with their colour swatches and I love helping them find what they want."

She also looks forward to dressing the interior for Christmas, an effort which takes almost 48 hours. "It looks wonderful with all these lovely colours," she enthuses, giving me a sneak preview of the sumptuous gold and red baubles and trinkets which will form part of the display.

"When I've finished it will look like there's a feast about to take place."

● Peridot has its Christmas launch on October 11 at 9.30am and the shop will stay open until 8pm. Normal opening times are from 9.30am to 5pm, closed on Sundays. Throughout December the shop also opens from 11am to 4pm on Sundays.

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NE gardening



Stunning: the beer garden at The Three Tuns

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We can all go and visit the fairies at the bottom of the magical garden of a village pub, says Gardening Correspondent BRIGID PRESS

Location: The Three Tuns, Sadberge, near Darlington

Created by: Marie Kenny

Age of garden: one year

Time spent on it: any spare moment

Favourite tools: secateurs and hoe

Top three plants: clematis tangutica; fuchsia; collection of grasses

THE young girl was tugging at the sleeves of anyone who would take notice of her. "Come and look at the fairies in the garden," she was shouting, unable and unwilling to suppress the wonder and excitement from her voice.

"Fairies?" I asked the lady standing across the table from me.

"Oh yes, I have fairies in the bottom of the garden. It's a magical garden."

I was in a pub, The Three Tuns in Sadberge. The woman was the landlady, Marie, and I was still sober. Marie had spent the last year slowly transforming the outside area from an overgrown waste ground into her dream garden. She had always wanted to conjure up a twinkling, mystical atmosphere in the small patch behind the pub, and that is just what she has done. She motioned me to make my way through the back corridor and proceeded to lead me on a guided tour of her new venture.

It's obvious that Marie doesn't trust the

British weather as the first section, which was probably once the back yard, is completely under cover. Two large gazebos form a canopy over a selection of tables and benches.

The eyes are immediately taken up the walls and to the ceiling which is clothed in a series of sparkling white fairy lights, some flashing in sequence, some winking randomly. Cleverly placed mirrors and candelabra emphasise the glitzy ambience. It is impossible to walk down the yard in a straight line because your head is turning and twisting, trying to take in all the small dazzling details.

The planting in this sheltered zone is subtle, yet stunning at the same time. Purple cordalines merge with tall crimson lobelia cardinalis, honeysuckle clammers up the gentle, old brickwork, and large leathery-leaved hostas spring out of the top of polished milk churns. Mingled amongst the flora, you catch glimpses of the steely frames and glass inlays of yet more lanterns.

An archway smothered in a large rambling clematis tangutica with its feathery seed heads and lemon peel petals – Marie refers to this as the "hairy ball bush" – brings you out into the garden itself. The beds on either side are crammed full of healthy shrubs. Fuchsias drooping under the weight of their voluptuous velvety flowers rub shoulders



Light fantastic: Marie's magical pub garden delights visitors

with shiny leaved hebes, smothered in their purple bottle brush blooms. The peonies have flowered but their large dark green leaves maintain their presence. Ever cheery crocosmia Lucifer smoulders away in the corner and forms a perfect foil for the stiff bright green leaves of the Bowles golden grass just in front of it. Up above, a dark violet clematis scrambles over the wall from the garden next door, and plays with the dangling tassels of the glossy *Garrya elliptica*.

Tall spikes of the cream and green gardeners garter grass soften the delicate features of the two scantily clad Greek statues hidden in the foliage. Dogs have an instinct-led need to graze on this particular grass. It has a healing and purgative effect on their innards, but this clump remained untouched and intact. Rebel, the larger-than-life resident hound, must have no need for the grass's remedial needs.

Lighting is maintained throughout the borders by fuel-filled lamps suspended on bamboo spears, tiers of candles and yet

more lanterns, some with stained and coloured glass.

The whole effect is one of travelling down a fragrant, colourful corridor full of life and vitality. This illusion doesn't stop at the lawned seating and barbecue area. Wallflowers continue bombarding the nasal passages with soft perfume whilst the statues, vibrant hanging baskets and brightly-stained trellis fencing tease and taunt the rest of the senses.

A rampant clematis Montana and the tempting but inedible fruit of the crab apple suspended on the canopy preserve the verdant mood. It is here, in the very last corner of the garden that Marie is plucking up the courage to attempt one final act of magic. She wants to turn a two foot gap in the wall into a fairy grotto, which will include a small water feature.

Marie has certainly fulfilled her wish to turn her garden into something special and mystical.

And luckily for us, it is a public garden, which means that we can all share in her dream.

