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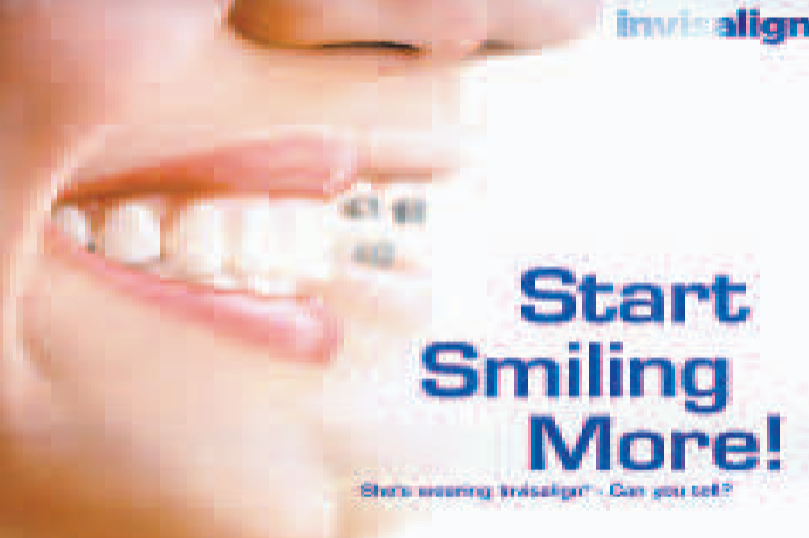
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ADVERTISING
 Neil Simpson (01325) 505 173
 neil.simpson@nne.co.uk
 Chris Kay (0191) 374 0298
 chris.kay@nne.co.uk

EDITORIAL
 Jenny Needham (01325) 505082
 jenny.needham@nne.co.uk

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 A £1,000 SOFA FROM ScS
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sharon griffiths

Hot buttered toast – proper toast – is one of life’s great pleasures

WE have the Slow Food Movement, the Campaign for Real Ale, organic farming, all sorts of organisations and campaigns trying to raise awareness and improve the standard of our food and drink.

In among that lot, there is still room for one more – the Campaign for Real Toast.

You know how it is. You spend the night in a hotel. Dinner is delicious. Carefully selected food, lovingly prepared by a team of top chefs. Even the bread rolls are special, often baked in-house and usually offering a selection of white or brown, plain or seeded, as well as something a bit more interesting.

Wonderful. The true sign of good cooking is to make something very simple that is also delicious. And that goes for the bread too.

Then next morning you go down for breakfast... The chef is still snoring in his bed, of course, and you are left to the mercy of whoever can be persuaded to do the early shift.

Do hotel owners think we’ve lost the use of our tastebuds overnight? Do they think that the diners they considered so sophisticated and demanding in the evening can be fobbed off with any old rubbish in the cold grey light of dawn? Does the chef think his responsibility to the clientele ends at midnight?

For just when you really need a little treat to get your day started, this is where you are invariably faced with a rack full of cold and flabby cardboard that passes as toast. It is horrible. Apart from anything else, it is just so...bendy. You can’t even take a decent bite from it, you just end up tugging inelegantly at it as the marmalade slides off and dribbles back onto your plate.

Once, exasperated in a very posh hotel in Wales, my mother asked the young waitress if there was any of the proper bread left from the night before. If so, could she pop some of that under the grill instead please.

The waitress looked baffled but obliged.

When she came back into the dining room, we felt a bit sorry for her. Once the other residents saw our heap of hot fragrant toast made with proper bread, they all wanted some too and ate it with relish and enjoyment as the poor girl went back and forth to keep filling the toast racks.

So why couldn’t we all have been given it in the first place?

Hot buttered toast – proper toast – is one of life’s great pleasures. And even better than at breakfast is teatime toast – especially on chilly autumn afternoons when the year’s first fogs have wrapped themselves damply around you.

For me, it has a special resonance. When I was a child my mother worked full time, but Wednesdays were her half day. Wednesdays were special. For a start, I came home to a warmer house. Before the days of central heating, we relied on the Aga in the kitchen and a coal fire in the sitting room. On Wednesdays the coal fire would be lit before I came home from school.

As I walked past the front of the house to go round to the back door, I could already see the warm welcoming glow of it reflected on the window and my heart would lift.

On the kitchen table would be a tray with a large loaf, the bread knife, plates, knives, butter and the toasting fork. We would take it all into the sitting room and sit in the glow of the fire, toasting thick slices of bread, spreading them with good Welsh butter and relishing the taste. The toast would be crispy on the outside and soft and warm inside and was just so delicious.

Hot buttered toast was also, in the nicest possible way, part of the seduction technique of some lads who were students with me. Their flat was in what had been the bedrooms of a Victorian house. It had the world’s tiniest fireplace, a little black grate surround by very pretty tiles, which took just two lumps to build up a blaze. Not only that, but they also had a television – very unusual for students in the 60s.

On biting cold winter afternoons, they would invite us round and we would make toast or crumpets on this tiny fire and then eat them luxuriously, butter running down our chins, while watching The Magic Roundabout.

In a rickety rackety world of cold flats and ravenous gas meters, it was an oasis of warmth, comfort and relaxation, and as a way to a girl’s heart, it knocked spots off cheap beer and corny chat-up lines in crowded bars.

Young men wishing to impress young women now aspire to smart suits and fast cars. They might do better to invest in a real fire and a toasting fork.

NE window shopping

RUBY BEAUTY

THIS beautiful silver and ruby ring was designed by Shaun Leane, whose work is admired by stars such as Elton John and Gwen Stefani. Currently British Jewellery Designer of the Year, Leane’s designs are exclusively available in the North Yorkshire area from E. DeWastney in Northallerton. It costs £390. For more designs visit E. Dewastney Jewellers, Barkers Arcade, Northallerton (01609) 779483. www.e-dewastney.com



MUCH MORE THAN A PAINT JOB

KENTS Interiors, in Barnard Castle’s Market Place, has almost doubled the size of its shop since Richard and Diane Kent took over the business eight years ago. The wallpaper

and paint shop, started by Diane’s father nearly 30 years ago, has developed into a thriving interior design business and retail outlet that draws customers to

Teesdale from as far away as Northumberland and Cumbria. The shop stocks wallpaper, paint, mirrors, lamps, pictures, cushions, candles, ornaments, East jewellery, small items of furniture and a quirky range of children’s rainwear, personally approved by the couple’s children Thomas, 11, and seven-year-old Abigail. Now, with support from Business Link in County Durham, Kents has launched a website: www.kentsinteriors.co.uk



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Having started selling furniture, Ken and Daniel Warn have changed their focus to fireplaces. SARAH FOSTER takes a tour of their well-stocked shop



Family business: Daniel and Ken Warn

Hot shots

THE first thing that strikes me about Fireplace Warehouse is its intense heat. Although most of the fires aren't lit, the few that are create a furnace-like temperature. For Daniel Warn, it's an occupational hazard. "That's our main heat source in the winter," he says, pointing to a bulky stove. "We had it lit the other day and it was unbearable."

Daniel is sales manager of the Bishop Auckland store, which is owned by his father Ken. He's always worked for the family business. "I started straight from college. I've made furniture, delivered it, set it up and all that sort of thing," he says.

Until recently, furniture was the family trade, with Ken and Daniel coming from Aycliffe to Bishop Auckland to set up Durham Interiors. Then Ken decided to move next door. "We did bespoke furniture for a designer then this place became available and we basically took it over to sell fireplaces," says Daniel.

