

The Northern Echo

# me

The lifestyle magazine  
for the North-East

JANUARY 2006

ME AND MY  
WARDROBE

Jenny Davies

GARDENING

Planning the  
year ahead

ART

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(01325)  
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**ADVERTISING**

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

**EDITORIAL**

Jenny Needham  
(01325) 505082  
[jenny.needham@nne.co.uk](mailto:jenny.needham@nne.co.uk)

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## sharon griffiths

‘It’s so much easier to succeed when your expectations are lower

If God had meant us to get fit in January, he would have given us more daylight and warm weather. Traditionally, January 1 is the big day for starting those health and fitness campaigns. But by the end of the month, around January 28 – most people have given up on their new year campaign.

So that didn’t last long, did it?

The trouble is we’re too brutal with ourselves. Expecting too much too soon. And instead of starting the year with the rosy glow of good intentions achieved, we’re plummeted even further down by an awful sense of failure.

True, New Year’s Day is a good day to start. After weeks of festivities, our systems are groaning with overload, and all we really want for a few days is a nice glass of water and a lettuce leaf.

But after a week or so, we’re back to normal, longing for a few drinks and a bit of comforting stodge.

The days might be getting longer, but not much. It’s still dark more than it’s light. Everything’s such an effort. And do you know why? Because we are designed to sleep through the winter. Like hedgehogs and dormice, we are meant to gather our stock of food and have a little snooze from about November to March, with just a little break for some partying at Christmas.

Traditionally, that’s what we did. Not totally hibernated, of course. But while spring, summer and autumn were times of hard work and harvest, winters were different. Winter was when we caught up with our sleep. We went to bed early, got up late, saw to the animals, then sat around the fire drinking and telling stories and waiting for television to be invented.

We did not get up at 6.15am, stamp out into the shivering dark, scrape the ice off the car just to drive to a health club, plunge into tepid water and swim for 45 minutes.

That’s what I’ve done every morning for the last 20 years and I think I must be mad.

I’ve got used to it now. I do it on automatic pilot, quite often literally in my sleep.

But every January there’s always a little cluster of keen new swimmers, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, leaping into the water at 6.45am. They don’t last.

They clutter up the pool for a week or so, bag the best showers and the only working hairdryer. They talk loudly and confidently about how they’re going to come every day or at least three times a week.

And by the end of the month, they’ve vanished again, taking their go-faster goggles with them. Another New Year’s resolution fizzled into failure. And I daresay a lot of the dieters, joggers and newly given-up smokers are equally doomed to fail.

Time for a re-think.

January is long month to get through. It usually has the worst weather of the year. And after all the busyness and excitement leading up to Christmas, it’s usually a horrible combination of anti-climax and hangover.

So it makes much more sense to take it gently, be nice to ourselves.

Then there are all those Christmas presents to be enjoyed. There are always a few chocolates left, a bit of Turkish Delight, a hunk of Christmas cake. Plus all those books and DVDs that you received. It would be rude to the givers, wouldn’t it, to ignore them.

So start your new regime lightly, gently... a little extra walking, maybe... a Saturday morning swim... a Sunday afternoon stroll... no smoking until after lunch... no drinking through the week... Nothing too jarring or disrupting. It’s so much easier to succeed when your expectations are lower.

And when there are still weeks to go until February and pay day, reward yourself with some of your Christmas goodies. If it’s a choice between going for a jog in the sleet and the dark, or curling up in front of the fire with a chocolate orange and Brad Pitt, which is more likely to make you feel happy?

Exactly.

Eventually, the days will lengthen, mornings will be lighter, afternoons longer. Getting up early on a fine spring morning is no real hardship. Just as Nature designed us to snore through the winter, she also planned for us to wake up in spring – along with those dormice and hedgehogs. That’s when we can put those resolutions into effect, when our body clocks tell us so.

So if you made all those self-improving, life-enhancing resolutions at the start of the month and are beginning to flounder. Relax. You’re not breaking them by giving up, you are merely adapting to the seasonal cycles of the natural world. You can’t fight Nature.

In other words – forget the gym and the swimming, the diet and the no-drink rule. Have another chocolate and go back to sleep.

Mother Nature will wake you up at Easter. Time enough for New Year resolutions then.

### PICTURE THIS

If you fancy sitting in Brad Pitt’s lap – or even Brian Clough’s – here’s the answer. Cloth UK takes cutting edge print technology and allows the addition of any image, photography, pattern or design to be added onto a range of contemporary products – armchairs, chaises longues, footstools, tiles, cushions, wall hangings, canvases and roman blinds.

“We’ve put football legend Brian Clough onto a chair and rugby champ Martin Johnson on a beanbag. We’ve put a quirky 1960s photo of a woman in a flowery swimming hat onto a cushion, and a



1950s photo of a customer’s father in a football team line-up onto a footstool,” says Cloth UK director Liz Watson. “It a fantastic way to make a special occasion and bring some individuality into your home.”

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NE window shopping



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## NE interiors



It has won a clutch of awards and was once patronised by the Prime Minister, but what makes The Rose & Crown at Romaldkirk so special? SARAH FOSTER pays a visit to find out



# Crown jewel

**L**OOMING large beside the village green, a towering mass of stonework, The Rose & Crown at Romaldkirk, near Barnard Castle, is certainly a handsome building. Built in 1733 as a stopping off point for weary travellers, little seems to have changed – when we arrive, two walkers are sipping drinks in the autumn sunshine. Going through the door, we get our first taste of the hotel ambience – instant warmth, a friendly smile and the sweet smell of orchids. Immediately, I feel at home.

For 16 years, Chris and Ali Davy have run The Rose & Crown. After an inauspicious start (the place was in receivership when they came) they have built up a thriving business, winning plaudit after plaudit. Among their most recent accolades have been County Dining Pub of the Year, Inn of the Year and Pub of the Year for England.

Chris says the recognition has helped bring custom from far and wide. “We’ve had some big national awards, and that’s very important,” he says. “When you start getting national recognition for what you’re doing, that helps draw attention.”

Certainly, on the day that we arrive the place is buzzing. The hotel restaurant is more or less fully booked, as are its 12 rooms – pretty impressive, considering it’s a Sunday.

Chris says the food is one of the hotel’s biggest draws. “We serve thousands of meals each year in the restaurant, brasserie and bar,” he says. “The restaurant has what I’d call a slightly more elaborate menu – it’s a four course dinner at a fixed price – or you can go in the brasserie or eat in the bar, where the food is slightly more informal.

“There’s a lot of local dining trade and a

lot of bar food trade. Then, at weekends, we get people from further afield.”

On the evening of our stay, we get to test the hotel’s high culinary standards – for which it holds two AA rosettes – by eating in the restaurant. After mulling over menus in the cosy bar, complete with roaring fire, we wander through to the candle-lit dining room. The atmosphere is genial, with the sound of easy conversation, and with its rich decor and wood panelling, the place exudes old-fashioned charm.

Our meals live up to expectations – options include my tasty sea bass and my husband’s Teesdale lamb – and everything is presented with panache. What makes the experience even nicer is the staff, who are pleasant and attentive, without being pushy.

Chris stresses the importance of his employees. “The food and the staff are the two crucial things,” he says. “We get a lot of comments about the staff. I think it’s quite important to have local people because they understand the area.”

While they have a team of 35 to help them run things, including eight who live in, Chris and Ali remain active in hotel life. Chris works mainly behind the scenes, whereas Ali’s role is front of house – when not caring for the couple’s daughters Laura, 17, and Becky, 13. “We’re a family,” says Chris. “Our business isn’t set in any way.”

