

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

SEPTEMBER 2005



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Priestgate,
Darlington
DL1 1NF
(01325)
381313

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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sharon griffiths

Working from home is no longer an anti-social occupation

THE best thing about working from home is that you don't have to get dressed in the morning. "Office clothes" take on a whole new meaning. Today's outfit, for instance, is an old silk T-shirt, once rather stylish but now lacking all shape, teamed with a favourite denim skirt that somehow acquired a bleach stain that has made it unsuitable for polite company but perfect for a day at a desk at home.

But at least that's better than the soot-stained nightie and smut-filled hair I had when I interviewed fashion designer Nicole Farhi. That day I had woken up to a freezing cold house and discovered, yet again, that our old coal boiler had given up. When I tried to coax it back into life, it had sent a spiteful shower of soot up in the air, all over the kitchen and all over me.

Then I suddenly remembered I had organised an early morning telephone interview with Ms Farhi. I sat at my desk, talking calmly to her about her new collection, about the importance of classic style and clean lines. And all the time, little flakes of soot were fluttering from my hair and landing softly on my nightie and my notebook.

Thank goodness video phones hadn't been invented.

The worst thing about working from home used to be the isolation. You get a lot of work done but when it was just me and the computer, it was easy to get stir crazy and be thrilled with the arrival of the delivery man with a parcel for next door. Human contact! Conversation!

Then you get silly little niggling questions into your head – like which were the Beatles' first three number ones. And there's no one to shout across and ask.

So hooray for e-mail. Idle thoughts, the equivalent of office gossip are easily shared. The ping of You Have Mail is the solitary equivalent of someone stopping by on the way to the coffee machine and can cheer the lonely day. A liberation. Working from home is no longer an anti-social occupation.

What you don't have is the day to day distraction of other people. No overheard conversations about football matches or drunken nights out or complicated love affairs. No having to take messages about other people's babysitters or car repairs. You get a lot more work done at home.

But very best of all, of course, is the fact that your time's your own to do with as you will. Put

the washing on... go out for lunch... prepare supper... go for a walk... As long as the work gets done, what does it matter?

I have never understood those people who set up an office at home and then work office hours. Why? Hot summer days find me lounging in the deckchair, or pottering round the garden. Work can be done in the cool of the evening, or on a rainy Sunday morning – saving the sunshine for pleasure, not work.

Most important of all is to choose very carefully the room in which you will work.

Many people use the kitchen table – and get breadcrumbs in the keyboard and sticky fingers on the screen. The printer will disgorge paper straight into the toaster and you never know whether that ping! means You Have Mail – or that your microwave meal is ready.

Years ago, in our last house, the only place for a desk and computer was in an alcove of our bedroom. Senior Son, then a toddler, remembers how comforting it was, lying in his little bed, hearing me tapping away at the keyboard along the landing.

It was also hopeless. You'd just be at a vital stage of something with files and folders scattered all over the bed – and then it was bedtime, and they'd all have to be put away again.

It was bad enough sleeping in a room that was just like an office, which, not surprisingly, gave me a lot of nightmares about work. Even worse was trying to work in a room surrounded by lotions and potions, dressing table mirrors, tights hanging over the back of the chair.

Now we have the luxury of a study. After the bedroom alcove it seemed enormous, but 17 years on, the clutter is taking over. One day I will have a grand sort out. One day.

In the meantime, I enjoy the view.

If you are setting up a study, don't choose the obscure little box room with a view of the garage roof. Instead, choose one with an attractive outlook – you're going to spend a lot of time in it, so it's a lot more important than a spare bedroom or dining room.

Our study window is framed by late flowering honeysuckle. And I look out on to the garden where thrushes use the patio as a fast food counter to bash the shells off snails and squirrels scamper along the top of the high wall.

It's all very cheering. And yes, of course, it's sometimes distracting – but not half as distracting as working in an office.

WASH AND GO

IF your room lacks traditional charm, or is a bit bland, wood mouldings can add elegance and character. The panelling on the sides of the window pillars above has been created using decorative mouldings and the wide skirting has been enhanced by adding a decorative moulding on top. The quadrant moulding between the wood floor and the skirting finishes the overall effect.

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CHINA BRIGHT

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Simon Spence: wants to preserve his land for future generations

Lying down in nature's lap

RICHMOND'S newest homes development is not easy to find. But that's undoubtedly a good thing. A track off a quiet road north west out of the town leads to some farm buildings at Aislabeck Plantation, but there's still no sign of the holiday homes being built there.

It's only when you walk 50 yards downhill further on that you catch the first glimpse of a floral rooftop. Yes, floral... The mix of red and white flowering sebum planted on the roof of the first eco lodge creates an overall pretty pink effect. There are no tiles, or slates, or bricks here, and the only concrete is hidden underground.

It means the homes have fulfilled their philosophical and planning aims of blending in with the landscape, and offer true privacy to their owners.

The houses are timber-framed with as strong-as-steel beams of Douglas fir to support the structure and are clad in red cedar. All the timber comes from sustainable forests.

Outside, lengths of cedar have been used for the decks which, combined with the glass frontage of each lodge, create a luxurious outdoor room rather than simply a wooden patio. It's their proximity to nature and ability to merge with the landscape that is the appeal of these homes, and a crucial part of why they were built in the first place.

Simon Spence, the man behind the development, inherited the 50 acres of land from his mother Christine, who bought it about 15 years ago. "She had it as a hobby farm really with a few cattle and sheep. When it became too much for her, she passed it on to me and I became the guardian of it," explains Simon.

Simon is vegetarian, so the animals soon went. Instead, he turned to managing the land organically as best he could to reinstate the old meadows and maintain the woodland and natural scrub. But he soon realised he'd taken on more than he could handle - nearly half the land is paddock but the rest comprises steep valley sides that were difficult to manage.

"It became a drain on my time and resources," admits Simon. "I had to make some decisions but I couldn't bring myself to sell it. I began to think seriously about how I could secure the land's future without changing it dramatically.

"Eco lodges seemed to fit with the way I was thinking. The land has always been a kind of retreat for me and I thought that feeling could be

passed on. It seemed like a responsible way forward."

Simon comes from a family that has moved a lot and always been involved in property - his older brother is a chartered surveyor and younger brother, Matthew, is an entrepreneur who has managed property portfolios for footballers and rugby players.

Simon, a painter and decorator by trade, had renovated houses before but had never built anything from scratch so he teamed up with Tim Crawshaw, an urban designer from Richmond. Between them they came up with the original designs for the eco lodges.