"Running a retail business alongside more of a commercial business was a bit difficult so we thought we'd split it in half. My dad's brother has next door now."

Since the split, about a year ago, father and son have put their energies into building up their new trade. Their practical skills have come in handy. "We've done the whole building out ourselves," says Daniel. "We've put all the floors in and sanded and finished them, and we've installed all the fireplaces. Now that it's set up, we're just buying them in and selling them - we don't have anything to do with manufacturing."

A walk through the spacious showroom is testimony to their work. They've gone for a modern, minimal look, with plain red walls and wooden floors, and the style is simple and uncluttered. Different rooms house various fires, from sturdy looking stoves to the latest hole-in-the-wall models. The range is certainly impressive. "I think we've got over 100 displays altogether," says Daniel.

Yet for the ambitious father and son, this is just the start. "We're going to move more into design - unique, bespoke-type stuff - be-

cause when you buy a fireplace, it tends to come in one design. If we can offer a more bespoke service, that's what we want to do," says Daniel.

He leads me up some stairs to show me the next phase of development - a second sales floor. Although it's incomplete, the space is starting to take shape, with lots of modern fireplaces. Daniel explains: "We're getting stock from Acquisitions of London, which advertises in all the home and garden magazines. It's going to be more modern up here."

A major step on the upstairs floor will be the introduction of room-like settings. "There will be individual rooms with maybe four-poster beds or a living room setting," says Daniel. "We'll use as much stuff as we can from next door. We're going to be introducing pictures and oil lamps, and we want to be able to sell whatever anybody sees in here. We've approached a lady on the front street about getting lights."

Yet the focus will always be the fires - and there seems to be something to suit everyone. "We do everything that's available, including gas, LPG (bottled gas), and solid fuel, although most people go for gas," says Daniel. "We go from a £649 deal, where you get the surround, the back, the hearth and the fire, up to £3,500. The fires themselves go from about £200 upwards and the surrounds depend on what they're made from. We sell solid oak, solid maple and marble."

Dealing with customers day to day, Daniel is well placed to pick up on trends. "I think pebbles are on their way out," he says. "I would say that electric fires are in at the moment. Most houses have central heating and good insulation so people tend to put in an electric fire so they get the effect without the heat."

As the business grows, it's building up its core suppliers, offering customers an even greater choice. And its close relationship with next door, which also showcases its fires, can only fuel family harmony.

● Fireplace Warehouse, Chester Street, Bishop Auckland (01388) 600008.



Super bowl: a modern take on fires from the Fireplace Warehouse

Picture: ANDY LAMB

RECENT advances in technology mean everyone can now enjoy the licking flames of a real fireplace as a centrepiece. "Many people don't realise they can still have a fireplace if they don't have a chimney or a gas supply," says Trevor Buckle of Blazes Fireplace and Heating Centre, South Side Retail Park, Stockton. "But manufacturers are now offering a huge variety of styles of living flame gas fires, with new powerflue technology which means they can be fitted without chimneys."

The only requirement is that the fire be positioned on or near to an outside wall.

Nor is not having a gas supply the obstacle it once was to securing some flickering flame action for your living room. Many small villages in the North-East don't have a gas supply but electric fires now come with much more realistic flame effects.

And if coals seem too old-fashioned for the trendy town house or aspiring loft-livers, you could substitute ultra-modern large round pebbles or natural-looking driftwood as the 'fuel' for your fires. You can now even choose the colour of your flames on an electric fire...

Philip Moston, managing director of fireplace manufacturer, Elgin Hall says: "The relaxed approach to interior design that allows individuals to express their own style and tastes is reflected in the huge demand for different styles of fires.

"Our most popular surrounds this year are modern updates on traditional surrounds, which



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makes them suitable for any setting. The demand is for fires that are distinctive enough to act as focal points but don't dominate the room."

Julie Roberts of Hot Fires and Heating in Cockerton, Darlington, agrees. "Our customers are opting for the hole-in-the-wall look which suits modern homes so well. They want something simple and uncluttered, which adds a touch of luxury to the sitting room."

● **Blazes Fireplace & Heating Centre** at Unit 14, South Side Retail Park, Portrack Lane Stockton on Tees (01642) 611079 www.blazes.co.uk

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NE interiors



JO STEVENS talks to a couple who dug deep into their reserves to turn a derelict site with masses of coal mining history into a family home and bed and breakfast business

Transformation: above, the buildings before conversion
Right: one of the guest rooms; Neil and Anne Padgett outside their home and the sunny conservatory extension



Coal comfort farm

WHEN coal mining flourished in the region, ponies were consigned to the pit to spend their working lives as beasts of burden, hauling great loads of coal up steep inclines ready for collection. When at last their working lives were over, many of the ponies had gone blind and, unable to adjust to daylight, had to spend their final days in a pit pony shelter.

Some ended their days at Stobbilee Farm, later to become the site of Langley Park Colliery in County Durham. The colliery, owned by Consett Iron Company, opened in 1873, and was taken over in 1947 by the National Coal Board.

Many years later, following the pit closure in 1975 and the demise of the last pit ponies, all that remained were farm outbuildings and stables. These had been used by the NCB as a pit pony shelter, pit baths, workshops and a general colliery maintenance area.

It took someone of singular vision to take stock of what had become a derelict site amid six and a half acres of neglected fields and undergrowth to decide there and then that he could turn it into the ideal family home. But 18 or so years ago, that is exactly what ex-fitter, turner and Post Office engineer Neil Padgett decided to do.

First he had to sell the idea to his wife

Anne and their two young daughters, but fortunately, Anne is an adventurous sort herself so it wasn't too long before Neil got the enormous project under way. "Mind you," laughs Anne, "I agreed to move into a caravan with Neil and the girls for six months and that turned into three years."

It takes a huge leap of the imagination to see the present spacious, luxury home, with its sweeping gravel drive, and visualise how it must have looked when Neil first set eyes on it. "People thought we were mad and they were probably right," says Neil, before admitting: "We were pretty naïve. We had no idea of the hoops we would have to jump through or all the complications of taking on a property whose deeds had been owned by the NCB. If you get me on to planning permission and conversion matters, we'll be here all day."

We begin our tour in the attractive study hall, where pictures painted by artistic son-in-law Martin Speight adorn the walls. Martin, once wicket keeper for Durham County Cricket Club, created the great Stadium of Light Picture From The Air, on show at Sunderland Football Club.

What was once the huge barn retains the original staircase, and all the original ceiling beams and rafters of Colombian pine. The comfortable sitting room with



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rich leather upholstery, offset by pale floor and walls, has well lit archway windows in place of the doors which once kept out light to protect the ponies.

Leading off the sitting room, through French doors, is a large, slate-roofed garden room, designed in keeping with the rest of the building.

The elegant dining room, once a busy workshop complete with circular saw, is now in frequent use for entertaining family and friends. The dining table, chairs and unit are of solid yew, while above the table hangs a treasured lamp, a gift to Anne from an elderly friend.

Neil points out a notch in an overhead rafter. "Miners would go upstairs to the pit baths and kick the dirt from their boots on what was then an open rafter, hence the worn area," he explains.

Neil and Anne have incorporated a B&B business into their unique home, with a split-level self catering apartment. "We have people visiting Durham City or nearby Diggerland Adventure Park and others who just want to escape for a few days relaxation," says Anne.