The hotel decor is Ali’s domain, and on the morning of our departure, she shows me her handiwork. First on the guided tour is the homely lounge, where comfy sofas are clustered around a solid fuel heater. The colours are bold – dark-hued walls compete with richly patterned fabrics – and the overall effect is of old-world opulence.

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**“** We get a lot of comments about the staff. I think it's quite important to have local people because they understand the area

One of the more modern rooms at the Rose & Crown. Below left: hoteliers Chris and Ali Davy



rooms take up the theme. Each has its own design, with regal reds, cornflower blues and canary yellows as leading colours. Behind the main hotel is a newer annexe, where guests can choose from more modern rooms.

For all its tradition, the hotel espouses contemporary ideals. Its en-suite bathrooms come with every convenience and touches like Molton Brown toiletries add a feel of luxury. This attention to detail is evident throughout, with walking guides thoughtfully laid out in bedrooms to help you explore the surrounding countryside. You can even order a packed lunch to take with you on your trek.

Aside from walking, there's plenty to keep you occupied during a stay at The Rose & Crown. It often hosts shooting parties and is a good base for discovering treasures like Eggleston Hall, Raby Castle, and England's highest waterfall, High Force.

▶ Continued on page 6



## The sliding door collection by Bedroom Image

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## NE interiors



Yet if you just want to relax, there couldn't be a more perfect place – what struck me most about Romalldkirk was its sheer tranquillity. This is something which no doubt appealed to Tony Blair, who used to visit The Rose & Crown with his family. "They always used to come here on New Year's Day," says Chris, jokingly adding, "but we haven't seen them since they've had Chequers."

For him, the hotel will always hold special charm. "It's just a lovely old building in a nice part of the world," he says.

● The Rose & Crown, Romalldkirk, Barnard Castle, tel (01833) 650213, [www.rose-and-crown.co.uk](http://www.rose-and-crown.co.uk). Four course dinner in the restaurant costs £26 per person and bed and breakfast starts at £63 per person.

**Right: The Rose & Crown has won many awards for its food**

Pictures: DAVID WOOD/Rose & Crown



If you feel you need a culinary treat to cheer you up in the long dark days of January, try this little bit of chocolate heaven from the kitchens of the Rose and Crown...

### RICH GRAND MARNIER AND CHOCOLATE POT

Separate four eggs

Melt 6oz dark chocolate in a basin over hot water

Remove from the heat and beat in 2oz chilled, cubed butter, the egg yolks and 3fl oz Grand Marnier

Whip the egg whites until they form stiff peaks, fold into chocolate mix and pour into individual souffle dishes

Serve with grated chocolate on top

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For all its tradition, the hotel espouses contemporary ideals... Its en-suite bathrooms come with every convenience and touches like Molton Brown toiletries add a feel of luxury



TAKE A SEAT

ANTIQUE furniture makers, Tomlinsons of Tockwith, between Wetherby and York, has launched a new bespoke upholstery range produced entirely by hand using techniques and natural materials of bygone eras. The range includes authentic designs from the Georgian and Victorian periods, each hand-built using natural materials such as horsehair and duck down. The sofa frames are made from long lasting kiln-dried hardwoods such as beech using traditional construction methods entailing glue, screws and dowelled joints.



There is a wide choice of coverings in sumptuous fabrics woven in northern Italy, soft leathers and durable fabrics from the US. Prices range from £2,195 inc VAT.

Tomlinsons, the largest antiques and fine furniture warehouse in the country, is at Moorside, Tockwith, North Yorkshire YO26 7QG. Tel: (01423) 359052

COVER STORY

FURNITURE is an expensive investment and a favourite piece can easily become part of the family. But a lifetime of lounging, messy babies, gnawing dogs and readily changing fashions can all take their toll on your special sofa or favourite armchair, leaving it looking a little tired.

Rather than forking out for a replacement or hiding the offending item under a clumsy throw, you could have it re-upholstered or give it new life with hand-tailored covers. A new website www.plumbsupholstery.co.uk has been launched by Plumbs, providing detailed information of all of their different services - re-upholstery, made to measure traditional or designer loose covers.

With a 250-strong team of design experts across the country Plumbs



provides a free, no-obligation home consultancy service where you can discuss your requirements and compare colours and prices from over 500 fabric designs and colourways.

Says home consultant Adrian Hope: "People form emotional attachments to their furniture and we can literally transform that shoddy old sofa into a brand new piece of furniture. There is practically nothing we can't cover."

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**NE interiors**

# Go green in 2006



We are all becoming more concerned about conserving the planet. This year you can show you care by having eco-friendly furnishings and accessories in your home. **GABRIELLE FAGAN** explains how



**A** FEW years ago anyone remotely interested in design wouldn't have looked twice at environmentally friendly homewares. Items made from old car tyres or pulped cardboard in sludge colours just didn't cut it compared to those glitzy designer ranges – even if they were helping save the planet.

All that's changed now though, because going green has become fashionable – and there are all sorts of great furniture and accessories made from reclaimed, recycled or sustainable materials. Not only do they look brilliant, but they're also easier to find and buy.

Designer Aaron Moore, whose bespoke furniture range includes tables and chairs made from recycled plastic bottles, says green design is here to stay. "People are much more aware of our effect on the environment and want to have eco-friendly products, but until now they have found it difficult to find products that combined design with ethics," he says.

Here's how to do your bit by joining the Green Chic clique.

## ECO-FRIENDLY FURNITURE

If you want a special piece of furniture, consider getting a local craftsman to make bespoke pieces using recycled or sustainable woods. Alternatively, stores such as Ikea and Argos have sustainable wood furniture in their highly affordable ranges.

- Aaron Moore's funky chair, table and stool – made from recycled plastic bottles – are sold through Plidesign. Table, £500, chair, £150, stool, £135.

- Banana bark – a woven sustainable source – is the material for a sleek furniture set from The Pier. It's ecologically friendly

and only bark shed naturally is used, so it's also sustainable. This material features increasingly in the Pier's range, which also includes rubberwood. The Bekasi banana bark collection has an armchair, £295, and two-seater sofa, £395. Team it with an Alaska rug made from leather off-cuts and cotton, £125.

- Alternatively, kit out a conservatory or a bathroom with the Cage armchair in woven rope, sealed with natural varnish. It's part of the AM.PM collection from La Redoute and costs £199.

## SWEET DREAMS

- Warren Evans sell beds made from fair trade woods and from timber that's certified by the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) which rewards good forest management. Beds start at around £115.

- Raft make their products out of reclaimed teak from Indonesia. Their beautiful and comprehensive range includes a Super King bed, £1,250, with a ball end headboard and footer or sleigh style. They also make a refectory table and chairs, £1,295 and £98. Raft have just opened a London shop and have a nationwide delivery service.

## BATHTIME

Make a splash with a bright red block bath made in recycled plastic by Durat, which costs £4,250. Other colours are available.

## PAINT SENSE

Using green principles to decorate prevents the environmental damage caused by harmful chemicals in discarded paint, but it can also help those who suffer allergies from synthetic products.

- EarthBorn believe their natural paints, varnishes and woodwork products are not only safer to use but are sound for the environment. Their collection includes a range derived wholly from natural clays. The paints also come in stunning shades like Wedgwood Blue, Blush, Lemon or Green and cost from £15.25 for 2.5 litres of emulsion.

- Create a warm, sunny Mediterranean look at home by using La Tienda Mediterranean Earth and Mineral Pigments, which can be mixed into paint from The Green Shop. There are 20 shades and it costs from £8.50 for a 500g box. It's just one choice available from this company which specialises in environmentally friendly paints and finishes. It also sells recycled garden furniture and other home accessories.