"It had to be challenging," says Simon. "I want to push the envelope all the time so it had to be innovative to keep me interested."

It is possible to buy flat-pack lodge-style homes but the sustainability principals to which Simon and Tim were working took the homes out of the realm of build-it-yourself.

"The green roofs, for example, meant the structure had to be designed in such a way that it could bear the load of the planting being continually soaked with rain, as well as the effect of snow and wind," Simon explains.

Three lodges have already been built and five are already sold to, among others, former England goalkeeper Ian Walker and Stoke City players Gerry Taggart and Clive Clarke.

In total there will be ten lodges, which cannot be used as permanent homes, only as second homes and holiday lets. Their locations within the valley have been selected for privacy and also for concealment from people enjoying the countryside around: the Coast to Coast footpath runs near to the southern boundary of the land.

"When we were choosing the sites we literally had people on the valley side waving flags. We were on mobile phones going 'right a bit, left a bit' to find the right spots," says Simon.

That turned out to be the easy aspect of building houses from nothing on a topographically unforgiving site. Creating flat spaces to lay the foundations meant digging into the hillside and shoring up the front edge with giant rocks.

Then all the services had to be brought to the site - gas for the hobs, ovens and central heating, and electricity for the dishwashers, washing machines and lighting.

"The electricity comes from renewable energy sources like solar or wind power which we draw from the National Grid. It costs a bit more but not too much," explains Simon.

Spring water is collected and purified on site



Forget Beckingham Palace. Footballers looking for real privacy are heading to the Yorkshire Dales to buy holiday homes built on green foundations. SARAH FRENCH reports

The lodges, built along strictly eco-friendly lines, blend seamlessly into their surroundings

Pictures: SARAH NICHOLSON



and a there is natural reed bed system for waste management.

Less than a third of the way into the development, Simon remains enthusiastic, viewing each step as a challenge, not a chore. "I've got a very short memory. I get up in the morning and get on with it. If you have a vision that's strong enough you develop the stamina to see it through," he says.

That vision and the eco principals it's based on has not meant compromising on home comforts or style inside the lodges. Each one has three double bedrooms, one with en-suite shower room, and a family bathroom. The main 8.5m x 5m living space is open plan with island-style kitchen area. The flooring throughout is French oak.

Each lodge has a super efficient wood-burning stove and is insulated to a high standard using recycled newspaper treated to make it fire retardant.

Once the lodges are complete, Simon will set to work re-placing the barns on the site with offices for Ecobuild UK Ltd. "The fact that the project has borne a company which is growing fast and going from strength to strength is an added bonus. It's a fantastic place to come to work and the guys have all really bought into the concept," he says.

Simon sees the future of the company in building homes for clients, as opposed to buying up land and creating more developments like Aislabeck. The team can erect a watertight building within a week; it then takes up to seven weeks to complete the installation of services, deck, cladding, flooring, plumbing, plastering and the rest of the interior.

He adds: "We are getting more confident and more inquiries are coming in. We could replicate these lodges but we want to develop, hone the design and try new things.

"We've proved that we can build in this sort of location without disturbing the habitat too much. There are five deer in the wood and they're working with us - they've had their young and don't seem too worried.

"It's given the land an alternative use, rather than it just being turned into agriculture and once the lodges are finished it will become a wildlife haven. Yes, there will be people here but not all the time and the money we make means I can manage the land better.

"It's all been about preserving the land for the future and I think this is the right answer."

For more information, tel (01748) 821828 or e-mail info@ecobuilduk.com

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NE interiors

Pictures: STUART BOULTON



Cabin fever



In the story of the Three Little Pigs, the house of sticks was one the Big Bad Wolf blew down. But a professionally built wooden home will defy not only the huff and puff of wild animals but the worst of North-East weather too. SARAH FRENCH reports

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THE closest most of us come to logs in the house is the ones we put on the fire. But in an age where people want to get more in touch with nature, are increasingly environmentally aware and are keen to have more personal input into their homes, a house built of logs provides the ideal solution.

They're quick to build, warm in winter, fit into the rural landscape, cost less and come with an in-built feelgood factor. And if you choose the wood look inside too, there's no decorating to do.

Mark Baty built his first house of logs with his dad 33 years ago, though you'd never believe it was that old. At the time, they had a battle to get planning permission. The house, with its open plan living space, was ahead of its time and attracted plenty of interest among curious neighbours.

Three decades on and the house, and others like it, are coming into their own as many buyers seek a more eco-friendly lifestyle and homes that are more in harmony with their surroundings.

Nevertheless, Mark and his dad George, who ran his own engineering company Euremica, learned the hard way.

"There were no power tools to speak of 33 years ago so every log was literally hammered in place with a rubber mallet. The timber had been sitting at the Tyne docks for a few weeks before it got to us so the numbers on each piece had worn off - it was like putting together a giant jigsaw," explains Mark.

Years later, he was asked to build another house in Durham and then two more in Richmond, which the owner rents out as holiday homes. Euremica Environmental Ltd, based in Guisborough, now provides a comprehensive design, supply and build service for log homes, summerhouses, garages, barbecue huts and other structures. "We can make a building to suit any requirements," says Mark. "If it can be built in brick or stone, we can build it in logs."

As well as private homes, Mark says wooden houses are ideal for farmers looking to diversify into holiday accommodation and rural hotels interested in offering self-catering lodges in their grounds.

Each bespoke design is sent to the Latvian company Mark works with. The quantity of timber is worked out on computer, then all the ma-

terials are shipped to the UK. The timber is spruce and pine and is sourced from sustainable forests.

The kit, delivery and construction of a typical two-storey home with four bedrooms and two bathrooms costs around £45,000 plus VAT. The foundations, which are extra, are laid first in the same way as for a standard house, then the walls go up. These can be either solid logs or there's the option of outer walls of logs and wood panelling on the inside with thermal insulation and a breathable membrane sandwiched in between.

"All the logs are numbered so we know where every piece of timber belongs. They all interlock with double tongue and groove for an exceptional fit and large wall sections have vertical trusses. We can build a home to the roof within a month," explains Mark.

The roofs are conventional, made from concrete tiles or slates, although Mark is moving towards Finnish and Latvian-style roofs of asphalt shingle, which is more cost effective.

The outside walls have to be treated every seven years or so. Inside, owners can choose to keep the Scandinavian look, the downside being all that wood to dust, or plasterboard can be put up for conventional decoration.