The farmhouse-style kitchen is large and cosy. "We had a young barrister living in the apartment upstairs for a few months who used to enjoy having breakfast in the kitchen. It made him feel quite at home watching the bacon sizzling and the coffee brewing."

Neil still holds down a full time job and is a doting grandad to three-year-old Benjamin, but despite all the hard work he's put into the house, he's not ready to put his feet up just yet.

"We've just been granted planning permission to convert the stables into a cottage so that's next on Neil's list," laughs Anne, "after he has completed the built-in wardrobes in our own bedroom."

When Neil does have a bit of free time, he togs himself up in his motorbike leathers and zooms off on his Honda Fireblade.

Neil and Anne have created a lovely home with a relaxed atmosphere that makes you feel instantly at ease. I leave reluctantly but with an invitation to visit again to hear more about the "phantom pony" and the retired miners who used to make their way up to the shelter, just to be back once again with their faithful old pit ponies.

Enquiries for B&B:
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▶ More pictures: page 8

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NE interiors



6 We had no idea of the problems of taking on a property whose deeds had been owned by the National Coal Board



Resting place: ponies were used in pits throughout the region. Many ended their days at Stobbilee Farm, now transformed into a light and spacious bed and breakfast and family home

Pictures: BRIAN CLOUGH





Just because the nights are drawing in, it doesn't mean we have to cocoon ourselves in the dark

New season, new look

Autumn's the perfect time to redecorate and revitalise rooms, and it needn't cost a fortune. GABRIELLE FAGAN reports

AUTUMN'S on its way and summer rooms need refreshing so they're spruced up and ready for the new season. Even if the holidays have drained your piggybank it's still perfectly possible to give them a successful facelift: today's style for interiors doesn't require oodles of dosh.

Instead, as Jane Cumberbatch, author of a new book, *Decorating Easy*, explains: "Today it's all about making your home comfortable and modern without spending a fortune. I believe our homes should be more down-to-earth, more earthy than earnest. They should be more in tune with real life and its imperfections than the glossy airbrushed interiors that advertisers seduce us into believing we should aspire to."

After all, she points out: "The best homes are those that are relaxed and welcoming, not uptight and squeaky clean. It may be hip to have a sleek 'east meets west' white and taupe linen look, but what a bore if you spill the take-out curry."

Jane has put together a realistic package of simple ideas and decorating tricks to turn your home into an attractive, comfortable haven away from the stresses and strains of daily life.

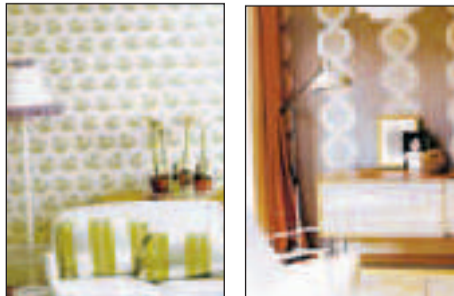
DECORATING EASY

- Motivate yourself by first re-painting the front door. Use a fresh, light colour – my favourite is seaside or duck egg blue – in tough exterior eggshell. No gloss, please.
- Revive a tired interior with fresh coats of your favourite paint. Try blues for bathrooms, soft or mint green for kitchens, and soothing lavenders, whites, greys and creams for living rooms and bedrooms.
- Treat yourself and shop in ordinary stores for cheap, functional but good-looking objects such as candles, bowls etc.
- Go to the sales to chase bargains, in linen sheets, cashmere throws, quality saucepans, and other life-nourishing luxuries.
- Aim to get two or three rooms in shape so they reflect your style and make you feel at home until you have the funds to do up the rest.

- Update everything from a junk table with a lick of paint, to a sagging armchair with a fresh new flowery loose cover.

JANE'S SIX WAYS TO MAKE A RELAXING LIVING SPACE

- 1** Blue and white is my number one chill-out combo. It looks classic yet modern and never dates. Key elements include soft white, duck-egg blue or eau-de-nil walls teamed with striped cotton ticking and checks.
- 2** Wall-to-wall carpets don't suit a light and airy look, so stick to mats and rugs for added texture and warmth underfoot. Painted floorboards are easy to achieve.
- 3** I prefer calm, soft pools of light from table lamps with pretty shades trimmed with ribbons. Paper parchment shades are good. Dark walls absorb more light than paler ones so choose the wattage of your bulbs accordingly.
- 4** Chairs look cool dressed in simple pull-on loose covers with maybe a tie or button for added detail. Use tough machine washable woven cotton and calico. Pre-shrink all fabric before use.
- 5** Use natural textures and scents for a living, breathing space. Try roughly woven baskets, fibrous rugs and woolly throws. Burn tea lights in jars or light a good scented candle, such as Tuberosa by Diptyque.
- 6** Buy the biggest sofa you can afford, with a solid hardwood frame and a sprung base and back. Second-hand buys from the 1940s or earlier might need covering but they're cheaper and sturdier than a modern day equivalent.



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The Northern Echo has teamed up with Space Blanket to offer two readers the chance to win this revolutionary material for their homes and see for themselves the difference high quality loft insulation can make to the bills.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

What is the name of the company that manufactures Space Blanket?

Answers on a postcard or back of an envelope to Space Blanket Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. The closing date is October 22 and usual newspaper competition rules apply.

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NE gardening



Covering an enormous seven acres, Worsall Hall Gardens are both wild and well-kept. SARAH FOSTER admires their sprawling splendour



Owen and Liz Evans in the stunning grounds of Worsall Hall, which has views down to the Tees

Pictures: STUART BOULTON

Seventh heaven



COMING through the iron gates of Worsall Hall, I'm struck by two things: the towering majesty of the house and the wide open space of the grounds. Little do I realise that this neat crop of land, with a summerhouse in the far corner, is only a fraction of the gardens.

Greeting me with a warm handshake, Owen Evans, the master of the house, takes me to sit at the summerhouse patio, where we wait for his wife Liz. He enlightens me on the scale of what he owns. "We have seven acres altogether, of which probably an acre-and-a-half is wooded riverbank. The walled garden is one acre," says Owen.

While in the past, two full-time gardeners tended the land, now Owen and Liz do this themselves, along with part-time helpers. "John comes on Saturdays and sometimes during the week, and Helen comes probably a couple of half days in the summer," says Owen. "I tend to do the heavy stuff and Liz does the lighter stuff. Helen tends to help on Liz's side, whereas John helps me on my side."

As Liz comes to join us, we embark on a tour of the vast grounds. Lying at the bottom of the village of Worsall, just outside Yarm, the hall stands high above the River Tees, with a sheer drop behind it. The gardens extend to the right, starting with the

neatly grassed area that contains the summerhouse. "In the evening, it really catches the sun. We spend most evenings that we're in there in the summer," says Liz.

Continuing right, we enter a patch of dense woods with a bright carpet of bluebells. The whole area has a wild and natural feel, and Owen explains that it has a long history. "We had a couple of fields and part of the big one was fenced off and planted with trees, some of which we call Aunt Greta's trees. In the 1950s, my father planted alders, hornbeams, beech, lime, oaks and alders," he says.

As well as the statuesque older trees, there are also saplings planted more recently by Owen and Liz. One of these, Owen explains, has a special heritage, having come from an acorn from Kew Gardens. His maintenance policy is relaxed – he says simply: "If any of the branches misbehaves, it gets removed."

Owen points out a ditch filled with geraniums, which illustrates the couple's habit of moving plants around. "These took over the garden so we just dumped them here," he admits. Beyond the woods is a tennis court, with public entrance by donation to the Red Cross, and below that, the grounds' centrepiece – the walled garden. I get my first glimpse from a special viewing platform, installed, jokes Liz, for diminutive spectators like herself.