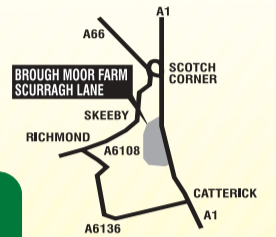


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Reader Offer

NE beauty

Hair and beauty salon owner Dean Jackson gets through more than £25,000 of designer clothes and beauty treatments a year. He tells CHRISTEN PEARS about his dedication to looking good



Stylish trio: Kristie, Dean and daughter Charlie Rose

Why I spend

£25,000

a year on

looking good

“YOU name it, I've had it done,” says Dean Jackson, reeling off a range of treatments including facials, massages, manicures, pedicures, botox and seaweed wraps. “I just had my botox re-done last week,” he says turning into the light so I can see the effect. It should sound like a ridiculous sentence coming from a man, but somehow, it doesn't.

With perfectly streaked hair, immaculate clothes and smooth, glowing skin, the owner of Saks in Durham is a walking advert for his business.

As a hair stylist, Dean has always been interested in his appearance but the turning point came when he took over the beauty salon upstairs three years ago. “I had to experience all the treatments so I could relate to the clients. I thoroughly enjoyed having them done and I kept having them done,” he says.

Earlier this year, Dean, who lives in Newton Aycliffe, appeared on an ITV documentary, Beautiful Boys, about well-groomed men. The show estimated he spent more than £25,000 a year on designer clothes, haircuts and beauty treatments, although he's quick to point out that, as a salon owner, he receives a lot of

treatments for free.

“It's quite amazing when you sit back and add up what all it costs, but it's definitely worth it.”

His motivation, he says, is to stave off the signs of old age for as long as possible. “Women have been doing it for years so why shouldn't men?”

At just 32, Dean doesn't have a lot to worry about but as a keen water skier, he spends a lot of time outdoors and was beginning to see the ageing effects of the sun and wind, particularly around the eyes. So he turned to botox.

“It's brilliant,” he says. “It really does work and it gives you so much more confidence.”

On a quiet afternoon, he often pops upstairs for a manicure or facial in the salon but treatments aren't restricted to work. Dean's partner, Kristie Taylor, is a beauty therapist at the salon. “It works really well because I can have a massage at home or some other kind of treatment if we're going out. I return the favour by blow drying her hair.”

Friends and family have got used to his obsession with grooming, although he sometimes finds himself the butt of friendly jokes; colleagues at the salon have





nicknamed him Jean. He was also voted the Vainest Man in Britain in a Sunday newspaper competition and has appeared on GMTV to talk about his obsession.

His male friends were taken aback when he first embarked on his grooming routine. He got used to being told he was vain or asked whether he was gay, but things have changed and even some of his most sceptical friends have facials and massages themselves.

Dean says: "I think it is becoming more acceptable for men to have treatments although there are still a lot of people who have quite a Neanderthal view about it. They automatically assume that you're gay but if they experience it themselves, they realise how relaxing and de-stressing it can be."

"Even if you walk into somewhere like Boots, there are a lot of male grooming products and Joe Bloggs walking in from the street can see that and maybe even try something."

One major factor in the attitude change, says Dean, is the influence of women. As beauty therapies become more accessible to them – it's de rigeur to have a manicure while having your hair cut at Saks – they encourage their partners to try them. During the last couple of years there has been an enormous increase in the number of women buying treatments or vouchers as gifts for boyfriends or partners.

Dean's dedication to looking good extends beyond the beauty salon. He loves designer clothes, particularly Prada, Ted Baker and Dolce & Gabbana. A regular customer at Van Mildert, the designer store on Durham's Elvet Bridge, he can't remember the last time he set foot in a high street store to buy clothes, but says he doesn't buy designer labels out of vanity; he likes the quality and cut.

"If I was given the choice between one T-shirt for £35 or three or four for the same amount, I would always choose the one. It's always going to be better quality. You may pay more but you'll get more wear out of it."

He seems to have found his perfect match in Kristie, whom he says has even more clothes than he does. The couple had their first child, Charlie Rose, in May. "We had so

much stuff between us, there's was nowhere to put the baby," he jokes.

And Jackson junior is following in mum and dad's footsteps. The couple have already been shopping for designer clothes. "We found these gorgeous Burberry babygros. They're to die for," enthuses Dean.

Although he accepts he will have to cut down on the amount he spends on himself, Dean is certain he will continue with his beauty treatments and trips to designer shops. He has, however, stocked up on towels to sling over his shoulders when he's holding his baby daughter. No sick on the Prada, please.

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"I think it is becoming much more acceptable for men to have treatments, though there are still a lot of people who have quite a Neanderthal view about it"



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me and my wardrobe

I don't really do scruffy and will even wear my Betty Jackson sheepskin out walking in the country



Matthew Williamson jumper and skirt; suede boots by Unisa

Pictures: MIKE GIBB

PAT COPELAND

PAT Copeland, 58, has run the designer shop JosephM in Darlington for seven years, together with her daughter Vickie, 30. She is always immaculately dressed – even when out walking in the country – and loves designers Matthew Williamson and Betty Jackson.