Either way, modern timber treatments address any concerns about damp and mould, rotting wood, bug infestations or susceptibility to fire. Inevitably there is shrinkage and expansion of the wood, but allowance for this is built into the construction and in the way doors and windows are slotted in place. "Having wood interior walls does make it a bit darker than magnolia, but if you want more light all you do is cut a hole and fit a new window," says Mark.

Cracks and crevices that develop add to the character.

In every other way the houses boast all the normal services, double glazing and, naturally, can have solid wood floors.

The result is a solid, warm building that comes with its own fresh forest fragrance... and the benefit of knowing, as thousands of red brick housing estates are being thrown up around the country, that you're living in an environmentally friendly way.

For more information, contact Euremica Environmental on (01287) 204020.



Pictures: North News

It may be a two storey shack with no electricity but the asking price for this beach home overlooking Embleton Bay in Northumberland is a whopping £200,000. The lack of mod cons is compensated for by magnificent views of the coastline and nearby Dunstanburgh Castle. You can also have pals over to stay in one of the three bedrooms and enjoy those long summer evenings in the roomy lounge.

Nick Rawlinson, of estate agency Groves, said: "We sell about four of these a year and usually they go for £92,000, but this one is stunning and with a great view. Anyone who thinks it's just a hut should come down, feel the sand between their toes, look out at the view and breathe in the sea air. They would soon change their mind. Normally these sort of places are passed down from generation to generation, so one coming up is really rare."

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NE interiors

Home is where the office is



Clean lines, light wood and acres of storage make this home office a design success

More and more people are deciding to work from home, but it pays to do your design homework if a home office is on the agenda

PERHAPS the summer holidays have finally convinced you that there's more to life than all that commuting, those endless meetings and boring office politics. Or perhaps time off with the family has pushed you into resolving to strike a better work life balance by working from home.

It's an increasingly popular option but whatever the reason – and even if you only need a home office occasionally – you will work better if that space is not only comfortable and practical, but stylish too.

Welcome your decision as a wonderful opportunity to escape the conventional workplace and get away from impersonal strip lighting and a dull, grey office desk. Instead, create a room where you can express your personality in your choice of colours and funky files, take pleasure in an antique desk, and surround yourself with inspiring photos and mementoes.

First, of course, you need to decide where you're going to locate that office in your home. If you haven't got a separate room that's suitable, consider converting a dining room, attic, landing, garage or even the cupboard under the stairs. Or you could buy a wooden home office for a corner of the garden.

Author Katherine Sorrell has a new book, *Home Design Planner*, which illustrates how to set up a practical but attractive workspace.

She says: "The first requirement is a quiet

and private space where you can concentrate without interruption. If you haven't got a dedicated room where you can simply shut the door, and have to share the space, you could create some sort of screen with a room divider with shelving."

Sorrell believes the fun of a home work space is tailoring it to your taste. "Your desk and chair can be in any style and packed with personality as long as the desk is large enough for you to spread your work out and the chair is comfortable.

"A desk can be a lovely block of polished wood or a sheet of toughened glass resting on a pair of metal filing cabinets. Or it could be a whiteboard so you can scribble down telephone numbers and messages. Your chair could be upholstered to match the curtains or in a zingy coloured plastic."

If funds are really limited, you could pick up a bargain in a second-hand furniture shop and sand away the wear and tear of a wooden desk, then varnish or paint it, or spray paint a steel one.

Adequate storage is essential. For a less structured and more informal look than fitted shelves and units, hunt around auctions, antique shops and markets for French armoires, old school lockers or even country style kitchen dressers, which are all ideal for holding files.

Those who are going to entertain clients in their home office and want to impress might want to invest in wall-to-wall units. One of the specialists in bespoke fitted



Philip Starck table and Charles Eames chairs furnish this modern, light-filled home office

furniture is Roundhouse, who combine great design with beautiful materials such as maple, cherrywood, and up-to-the-minute touches like frosted glass cupboard fronts and slideaway file cupboards.

Keep your desk clutter-free with storage accessories. The Cotswold Company has a faux leather set – a filing tray is £17.95.

Oka, with shops and a mail order service, has woven storage boxes and a desk set, as well as a charming mini leather chest of drawers. The latter costs £59.

Home Design Planner by Katherine Sorrell (Ryland Peters & Small, £16.99)



TAKE A STYLE NOTE

● **Think about materials and colour before fancy finishes or decoration. Blue walls promote creativity, while green creates a calm, focused atmosphere. Or paint one wall in a vibrant shade for inspiration.**

● **Desktops:** If the room is naturally warm, choose a hard, cool surface like glass, steel or granite as a stylish option. Otherwise, wood is a good choice for its beauty and warmth to the touch.

● **Good lighting is a priority. Consider a mixture of sources, such as track lighting, spots inset into the ceiling, and task lights like desk lamps.**

● **Make sure power points and cables are accessible, and where possible hide flexes so they don't interfere with the use or look of the space. Make sure you have enough power points for the computer, phone, fax and music system.**

JOHN Lewis has some attractive, well priced, self-assembly room divider furniture incorporating shelves and cupboards. The beech veneer Largo room divider, pictured left, starts at £19.50 and goes up to £329; while the half height unit starts at £19.50 and goes up to £195.



Suit and slippers man: Ian in his home office

'Why I like working from home'

MONDAY morning feeling? Late for work? Stuck in traffic? All things of the past when you work from home.

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NE gardening

When they first moved in, Helen Welch and her husband Norman spent hours rescuing their cottage garden.

Far right, centre: Helen's prized hibiscus, which are difficult to grow in our climate



It may be small, but Helen Welch's garden is full of old-fashioned charm, as SARAH FOSTER finds out

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LYING at the end of a stony lane surrounded by fields, Helen Welch's home is every inch the country cottage. When she and her husband Norman moved there 30 years ago, it was actually two cottages, and the couple spent hours of toil converting it into one. Now retired and having a well-earned rest from renovating, they can afford to spend more time on the things they enjoy – and for Helen, this is definitely gardening. "I'm the gardener," she says, looking proudly over her work, "although my husband does cut the grass."

In terms of the weather, I couldn't have chosen a better day to visit the garden – its vivid greens and delicate pastels are resplendent in the sunshine. Its scents, too, are pure sensory pleasure, yet modestly, Helen highlights another attraction. "Of course it's the view that sells the garden," she says, pointing beyond its wall to the vast expanse of rape fields stretching right to the Cleveland Hills.