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OWEN AND LIZ'S TOP THREE PLANTS

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- Euphorbias
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Above: mature trees form a green cathedral; left, the vegetable patch

Even without being in full bloom, it's pretty impressive, with neatly divided sections and pretty walkways. Owen explains that when his parents first bought the house, it was very different. "My parents came here in 1929 and pre-war, it was entirely a practical garden – except for the rose garden, which my father created," he says.

Once full of hybrid teas, this is now mainly shrub roses. "One bed has survived but we've got rid of most of them. Why? Less maintenance," says Owen.

Although they still grow vegetables like potatoes, cabbages and leeks in the small kitchen garden area, Owen and Liz have largely turned the walled garden into a pleasure ground. Their favourite part, enclosed by a yew hedge, is the Autumn Garden. As we wander into the secluded space, they explain that they sought help from a

landscape gardener to install autumn flowering plants and create a level seating area at the bottom of a gentle slope.

While the landscape is evolving all the time, with plants dying and being replaced, sometimes nature takes a more dramatic turn. One night in 2000, for example, flood water built up to a height of 4ft 6ins behind one of the walls, making it collapse and engulfing the walled garden. While many plants were destroyed, amazingly, others survived, and now it's hard to tell that the flood ever happened.

Although they both enjoy gardening, Owen and Liz recognise that with limited time and resources, they can only do so much. Yet they're happy to accept this. As Owen puts it: "We don't say we want the garden to be of this or that standard – we put a bit of effort in and we get the standard we get."

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Black may be back this season, but according to colour expert Gill Valentine, the shade suits few people. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS learns how to bring a little colour into your wardrobe



Don't go back to BLACK

C OLOUR expert Gill Valentine hates black clothing. She scoffs at the idea that it might be slimming and laughs in the face of it being practical. In reality, she says, it is a shade which suits a tiny minority and can actually make most people's skin tone look pale and definitely uninteresting.
 Even worse, in Gill's eyes, is the thought that this autumn/winter season, black has been hailed once again as the shade to be wearing. It is definitely back, despite the fact that for most people it never really went away.
 "The right people to wear black are teenagers when they're being desperately introspective because that's what it makes you do - turn inwards," says Gill. "Coco Chanel introduced this little black dress concept and we just won't let go. People say it's slimming and that dark colours are slimming, but black is just lumpy."
 Gill, of Haydon Bridge, near Hexham, runs Colour Matters 2, a wardrobe SOS service offering colour analysis, make-up lessons, personal shopping trips, wardrobe sorts, bridal services and individual style tips. She also gives talks to groups.
 Gill launched Colour Matters 2 six years ago, a natural progression from having her own ladies' clothing business where people were always asking her 'which colour suits me best?' She then underwent some intensive training with a colour therapist, where she learned about the science and psychology behind colour.
 As part of a consultation, Gill says she studies the different colours in people's eyes. At that, she whips

out a magnifying glass and moves close to my face before reporting that I have grey/blue eyes but with a warm brown colour around the iris and a hint of cool taupe.
 "No-one's eyes are all green or all blue," she explains. "You could have a warm hazel eye and around the outside there could be a cool taupe colour and that would tell me there's a combination of warm and cool. It's also down to skin tone."
 She explains that each person falls into one of four types - spring, summer, autumn and winter - and each of the seasons have their own characteristics.
 Spring types are optimistic, people's people who are good communicators. Even if they are overweight, they can look light. Dawn French is a spring, she says, compared with the heavier looking Jo Brand, who's a typical "autumn".
 Summers have a tendency to look vulnerable but have cores of steel. They also like quality things around them.
 Autumn people are the deep thinkers who don't have the optimism of their spring cousins. But they are very
"Coco Chanel introduced this little black dress concept and we just won't let go... but black is just lumpy"



Picture: DAVE WOOD



● Gill will be offering three lucky ladies the chance for a complete make-over at the Dalton Park charity fashion show on Monday, October 17, at Redworth Hall, near Darlington. The event starts at 7pm and tickets cost £10, including a glass of bubbly and nibbles, a goody bag and a 10 per cent discount to use at Dalton Park, the designer shopping outlet. For tickets contact 0191-526 6500 or buy them at The Northern Echo front counter in Priestgate, Darlington. To book an appointment with Gill contact (01434) 688199.

● Under the microscope: Gill checks out Lindsay's eye colour

patient. Many autumns have a zany sense of humour and tend to be solidly built. They also have a real thirst for knowledge and they hate to be wrong.

The winters are a little rarer. Typically, they tend to be abrupt, sarcastic and have a crisp way of dealing with people. They are also the only people who can wear black.

In her six years, Gill has yet to do a colour consultation for a winter person. "If you can wear black without make-up and still look good, you can say you're a winter," she says. She also points out that just because you have the characteristics of a season, it does not mean that you are a "summer" or a "winter".

Throughout a colour consultation, Gill lays various different swatches around her client's neck, peeling away colours to see which illuminates the face the best. Afterwards, Gill will make a personal colour swatch-card for the client to keep, so they can take it shopping with them.

Her typical clients include those who have an entire wardrobe full of clothes but feel they have nothing to wear. They may spend a fortune on a one-off outfit for a wedding or christening, never to wear it again. Instead, says Gill, they would be far better buying something which will slot into a wardrobe, such as a fab pair of new boots or a new skirt. Once you know which colours suit you, you can build a wardrobe up.

Colours are also important when it comes to getting married and Gill also helps brides decide which colours would work best for their weddings.

"The bride will have decided she wants all her bridesmaids in burgundy which is great if you're an autumn, but if I was put in burgundy, I would look ill."

But the enjoyable part of Gill's job is watching people's confidence grow. She recalls one lady in her 50s who appeared to be quite unassuming and turned out to be an autumn person.

"She changed the whole way she dressed and her friends kept telling her how fabulous she looked. Every time I see her, she's in her autumn colours," she says.

Many older ladies also get into the habit of going around to their friends' houses to have their hair dyed a block colour which may not suit them. And, when you consider people can be wearing the wrong bra size, the wrong shaped glasses for their face and sticking to their little black dress safety net, there are any number of fashion pitfalls they can fall into.

"You only get eight to 11 seconds to make a first impression," says Gill. "If you're going for a job interview, how much better are you going to feel if you know you can sit there knowing you are the best you can be appearance wise?"

"What I want to do is get people to enjoy their clothes and get them looking the best they can."

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me and my wardrobe



Vivienne Westwood bustier, Nicole Fahri jeans, Pura Lopez shoes and Shaun Lean necklace

Charlotte Fleming is a jewellery designer, who runs E. DeWastney Jewellers in the Barkers Arcade in Northallerton. She is in her early 30s.

Describe your style
Eclectic.

What's your daytime/work look?
Simple. Trousers and a top or a dress. My choice can be very simple as I accessorise with either two pieces of jewellery – necklace and bracelet – or just one large necklace. The jewellery makes the outfit, not the other way round. Once piece can change my outfit and mood from classic/understated to a modern twist, expressing style and individuality.

What couldn't you live without?
A black DKNY dress I bought three years ago. It's simple and I can wear it anywhere I go, making it different each time by accessorising. And I can't live without my jewellery, obviously! You can make an outfit which you have had in the wardrobe for years look like new each time you use different pieces of jewellery.

