

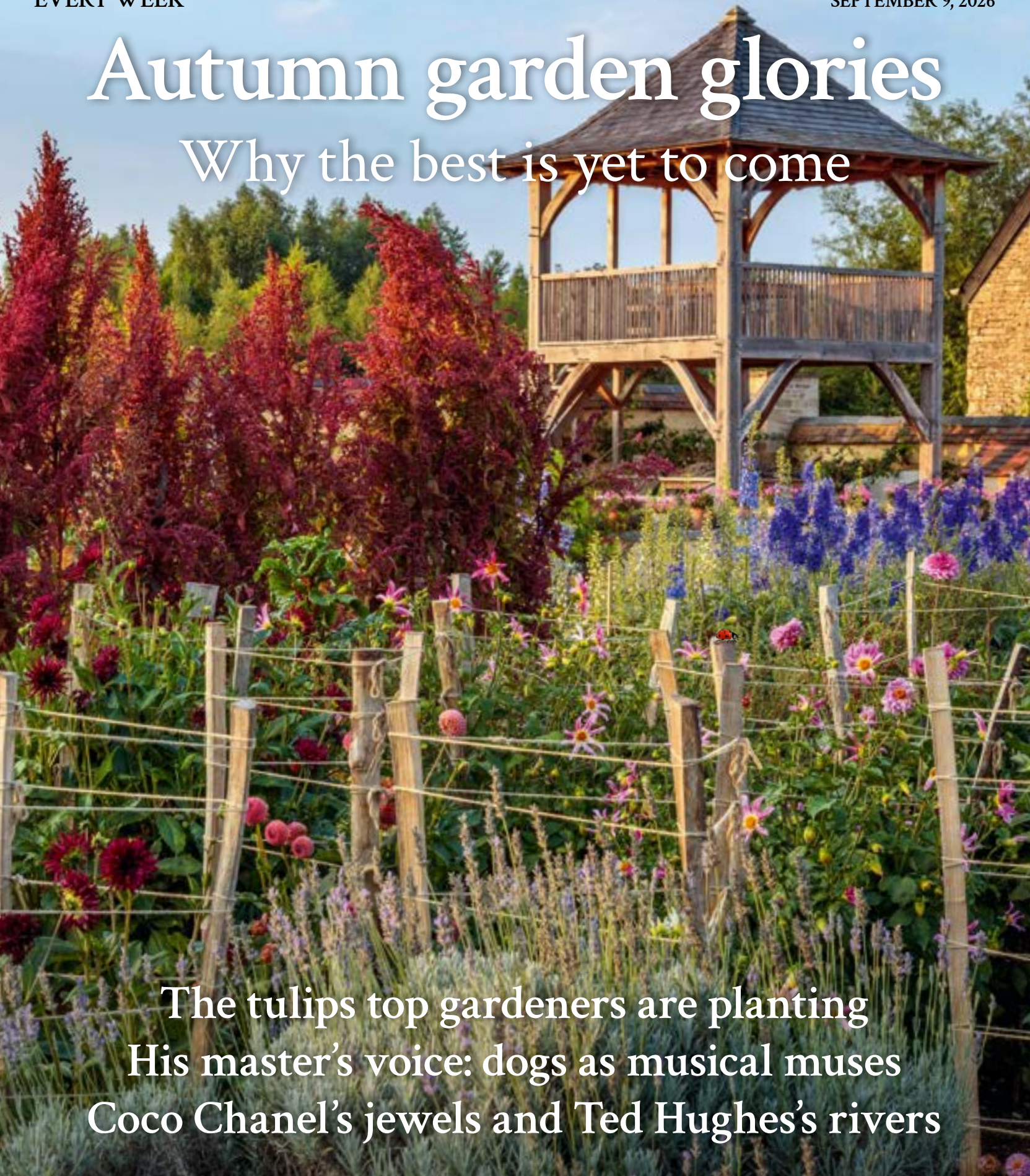
COUNTRY LIFE

EVERY WEEK

SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

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The tulips top gardeners are planting
His master's voice: dogs as musical muses
Coco Chanel's jewels and Ted Hughes's rivers