The area in front of the house, where we're now sitting on a wooden bench, was once divided by a fence, with one side taken up by vegetables. When Helen and Norman merged the cottages, they also merged the gardens, tidying them up in the process. "They were terrible when we came. There was no patio and we had to cut and feed the grass," says Helen.

Having extended the lawn into the second half, Helen set about making the garden a place to relax in, laying a patio and installing the wooden bench. She says it's gradually evolved over the years. "We have overhauled the garden a few times."

As we embark on a tour of the neat flower beds, she points out her pride and joy – a flourishing hibiscus bush. Although notoriously difficult to grow, Helen says it seems to like the conditions in its corner near the stone wall. "The hibiscus comes out, very much to everyone's surprise. There was a lady here once who said, 'I've lived in South Africa and I couldn't grow it there. I don't know how you grow it here'," she says.

Moving around the garden, we come to a green belt of herbaceous plants. Helen says she has tried to use a mixture of varieties, including summer flowers for colour. Although when I visit, these are not yet out, the different heights and shades of green provide interest. The border is lifted by a row of dazzling blue irises.

Helen prefers metal frames to wooden supports, and a couple of these nestle discreetly among the foliage. She has a special area to cultivate seedlings, protecting the most vulnerable with plastic domes. However, she can't always prevent weather damage, and points out the brownish tinge caused by frost. "There's been quite a lot this year," says Helen resignedly.

One of the garden's prettiest features is the pink clematis that adorns the old farm buildings. Helen explains: "I put it there soon after we came here and it was just a little cutting off my mother's." Now it sprawls everywhere, a rambling mass of colour.

While the garden is carefully cultivated, with stone urns for decoration, Helen has kept it simple and unfussy. Despite the changes, it remains quaintly old-fashioned, with the netty still standing alongside. Not one to see this go to waste, Helen has adapted it as a garden shed, piling equipment on the old seat.

Although not obsessive, she says she spends a fair amount of time gardening. "Every week I'm doing something. The best thing I find is just to do a little bit every day when you have free time," says Helen. But amid all the hard work, she still makes sure she enjoys the garden. "When I haven't got hayfever, I sit out here all the time."

HELEN'S TOP THREE PLANTS
 Hibiscus, delphiniums, poppies

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Pictures: ANDY LAMB



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You're not going out in that!

It used to be a big battleground, but now parents and children see more or less eye to eye on the fashion front, says SARAH FRENCH

IT'S the school disco. You're 11. You're about to leave Year 6 behind and move up to the big school. You've spent ages planning your outfit and you know exactly what you're going to wear. It's cool, trendy and very grown-up.

Then your mum or dad comes along and spoils it. "You're *not* going out in *that!*"

Well, that's how it used to be. And it didn't stop at primary school.

I remember on my first day at sixth form college being hauled back into the house and ordered to offload at least half of my carefully chosen strings of beads and crucifixes. Heighington's version of Madonna was a poor imitation after that.

But times have changed, it seems. Either parents have got cooler and more forgiving, or kids have got wiser to what they can get away with for there was little but mutual respect when we spoke to parents dropping off their youngsters at one school disco.

Short skirts apart (the most common no-no among mums of daughters) it was agreement and, for the most part, shared admiration all the way among parents and pupils at Barnard Castle Preparatory School, in County Durham.

KAREN FARROW AND SON WILL, OF STANWICK

KAREN

How much influence do you have over what Will wears?

Not much, he has very definite ideas but luckily there's nothing too outrageous. He chose his outfit for the disco about three weeks ago - he takes it very seriously.

Is there anything you've put your foot down about?

I've never had to say 'you can't wear that'.

What would you like to see him wearing?

I like what he wears. He recently joined Blackwell golf club where they don't allow trainers and t-shirts. He wasn't



keen on putting on a shirt and proper shoes but when he looked in the mirror he was quite confident and pleased with himself.

WILL

What do you think of your mum's style?
 I think she looks good.

Is there anything you'd like to see her wearing?

I'd prefer it if she didn't wear so many layers. Layers are fashionable but not that many!

Who's the most fashionable person in the family?

Me.

It's quite difficult to find things that aren't too young or too old for him





JENNY PEAT AND DAUGHTER EMMA, FROM BOLDRON

JENNY

How much influence do you have over what Emma wears?

Until now I had quite a lot, but it's all changing very suddenly.

What's your favourite look for Emma?

I like her best in jeans and cut-off trousers. She makes a fantastic tomboy.

Is there anything you've put your foot down about?

Yes, short skirts with high heels. She got away with the short skirt for the disco but I put my foot down about the high heels.

EMMA

What do you think of your mum's clothes?

They're all right, but sometimes she looks really rubbish.

What do you most like to see her wearing?

My favourite look for her is long skirts and boots. I really like her best brown boots.

Who's the most fashionable person in the family?

My dudey brother Josh.

VIVIANE JOHNSON AND SON THOMAS, OF SHILDON

VIVIANE

How much influence do you have over what Tom wears?

Not a lot, just his uniform at school. He wears what he wants to wear.

What would you like to see him wearing?

I like what he wears, he's got good taste.

Where do you buy his clothes?

Mainly abroad. There's a definite niche in the market for his age group - it's quite difficult to find things that aren't too young or too old for him. He does a lot of trials bike riding so he wears mainly sports and skateboard gear.

TOM

What do you think of your mum's style?

Cool.

Is there anything you'd like to see her wear?

Not really. Sometimes she asks me whether I like what she's got on and she will change if I don't like it.

Who's the most fashionable person in the family?

Me.

LINDA RAPER AND DAUGHTER VICKY, FROM STAINDROP

LINDA

What do you like Vicky to wear?

I prefer her in more casual things, combat trousers and the khaki look.

Is there anything you've put your foot down about?

Short skirts and cropped tops.

Where do you buy her clothes?

All over. Next, Mark One, Primark and Boyes mainly.

VICKY

Who buys your clothes?

It used to be my dad but now it's my mum. I tell her the kind of style I want, like gypsy or modern.

What do you think of your mum's clothes?

She's fashionable, she likes the latest stuff. She likes stylish tops but she always checks with me first and asks if there's anything she could do better.

Who's the most fashionable person in the family?

Me and my mum.



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me and my wardrobe



Heather Carne, 44, is manager of the Joseph outlet store at Dalton Park, Murton. Smart certainly rules for Heather at work, but when she gets home to son Jamieson, eight, the tracksuit or jeans come out for a game of cricket, rugby or football together



Main picture: Joseph white suit and Joseph top. Above left: Seven for All Mankind jeans, top from Oasis. Front cover: pink suede Joseph jacket

How would you describe your look?
Smart and sophisticated fashion with an awareness of this season's must-have looks – as long as they suit me. The key to my wardrobe is mixing designer labels with high street favourite fashion stores to get an individual look.