What was your best bargain?
A Sportmax yellow, funnel-neck, three-quarter coat for £40, reduced from £200 in Newcastle.

What is your most expensive item?

A white Armani suit for £750
How many pairs of shoes do you own?
31!

What's your favourite evening outfit?

Seven jeans and Vivienne Westwood black and white top, with Pura Lopez shoes and a Sam Ubhi stone set belt. I change the look with either a simple piece such as a white gold and black

diamond necklace by Dower & Hall or a larger beaded piece designed by Sue Godley.

What's your worst fashion faux pas?
Cycling shorts, which I used to wear with a blazer when I was 14.

Who is your style icon?
Isabella Rossellini and Audrey Hepburn, two people who look/looked amazing and always accessorise/d extremely well.

What's your favourite beauty product?

Alterna shampoo and hair gel and Ren Mayblossom facewash and moisturiser.

What's your favourite accessory?

A Leif yellow diamond ring bought for me by my husband, a Sue Godley turquoise and silver necklace and my Sam Ubhi stone set belt.

● E. DeWastney Jeweller, Barkers Arcade, Northallerton (01609) 779483

Left: Fenn, Wright and Manson black dress, Leif pendant, Pura Lopez shoes

Right: Max Mara cap-sleeve top, white trousers by Marni, Sue Godley necklace and Lapponia ring

Pictures:
RICHARD DOUGHTY



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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



JOANNE SHAW

McCourt & McKay

AFTER the recent glamour of summer balls and the races we visited a more down-to-earth location where casual is the style and having fun is the fashion.

We had heard that Consett was quite a lively place to be on a Saturday night and as it is Judie's hometown, we decided to give her old haunts a visit. The Braes has recently been refurbished and if you like live DJs pumping out loud dance music, a bit of a dance and good value drinks, then this has it all.

LISA SHAW & IAN BURDETT

Century Breakfast show presenter Lisa Shaw and husband Ian Burdett had been in The Braes for a quick drink when we spotted them just leaving.

Lisa, 29, is a local lass and although she generally doesn't go out much locally, she does enjoy the odd night out at The Braes. She says it's a place you can go and mix with people of all ages in an unpretentious environment.

Lisa wore a top from Dorothy Perkins with Diesel Jeans. Her favourite shopping houses are House of Fraser, USC and French Connection. Lisa recommends eating healthily and going to the gym. To combat the tired eyes caused by her early starts, Lisa uses an eye cream called Eye Support by Elemis.

Ian Burdett is a fitness manager at the David Lloyd gym in Gosforth. He has a simple rule to feeling and looking good and that is to do 30 minutes of exercise daily of any activity and to allow yourself 20 per cent of the naughty stuff as long as it is mixed with 80 per cent of the good stuff.

Lisa tends to shop for Ian as his pre-Lisa wardrobe consisted of tracksuits and fitness training gear. He wore jeans by Jack and Jones and a Ted Baker T-shirt.

The music they are listening to at the moment is James Blunt, Lucie Silvas, Daniel Powter and Gwen Stefani.

KIM WOOD & SARAH JEFFCOCK

23-year-old Kim is a salon assistant and was out with friend Sarah Jeffcock, who was on her hen night. Kim was dressed for action, toy gun and all, in top and skirt from Topshop and accessories from Internationale. Sarah wore an outfit bought from her local favourite, 'Bob's stall', in Consett. Apparently, he stocks some good labels for less and a fab range of accessories.

These girls believe in having fun and listening to dance music as they insist on it being the best tonic and pick-me-up, and after a good night out they drink lots of water to flush out toxins.



SARAH JEFFCOCK & KIM WOOD

JOANNE SHAW

The 32-year-old sales manager says Consett is a thriving community with new housing and leisure developments being built, making it a great place for younger people to buy property and settle there. She recommends going to the gym three times a week and finds the hardest part is getting into the car... the rest is energising!

She was wearing top and jeans from River Island and generally likes to shop in House of Fraser and USC. The CD in her car at the moment is The Killers.

● The Braes, Sherburn Terrace, Consett (01207) 508131

● 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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IAN BURDETT & LISA SHAW

STUART MCGILLIBRAY

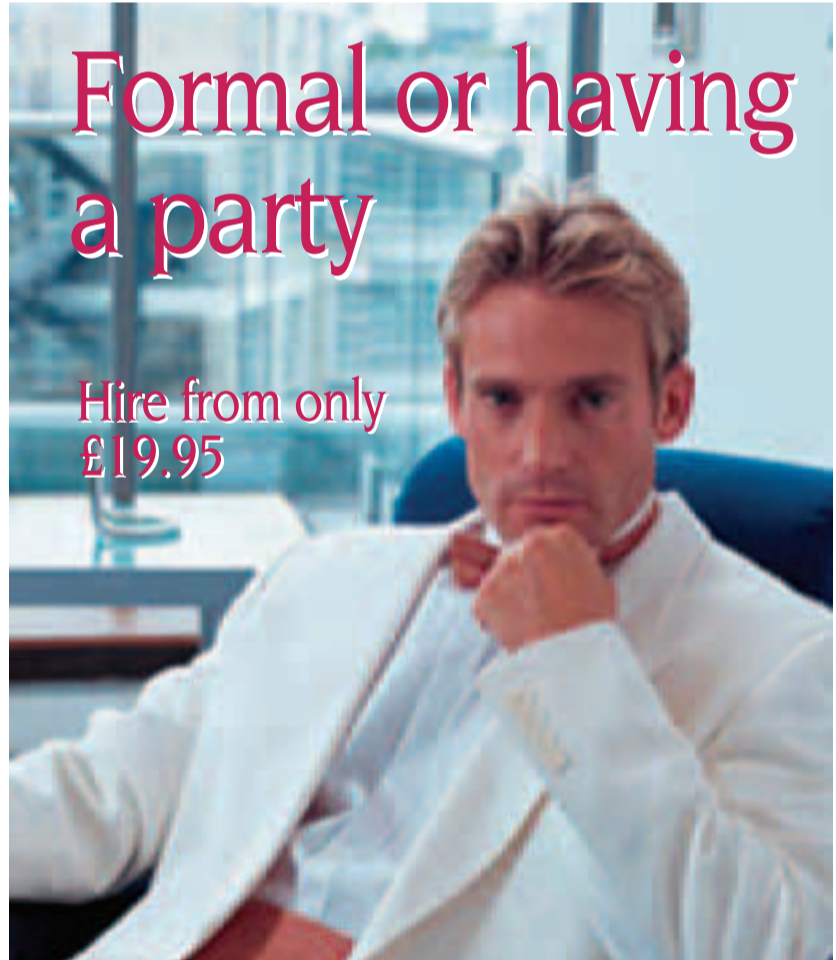
The 46-year-old civil servant is a local lad and was out with friends. He likes to go out in Newcastle and Durham but finds that Consett is better than ever on the social scene as new and improved bars open, attracting a younger crowd.

Stuart wore French Connection jeans, shirt and a stylish pair of Versace glasses. For 46, Stuart has great skin and though a Consett lad shouldn't really confess it, he confided in us that he cleanses his skin, uses Nivea moisturiser and goes to the gym regularly.

STUART MCGILLIBRAY

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- More than £18m is being invested in 2006-07 to enhance Teesside's reputation as a leading university for digital technology and digital media. The developments are an £11m Institute of Digital Innovation and a £7m Centre for Creative Technologies.
- The National Student Survey recently placed Teesside in the top 30 for student satisfaction of all UK universities.