How would you describe your look?

I would describe it as cutting edge with a twist. I absolutely adore clothes and I always have to have the season's latest trends. I like bo-ho chic and I love colour, particularly red for energy. I don't really do black.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

One of my favourite items is my Betty Jackson sheepskin coat which oozes luxury and opulence. Her sheepskins are to die for. I don't really do scruffy and will even wear my Betty Jackson sheepskin out walking in the country.

What's your worst buy?

It's probably a black Gucci bag I bought at the Gucci store in London for £800 which I only used a couple of times. I think it was an impulse buy but it's just too plain for me.

What's the most you've ever spent on an item of clothing?
A Matthew Williamson dress which was £1,800. It's a heavy, beaded, full-length gown which I got for the balls and when I go on cruises. It was a 'must-have' thing.

What are your favourite shops?
I tend to shop here at JosephM and at places such as Harvey Nicols or Selfridges. But I do go into Top Shop, which is great for younger fashions, to pick up items like white vest t-shirts.

Which celebrity style do you admire and why?
It has to be Kate Moss. She has such a relaxed dress sense and yet is the epitome of style and good taste. She can do bo-ho chic yet she can do glamour.

● JosephM, 12 Grange Road, Darlington (01325) 489821 or www.josephm.com. The shop sells designer womenswear and boasts a recently expanded designer childrenswear department.

Above left: sheepskin gilet, beige polo neck and tweed trousers. All Betty Jackson

Above right: Matthew Williamson jacket and jeans, white vest from Topshop and red wedge sandals by Unisa

NE out on the town

Our image experts scour the social honeypots of the region in search of style and individuality



McCourt & McKay

AT long last we get invited to a Ball (not that we are hinting). This extremely glamorous event, The Top and Tails Ball, was organised by Leggs Fashion store. It was held at The Redworth Hall Hotel and all proceeds went to Breast Cancer Care and everyman, which funds research into male cancer.

Leggs is a trendy fashion shop in Skinnergate, Darlington, which sells quality designer labels for men and women, and we have to say we were totally spoilt for choice on the style front. After a wonderful three-course meal and hilarious sketch by comedy duo Chambers and Nettleton, everyone piled on to the dance floor as soon as live band Westway struck a chord. Which meant trying to keep anyone still for five minutes proved difficult...

DEBBIE SMITH & ANN COXON

DEBBIE, 40, is manageress at Leggs and organised the event after recently losing her mother to breast cancer. We have to say she did a great job.

Despite all the stresses, Debbie looked stunning in a dress from Leggs by Catwalk. Debbie has a petite figure and we asked her how she keeps so slim, she wasn't quite sure but felt it could have something to do with

eating a chocolate muffin for breakfast every morning!

Ann Coxon, 47 (honestly!) co-owns Leggs with her husband John. She is also the store's fashion buyer, which means she makes regular trips to London to choose what her customers will be wearing. Ann wore a classic dress by Hunter and Gatherers, which was made from a fine jersey mix. As we all know you can't get away with too many bulges in this material but Ann doesn't need to worry about that. Running up the three flights of stairs in the store at least three times a day ensures all those extra calories are burned up.

ZOE BIRKETT & MARK RHODES

FORMER Pop Idol finalist Zoë Birkett looked absolutely edible in a dress by Catwalk from Leggs. It was a bustier with a chiffon layered long skirt. She was with her fiance Mark Rhodes, also a Pop Idol finalist and now TV presenter as part of the duo Sam and Mark. He was wearing an Armani suit with a funky black and white tie.

Mark says although it sounds feminine it is very important to cleanse, tone and moisturise. Well Mark, that's what us women have been trying to tell you guys for years!

CORA & NORMAN CHAMBERS

CORA and Norman would normally be tucked up in bed by now but as it is their grand daughter, Debbie who organised the Ball in aid of their daughter, it was worth staying up for. Cora wore a lovely bronze sparkly jacket and long dress from House of Fraser. Norman is the boss (so he says). He is 84 and looked very smart in a suit from Greenwoods Classic range. His secret to staying so young and fit is having a good wife for which he says he thanks his lucky stars for... aah.

Debbie and Ann would like to thank everyone who helped to raise over £3,000. This was the first Top and Tails Ball and it certainly won't be the last.

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

amcreativeproductions.com

● If you have any functions coming up and would like McCourt and McKay to attend, please email: allison@amcreativeproductions.com



RUTH RODDAM

RUTH owns Saks Hairdressing and Beauty in Darlington. She was wearing a beautiful bustier and long trousers with splits up the side from Kate Saint. Ruth loves to shop in the most stylish shopping cities, but Grange Road, Darlington is also a shopping favourite. Ruth likes quaint little shops where she can buy something exclusive and she loves a bargain.