What's your favourite item of clothing?
It has to be my Seven for All Mankind Jeans, which are very versatile whether they are worn casually with a jumper or

T-shirt for a game of footie or dressed up with a sequined top and heels for a dinner date.

What are your favourite shops?
I love Joseph as well as Zara, Logo and Karen Millen.

What has been your worst buy?
A pair of very high, Prada black boots which I adore but unfortunately am unable to walk in for any period of time.

Dancing the night away is definitely out when wearing them.

What was your most expensive buy?
A Joseph brown sheepskin full length coat which feels like butter to the touch. I got it for £569 at Dalton Park – down from £2,000.

Which celebrity's style do you most admire?
Catherine Zeta Jones is a real woman, with a real woman's shape. Whatever she seems to wear makes her exude elegance and her dress sense creates a real style.

● Dalton Park is just off the A19 at Murton. Contact the outlet on 0191 526 5140 or visit www.dalton-park.co.uk



Skirt and top from Joseph

Pictures: BRIAN CLOUGH

Catherine Zeta Jones is a real woman, with a real woman's shape

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

WHAT better way to spend a summer afternoon than with the girls at York Races Ladies' Day? Even if horse racing isn't your thing. If you love fashion, fun and copious amounts of champagne, this is a perfect day out. We have to be honest - we didn't see a horse running all day - but we saw some amazing outfits, had a little flutter and came home happy!

MIKE CHARLTON

MIKE, an estate agent from Richmond, was enjoying a day out with the gents. He was wearing cream slacks and a navy blazer with a white shirt and blue tie. Mike likes to shop when he's on holiday in Spain or the States; he finds their clothes are lightweight, better value for money and a little bit different. He doesn't do 'labels' although he does appreciate quality and it shows. To keep fit, Mike recommends going to the gym every day for 45 minutes, he never eats fried food, tries to avoid wheat and has never smoked.

ROBIN HOUSTON

ROBIN is 38 years old and owns the franchise for Collagenics in Ireland. He was over for the day enjoying some corporate hospitality. Robin wore a pinstripe suit from Hugo Boss, white shirt from Prada and tie from Gucci. He admits being a bit of a shopaholic and his favourite shops are Brown Thomas in Dublin and Selfridges in London. To relax Robin listens to all types of music but he's particularly enjoying James Blunt's new album. To look good, he recommends lots of moisturiser and regular Botox injections from Collagenics.



PHIL DAVIS



ROBIN HOUSTON



MIKE CHARLTON

JOLIE KELSEY

JOLIE, a 28-year-old hairdresser from Barnsley, was at the races with her mum. She loves the glamour and eccentricity of the outfits. She loves shopping at Vivienne Westwood for the individuality of the clothes and that's where her shirt, shorts and tie were from. Jolie's hat was from The Hat Company, although she did customise it with the cards. Her bag was from The Bellagio Hotel in Vegas. Being a hairdresser, Jolie recommends leaving your hair to the professionals though she does recommend experimenting with make-up.

RACHEL WALSWORTH

RACHEL is a 37-year-old secretary from Leeds and said coming to York Ladies' Day was a regular event with the girls. Her dress was from Emma Somerset in Harrogate. She likes to shop in Leeds because she reckons there's loads of choice, and Harrogate because it's got quirkier outfits and it's very pretty. Rachel goes to the gym three times a week and wouldn't dream of going to bed with her make-up on. She swears by Clinique products. On her CD player at the moment is Renaissance, but she admits to being a huge 80s music fan too.

RACHEL KIRWAN

RACHEL, 30, is a secretary from Leeds. She looked stunning in a dress from Tunstall in Leeds with a hat designed by India Honeybowl from Hats of the Ocean, also in Leeds. For a special occasion and when she can afford it, she shops at Harvey Nichols. Her beauty regime consists of exfoliating and moisturising daily, which showed in her flawless complexion, and she recommends a false spray tan to make you feel better. Rachel loves music and has a huge CD collection from classical to dance.

PHIL DAVIES

PHIL, 40, is from Essex and was enjoying the races with colleagues from work. Although he doesn't enjoy clothes shopping, he appreciates quality, particularly Gucci, which is where his whole outfit was from. Phil enjoys listening to all types of music - at the moment it's Coldplay. He admits to wearing Lancôme products on his skin and gets his hair cut every eight weeks. Phil doesn't like going to the gym. He prefers running, which he says doesn't take too much effort.



RACHEL WALSWORTH



RACHEL KIRWAN



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NE shopping

DURHAM CITY



Meeting the Mugwumps

With its cobbled streets and sense of history, Durham is a city with boundless charm. SARAH FOSTER samples some of its one-off shops

STANDING in Durham marketplace, the city's character comes to the fore. The bustling square, replete with ancient buildings, seems trapped in history. At its centre, tall and proud, stands a famous statue – of the Marquis of Londonderry on his horse. A little smaller, though no less dignified, is that of Neptune. The light stone of St Nicholas's church towers high above the cobbles, and the quaint town hall, with its leaded windows, forms a central focus.

Behind the bank of payphones – bright red like in bygone days – lies the Market Tavern, a real old-fashioned pub. There's also the indoor market, selling everything from fish and fruit to furry toys.

Proceeding to Silver Street, one of two main arteries from the market place, there's ample evidence of modernity. Beyond the imposing banks lies a host of high street favourites, with Woolworths at the helm. Sloping down towards the river are Marks & Spencer, Barratts, Dorothy Perkins and other national chains, which share the busy street with less familiar names.

One of these is Wishes, a relative newcomer to the city. Having previously been a standard charity shop, selling mainly second hand clothes, the store has switched to selling cards. It may be small, but the choice is impressive, with something for all occasions. Along with cards is pretty giftwrap, quirky candles and other novel gifts, including candy striped baby journals. Manager Colette McCormick says that despite its professional look, the shop has stayed true to its roots.

"We're a charity shop that just happens to sell cards and gifts," she says. "Every penny of our profit goes to Cancer Research UK. It has over 600 shops altogether and at the moment, only ten are Wishes shops."

Colette says the card shop concept has been well received – except that customers might not spot the charity side. "People don't realise we're a charity," she says. "It's

a case of trying to engage them in conversation and telling them. People often say, 'I'll be back' or 'I'll tell my friends'. They like the idea of being able to buy something they actually want and helping a charity."