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June 2005 saw the launch of the Centre for Forensic Investigation – which will bring international professionals to Teesside in the areas of forensic science, crime scene investigation and disaster management. It will also promote research, complement courses and underpin teaching.

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Makers of Toy Story 3 wanted

Animex is the UK's biggest and best festival of animation – with talks from industry experts, special screenings and gaming. Previously, Animex reeled in Pixar's Mark Walsh, the man behind *Finding Nemo*, *Toy Story 2*, *Monsters Inc.* and *The Incredibles*.

Other high profile industry appearances came in the shape of Stuart Sumida, a Californian Professor of Biology who advises animators on the movement and physiology of animals – his credits include *The Lion King*, *Hercules*, and *Scooby Doo*. Whilst Tom Martinek from George Lucas' Industrial Light + Magic talked about one of the largest and most well known digital effects companies involved in the movie business.

There is also Animex Game. A two-day dedicated games event packed with games art, design, demonstrations and animation – and the Animex Student Animation Awards, which gives students the chance to show off their amazing work. Put 6 - 10 February in your diary or visit www.animex.net – you won't be disappointed.

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Olympia makes future Olympiads?

The University's £6.5 million centre for sport, the Olympia Building, opened its doors last year.

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Design Director Aston Martin,
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Kim Hammond
BA (Hons) Public Relations,
Public Relations Officer,
Avanticom.



"Teesside stood out from the crowd. It looked like it was a university going somewhere. The course had a great range of topics as I wanted to go into television and this course offered me that chance. It had a practical side which I was really keen to do but it was also backed up with some really interesting modules. The course got me where I am now, it educated me, inspired me and enthralled me."

Steven Todd

BA (Hons) Television Production Professional Practice,
Editor, Twenty First Century Media.



"I choose Teesside because all the modules on the course were varied and interesting. I really enjoyed them. This course is an excellent way of getting a career as there is a national shortage of trading standards officers. The University has very good facilities and the lecturers are very supportive."

Daniel Briggs

BSc (Hons) Consumer Science and Consumer Law,
Trainee Trading Standards Officer,
North Yorkshire County Council.

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Silje Berthelsen
BSc (Hons) Information Technology,
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gadget man



A tiny little bite of the Apple

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

Fancy an Ipod Nano? Then get down to your local electrical store pronto as this funky little music maker will sell like hot-cakes

CAN anything topple the seemingly unstoppable Apple iPod? Just when it seemed the competition was getting its act together - particularly Sony - Apple has raised the bar once more.

"It's impossibly tiny," Apple boss Steve Jobs told the world as he took the wraps off the latest member of the iPod family: the iPod Nano, a phrase which came back to haunt him as problems were soon reported with cracking screens and cases that scratched too easily.

These aside, it seems the Nano will replace the wildly popular iPod Mini and it makes that particular machine look about as slim and sleek as a Monster Truck.

About the same size as a credit card, and not much thicker at just 7mm wide, the Nano is truly a hard disk music player you could take anywhere.

It will come in two flavours: the 2GB variant for £139 and the 4GB model costing £179. At launch just the two colours are available - the traditional iPod white and glossy piano black. Whichever you buy, they both look impossibly cool.

Apple reckons the Nano will prove irresistible to style-conscious young music lovers and iPod converts who already have a larger machine but need something small and light for music on the move.

Apple has done so much more than merely put the Mini on a starvation diet. The colour screen is much better and able to display your photos should you use the device as a portable storage device. The battery life (an early bugbear for the iPod) is also much improved at 14 hours play time.

Unfortunately, the shiny casing still marks and scratches far too easily. Apple should package a decent case to prevent its

Apple has done so much more than merely put the Mini on a starvation diet

new baby looking battered - or try a different finish on the casing.

So while the designers deserve a pat on the back for creating such a beauty, the bean counters should be ashamed of themselves.

And maybe the engineers, too, because the Nano has no voice recording, no radio and no other kind of functionality.

None of that matters, of course, because the Nano will fly out of the shops on looks alone. The iPod may be smaller than ever but the task for Apple's rivals just got an awful lot bigger.

ANOTHER tiny device that's gone on a diet recently is the Palm PDA. These digital diaries were always a bit skinnier than their Pocket PC rivals but the latest is truly tiny.

In fact, it even manages to make the Nano look a bit lardy because this is a PDA you can wear on your wrist.

The Fossil Abacus Wrist PDA is a full blown Palm organiser - you can set your schedule, write your memos and list your contacts - with 8MB of storage and a small black and white screen. You can even enter data on the road by writing on the touch sensitive screen.

It's a great gadget and possibly the best wrist PDA since the old Timex Data Link, but it's unlikely to ever catch on.

And what's the point of calling something that's supposed to be cutting edge a Fossil?

● Log on to: www.fossilwristpda.com for more details.



The Fossil: great gadget, bad name

SHEREEN LOW draws up some pointers to the make-up trends for autumn

IT'S ALL change for the new season. The autumn look is a complete contrast to the candy pastels and brightly coloured eyes that were huge during the summer.

"Some of make-up's perennials have disappeared off the beauty barometer this season, replaced by a new, less obvious class of looks that takes elements of make-up past but gives them a modern edge," says MAC make-up artist Gordon Espinet.

"Gone, at least for now, are those contemporary classics such as glossy pink lips, colour flushed cheek apples and bright flashes of liquid liner.

"In its place, we've got unexpected tendencies – such as losing blush and contouring cheeks in taupe, summery skin in winter with the use of gold and bare-faced simplicity becoming glamorous."

At the other end of the scale is the make-up inspired by icons, stars like Marianne Faithfull and screen stars of yesteryear.

LADYLIKE GLAMOUR

Smart two-piece skirt suits are back in fashion this autumn, and make-up is reflecting the trend. Think defined eyes with mascara and eyeliner, and sultry red lips.

"Rich shades will be on everyone's lips and nails this season. Look out for deep reds and berries," says make-up artist Barbara Daly. "If you want to go for a deep red or berry shade, but don't want it to look too strong, blot the colour with a tissue after application and lighten the look with a slick of gloss."

Get the look with: Versace's Lips red lipstick, £16 (01273 408 800); Clarins Wonder Volume mascara, £15.50, and Max Factor Colour Perfection lipstick in Berry, £6.99.

SUBTLE SOPHISTICATION

There's always something of a bare bunch every season, but what sets the pared-down looks of this winter apart?

"Skin appears completely bare, yet it is obviously seriously consuming both product and time-wise. It's about maximising the minimal," explains Gordon.

At Balenciaga, lips were lightly tinted with clear lip balm, while the



Lashings of black mascara are in vogue this season

Vamping it up

models at Chloe had taupe blusher, rather than the conventional rosy-cheeked cheekbones.

Get the look with: Barbara Daly's make-up for Tesco Quartz Designer Eyes trio, £4.75 at Tesco; Bobbi Brown Apricot Shimmer Brick compact, £27, and Clinique Stay The Day Lip Colour in Nude Glitten, £14.

ICONIC EYES

There's no doubt that eyes are accented and highlighted this autumn, but taking inspiration from the 50s and 60s, we're piling them with lashings of black mascara and black eyeliner.

"Reminiscent of Brigitte Bardot, lines are much softer this time around – strong but not severe epitomises the look. Lots of eyeliner and mascara is essential to create these sultry, defined eyes," explains Max Factor make-up artist Ashley Ward.