## ACCESSORISE

- You're spoilt for choice with The Natural Collection's range available by mail order. It's bursting with home items, which are either produced according to Fair Trade principles, or made from recycled or sustainable materials. Look out for its retro dotted Bubl glassware, which is made from





Left: Bekasi banana bark sofa from The Pier, £395



Left and far left: natural flooring from Crucial Trading. Below left: eco-paints don't contain damaging chemicals



Right: the Hoop occasional table, designed by Christopher Pett, has a recycled paper core with organic eggshell laquer finish, £250, from Plidesign



**ECO SOURCES**

**Annasach: 01361 884 189**  
 Baileys Home & Garden: 01989 561 931/www.baileys-home-garden.co.uk  
**Crucial Trading: 01562 743 747/www.crucial-trading.com**  
 Dibor: 0870 013 3666/www.dibor.co.uk  
**Durat: 0035 822 521 000/www.durat.com**  
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**The Green Shop: 01452 770 629/www.greenshop.co.uk**  
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 Raft: 020 8450 5078/www.raftltd.co.uk  
**La Redoute AM.PM: 0870 050 0455/www.laredoute.co.uk**  
 Shakspeare Glass: 0182 333 3422

100 per cent recycled glass and is dishwasher proof. The glassware is priced from £6.75, while a paper leaf Japanese-style lamp costs £29.95, and a set of four laundry baskets, £29.95.

- Ocaso vases from the Pier, £24.95 or £29.95, are made in Spain from recycled glass, with burnt orange paint sprayed inside.
- Shakspeare Glass hand makes eye-catching glass accessories from recycled lead crystal. Small bowls are priced from £77.50 and large jugs, £120.
- Baileys Home & Garden have a recycled range including decorative items such old wooden shoe lasts as well as tailors' dummies, £260 each.
- Harrogate company Dibor has a collection of items made from reclaimed or sustainable materials, including a toy

box, spice rack, and a log basket.  
 ● Get a touch of tartan with environmentally friendly cushions and throws handmade in the Scottish borders from locally sourced waste fabric. Crofters slouch cushion, £76, Real McCoy throw, £450, all made by Annasach.

**FRIENDLY FLOORS**

Wooden flooring is not only 'green' but it looks great as well. There are many companies now offering timber boards made from reclaimed or sustainable woods.  
 ● If you prefer to keep your toes warm, especially in winter, companies such as Crucial Trading specialise in natural floorcoverings made from coir, sisal, seagrass and jute or wool. Coir costs £10.60 a metre.

## Problems getting the right mortgage or remortgage?

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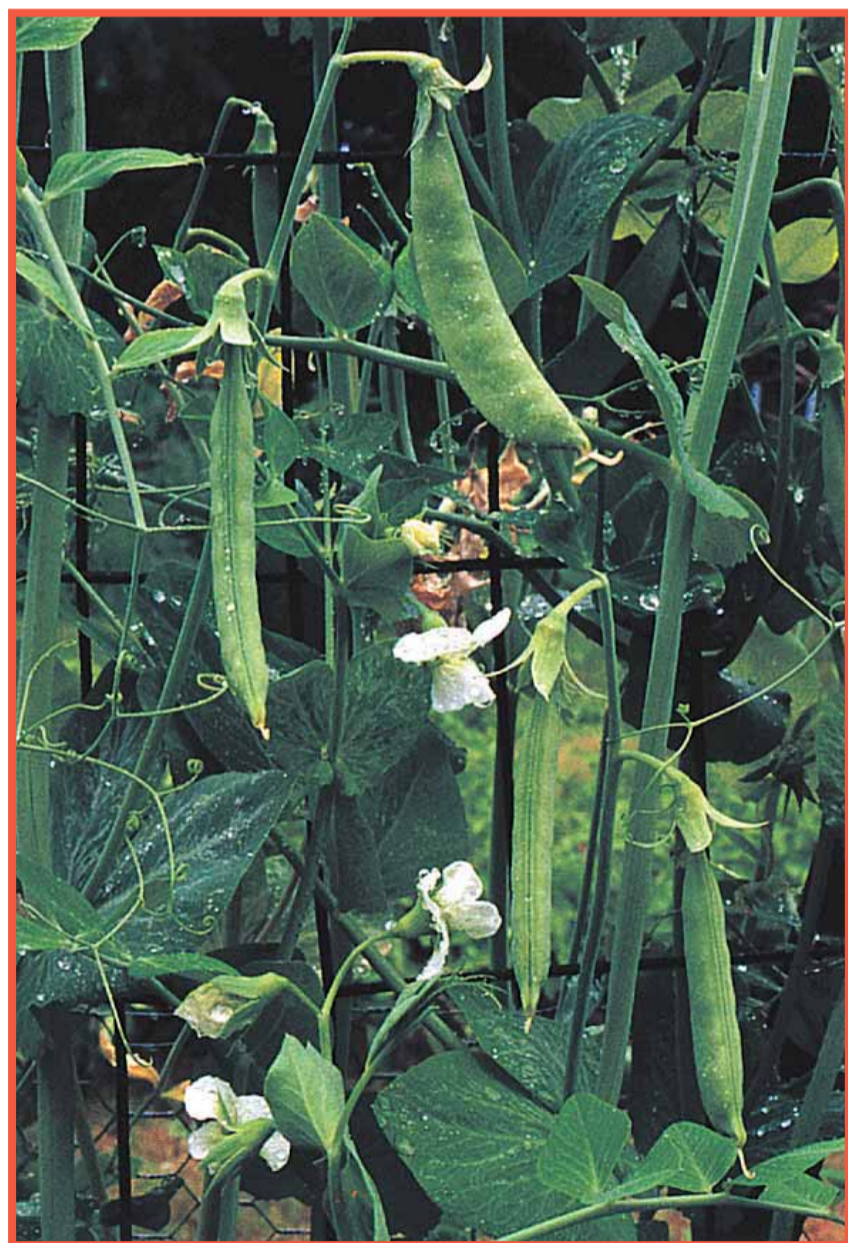


# NE gardening

With the New Year upon us, Gardening Correspondent BRIGID PRESS recommends jobs to do in the house, the greenhouse, the vegetable patch and the garden in general, as well as plants to look out for each month



# Forward planting



## JANUARY

PLACE early potatoes in shallow boxes with their eyes uppermost, and store in a light, frost free place. Plant out shallots if the ground is frost free.

Clean the leaves of indoor plants with warm water and a dash of washing up liquid.

Prune climbing roses, cutting back long, whippy growth and creating a framework of horizontal stems. Remove any snow that accumulates on the branches of shrubs and trees.

### Jasminum nudiflorum

No need to pamper the winter jasmine for it flowers abundantly from late autumn to early spring, on even a cold north facing wall. The lax, dark green stems, though, need the support of trellis, walls or wires.

## FEBRUARY

SOW broad beans, peas and spinach outdoors. In the greenhouse sow cabbage and cauliflower and sweetcorn. Chit main crop potatoes.

Split and repot overgrown tubs of peace lilies.

Continue to plant out fruit trees, and plant rhododendrons. Begin cutting back the dried stems of perennial plants and shrubs that sheltered insects over the winter.

### Helleborus orientalis

The Lenten rose has a mind of its own, producing plum, pink, cream or white saucer-shaped flowers, the insides freckled with crimson, amidst even the coldest of weather. The broad, prostrate dark green leaves are evergreen in mild areas.

## MARCH

PUT onion sets in the ground, and sow beetroot, carrot, parsnip and lettuce in situ. Under cloches, sow spring onions. In the greenhouse, begin sowing tomatoes. Move cyclamens that have finished flowering and gradually reduce watering.