The other main street off the marketplace, snaking up to the cathedral, is Saddler Street. In contrast with the modern shops of Silver Street, this has a distinctly old-fashioned feel. A glance above eye-level reveals the buildings' advanced age, along with many period features. The black and white mock Tudor of The Art Shop and Kemble Gallery, near the bottom of the street, is one of several things to note.

Walking past clothes store East, with its rich fabrics and pretty jewellery, you come to Scorpio, one of the city's stalwarts. Its young and funky style is reflected by the shoes displayed outside and although small, it packs in plenty of fashion footwear.

Further up the street the shops turn more traditional, with Uncle Sam's Sweet Emporium, its walls lined with jars, standing next to the old-style barber's.

One famous fixture, which turns 40 next year, is The Mugwump. Owned by Jean and Peter Jackson, on first glance the store looks deceptively small. Yet step inside and it's a labyrinth, with several rooms on three floors.

To describe its product range as diverse would be an understatement. From games to ball gowns, glassware to greetings cards, The Mugwump seems to sell almost everything. Maria Morris, one of the "family" of

“People don't realise we're a charity. It's a case of trying to engage them in conversation and telling them



From top: inside the Mugwump; the Cancer Research UK charity shop Wishes and the Georgian Window

Pictures: CHRIS BOOTH

assistants, says working there is a pleasure. "It's a lovely atmosphere to work in - you never know from one day to the next what you'll be doing," she says. "There are five core staff, a Finnish girl, a schoolgirl and a Russian student - and I'm of Polish origin - so we're quite international. Mrs Jackson always keeps us involved. She asks us if we like things and if we think they will sell. We're all a team - it's like a little family."

Although the shop appeals to everyone, attracting locals and tourists alike, it's especially loved by students. "We get students who have been to the university coming back on a day trip, who pop in and say they can't believe we're still here," says Maria. "The shop is an institution in Durham."

While its stairs and sloping floors may make it tricky to negotiate, Maria says they only add to its charm. She says it sits well in a place like Durham. "For a shop in a small city, there's quite an unusual collection of things under one roof," she says. "People come in here and they see things they haven't seen anywhere else."

"Durham's unique in that it's a city but at the same time, it has a very cosy, villagey feel to it."



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i-deck, the new companion music player for iPod

Record TV the easy-peasy way

If recording the right side at the right time is beyond your capabilities, there's a great British gadget out there aimed at you

DO YOU remember when your dad came home with a video? Once you'd got over the shock of taping the TV, the next trick the family wanted to try was recording a programme when everyone was out.

But setting the timer was a nightmare. Your dad would spend a fruitless night pressing buttons or trailing wires around the front room as he stabbed away at the wired remote. Then he'd get the instructions out, before having "a quick run through" by taping the Epilogue or something else nobody cared about. The next day the whole family would gather around the telly only to discover dad had recorded the test signal for three hours. And despite all the advances in VCR technology it didn't get any better.

Even VideoPlus depended on your dexterity in punching in a seemingly random code – and if the programme started late, you would just know you'd missed the end.

Today one of the beauties of owning a personal video recording device like Sky+ is the ease of programming. Just select the on-screen programme guide, hit the record button and that's it done. If a show overruns, the system compensates (usually) and if it starts late, you won't get three quarters of an hour of Farming Today (or whatever).

But what if you still can't bring yourself to junk the vid? And don't many DVD recorders rely on the same tiresome old methods to set the timer? Well now there is a solution. What's more, it's a British invention and it doesn't cost the earth.

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Remember when your video recorder looked like this, and it was near impossible to record?



Phantom does the rest – switching on your VCR and taping your favourite show without any fuss.

Early Phantoms worked OK with videos but not DVD recorders because a disc-based unit takes anything up to a minute before it is ready to go. The latest Phantom Plus takes this pause into account.

I used it with a JVC video and a Panasonic DVD recorder. In both cases it worked without a hitch (although it sometimes failed to switch the Panasonic off). It's virtually foolproof and just like having Sky+ in the spare bedroom.

And it only costs £32.95. Just think, for less than the cost of a night out you can leave home confident you'll never miss your favourite TV programme again. And as the Phantom Plus can be easily reprogrammed, you don't have to throw it away when you replace your VCR. What a bargain!

● **Fancy a Phantom Plus? Then get in touch with Bluedelta's Leeds-based stockist Brymar on 0113-232 0005.**

WHAT'S missing from iPod speaker systems today? Real stereo sound, for a start. Great audio performance at any volume louder than background noise would be pretty cool too. And how about some design flair to go with the classiest-looking MP3 player on the planet? All of this is now possible with i-deck, the new, high quality companion music player for iPod.

Developed by Monitor Audio, the UK's premier name in loudspeaker technology, i-deck transforms iPod from a personal digital music player into a stereo sound system with stunning sound quality and the iconic looks to match.

Stylish, cool design ensures that i-deck is the ideal fit for the studio apartment, lounge, kitchen or bedroom, recharging the iPod as it plays.

i-deck speakers feature separate bass and trademark gold tweeter drivers which can be placed next to the amplifier module and take up the minimum of space. Alternatively, the speakers can be separated using the cables provided to create a full-blown stereo experience.

● **i-deck is initially available online at £249 from www.i-deck.com**



Looking great the DIY way

We all deserve to be spoiled and pampered once in a while, but it's sometimes hard to justify the cost. SHEREEN LOW has some tips for beauty on the cheap

IT'S hard not to be tempted by each new expensive product, from body scrubs and creams to facial peels and deep pore cleansers, all touted as the next must-have, promising miraculous results, even though the price of beauty creams has increased at five times the level of house prices since 2000, according to research carried out by Olay.

But you can achieve great results without spending a fortune – and even better, you can do it without leaving your house.

“Many basic store cupboard ingredients are as good as, if not better than, fancy store-bought concoctions,” says Bharti Vyas, holistic beauty therapist and author of *Tips For Beauty Wisdom*.

BATH OF THE FIVE NECTARS

“In Ayurveda, milk, honey, yoghurt, ghee and banana are considered to be the five perfect foods, so this bath would be a real treat to nourish, soften, smooth and re-energise your skin,” explains Bharti.

- 1 banana, mashed
- 2tbsp milk
- 1tsp honey
- 1tsp yoghurt
- 1tsp ghee (can be found in your local Indian supermarket)

Combine all the ingredients together, before massaging the sweet-scented mix onto your skin. Plunge yourself into a warm bath and feel your skin gradually becoming softer and strokeable.