Get the look with: Estee Lauder Lash XL mascara, £16.50; L'Oreal Volume Shocking Double mascara, £10.99, and Bobbi Brown Shimmer Long-Wear Gel Eyeliner in Graphite Shimmer Ink, £13.50.

GOLDEN WARMTH

"This look is gold but it's sophisticated gold, not glitzy gold," says Gordon. "It's sun-warmed, but not sun-kissed in a deep

tanned way. It's a glamorous, groomed look, that's very Beyonce: a return to neutral make-up using a lot of caramel and camel tones."

You want to look pulled together, so load your palette with luxurious warm shades like oatmeal, fudge and toffee.

Make-up artists at Luella Bartley and Alexander McQueen used bronze to give glow and shape features, while models at Oscar De La Renta had gold-coloured eyes.

Get the look with: MAC Mineralize Skinfinish, £16; Stila's Clutch And Go eye and cheek palettes in Perfectly Gold, £19 (0870 034 2566) and Sothys Hydra Glide Lipstick in Beige The, £13 (01303 262 666).

GROOMED NAILS

Bright colour is a trend that emerged from the autumn/winter collections shown at London Fashion Week last February.

"Experiment with colour and don't be afraid to use strong, primary colours on your nails. Red will be a popular choice for this season but also try blue, brown and purple," says nail expert Glenis Baptiste.

Get the look with: No7 Stay Perfect Nail Colour in Poppy, £6 at Boots; Revlon Crystalline nail varnish in Revlon Red, £6.29, and Rimmel Lasting Finish nail varnish in Exotica, £3.99.

WHAT: Hot Stone Massage

WHERE: Beauty Oasis, Northumberland Street (just off Grange Road), Darlington (01325) 489970

I'VE had some strange things done to me in the name of beauty and relaxation, but I've never had warm pebbles placed on my face, breastbone, stomach in and between each of my toes before.

But then Hot Stone Massage is a fairly new phenomenon in the UK's spas and beauty salons, even though it is an ancient practice which originated thousands of years ago in the Far East.

First, Beauty Oasis therapist Clare Leighton asked me to strip to my undies and lie face down under a towel. She then donned enormous rubber gloves in order to fish out the specially harvested basalt stones from their cooker and placed them down the sides of my body. So far, so strange...

I chose a de-stressing oil, which she massaged into my back in the traditional way, before picking up the stones and continuing the massage with them.

The theory is that the heat from the stones helps to increase your heart rate and helps to regulate blood flow. It also helps to rid the muscles of toxic waste products, which build up from stress and bad lifestyle habits. Stiff joints benefit from the penetrating heat, so this would probably be a good choice after exercise or any physical work. Hot stone therapy is also used to help relieve stress, depression, PMT and is also effective for some skin disorders.

"One stroke of a stone is the equivalent of five to ten strokes of the masseur's hand," says Clare. "The heat works deep into the tissues and increases blood supply, encouraging healing and detoxifying."

And it is deeply, deeply relaxing...

Clare then asked me to turn over and placed hot stones under my body, on my face, body and between my toes, before massaging my feet (a bit ticklish!) and my head. The careful placement of the stones, says Clare, encourages the opening of the energy meridians.

When the treatment was over and I was dressing, I picked up one of the stones I had been lying on. The amount of heat it still retained was incredible. And yet when Clare picked one up to massage with it, the heat soon drained from the stone, presumably into my poor, old aching muscles.

I have to say that the sensation of warmth from the stones used in combination with massage was unlike that of any other therapy I've had and despite the fact that the treatment took less than an hour, it gave great and lasting relief to my neck and upper back muscles, which had been very tight and painful.

All in all, a Rolls-Royce of massages.

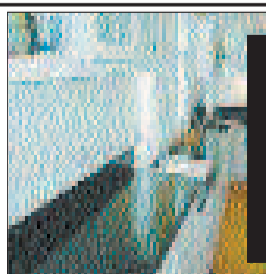
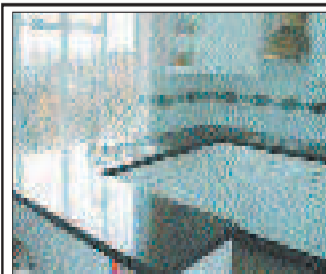
Hot Stone Massage: 45 mins, £25; 1hr 15 mins, £38.

Jenny Needham

SPECIAL OFFER

Until the end of October, all readers of The Northern Echo get ten per cent off when booking a Hot Stone Massage with Clare.

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NE motoring



Toyota Aygo: funky looks, groovy interior and a fantastic price tag

The car that will have youth on its side

The Toyota Aygo has been built to appeal to the world's urban youth, but a much more mature IAN LAMMING is pretty impressed too

WHEN you want to stand out from the crowd at the golf club, you have to think laterally. It's no use turning up at Gleneagles for a business weekend in a Bentley, a BMW or a Mercedes; they are as thick as bugs on the bumper.

Turning up in an Aygo is a whole different matter and guaranteed to attract attention as the only one in the park.

Toyota's diminutive hatchback is a real eye-turner though the looks it attracts from the rich golfers of the world say more about 'how dare you' than 'wish I had one'. We dare and are just glad to arrive in time after a 150 mile jaunt from North Yorkshire to one of Scotland's most exclusive golfing resorts.

Tested very much out of its natural habitat, the little Toyota does very well – although on one A68 overtake I have to knock the air-con off to gain that bit more power to get past in time. But five hours in any car is a good test and the Aygo passes with flying colours.

Our heads aren't ringing from the noise, our backs are far from achy and our bottoms are in pretty good shape too, I'm happy to report. There is no real dread on arrival that two days later we have to repeat the same journey in reverse. In fact, the trip back is completed at night in considerably less time.

But in truth the Aygo is aimed at the young who probably won't venture too far from home. And the target hip young things are in for a treat as Toyota produces a brand new model just for them.

Pronounced Igo, by the way, it comes to the youth of today courtesy of Toyota, Citroen and Peugeot, who seem to have teamed up to produce it.

The smallest of Toyotas, being built in the Czech Republic, joins the ranks of the Japanese giant to appeal to the world's urban youth and its baggy-panted culture.

So it looks appealing and vaguely aggressive with trendy modern bits such as the glass hatchback and translucent dashboard. Oh yeah, there's a socket for your MP3 player too – though I still don't understand what they are all about.

Funky looks, groovy interior and a great drive. But as far as the kids are concerned,

they will be more interested to hear the price tag – under £7K – and the fact it qualifies for the cheapest insurance grouping you can get, 1E. Economy is also fabulous with more than 60mpg achievable with a light foot and a willing heart.

But none of this comes at the expense of the driving experience, which is pretty darn good too. Super-accurate electric power steering, nice gearbox and tremendous ride quality make it a joy to drive.

With a wheel at each corner and the shortest overhangs I've ever seen, the Aygo handles well rounding the bends, with a pleasing sense of confidence and security.

The peppy 1.0 three cylinder pumps out a class leading 67bhp and plenty of torque. The off-beat sound of a three means it even sounds good – not that you'll be able to hear that for the din of the stereo most of the time.

Aygo offers a tidy little package without feeling too cramped and small. It drives like a much larger car but has all the appeal and the price tag of a micro mini.

With its good looks and bargain price, it's hard to see how it can miss the mark. And if the kids don't fancy it, there are a lot of adults out there who undoubtedly will. In fact, it's just the thing to carry your clubs around your favourite 18 holes.