Plant gladioli. Prune hybrid and perpetual roses.

Wash, scrub and repaint garden furniture.

### Primula vulgaris

Britain's native primrose, with its soft yellow flowers and dense clusters of leaves, is the well loved forerunner of spring. It is small in size, being only 15cm high, but given the right conditions will quickly colonise. Despite looking best in a woodland setting, it can be used to edge borders or fill rockeries.

## APRIL

SOW kale and broccoli in the ground. Transplant cabbage, leek and cauliflower seedlings. Pinch out the growing tips in the broad bean plants. Transfer tomato plants to tubs, larger pots or growbags in the greenhouse.

Nip out the tops of fuchsia seedlings so they form bushier plants with more flowers.

Plant out dahlias. Sow lawn seed, or lay turf. Begin mowing lawns on dry days, but leave the blades at a height of at least 8-10cm.

### Doronicum colimnae

In mid spring leopard's bane is a mass of wiry-stemmed, brilliant yellow daisy-like flowers over clusters of mid to rich bright green, usually heart-shaped leaves. It grows up to 30cm high, and dies down quite early in the season. The flowers are good for cutting.

## MAY

SOW French and runner beans, Chinese cabbage, courgettes and turnips. Harvest

asparagus spears as they come, as well as the first of the broad beans. Earth up potatoes.

Take cuttings of poinsettia. Thin grape bunches by a third.

Harden off all bedding and hanging basket plants. Stake sweet peas.

### Fritillaria imperialis

The aristocrat of spring, the crown imperial is spectacular in full bloom. Whorls of bell-like flowers, lemon yellow through to dusky orange or scarlet red, are carried proudly atop tall leafy stems. Each cluster of flowers has a crowning tuft of leaves to complete the beauty of the plant, which has only one fault – an unpleasant foxy smell when the new growth appears in spring.

## JUNE

TRANSPLANT sweetcorn, and place in a warm spot in the greenhouse. Sow radish, lettuce and more peas. Thin out beetroot and turnip. Harvest the early peas and new potatoes. Harvest asparagus until the end of the month only.

Plant out bedding and hanging basket plants. Roll and mow the lawn regularly, taking the height down to five cm now.

### Geranium grandiflorum

True geraniums are among the most charming and well known garden plants with their saucer-shaped flowers held over a rounded, bushy mass of foliage. These tough plants have deeply divided palmate leaves, usually in a midgreen colour. The soft flowers always have five petals, and can appear in any colour variant from white, blues and purples to pinks. They can be grown in the borders, as ground cover, for edging, in the rockery or under a woodland canopy.

## JULY

SOW final crop of beetroot, carrot and turnip. Thin out carrots. Harvest broad beans and the first of the runner beans.

Layer strawberries. Begin to dead-head sweet peas and hanging basket plants.

### Eryngium

Sea holly is much prized by flower arrangers for its spiny leaves and teasel-like flower heads surrounded by a collar of prickly bracts. The leaves of these stylish plants may be a greyish green, bluish green or dark green. The flower heads are light blue, steely blue or violet blue. They can grow up to 4ft tall, make a stunning addition to the back of the border and seed themselves quite readily.

## AUGUST

SOW Japanese onions for over-wintering. Sow spinach for spring. Earth up celery. Begin harvesting tomatoes.

Take hydrangea and fuchsia cuttings. Shake out and repot cyclamen.

Cut out old growth and crossing stems of climbing roses. Tie in young growth. Pot up strawberry plants that were layered in July.

### Kniphofia

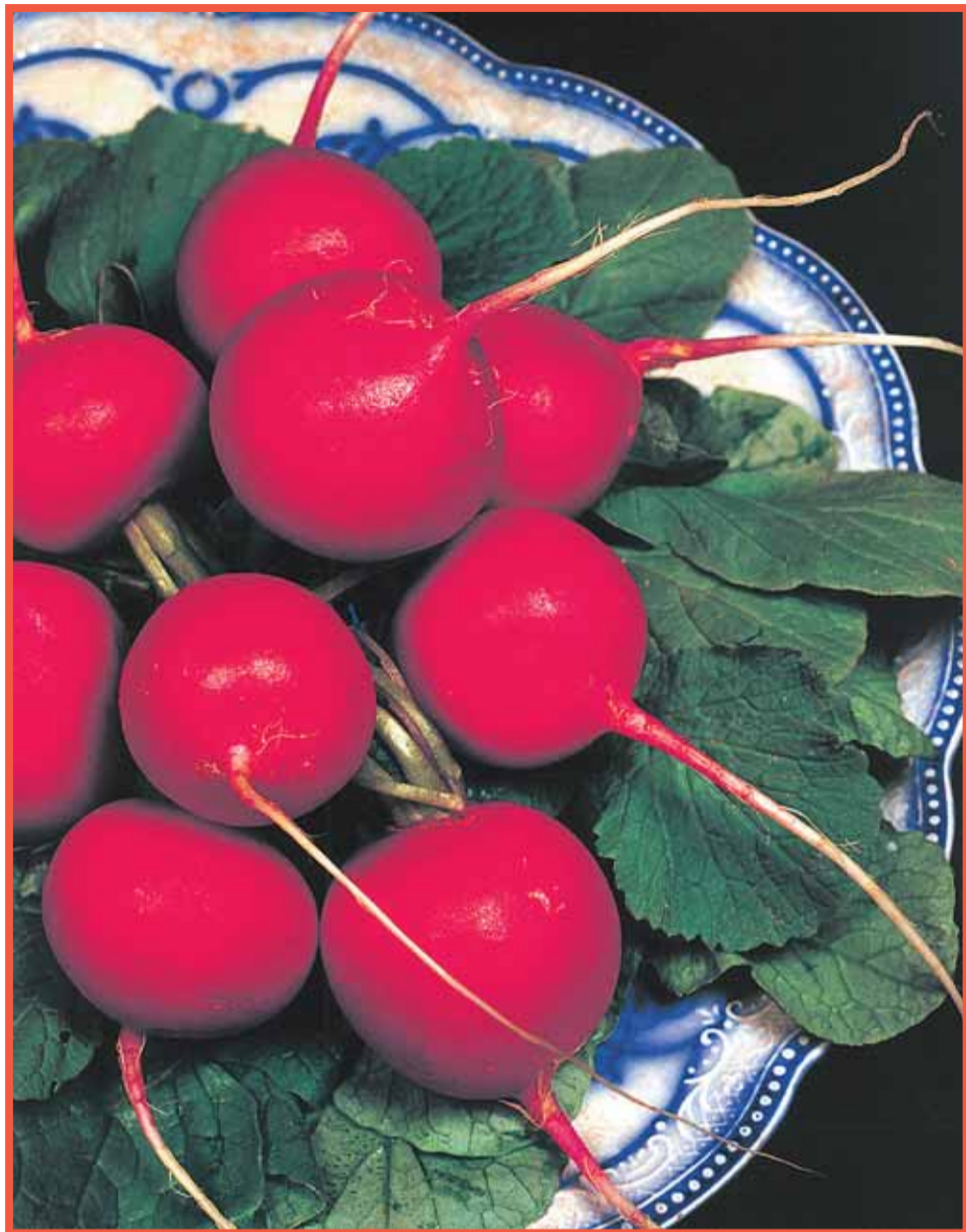
The unmistakable dense spikes of pendant tubular flowers, rising over clumps of grassy foliage, make red-hot poker outstanding focal points for herbaceous and mixed borders. Set on strong upright stems, the poker-like flower spikes are traditionally yellow, with hot red or orange tips, but a wide range of hybrid varieties in colours including creams, yellows and green are now available.