Ruth says you should have your hair cut every four weeks. She feels looks and grooming are very important in her profession so she regularly detoxes and indulges in the new Collagenics treatments available in the salon, with twice-yearly dental treatment in London's Harley Street.



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Artist Bill Harris and Michael Griffin of the Hill Island Brewery

Art at the heart

Fowler's Yard is a unique community of artists and craftspeople in Durham City. CHRISTEN PEARS reports

NESTLING on the banks of the river Wear in Durham, Fowler's Yard occupies an idyllic spot. Away from the hustle and bustle of the city centre, the former warehouses are now home to a thriving artistic community.

The historic buildings were refurbished last year and converted into creative workspaces for professional artists and craftspeople, including a glass worker, embroiderer and brewer. The workspaces are open to the public, providing visitors with the opportunity to observe the creative processes.

The £500,000 refurbishment by Durham City Council is part of its £30m Millennium City project, supported by the Millennium Commission and the European Regional Development Fund. It provides a much-needed focus for designers to promote their work and share ideas with others. "I used to have a studio at home and you can often feel quite isolated," says artist Pamela Nord, of Hart Design and Interiors. "Here you have the other artists and you do get people coming down to have a look."

Pamela worked as a pattern cutter for 12 years before going back to college to study art. Her unusual pieces are often made with materials found around the house – bleach, emulsion, glue and ink. She uses scraps of silk, beads, string and paper to create large, abstract canvases and delicate flowers, as well as exquisite hand made cards. Many of the fabrics are recycled from clothes she finds in charity shops.

"I like to experiment. If I'm not working on a commission, I go off and do my own thing," she explains.

Glassmaker Roger Tye, who runs the renowned Phoenix Hot Glass Studio, has taken over two units – one as a workshop and the second as a gallery to display his wares. Before moving to Durham he was based at Sunderland Glass Centre, where he built up an enviable reputation. Visitors of all ages are fascinated by glass blowing and there's often a crowd of people outside the studio, particularly at weekends when the yard is at its busiest.

Next door, is embroiderer Tracy Franklin's studio. She studied costume making at the London College of Fashion



Above, Roger Tye of Phoenix Glass with his work, left and above right. Top and above left, Tracy Franklin, a freelance embroiderer, who works and teaches at her Fowler's Yard studio

Pictures: BRIAN CLOUGH

before joining the Royal School of Needlework in 1997. She is now freelance, working and teaching from her studio.

She grew up in County Durham and was keen to return to her roots after several years in London.

"I did think about Newcastle but only very briefly," she says. "Durham is a wonderful place to be. There's so much history. More and more people are hearing about Fowler's Yard. We've only been here a year but it's growing already."

Tracy has already published one book, *New Ideas in Goldwork*, and is now working on her second. She runs a range of courses from her studio, catering for people of all abilities – a reflection developing links between the artists and the local community.

The walls of Bill Harris' studio are hung with bold paintings, some huge, some just a few inches in size. It's mainly acrylic on canvas, although he does experiment with different styles and media.

Bill had always been interested in art but only made it a career after he was made redundant from his job repairing TVs and videos. He studied for a BA and

MA and set up his own business.

Fowler's Yard is also home to photographer Stephen Landles and Hill Island Brewery, run by Michael Griffin. The micro brewery really does live up to its name – you wonder how it's possible to fit all the brewing equipment in. But size obviously doesn't matter at the brewery is listed among the best new ones in the 2004 Good Beer Guide.

The workspaces – there are nine in total – are all slightly different. Some are single storey. Others are one-up, one-down affairs, with a larger, studio space on the ground floor and a mezzanine which the artists use as offices. When they're open, members of the public are welcome to wander in and have a browse. The artists are always happy to chat about their work and there are, of course, plenty of opportunities to buy.

● Fowler's Yard, Back Silver Street, Durham City. Opening times vary. For more information contact Durham City Arts on 0191-301 8245



LIFE COACH

MOTIVATION

Get Your Motor Running

SOME time ago I wrote about desire being the fuel to achieving what you want. So many times



I hear people say they really want something but then do nothing about getting what they want. Talking, dreaming, thinking, meditation and prayers are all great stuff, but only of use if we get moving and actually do something.

I've found one of the biggest causes of failure is a reluctance to get out and really make a go of things. Half-hearted rather than whole-hearted approaches. Or maybe even thinking someone else might come along and do it for us like some modern-day fairy godmother. Only you can make changes in your life. Others can help and be a catalyst to get things going, but at the end of the day it's the steps you take that make the difference.

So be honest with yourself: have you really put in the effort and given yourself a decent chance at achieving your goal? Or are you fooling yourself with a lot of talk but little action? I hate to use a cliché but Just Do It. It's the only way.