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will.matthews@knightfrank.com

Knight Frank Tunbridge Wells
01892 772042
simon.biddulph@knightfrank.com





Weston, Hertfordshire

Guide Price: £1,750,000

4 Bedrooms | 3 Reception Rooms | 3 Bathrooms | D EPC

A Grade II listed cottage with outbuildings set in 10.5 acres of gardens and paddock land. Dating from the 17th century with recent additions, the property offers over 2,000 sq. ft. of living space and comes with planning permission to extend further. The rear garden features a rill, an ornamental pond, and a paved terrace with open countryside views.





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Grade II listed | EPC D | Council Tax band H

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Guide price £2,950,000

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020 7801 5390

julia.mesdowcroft@knightfrank.com

Knight Frank Tunbridge Wells

01892 515035

simon.biddulph@knightfrank.com





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 6  5  4 | 5947 sq ft

Hertfordshire. Guide price £2.95 million.

Discreetly nestled on the outskirts of the Grove Estate, The Dower House offers historic charm and excellent access to local schools, market towns, and Central London. The estate features a five-star hotel, renowned spa, and championship golf course. The house dates back to the late 17th and 18th centuries and was once home to composer Frederick Delius and cooking personality Fanny Craddock.

Freehold | Council Tax Band = H | EPC = E





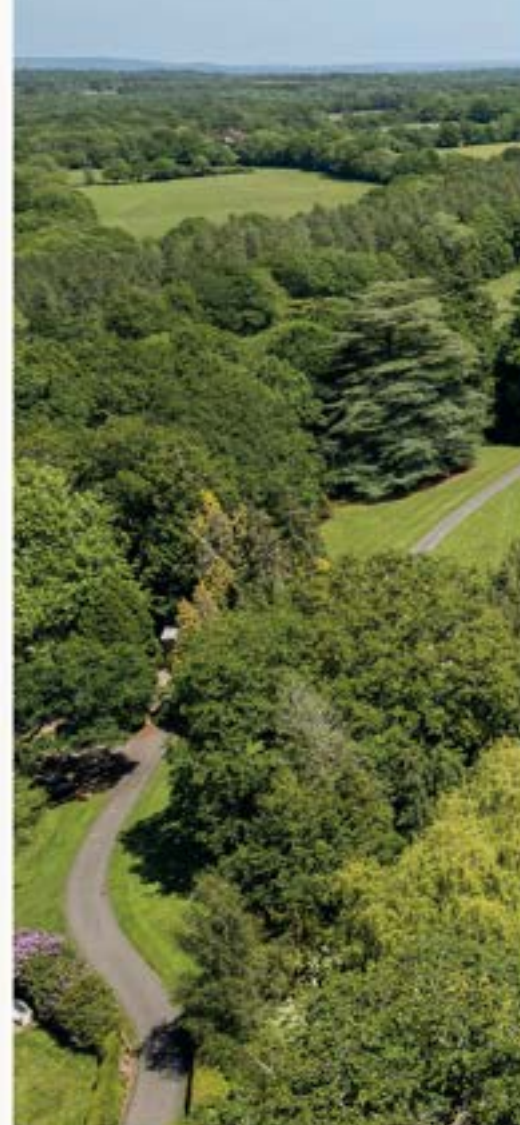
Hugh Maconochie

Country House Department
+44 (0) 7870 999 589
HMaconochie@savills.com

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Knight Frank
+44 (0) 7979 530 455
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Warnham Lodge

Warnham, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12

Eight reception rooms | Eight bedrooms | About 26.6 acres

An exceptional country residence offering over 9,000 sq ft of accommodation, extensive grounds, swimming pool, tennis court, impressive outbuildings set in 26.6 acres in a wonderfully private rural setting.