## SEPTEMBER

HARVEST tomatoes and maincrop potatoes, as well as onions, making sure that the tops have begun to wither before pulling out of the ground.

Take cuttings of pelargoniums. Pot hyacinth bulbs for indoor flowering.





Plant up rockeries with alpines. Sow sweet-peas for next year. Transplant evergreen shrubs. Start raking up leaves and placing in their own compost area.

Clean and put away garden furniture.

**Schizostylis coccinea**

*This splendid genus of autumn flowering plants comes from South Africa. Its flowers spikes stand above the erect sword-like leaves. They bear up to ten bright scarlet flowers which open into stars in bright sun and bloom from early to late autumn.*

**OCTOBER**

LIFT the last of the potatoes and carrots. Cut down asparagus foliage. Tidy empty patches and dig over bare soil, removing any weeds. Clear out tomato growbags, and re-sow with lettuce.

Make sure that all tender plants have been brought indoors. Lift and store gladioli, dahlia and begonia tubers.

Plant daffodils, tulips and hyacinth bulbs for a spring display. Split large or congested perennial plants in the borders.

Scrub paths and patios with salt and water to remove algae.

**Sedum 'Autumn Joy'**

*The ice plant is a hybrid with a height and spread of two feet. It has ovate pale grey-green leaves and the flower heads, up to eight inches wide, are borne on thick, fleshy stems. They are pink when they first open in late summer, deepening to copper red by late autumn.*

**NOVEMBER**

SOW broad beans and peas outdoors, but protect with a cloche in exposed areas.

Remove yellowed leaves from brassicas. Sow green manure on empty ground.

Hold back on watering bulbs, corms and tubers lifted from the garden last month. Insulate the greenhouse with bubble wrap.

Plant roses in the borders. Get ready to fleece tender plants on colder nights.

**Euonymus europaeus**

*The native spindle tree bears a profusion of pink, winged seed capsules that gradually split open to reveal bright orange seeds. The leaves, too, turn from lime green through to orange and finally deep burgundy before tumbling to the floor. It grows to six feet tall and has a similar spread, and prefers a non acidic soil.*

**DECEMBER**

LIFT and store turnips. Harvest Brussels sprouts and parsnips. Manure and dig over soil ready for next season.

Clean and sterilise the greenhouse, staging and pots. Check that heating systems are working properly.

Plant trees in the garden. Water and cover compost heaps.

Dig over any open ground as the weather allows.

**Garrya elliptica**

*The evergreen, quick growing Garrya assumes tree proportions against a sunny wall. Magnificent in its winter glory, it begins to produce lime-green flowers in late summer, and by mid winter it is wreathed in a mass of drooping catkins as much as 25cm long, that last for several months. In sheltered gardens, it makes an eye-catching specimen tree.*



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Naked japes on the Millennium Bridge in Gateshead and, right, another mass nude outing on Tunick's travels



# The bottom line

Thousands of people have felt the need to strip naked and pose for New York artist Spencer Tunick – including 1,700 in the North-East. Ahead of his exhibition at the Baltic in Gateshead, he tells LINDSAY JENNINGS why he's no renegade

**S**PENCER Tunick would definitely consider posing naked for other artists – but only if he liked their work. That, and if he could lose himself in a crowd. "That's what I try to do with people, so that they feel as if they're part of something bigger," he says, of his predilection for taking photographs of crowds of naked people.

New York artist Tunick doesn't really have a problem getting people to pose for him. When he asks for people take part in some of his controversial mass nude work, they come in their thousands.

One of his most recent "events", was at Newcastle/Gateshead in July when 1,700 ebullient people shed their smalls and gathered on the shores of the Tyne.

Tunick had asked them to turn up for a 4am start, which they duly did, raring to go and with a bitter North-East wind nipping at their bits.

"You only live once, so thank you," Tunick told them over the tannoy system. "Today, we are going to make some shapes that reflect the city."

Tunick describes his work as "land art" but says there's a performance element to it too, a kind of story running through it. "It's like these people could be from a different world or a different society," he says of some of his work.

But that's not to say he wants individuals to stand out in his images. He asked some of the crowd at Newcastle – those with tans and tattoos – to stand at the back during one shot, and in another he pointed to a girl with blue or pink hair to move aside completely.

"I think she wanted to bring attention to herself and while it is about the individual in mass, it's not about the individual separated from the mass," he explains.

Tunick, 38, grew up in the Catskill Mountains in up-

state New York, where the landscape was full of forests, waterfall, rivers and lakes.

He began taking photographs of nude figures in public in 1992 after noticing that no other artist was doing it. Two years later, he progressed to doing nude group shots and it was another two years of experimentation before he felt confident enough to organise a mass shoot. Initially, he would wander the streets, handing out 3,000 fliers and asking people to take part in his art installations.

"You used to be able to tell by what they were wearing if they were inhibited or not," he says.

People in gold jewellery would generally not show up, whereas those in silver were more likely to say yes. Those people wearing suits but with unique jewellery, some kind of leather or shell hanging from their neck as evidence of their free spirits, were showers. Hip-hop types were not.

Today when he is organising a shoot, he relies on the venue, such as Baltic, to set up a website to attract people. He knows how many people are going to turn up because they sign up via the website.

So far, he has photographed 7,000 nudes in Barcelona; 4,500 in Melbourne; 2,500 in Montreal and 4,000 in Chile. His volunteers come from all backgrounds, in all shapes, sizes, ages and colours.

Tunick works with two cameras and to cause the least amount of disruption – and perhaps embarrassment on behalf of his volunteers – he starts at sunrise.

Many of the participants report feeling elated after they've taken part. Northern Echo reporter Olivia Richwald, who took part in Tunick's installation at Newcastle, says that although she felt self-conscious, she was also buoyed by the "live for the moment" mentality which swept through the crowd.





*For me, the nude body is like a raw material; another artist might use oil or clay... The setting I choose is like a canvas*

– artist Spencer Tunick

held his right to free speech, stating his work was protected by the first amendment of the US constitution.

“I felt in New York I’d clarified things for myself,” he says. “The police in New York know now not to randomly arrest artists using the body.”

He sums up what the nude body means to him best in a newspaper article he wrote recently.

“For me, the nude body is like a raw material; another artist might use oil or clay. I love the fact that, en masse, it can be turned into an infinite number of shapes or abstractions, while the setting I choose – rural, urban, indoors, or out – is like a canvas.

“My work’s also about an attempt to challenge notions about nudity in a public space and how the body is represented in our culture. When you see 300 people naked in Grand Central Station, or a river of flesh flowing through the beauty aisles of Selfridges department store, it makes you think about all sorts of social and political issues.”

**T**UNICK is always extremely aware of his volunteers, often thanking them profusely during the events. He uses various sound systems to get people to move around and had a problem with one of the microphones during the stint for the Baltic.

“I was really freaking out because I was very concerned about the participants,” he says. “But at the end of the day the people got past the problems and they really shone. I got some wonderful work, it just took me longer. They were awesome.”

Tunick is married to Krystal Pink, a graphic designer and illustrator, and the couple have a daughter, Seda Moon, who’s almost one. The family live in Brooklyn, New York.

Tunick is flying over to the North-East later this month for the opening of his new exhibition at the Baltic, which runs from January 21 to March 26. He’s looking forward to meeting the people who took part in the shoot. Like all his volunteers, everyone who posed naked will get a free photograph as a memento of their experience. For many, it will be something to treasure and to show the grandchildren in years to come.

“I pick out the one I think they would enjoy the best,” says Tunick. “It’s great, it’s really energising having everyone there and they can come and talk to each other and share what they’ve experienced.”