Juliette Lee

E-mail: juliette@sunflowercoaching.com
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gadget man



How to end the megapixel madness

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

If your two megapixel digital camera is already out of date, an amazing new system designed for NASA can extend its life... with amazing results

HOW often have you bought the latest gadget only to find it superseded by something even better almost as soon as you got it home? Living life on the cutting edge of gadgetry is a never ending battle to stay ahead of the game.

The problem of built-in obsolescence has been getting steadily worse. Nowhere is the difficulty more clearly identified than in the world of digital photography.

In the good old days when we bought a 35mm film camera, it was expected to give years of picture taking pleasure. An SLR (single lens reflex - the professional cameras used by newspapers) could last a decade or more. How times change - and not always for the better.

Eighteen months ago a camera with two megapixels (two million picture gathering sensors) was considered more than good enough if you wanted 7 x 5 inch prints.

A two megapixel compact camera cost around £500 and an SLR-style cam like the Fuji 4900 was nearly twice that.

Today those same cameras are hopelessly out of date - an entry level camera now has five megapixels and costs less than £200. Consequently those old digicams are virtually worthless.

Until now, if you wanted big prints there was no alternative to splashing out hundreds on a new camera. But now there is a nifty piece of software that can turn that old two megapixel embarrassment into a six megapixel digital monster with just a couple of clicks.

Genuine Fractals is the name of a small programme known as a "plug in" that works alongside imaging software to enlarge digital pictures.

Designed for the American space agency NASA, the software uses a special form of interpolation to take a picture to bits then rebuild it up to 600 per cent larger. And because of the way the tool works, enlargements are as sharp as the original.

Now your two megapixel camera can output files every bit as good as those

produced by the cheaper entry level digicams boasting five megapixels or more.

To test the theory, I took my old two megapixel camera out for the day, snapped some pics and loaded them into my PC. Using Genuine Fractals I enlarged them to A4 size and printed them out. For a comparison I used Photoshop's own bicubic method of increasing a picture's size.

The results were astonishing. The Photoshop images looked soft and, in places, the image broke down completely. Those enlarged with Genuine Fractals looked as though they had been taken on a six megapixel camera. Apart from a few strange edges (hardly visible expect close up), they were as good as anything I've seen using software enlargement solutions.

Earlier versions of Genuine Fractals were incredibly expensive, but with the latest edition Sheffield-based distributor DCP Systems has slashed the price. The Genuine Fractals Print Pro edition for all sizes of camera output costs £167, while the standard programme comes in at £87.

The company also markets an LE edition for use with three megapixel or lower cameras that costs a mere £23!

So for less than the cost of a new printer cartridge, you can turn your old camera into a five megapixel digi snapper and extend its life for years.

Remember, though, you will need an imaging programme such as Photoshop, Elements or Paint Shop Pro, but most dedicated digital photographers should have one of those already.

You can download a trial version of Genuine Fractals from www.dcp-systems.co.uk and buy your version at the same site as either a download or a CD copy, or call the sales line on: 0114 257 3640.

For less than the cost of a new printer cartridge, you can turn your old camera into a five megapixel digi snapper and extend its life for years.

NE food

Two old hands at the food game have reunited in a new venture

Roberto Pittalis and Daryl Chadwick

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The cafe culture

THE opening of Café Lilli on Norton High Street, Teesside, reunited two well-known contributors to the development of the thriving café culture that now exists in the North of England.

Daryl Chadwick and Roberto Pittalis first worked together in the early days of Darlington's hugely popular Imperial Express Café.

The new venture is a blend of the traditional European café styles – French, Italian, Greek and Spanish. Their intention is to provide a social focal point for the leafy neighbourhood around Norton's village green, one that is sufficiently casual to be able to drop in any time of the day and affordable enough to do that several times a week.

Café Lilli is not a restaurant, though, in the accepted formal sense. Without formal dining times or menu course structure, dishes can be ordered as snacks, starters or main meals. Everything is made fresh on the premises each day and the dishes

include classic café standards, as well as seasonal favourites. There is a deli blackboard with a selection of antipasto and meze dishes, which can be enjoyed on their own or combined into a main meal. Fish of the day is fresh, local when available and simply chargrilled.

Daryl was a founding partner in the then ground-breaking Imperial Express, which first introduced the authentic continental café concept in Darlington. He then opened Chadwicks in Yarm, a meeting place which helped trigger the revitalisation of Yarm's High Street. After selling this, he has been adding to his European culinary experience by hosting private sailing charters in the Greek Islands during the summer and French skiing chalets in the winter.

Born and brought-up in Sardinia, Roberto introduced a true Italian atmosphere when he arrived at the Imperial Express in Darlington. He later joined Daryl at Chadwicks, before moving on to Sassari in Durham.