GENTLE FACIAL EXFOLIATOR FOR SENSITIVE SKINS

“Oats and oatflakes have a gentle but deep cleansing action, and can correct skin imbalances, making them ideal for dry, irritated and sensitive skins,” says Bharti. This scrub can be used once or twice a week, to get rid of the dead skin cells and to reveal more radiant skin underneath.

- 2 heaped tsp fine oatmeal
- 2tsp double cream

Combine ingredients, apply to skin and rub with a very light action, using the

balls of your fingers, then rinse off. Do not apply sustained pressure to any particular spot.

NUTRIENT-RICH HAIR CONDITIONER

Avocados and bananas are rich in nutrients – both have moisturising properties and will leave your hair shinier and silky soft. This recipe is made with blackened bananas, so it's a great alternative to throwing out old bananas you'd rather not eat.

- 2 blackened bananas
- 2 mushy avocados

Combine the two fruits together into a paste, which will apply easily onto your hair. Leave the tropical puree in your hair for 15 minutes, and then wash it out over the kitchen sink.

● **From The Doctor's Book Of Home Remedies by Dr Stephen Amiel (Pan Macmillan, £20)**

CLEANSING MASK

“Runny honey is good for dislodging dead skin cells – it also has soothing, healing, emollient and mildly antiseptic properties,” says Bharti. This makes this mask ideal for congested skins.

- 2 heaped tsp gram flour
- 1tsp water
- 1tsp runny honey

Mix to a thick, sticky consistency. Apply to affected areas and leave for five to seven minutes.

ALL-PURPOSE OATMEAL SCRUB

This scrub is gentle enough to be used all over the body, and will leave behind radiant-looking skin. The quantities given are enough for one thick application.

- 2tbsp finely ground oatmeal
- 1tbsp almond oil

Combine the two ingredients together, and massage into your body. Rinse off with warm water and pat skin dry, making sure you moisturise well afterwards.

● **Tips For Beauty Wisdom by Bharti Vyas (Vermilion, £8.99)**

NE beauty

How to indulge your inner Neptune

TREATMENT: Thalassotherapy

WHERE: Timeless, a holistic salon in Blackhill, Consett (01207) 588 686 or 0776 951 2722.

AS the sun blazed away outside on one of the hottest days of the year, I was smothered in a lotion made from four different types of seaweed and wrapped up in a plastic sheet. I had two towels on top of me, a silver foil blanket and a heavy duvet that which would have been fitting for a cold winter's night.

The aim was to open up my pores to eliminate any toxins with the aid of a menthol gel which was massaged into my legs and tingled like an extreme dose of Deep Heat. There was also a distinct aroma of the sea in the air.

This was my introduction to a thalassotherapy treatment – thalassos being the Greek word for 'sea'.

Timeless, a unisex salon in Derwent Street, Consett, has just been opened by local woman Carole McNally, 41, who has worked at several spas across the country.

Her aim is to bring an increased sense of wellbeing to those who visit the salon and although her logo is a picture of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of beauty, she is also keen to encourage men to try the treatments. “There are quite a few who will use a sunbed but most are afraid of being called a cissy if they have a treatment,” she says. “But the tide is turning.”

Carole gave me an Indian head massage while I closed my eyes and relaxed, listening to the soft background music.

The full body thalassotherapy treatment is designed to eliminate toxins and mineralise the skin using seawater or seaweed. The session started with a full body scrub to remove dead skin cells followed by a hot rock massage, using magnesium-enriched rocks from a Mexican volcano.

She then moved on to the thalassotherapy, using seaweed solution to drain the toxins from my system. The product Carole uses is called Algothem, which is created by a French company and comes from seaweed harvested in Brittany.

Carole thoroughly massaged the product into my arms, legs, chest and back before wrapping me up for 20 minutes while the treatment took effect. Hot towels were used to wipe the solution from my body before Carole gave me a refreshing spray with sea water. She then applied a fragrant body firming cream to make sure I was in no danger of being known as “the man who stunk of fish during the heatwave”.

My treatment cost £65 for a two-hour sessions and I felt relaxed, revived and rejuvenated.

● As well thalassotherapy, hot rock treatments and Indian head massage, Carole also offers Swedish massage, hand and foot treatments, manicures, facials, eye care, waxing, tanning and aromatherapy.

Gavin Havery

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MASERATI

NE motoring



Stirring the soul

Fancy turning some heads? The Maserati will do it, says
Motoring Correspondent IAN LAMMING

Maserati Quattroporte

Life turns full circle in the world of motoring. In the old days, discerning drivers cared little for fripperies; all that mattered was the engine and chassis. If the car looked good, that was a blessing; if it had any luxuries, it was a bonus.

But as time progressed engineers got a little bit clever and before you knew it, cars had begun to sprout all manner of techno-wizardry. Anti-lock brakes, electronic suspension, clutchless gearboxes with paddle shift, electronic brake force distribution, anti-skid and electronic stability programmes, to name a few.

Interiors received the same treatment: televisions, air conditioning, electric windows, key-less central locking, automatic lights, automatic wipers, surround sound hi-fis and even DVD players.

All this technology very quickly transferred its way from luxury marques to the mainstream and the mundane. So you are as likely today to find all of the above toys on a £8,000 Toyota Yaris as you are an £80,000 Mercedes.

Meanwhile, the driving experience was forgotten, with most cars feeling like huge balls of cotton wool. They might be reliable and efficient, but few excited the blood.

So what does the modern motorist require to feel alive again? Well a three-pronged badge on the biggest grille in history might just be a start. Italians are renowned for their love of life, particularly behind the wheel. And while the rest of the world seems obsessed with cossetting and smothering motorists, the engineers at Maserati remain hell-bent on construction; creating a motor car that stirs the soul.

The GT and Spyder started the ball rolling with a vengeance for the lovers of sports cars; the Quattroporte seeks to do the same for those who require a saloon.

Trust the Italians to make even "four door" sound sexy, which is all Quattroporte means in translation. Trust the Italians to make a four door look sexy, which is what the Quattroporte undoubtedly does.

The shape, courtesy of style masters Pininfarina, is simply glorious, from its huge retro grille and contemporary lights, through flowing curves, to its superbly understated rear which contrasts markedly with the aggression of the four oval exhausts.

It is a joy to behold from any angle and turns heads wherever it goes. Passers-by ooh and

ahh their appreciation; small boys point while their fathers mouth the word Maserati and smile.