For most, it will be an experience they won’t forget in a hurry.

● **The Spencer Tunick exhibition runs at the Baltic, in Gateshead, from Saturday, January 21 to Sunday, March 26. Admission is free.**

“Stripping off was actually the scariest moment of my life. When they shouted ‘get your kit off’ I was suddenly surrounded by naked people. It all went in slow motion,” she says. “Once we were naked it wasn’t that bad because everybody was the same. I tried my hardest not to look down, but curiosity got the better of me.”

“Now, I’m proud I did it. I often tell people about it and they are a bit freaked out, but quite impressed.”

Tunick himself admits he doesn’t know why so many want to pose for him but it never ceases to amaze him how they’ll get into the spirit of things.

“Maybe it’s because there are not that many activities to be nude,” he muses. “Then there’s the participating in the making of art, which isn’t trivial – it’s just everyday people who take a leap of faith. And I would think if they have any issues then it would sort of clarify those issues.”

But despite the willingness of the volunteers there has been plenty of controversy throughout Tunick’s artistic career. He has been arrested eight times while working – five times in New York, twice in Paris and once in California – the charges ranging from ‘promoting the exposure of people’ to ‘reckless endangerment’.

“Some of them involved handcuffs and the police holding me for a while and I got used to it pre-2000,” he says. “But the thrill for me is in seeing my work being made. I’m not this sort of underground artist persona that some of the mass media likes to attach to me. For me, it’s just a distraction. I’m trying to make serious artwork, not be a renegade.”

Tunick eventually struck a blow for artists when he filed a federal civil rights law suit against New York City claiming the arrests there were illegal because there was no law against making nude art work.

In 2000 he won the case after the Supreme Court up-

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## me and my wardrobe

Jenny Davies, 32, runs the jewellery, accessories and gift store Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) on Darlington's Coniscliffe Road



Pictures: RICHARD DOUGHTY

Marks & Spencer long sleeve top, jacket by House of Fraser, black trousers by Hobbs, black stilettos, Russell & Bromley and black bead necklace and bracelet from OCD

### Describe your look

Smart casual for most of the time – I like to feel comfortable in what I'm wearing and it also needs to be practical for while I'm working in the shop. Every so often I like to dress up just to remind myself of what it feels like!

### What's your favourite item of clothing?

Whatever my latest buy is! If not, probably a pair of jeans of some description because of their versatility, in that they can be dressed up or down, as the occasion requires.

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

Not sure of the exact amount, but it was a black Burberry dress from Cruise in Newcastle, costing somewhere around the £400 mark.

### What's your worst buy?

Anything that is still in the spare room with the tags on! These are all things that I've bought thinking that they were a bargain, but still don't suit me, even at half price.

### What are your favourite shops?

Marks & Spencer is my all time favourite! You can find all the basics there, plus they do some fantastic fashion items at great prices, but you have to buy them when you see them, as they sell out fast. Otherwise I like Karen Millen, House of Fraser stores and any smaller individual boutique-style shops for pieces that are different.

### Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?

No one individual springs to mind, but I increasingly admire anybody who is in their 30s who looks good, as I am now starting to appreciate that it all takes a lot more effort than it did when you were younger.

● **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Coniscliffe Road, Darlington (01325) 469880.**

**Top right: dress by Karen Millen, shoes from Faith, silver ring with lapis lazuli stone from OCD**

**Right: Pennyblack beige T-shirt, jeans from Gap, cardigan by Fenn Wright Manson, belt from OCD**

*Marks & Spencer is my all time favourite! You can find all the basics there, plus they do some fantastic fashion items at great prices*





# NE out on the town

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



## McCourt & McKay

**F**REEDOM Direct is a travel agents based in Durham and Newcastle. The Derwent Manor Hotel in Allensford provided the perfect venue for their festive party and awards ceremony, with its professionalism and friendly service.

The evening kicked off with a champagne reception in the Gallery Bar overlooking the grand hall. Prime Entertainment impressed all with a mock Oscars stage setting, adding to the glamour and glitz.

### JODIE WILSON & COLLETTE GOLIGHTLY

JODIE Wilson from the Durham branch (above left) and Collette Golightly from the home working division were in a mood to celebrate after Jodie scooped the top holiday sales person award for 2005. Collette was awarded the Freedom Direct You Brighten My Day award, after being nominated by her colleagues.

Jodie wore a top from Morgan and classic evening wear trousers from Topshop. To keep skin clear she recommends drinking lots of water, es-

pecially after a big night out.

Collette wore a dress from Coast and her top tip for looking good was to smile and be positive.

When the girls go shopping, they head for Morgan, Debenhams and River Island for value and the MetroCentre for lots of choice.

Jodie's favourite album now is Sugarbabes and Back to the Movies soundtrack while Collette is enjoying U2.

### HEIDI COLLEDGE

HEIDI (standing next to her sponsor, Simon Strong) is an operations director and has been with the company from day one.

Her trousers were made from a beautiful chestnut satin, teamed with a very fine woven gold wrapover top. The outfit was bought during a shopping spree in York. Heidi likes to wear Armani for its quality and fit and generally shops in Fenwick, John Lewis or Cruise.

Being a full-time working mum leaves little time for beauty regimes, but one range Heidi has always

JODIE WILSON & COLLETTE GOLIGHTLY



HEIDI COLLEDGE & SIMON STRONG



NICK JACKSON

### NICK JACKSON

NICK, 40, is commercial and marketing sales director. Nick's suit cost him £20 and was bought 18 years ago at Portobello Market in London, just after he graduated. It was made by quality tailors, the Burton Brothers, and has been able to stand the test of time. On his days off, Nick likes the comfort of Gap clothes and Levi jeans.

As for looking good, Nick starts his days very healthily by squeezing his own fresh orange juice, followed by a good dose of porridge and some bio-yoghurt with a few seeds sprinkled in.

bought is Crabtree and Evelyn, particularly the Goats' Milk Soap

### JOHANN JEMMA

COMPANY trainer Johann Jemma won the night's award for outstanding contribution. For affordability as well as good quality, Johann shops in Wallis, Principles and Next. Her linen top was from Wallis and the black classic trousers were from Principles.

When it comes to the skin Johann recommends not applying too much foundation as the skin needs to breathe and has always found Clinique products work wonders, especially the Dramatic Moisturiser.

Heidi's latest album purchase is Bryan Adams' greatest hits.

### MARTIN JONES

MARTIN is company director. He was a little camera shy, hence the startled expression! Martin's suit is Hugo Boss from Jules B in Jesmond. It comes out every year for the Christmas party and awards night. (It's so much easier for the boys!)

Martin doesn't really like clothes shopping so he keeps it to a minimum and makes it an occasion by heading off to London for the weekend, booking into a nice hotel and giving himself plenty of time to wander around Bond Street, where he can usually find all his needs.

For music, Martin enjoys a bit of 80s soul but his latest CD buy is the Kaiser Chiefs.

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

amcreativeproductions.com

Picture of McCourt & McKay  
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JOHANN JEMMA



MARTIN JONES

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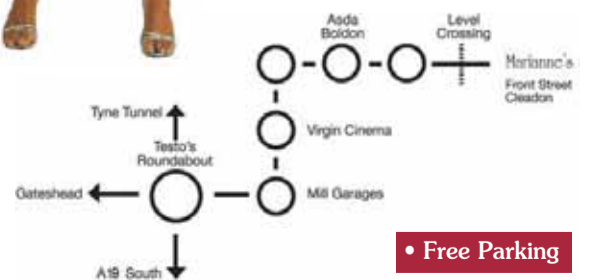
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After running a successful interior designer business in London, Alice Thompson has brought her considerable skills north to Harrogate. Women's Editor LINDSAY JENNINGS reports



**A**LICE Thompson likes cosiness. It's a word she uses often during our interview, but not one necessarily associated with all interior designers. Although designers tend to reflect what the client wants, deep down some prefer the cleanliness of clinical white minimalism or the trendy elegance of the monochromatic look. Alice is definitely in favour of cosiness.