TUCK-IN TO LAMB

FOR the Sunday roast this week, try a leg of autumn lamb. While spring's usually seen as the season for lamb, chefs and butchers argue a more mature autumn lamb has a much better flavour after grazing on summer grass. The English Beef and Lamb Executive's Tuck-in booklet features a range of great lamb recipes you could try out. Order your free copy by calling 01727 799 988 or go to www.tuck-in.com

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EATING OUT

THE OLD ROYAL GEORGE, MORTON-ON-SWALE

A WEEK after Katherine Fumidge and her partner Stephen Kennedy took over The Old Royal George in Morton-on-Swale, she discovered the pub was named after a royal flagship which sank on its maiden voyage. Luckily, the similarity stopped there, and the George is in full sail.

The pub used to be the "bad boy" of the pubs in Morton on Swale and Ainderby Steeple, near Northallerton. It was the place locals went for a good drinking session, and pork scratchings were usually the only food on offer. How times have changed...

While the pub – on the main A684 between Northallerton and Bedale – has maintained its charm as a local, the George has also carved out a niche for good pub food in its small and cosy restaurant. It also has a popular quiz night on Thursdays and donates proceeds to local charities such as the Morton Playing Fields Association and Scruton Pre-School.

The George is well-kept and pretty. The menu features seven starters and 13 main courses. When my husband Ian and I visited, the Lobster Festival was in full swing. The menu is changed daily, and food is fresh and home-cooked by Stephen.

Starters include a warm salad of black pudding and confit of duck with a raspberry and mustard dressing for £5.50 and oak-smoked salmon with lemon and cracked black pepper for £5.95. Ian opted for the "excellent" duck liver and garlic pate with plum confit (£4.50). I had the strips of Thai

chicken on mango and papaya salad (£4.50). Both were huge portions.

Main courses are in the same price range as restaurant food, with chargrilled breasts of guinea fowl on apple and black pudding mash with white wine tarragon sauce and slow roast shank of lamb on crushed new potatoes with rosemary-infused gravy, both at £10.95. A fish special included a fillet of red snapper on stir-fried peppers with a sweet Thai chilli sauce (£10.95).

Ian went for the half a roast crispy duck with a port and red wine reduction (£14.95) and I had the cannon of pork fillet on a red onion marmalade with a coarse grain mustard and whisky sauce for £11.50. Again, portions were huge and delicious, washed down with a bottle of house merlot from a list which featured options from France, California and South America.

Dare I mention desserts? We had a passionfruit cheesecake, which was fantastic and my favourite course of the meal, while Ian had Drambuie ice cream, totalling £7.90. Others included a chocolate and whisky nut slice and treacle sponge and custard. The whole bill came to £59.91, very good value for enough food to last us a week!

● **The Old Royal George, Morton-on-Swale, near Northallerton (01609 780254). Bookings for Christmas lunches and parties at £15.95 per head and a New Year's Eve seven-course dinner at £32.95 per head are now being taken.**

Christine Fieldhouse

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NE motoring



The BMW 645Ci: rebirth of a classic model. Below: the luxurious interior

The 6 Series adopts a modern mantle

A lot of posh coupes are boring to drive, not an accusation which can be levelled at the new BMW 6 Series, says IAN LAMMING

THE date was 1976. I was 14 years old and had been a car nerd for almost a decade. To me, cars were so much more than tin boxes, they were cool, they were classic, they were... pretty dreadful pieces of engineering, really.

The 1960s had spawned such classics as the E Type Jaguar, the Aston Martin DB, the Porsche 911. The 1970s hadn't been so kind as designers struggled to blend form and function. But I loved them nonetheless because I was a car nut.

Then, emerging from the dry ice, came a car that warranted my affections – the very first 6 Series, the gorgeous 633CSi. Oh, how my parents suffered as I bored them rigid with every detail about the two-door coupe. How their ears bled as I recounted tales of its performance. And how I mourned 13 years later when production finally came to an end 86,000 cars down the road.

Given its success it's hard to believe BMW waited so long to produce the next 6 Series but 15 years later, here it is, the equally gorgeous 645Ci. And like its predecessor, it loves to stand out from the crowd, making many a coupe look little more than a tin box.

You may have noticed that today's BMWs are a tad unconventional, not everyone's cup of tea, but brave and fresh-faced nevertheless. Everything from the new 1 Series, through to the distinctive 5 and on to the top-of-the-range 7 have their own quirky aesthetics. X3 and X5 provide BMW's own particular twist to the off-road market, while the Z4 does the same for roadster. This leaves the ageing 3 Series as the only conventional looking car in the stable and I can't wait to see what the designers intend doing with that.

The 6 Series adopts this modern mantle resembling a pumped-up Z4, albeit with a tin and glass top. Like it or not, it is impressive, a real head-turner from all angles and unique in its character and looks.