Aygo is aimed at the young who probably won't venture too far from home. And the target hip young things are in for a treat



NE connections



Smitten: Masha Woollard

Bulgaria bound

BULGARIA has suddenly become the new tourist destination in Europe. The Mediterranean weather, and low prices have made it “the new Spain”.

And some of us like it so much, we are getting out our cheque books to buy into the Bulgarian dream, a boom fuelled by newspaper articles promising “a house for the price of a car”.

Last May, at the age of 67, I decided to join the Bulgarian property owners’ club. I took a package holiday to Varna, the most popular Black Sea resort, on a direct flight from the North-East, and set out alone to buy a house in an unfamiliar country, with no knowledge of the language.

Why? Mainly because it seems to offer a long term investment. I could enjoy holidays there, and invite my family and friends, knowing that the value of my property will go up, especially if Bulgaria joins the European Union in 2007.

Hopeful Bulgarian taxi drivers walked between the breakfast tables presenting their cards, offering house hunting tours to the new arrivals. One of them, Nicolai, had three business cards, one as a taxi driver, one as a tour guide, and one as an estate agent. “He is Mafia,” said Mariana, the hotel receptionist.

I was waiting for Elena, who had sent me an enthusiastic email promising to show me wonderful properties and shepherd me through the whole process.

Elena was a smart young woman with a briefcase. I felt shabby by comparison in casual holiday clothes. In excellent English, she described various properties to me, and then took me on a tour.

IHAD expected neglected vineyards, whose owners had all migrated to the towns. Instead, I found beautifully kept smallholdings, with tidy rows of lettuces, tomatoes, raspberries, strawberries, enormous leeks and carrots. There were fruit trees, succulent dark cherries – already ripe in May – plum, and fig. We passed fields of sunflowers, grown for their oil.

The houses, on the other hand, were neglected: the land was the important thing. But however rundown it appeared, each house had a terrace covered with shady vines, on which I could see baby grapes, the size of an apple pip, which would mature at the end of summer.

The house I fell in love with had builders finishing off their work, loading rubble into a horse drawn cart. It had four bedrooms and two bathrooms, and cost about £35,000.

Villagers passed us by in brightly painted carts. Geese, chickens and goats wandered freely in the road.

That night I talked it over with some fellow guests. I took “Stoneface” – the one with the poker face – with me to see the house and negotiate with the builders. This seemed successful at first. We left the house with a list of improvements they promised to make. I treated Stoneface to lunch to celebrate. Then, over

coffee, my mobile rang. The sale was off.

I learned that bargaining was not really the practice there. Prices had risen so rapidly that sellers know that if they can’t get the asking price today, they can a month later.

So I decided to explore another part of the country, near Burgas airport, in the South of the Black Sea Coast. I had been in touch with an agent there, a Yorkshireman married to a Bulgarian.

Nicolai was not amused. He told me that when he did his Military Service in that area, it was known as the Triangle of Death. Undeterred, I asked him to take me to the station, where he helped me buy a first class ticket, which for a 3½ hour journey cost under £4. He warned me not to travel second class as I might be mugged.

My main worry was not being able to read the names of the stations, as the Bulgarians use the Cyrillic alphabet – created by a medieval monk called, you’ve guessed it, Cyril – but I found a student who was happy to practise his English and tell me when I got to my station.

FROM the train I saw cultivated fields, sunflowers, and poppies, purple mallow, and wild pink roses. Once we passed a field of wild boar.

At the other end, the agent was waiting to show me round. I was looking for a village with a shop, a post office and a school, to show that it was still alive and inhabited. One of them had an enormous stone monument in the village square, showing noble workers from the Communist days.

I found a bungalow standing in a smallholding which contained two other building plots. It had mains water, sewage, and electricity.

The great attraction was a stone barn with beams which would convert to a wonderful living room. And it was, literally, the price of a car, 9000 euros, about £6,500.

Foreigners wanting to buy land in Bulgaria have to form a Limited Company. This is not expensive, and takes about ten days. The whole conveyancing process takes less than a month.

Nicolai saw me back at the hotel the next morning.

“So,” he said, “it’s the Triangle of Death, is it?”

“Yes,” I replied, “I can’t wait to go back...”

● You can fly direct from Durham Tees Valley and Newcastle airports to Bulgaria www.balkanholidays.co.uk

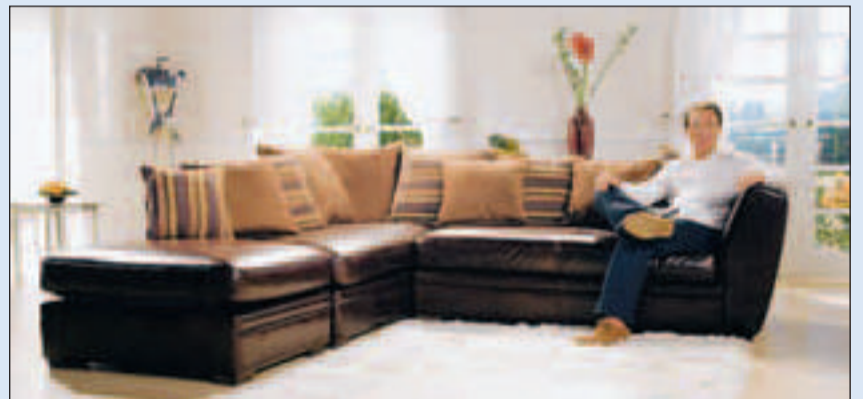
“However rundown it appeared, each house had a terrace covered with shady vines, on which I could see baby grapes, the size of an apple pip”



In need of TLC: Masha’s Bulgarian property

More and more North-East people are snapping up property on the continent. MASHA WOOLLARD, who is 67 and lives in Darlington, explains why she has bought into Bulgaria

Great £1,000 sofa giveaway with ScS



TO celebrate the launch of its new sofa superstore at Durham City Retail Park this Thursday, national sofa retailer ScS is offering one lucky reader of The Northern Echo the chance to win a bumper £1,000 to spend in the new store on the sofa of their dreams.

With more than 100 styles to choose from, the extensive leather and fabric range offers something for everyone. And with great prices across the range, you’ll be amazed how much you can get for your money.

The new Durham store will be the 70th ScS store across the UK and cements the company’s reputation as a major national retailer. It also adds to the nine stores in the company’s homeland, including Darlington, Stockton and Middlesbrough. To further celebrate the launch at Durham City Retail Park, all ScS customers will be welcomed with an exclusive selection of money-off vouchers. Offering substantial savings, the vouchers are redeemable across the whole range, including the new

sophisticated Firenze – pictured above with the face of ScS, actor Martin Kemp. Plus ScS is also offering fantastic savings of up to 50 per cent, up to three years interest free credit and nothing to pay for the first year on loads of sofas, so there’s a style to suit all tastes and budgets.

For further information on the latest range from ScS, visit the new ScS sofa superstore, near the new B&Q, at Durham City Retail Park, off the A690, call freephone 0800 7310048 or log on to the website www.scssofas.co.uk

For your chance to win £1,000 to spend with ScS, just tell us the name of the actor who is the “face of ScS”. Answers on a postcard or the back of an envelope to ScS Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. The closing date is October 18 and usual newspaper rules apply.



Flying the flag



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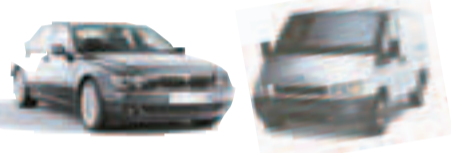
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