But sight is only one of the senses it stimulates; the other is hearing. The V8 burble crescendos as the revs rise to a spine tingling howl that only Maserati and siblings Ferrari can manage. In town, just in case the Quattroporte hasn't been noticed, it is naughty but nice to drop to first gear and hear the cacophony from motor and exhaust. It's the one thing that sets the Maserati apart from other V8 models on the road, the operatic note that can be mimicked by no other.

The driving experience parallels the sight and sound. While many super cars are sterile, the driver cocooned in a protective void, the Maserati enthral. It drives like no other four door saloon. In fact, it drives and feels like a sports car, which is remarkable given its sheer size.

The ride is sports car hard but not uncomfortable; the handling is sports car precise, agile, with tenacious grip; the responses are sports car sharp with incredible prowess.

Performance is electric with a snarling, rasping 400bhp under the sleek bonnet. That's enough for a politically incorrect 171mph top speed and a shattering 0-60mph time of about five seconds. Mid range is phenomenal, thanks to 451Nm of torque. Drive like that and fuel economy is dismal, somewhere in the low teens. Don't and it isn't, with 22mpg coming up on the trip computer on a slow road to the Lake District.

The six speed sequential manual gearbox also has an automatic setting and is operated by Formula One-style paddle shifts behind the steering wheel. Press the sports button on the dash and the changes are three times as quick. The system also changes the Skyhook adaptive suspension making it even more sporting.

Inside, the toys are all there but are largely irrelevant. More important is the characteristic elliptic clock, the trident badge and the beautifully embossed leather seats. It has the air of an old fashioned sports car but with a contemporary twist.

If there are any flaws, they are too minor to mention (oh, all right, the boot isn't the biggest I have ever seen, but so what?). There is only pure old fashioned feelgood from a car that harks to the classic days of motoring but has a foot firmly placed in the 21st century camp. May the Maserati continue to turn full circle.

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The rugged interior of the kingdom is a million miles away from the plush hotels of the coast



EMILY SHELLEY finds a fascinating mixture of the ancient and modern in the Middle East

BEFORE I set off on my desert adventure in Oman – headscarf, lip salve and four litres of water at the ready – everybody I knew or met told me the stars would be “amazing”. People who had enjoyed (or survived) similar camping excursions in Dubai, Egypt and Tunisia raved about the unspoiled view of the sky on an Arabian night.

Armed only with this gem of expectation and a handful of stereotype images, my first trip to the Middle East began in Muscat, Oman’s capital. This lush, tropical-looking city, with grand white residences plotted in neat blocks and rich green palm trees lining its wide roads, couldn’t have been further away from the bustling, dusty place I had imagined.

Backed by rocky mountains, the city lies on the Arabian Sea, and has several long sandy beaches lined with modern, upmarket hotels. Since Oman has mainly avoided the futuristic high-rises of Dubai, a sense of its rich history survives alongside the five-star developments and glossy shopping centres.

The old port area, in particular, where the fish market and souk attract local and foreign bargain-hunters alike, is worth exploring on foot. Other attractions include the Grand Mosque, which dominates the skyline towards the centre of the city, and the many museums detailing the long seafaring heritage of Oman, its ancient Islamic roots and the varied natural wonders to be seen here.

Having travelled to the Sultanate during the holy month of Ramadan, we had arrived at our hotel laden with discreet clothing and duty free for private consumption in our rooms. Any misgivings we might have had about the timing of our trip were dispelled by the warm welcome we received.

While it’s not a good idea to go about in extremely revealing clothing, Oman is a relaxed country where all religions are respected. If anything, I began to regret packing oversized long-sleeved cotton shirts as most tourists wore smart shorts and T-shirts.

The best time to visit is probably in the winter months, between October and April, when temperatures are hot, but bearable. Though Arabic is the official language, English is widely spoken.

With the usual holiday watersports on offer at the hotel, and burgeoning dive centres dotted along the coast, there’s much to occupy any visitor here, but the city couldn’t hold our group for long. We were bound for adventure, and packed up a 4x4 to head inland.

Accompanied by two French guides who had made their home and their living in Oman as

hosts and tour leaders for walkers, cavers and rock-climbers, it became obvious as the slick new roads of the coast gave way to the climbing dirt tracks of the interior that we were in for a rare experience.

Amid giant boulders and stark black peaks we came across pockets of lush vegetation, clear springs and dense carpets of brightly coloured flowers. Cool white villages stacked into cultivated hillsides appeared by surprise on a bend in the track, as children from nearby farms waved at us from the backs of Range Rovers on their way home from school.

The truly spectacular scenery was worth every bump and grind of the long drive.

Stopping for some sundown refreshment in the market town of Nizwa, with its imposing 17th century fort, we shared local sweet cake and strong black coffee along with the men breaking their fast in the square, while one of our guides phoned ahead – yes, even the old tribal groups are now equipped with mobile phones – to the Bedouin family we would be staying with in the desert.

Rightly or wrongly, I was glad our Bedouin hosts were furnished with 21st century communication when we got lost in the pitch-black sand dunes hours later. Finally spotting the camp after some scary near-crashes with camels, we pulled up alongside penned chickens and goats, unsure what to expect.

Ushered into a straw fenced area covered with rugs and rush matting, we could see shadowy shapes cooking and murmuring in the covered living quarters beyond. Served by the giggly children of the family, we ate fried chicken and rice with our fingers and began to relax. Later, we drank tea while the men and boys sang and danced for us, before being forced to dubiously return the favour with some songs of our own.

Just as we wearily climbed into our sleeping bags for the night it occurred to me that there was no form of electricity out here and the heavens above had been lighting our evening. Looking up at the vast dome of twinkling stars, it was more than the “amazing” sight I had been expecting – but hopefully not once-in-a-lifetime.

TRAVEL FACTS

● Emily Shelley flew with Gulf Air to Oman as a guest of Oman Tourism. Gulf Air operates daily direct flights from Heathrow to Muscat (reservations 0870 777 1717 and www.gulfair.com). Oman visas can be arranged through travel agents. Visit www.omantourism.gov.om for more information.

● Emily stayed at the InterContinental Muscat (00 968 2468 0000/www.intercontinental.com).

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– Sarah Bernhardt

● Juliette Lee is a life coach and inspiring speaker. She can be contacted on: info@juliettelee.co.uk; (01748) 823010; www.juliettelee.co.uk

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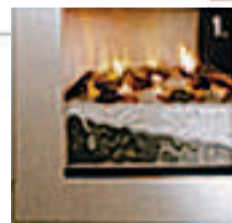


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