"It can come through in the accessories, like the cushions, and soft furnishings etc and it brings depth. For me, cosiness doesn't come from dark red walls, it comes from depth."

Alice, who was brought up in rural Northumberland, has returned to her northern roots and brought Cooch & Co, her interior design service and now gift shop, to Harrogate.

The businesses in Montpellier Gardens in the town centre all pride themselves on individuality and Cooch & Co slots in very nicely.

As you walk in, the walls are painted in warm cream with French country chic style print curtains framing the nearby window. It definitely has a cosiness to it, given added 'depth' by gift shop manager Serena Wilson's coffee coloured lurcher, Google, who is curled up asleep.

The decor is an ideal backdrop to the pretty gifts in Alice's shop. They include coloured glass door handles, embellished cushions, Venetian glassware, hand-made bath oils and soaps and Cath Collins' gorgeous smelling candles and oils. There are also small pieces of furniture, such as side tables, and ornate lamps and chic photograph frames.

It works in perfect tandem with the interior design business. Alice trained with acclaimed interior designer Prue Lane Fox in London. She met Prue after working for one of her suppliers, a lighting company, and decided she wanted to experience life on the other side of the fence.

"I started off as her assistant and she was brilliant, she taught me everything I know," says Alice. "But had I stayed with her I would have always had to

have designed in her style and I wanted my own ideas to come through."

Alice set up Cooch & Co in London in 1998 and has designed flats, houses and businesses for scores of clients, including the actor Alexander Armstrong, one half of the comedy duo Armstrong and Miller. Each of Cooch & Co's projects are tailor-made so that the client's style is reflected in the overall design.

"If I had a choice and could do houses the way I wanted all the time, it would be a mixture of traditional and contemporary," says Alice. "But we take on board whatever the client wants."

Alice prefers to stay away from the dreaded neutrals – plain carpet, plain curtains, plain walls – but that's not to say a room has to be painted bright yellow to be exciting. One of her client's interiors has a living room with pale coffee coloured walls and neutral curtains. But the accessories – the gilt Louis XIV-

*"If I had a choice and could do houses the way I wanted all the time, it would be a mixture of traditional and contemporary," says Alice. "But we take on board whatever the client wants"*

## Where 'cosy' is the catchword

style chair sitting next to a Perspex table and a glass ornate lamp – create drama and depth. People are getting a bit fed up of painting everything neutral, she says.

"I predicted people would get bored of neutrals because there's nothing to look at, there's no depth and no interest. It's uninspiring for me," she says. "But the mood is vital, it creates ambience and makes a room last. If they're going too bold they're going to get bored of it so we try and keep it quite subdued and keep the interest at the same time."

Alice, who works with fellow designer Sophie Wood, has a team of suppliers so Cooch & Co can manage the entire project from start to finish, dealing with architects, planners, builders, electricians, curtain makers and furniture designers.

"Nothing is done before the prices are approved," she says. "From the beginning, you can see exactly what it costs and it never alters."

Alice moved to Harrogate with husband, Robin, who's originally from Nidderdale, North Yorkshire. It means they're closer to both sets of parents, which is great for them considering that they have a baby girl, Emily.

The couple love Harrogate, the architecture and the friendliness, and say it reminds them of Bath. All in all, life seems as cosy as the interiors Alice designs.

● Cooch & Co, 6 Montpellier Mews, Harrogate, North Yorkshire. Tel: (01423) 506590 or log onto [www.coochandco.co.uk](http://www.coochandco.co.uk)



Expert eye: Alice chooses fabrics that create depth



# gadget man

# What to snap up in the sales



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



**1** What better way to ring in the New Year with one of the latest smartphones? The 02 Xda Mini is a Pocket PC, a tri-band handset and a 1.3 megapixel camera in one handy unit. It even has a tiny slide out keyboard and costs £109.99 with a contract.

**2** Portable weather station: Now Christmas is over all you can look forward to is snow and ice for a few months. The Bar 926 can predict a winter chill and can wake you up ten minutes early when the temperature drops below a set level. Plenty of time to warm up the car and drive to work more carefully.

**3** If it's chilly outside have your PC keep you warm by plugging in a USB cup warmer. This totally daffy gadget can keep a cup of coffee moderately warm for hours - just don't plug it into a laptop if you want the batteries to last for more than a minute. Just £12.95 from [www.paramountzone.com](http://www.paramountzone.com).



your local photo store and expect to pay around £500.



**6** If you fancy a hot reception nothing beats digital radios for signal quality. The Eton Porsche Design DAB cube costs £250 and has an extra sub woofer for enhanced bass perfect for all those rock stations.

**4** Satellite navigation: These systems are the must have gadget for 2006. If you own a Vauxhall take a look at the stylish VDO-Dayton which plays CDs/MP3s and pipes the sound via a home theatre-style sound set up in your car. The system offers full colour guidance, voice instruction and a scrolling map.



**5** Cameras still provide a flash of inspiration for the New Year. The Fujifilm S9500 offers all the advantages of an SLR (great pic quality, manual control) in a smaller body. Try



**7** Maybe a bit of hi-tech home help will make Spring cleaning that bit easier this year? The Roomba Robotic Vac can be switched on and left to get on with the tough job of keeping the carpets clean. Mind you £189 is a lot to pay for avoiding the dusting.

**8** Sometimes there is no better way to let off steam than games playing. The big console this Christmas was the Xbox 360 but if you're a patient type the Sony PS3 is due later in the year. Don't expect much change from £300 though.

**9** Gaming on the go has grown up now. Splash out £179 on a Sony PSP to watch movies, listen to music and play Grand Theft Auto on the way to work.

**10** If you really must do DIY at least get the shelves straight by using a laser level. The Black & Decker LZR4 projects a laser line on four walls at once so there are no excuses for not hanging those pictures correctly.

Christmas has come and gone for a year so you can forget about those sad socks and handkerchiefs. But what to spend all those gift tokens on? NIGEL BURTON ponders what to look for in the January sales

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## NE motoring

# King of the road



Powerhouse: fantastic performance, smooth, safe and controllable

Once again motoring correspondent IAN LAMMING is caught out by the weather – but when he's driving an awesome beast like the Subaru Impreza, who cares?

### Subaru Impreza WRX 2.5 STi UK

**M**Y LUCK with the weather is well documented; go to New Zealand and experience the worst summer in 60 years; go to Spain and single-handedly end a 40 year drought; go to Dubai and get fog bound for hours; and Jordan? You guessed it, a foot of snow in the desert!

It's the same with test cars. Book myself a nice all-weather off-roader and the sun comes out to play. Take delivery of an attractive and powerful soft top and the hailstones fall. Take a tip from me, don't ever book a holiday in the same country at the same time as me and you should be fine – unlike the weather.

Generally speaking then, mixing a 280BHP monster with the first snow of the season should have been a recipe for disaster, albeit a familiar one for this hapless motoring hack. But this time I manage to trick the weather Gods by choosing a supercar that is as happy in the slush as the sun.

This particular fire-breather was conceived in motorsport and born into the world's toughest rallies where it has thrived ever since.

So when the snow decided to deposit itself on the roads of the North-East and North Yorkshire, it was happy to chug everywhere in four wheel drive.