It may be a two-door coupe but it is enormously long and you will be grateful for the all-round parking radar that not only beeps but projects a schematic of the car onto the dashboard, telling you in

glorious Technicolor just how close you are to various objects.

Believe it or not the massively long bonnet is full of engine, 4.4 litres stacked in a V8 configuration and tuned to turn out a whopping 333bhp and 450Nm of torque. That's more than enough to bring 62mph up in 5.6 seconds with a spine-tingling roar from the engine. Yet, thankfully, if you go easy, you will get more than 25 miles per gallon – guess which one I did? Well I am a northerner and money is tight.

A lot of posh coupes actually aren't that much fun to drive. They are all a bit too good, a bit too sanitised, a bit too boring. BMW prides itself on providing the "ultimate driving machine" and has managed to dial in plenty of feel. The 645 handles beautifully, gripping, cornering, steering with aplomb while the driver still feels in touch with reality. The brakes are hugely powerful scrubbing off speed with just the lightest of pedal touches.

Of course this class of car wouldn't be complete without the usual raft of toys, of which there are plenty – colour satellite navigation, bumper stereo, nice glass roof. The iDrive computer mouse system is carried over from the 5 and 7 Series. There is even the opportunity to have radar monitored cruise control and head-up display, whereby various readouts can be projected on to the windscreen.

What was projected on the windscreen most of the time with the 645Ci was my little face, beaming with enjoyment at the rebirth of a classic model. The date was 2004. I was 42 years old and still a car nerd after all.



The 645 handles beautifully, gripping, cornering, steering with aplomb while the driver still feels in touch with reality

Party till dawn... a spot of scuba diving or rock climbing... safaris, snorkelling and lots of shopping. Bet that's not what you expect from a cruise. Think again, says SHARON GRIFFITHS

CRUISING is changing. And a company in landlocked Richmond, North Yorkshire, is leading the way in getting a whole new generation aboard and having fun.

"Think cruising isn't for you? Well think again cowboy!" says Futurewave, a new website launched by Sealand Cruising.

"The image of cruising is way out of date," says Ray Merry of Sealand. "It's not just for the elderly who want formal dinners and to be tucked up in bed by eleven o'clock – though there are still plenty of relaxing luxury cruises available. But it's for everyone, and that includes youngsters who like to have a day full of activities and then party all night."

Cruises now offer special party packages. You can have your hen party on a cruise – "a night out with girls and no worries of how you'll get home" – that includes shopping and spa treatments. You can have your wedding on board ship – or get married in New York, a tropical beach or even in Alaska, all as part of a cruise. You can even go clubbing.

"Most trips ashore are in daytime so people can go shopping or sightseeing. But on the call into Ibiza, for instance, you arrive early evening and leave the next day so you can make the most of the clubs."

The problem is getting past the old idea of cruising and picking out the new ideas. So Sealand has just launched www.futurewave.com – a bright and punchy website aimed specifically at the younger end of the market, which was largely the work of Ellie McCormack, 29, and Sharon Thornton-Dunning. "We wanted it to look like a magazine, give people an idea of all the things that are on offer," says Ellie.

SO there are travel guides, style and design tips, details of weddings, parties, adventure sports and all the information you'll need before your first shipboard holiday. Even a cheerful low-down on cruise holidays for single twenty somethings – with the bonus, not only that you might meet the perfect partner, but that a cruise ship is one of the safest places to holiday alone.

It's all backed by another website – www.onlycruising.com, which gives details of just about any cruise imaginable – whether you're sailing on a shoestring, so to speak, or splashing out on six star luxury in the grand old style.

Ray and Jean Merry started Sealand some years ago after running a general travel agency. "We wanted to provide a real service so we decided to specialise in order to get a thorough knowledge of one part of the holiday business," says Ray.

Jean had always liked cruising. Ray, like many men, was unconvinced – until he went on his first cruise and was utterly, blissfully converted. "It's just the most perfect holiday. It has everything you need and it's just all so easy," he says.

The company has grown rapidly, is about to move into bigger premises and has gathered a wealth of information about cruise ships, types, destinations and facilities. And they have tried to put it all onto their ground breaking website.

"People want to know not just the big things, the little things are important too. They want to know if they have to dress up, what the food's like, will they have to tip and



The changing face of cruising: Ray and Jean Merry are hoping to attract the young, single and sporty to a holiday at sea

Cruising with attitude

if so, how much? How big the cabins are, what the beds are like, what the atmosphere's like, every little snippet," he says.

The website has given them customers far beyond the boundaries of North Yorkshire. Testimonials come in from all over Britain. They have plans to be the biggest independent cruise centre in Britain and hope to move into Europe and even the USA.