The latest top-of-the-range Impreza is a car of letters, many of them to be precise. Take a deep breath and repeat after me – the Subaru Impreza WRX STi UK. The UK is important because WRXs are imported into the country in various guises and specifications, many not a patch on the original.

And speaking of originals, the very first Impreza used to be such a laugh because it looked like an anonymous Japanese saloon but could ruin the day of many a Porsche with its storming performance.

The latest doesn't enjoy such anonymity; it is no longer a best kept automotive secret. In fact, it is a bit of a boy racer's dream. If it was a boy, it would certainly wear a Burberry baseball cap; if it was a girl, it would sport large hooped earrings, if you know what I mean.

That said, the STi does, in fact, look like it goes. The gargantuan bonnet scoop more than hints at the performance from the 2.5 litre boxer engine, while the colossal boot spoiler screams of it. There is also electric blue rally team paintwork, gold wheels (oh, please!), and a second spoiler over the back window.

Up front, the Impreza gets a welcome new look with a more memorable grille and headlamps – which work excellently, by the way. The quality of finish inside has also improved and

the new dash is particularly appealing in fluorescent red. The seats could have been ripped from any self respecting rally car, and probably were, while the six speed gearbox moves a matter of inches in the gate, which feels fantastic.

Now before anyone complains, this car is about performance – that is its raison d'être – and there is more than enough oomph for our modern roads.

The boxer belts out an incredible 280BHP in a car that doesn't weigh that much at all. (So that's why there are so many spoilers – to keep it on the ground!) Now before the letter writers start reaching for their quills, this doesn't necessarily mean the Impreza is irresponsible, nor that I am for writing about it. With power comes safety as well as responsibility.

Firstly, it is king of the road; all but £100,000 supercars bow before it so there is no need for STi man or woman to prove anything to anyone.

Secondly, the power is controllable. It lurks beneath your right foot in just about any gear but its delivery is smooth, safe and controllable as well as staggering.

Own an STi and you will never experience the heart stopping moment when the slow moving vehicle you are overtaking suddenly decides to speed up – and you are stuck on the wrong side of the road.

Own an STi and you will never have to worry about the back end stepping out under hard acceleration because its grip on the tarmac is as strong as a vice thanks to rally-tested all-wheel drive that thinks for you and moves the power to the wheel with the most traction.

Own an STi and you will have to visit the pumps on a regular basis as the Impreza struggles to eke out much more than 200 miles per tank. But that's the price of performance, I suppose.

In a world of also-ran vehicles, the Impreza stands out as truly awesome, offering supercar performance for under £27K. In a world where conditions are so changeable, it's a car that is certainly no fair weather friend.

*It is no longer a best kept automotive secret. In fact, it is a bit of a boy racer's dream.*





Oasis of calm: the Cipriani swimming pool and, right, a launch coming in to the hotel

## Retreat from the madding crowds

KEITH ALLAN and LYNNE GRAY extol the virtues of one of their favourite hotels, the Cipriani in Venice

**M**ENTION the name of Dr Natale Rusconi to anyone who is anyone in the hotel business and you will get an instant response. "One of the great hoteliers," they will say.

Look at his pedigree and you begin to see why. For a start, he was born in a hotel, close to the Central Station in Milan. His grandfather made his fortune developing small hotels while both his parents were passionate hoteliers, so the business races through his blood.

Rusconi has been at the head of one of the finest hotels in the world, perched on the tip of Giudecca just across the basin of the Venice lagoon, for 30 years now, a sort of commodore standing on the bridge of the Cipriani, sailing it through the ups and downs of the hotel world.

So, just like a gleaming private yacht that has permanently dropped anchor in the lagoon, the Cipriani waits for you to arrive by boat – usually the hotel's own private launch which is on permanent call to take you to and from St Mark's Square, or perhaps by water taxi from the airport or railway station at the top of the Grand Canal.

The hotel's history, in a city that oozes centuries-old architecture and art, is a short one. In fact, 50 years is all it can lay claim to.

It was in 1956 that Giuseppe Cipriani of Harry's Bar fame hooked up with the Guinness sisters and decided to build a hotel on the island of Giudecca. Many thought it was a mad scheme – too far away from the centre of Venice and, anyway, who would want to be in a brand new hotel stuck on Giudecca when they could be languishing in an ancient palazzo along the Grand Canal?

Cipriani, on the other hand, saw it very differently. He must have seen the crowds getting bigger by the minute, swamping the ancient piazzas and churches, watched the canals clogging up with gondolas and thought how marvellous it would be to stay in a hotel that was only minutes away from the centre of Venice where you could hear a blackbird sing and relax in a heated, saltwater swimming pool. The old gardens of Giudecca, where Casanova once wooed his women, would be the perfect site to make that dream come true.

Even in the 1950s, Venice was a busy place and the Cipriani offered the best of both worlds – the

chance to take in Venice and all its glory while at the same time escaping to a peaceful hotel for a swim. Film stars dropped in and flying boats flew wealthy, English gadabouts to the Italian Riviera where they would pick up a car and drive overland to Venice.

As Rusconi knows only too well, to keep a hotel in tip-top shape you have to keep evolving. Over the last 30 years more than \$120m has been spent on the Cipriani, upgrading the rooms, offering butler service at the Palazzo Vendramin, turning an ancient granary into a banquet hall, creating more restaurant facilities, and, most recently, creating a beautiful spa. Pasta is all home-made in the kitchen and dishes like osso bucco and the famous chocolate ice cream are just as popular as they ever were.

When you step on to the launch and motor out across the basin of the lagoon, the hurly burly world of busy Venice is left behind. Instead, a bewitching, Canaletto canvas slips into view – the puffed-up dome of Santa Maria della Salute, the Campanile of San Marco poking up through the higgledy-piggledy, skyline of palazzos, and a tantalising glimpse of the five domes of the nearby basilica and the lace-like arcades of the Doge's Palace.

Over the rumbling of the engine and the turquoise water dancing in the sunlight, you can't help but glance back at the smiling face of the Cipriani glowing in the early morning light. One or two guests are already swimming in the pool, others are settling down to breakfast on the terrace. With a lump in the throat, you have already made a promise to return.

● **Hotel Cipriani & Palazzo Vendramin, Giudecca, Venice.**  
Telephone (39-041) 520 3930  
Website: [www.lhw.com/cipriani](http://www.lhw.com/cipriani)  
info@hotelcipriani.it

**What to take:** dress up as much as you like! In the Cips restaurant, overlooking the basin of the lagoon to St Mark's Square, dining is more casual. The views are to die for. If you go in the winter, it can be cold, foggy and damp but somehow it doesn't matter in Venice.

**Recommended reading:** Eyewitness Travel Guide to Venice and the Veneto (Dorling Kindersley)

## NE connections



KEITH Allan and Lynne Gray travelled to Venice via Milan from Newcastle with Ryan Air. Fares from £22.25 return including taxes. Book at [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com) or tel: 0871 2460000.

From Milan they went by train with Rail Europe. [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk) Information and Bookings: 08705 848848

Next to arriving by sea on a cruise ship or ferry, arriving in Venice by train is spectacular. The causeway built in 1846 to link Venice by train with the mainland was a momentous event. It meant Venice was no longer an island. The train travels alongside the roadway, which came much later in 1931. From the railway station you go down a series of wide steps straight on to the Grand Canal. If you fly to Milan, the very pleasant train journey from Milan to Venice takes about three hours. Or you could travel to Venice by train with Eurostar from London through the Channel Tunnel to Paris and then on to Venice. Book with Rail Europe. [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)

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