Cruising is one of the fastest growing areas of holiday business. Last year more than ten million people went on cruises, eight million of them from the US. But the next most enthusiastic country is Britain where we're taking in growing numbers to shipboard holidays. And yes, there are still plenty of those traditional cruises available for those who like peace and luxury and are able to splash out. But that now just represents just one option among many.

Futurewave will just be the first of a number of specialist websites that Sealand is planning. Among those coming soon will be one for sports enthusiasts – cruise ships have swimming pools, of course, but also fitness centres, ice rinks, golf simulators, tennis courts. Some even have climbing walls, tucked in behind the funnel – and one aimed specifically at families.

"Cruising is a terrific holiday for families. So many activities on board, for children, teenagers and parents. You can spend plenty of time together or hardly see each other at all. And you know the children will be safe, happy and having a whale of a time," says Jean.

"And yes, it might seem a bit pricey upfront. But when you think of all the extras you can spend on a family day-out keeping the kids fed and entertained it can actually work out as a real bargain."

As cruise holidays boom, more of us will be all at sea in our floating resorts.

"Just unpack once and watch the scenery change," says Ray "Sounds perfect, whatever your age."

● Sealand Cruises 2nd Floor, 13 Market Place, Richmond, North Yorkshire, DL10 4PX, UK email – info@sealandcruising.com phone – 01748 850851 booking hotline – 0870 0555 007



WIN a £1,000 diamond ring

DIAMOND specialists Asquith's Jewellers are offering one loving couple the chance to win a fabulous diamond engagement ring worth £1,000. The lucky winners will even be able to have the ring designed and made specially for them with the help of Paul Armstrong, manager of Asquith's Jewellers in Post House Wynd, Darlington.

Couples who are looking to get engaged simply have to call into the shop any time between Saturday, October 23 and Saturday, November 6 to try their hand at picking out the genuine diamond mixed in amongst four diamond look-alikes. The couples who pick the real diamond will be placed into a draw and the winner will be pulled out of a hat. The man must also be willing to propose to his girlfriend and the couple will be presented with their specially designed ring at a complimentary celebration evening.

"Identifying diamonds is always fascinating," said Paul. "The cubic zirconia is an imitation of the diamond and is very white. Real diamonds may have a number of nature's hallmarks, but in the nicest diamonds, these marks are not easy to spot. The depth and quality of diamonds give them their real beauty."

● Asquith's Jewellers can be contacted on 01325 250522.



Paul Armstrong with a selection of rings

NE puzzles

Find a word that can follow the word on the left and precede the word on the right. When you have filled in all the answers, the name of a celebrity can be read from top to bottom in one of the lines.

WALL						POWER
LOAN						SKIN
CROWN						MARTIAL
UNLEADED						PUMP
PRINCE						STREET
DINNER						HALL
EVEN						PLATE
LETTERS						LEATHER
OPEN						SEEDS
ICE						BOARD
GARLIC						CUP
LORD'S						MAT



Name the star pictured on the left ?

ANSWERS
Celebrity wordmatch: Flower, Shark, Court, Petrol, Regent, Dance, Number, Patent, Sesame, Skate, Butter, Prayer and the hidden celebrity is Warren Beatty
Celebrity stare: Tamzin Outhwaite

WORD wise

The word may sound familiar, but do you know what it means?

VESTIBULE

- A A robing room
- B A bathroom
- C An entrance-hall

C: An entrance-hall

IMPOSSIBLE PUZZLE

John got married in 1980 when his age was the square root of the year he was born.

What year was he born?

SOLUTION
 John was born in 1936

NE competition corner

WIN £300 voucher to spend on fashion at McArthurGlen

PRIM is in. This season, trends are ladylike to say the least. But they come with a sexy twist. Girlie accessories and a smattering of bright colours make the schoolmistress-look sexy. The McArthurGlen Designer Outlet York offers discounts of up to 50 per cent all day every day in top-name stores including Elle, Paul Smith, Armani Collections Jesire, Margaret Howell, Marks and Spencer Outlet, Mexx, Pilot, Thomas Pink, Claire's Accessories and Coccinelle. McArthurGlen York is located at the A19/A64 intersection south of York. The centre is open weekdays from 10am to 6pm (until 8pm Thursday), Saturday from 10am to

6pm and Sunday from 11am to 5pm. For more information, visit www.mcarthurglen.com/york

We've got £300 of McArthurGlen Designer Outlet York vouchers to give away to one lucky reader. (Please divide vouchers how you feel appropriate).

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question and send your answer to McArthurGlen Competition, NE Magazine, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. The closing date is Monday, October 18.

What time does the McArthurGlen Designer Outlet York close on a Saturday?



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NE Homes & Gardens

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* Source - NOP June 2002

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* Source - NOP June 2002

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1 in 4 readers of the Northern Echo are planning to carry out home improvements in the next 12 months*
* Source - NOP June 2002

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