Guide price £5,950,000

Three-bedroom bungalow with planning permission to significantly extend available by separate negotiation.



Arrange a viewing

Oliver Truelove | +44 (0) 20 3542 0466
Holly Pearn | +44 (0) 1483 306 565





Luton House

Selling, Kent, ME13

Five reception rooms | Nine bedrooms | Superb gardens | About 20.19 acres

A substantial and gracious country house well set within delightful gardens, with a tennis court, an arboretum, acer garden, lily pond and wildfowl aviary. Selling is a sought-after village on the edge of the beautiful Kent Downs National Landscape and is well situated for both fast communication links and the famous cathedral city of Canterbury with its well-regarded schools.

Guide price £3,000,000



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4 bedrooms | 3 bathrooms | 4 reception rooms | Fishing
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Guide price £2,250,000

Knight Frank Winchester
01962 677236
edward.hunt@knightfrank.com





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£1,950,000 guide | EPC E
 Chichester: 01243 786316



DEVON, TEIGN VALLEY

Set within 4 acres, a fully restored former rectory with five bedrooms and three reception rooms
£1,350,000 guide | EPC D
 Exeter: 01392 214222



GLOUCESTERSHIRE, LAVERTON

Magnificent farmhouse with separate barn and land set within a tranquil village
£2,650,000 guide | EPC D
 Chipping Campden: 01386 840224



NORFOLK, BUNGAY

Remarkable period residence of exceptional character with picturesque gardens
£1,400,000 excess
 Norwich: 01603 612333



CHESHIRE, NESTON

Historic Grade II* Listed seven bedroom property with a detached barn and garden
£1,150,000 guide
 Chester: 01244 328361



SURREY, WEYBRIDGE

Imposing five bedroom detached family home offering over 2,600 sq. ft of living space
£1,500,000 guide | EPC C
 Weybridge: 01932 821160



EAST SUSSEX, CHELWOOD GATE

Charming 20th Century home spanning three floors with views of the South Downs
£2,750,000 guide | EPC E
 Mid-Sussex: 01444 484400



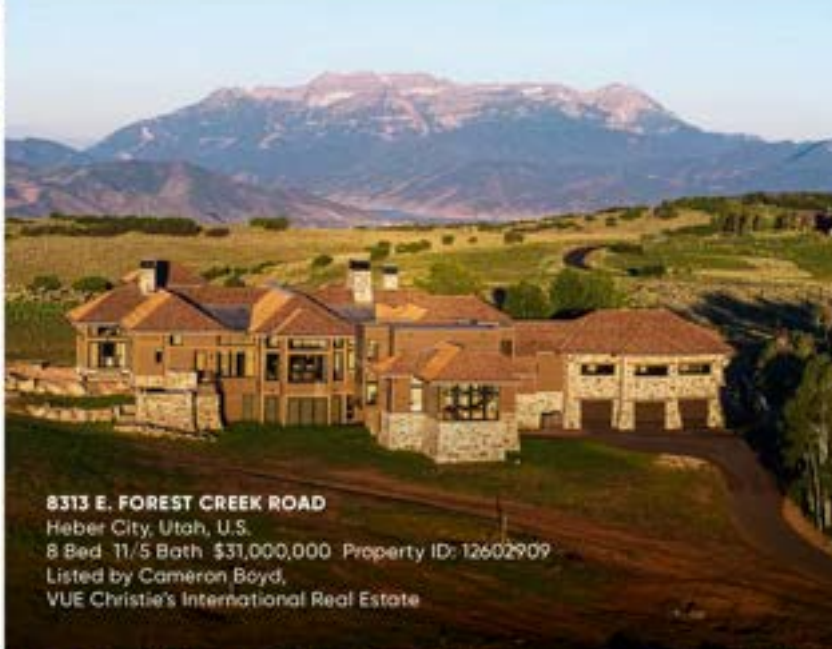
LANCASHIRE, CHIPPING

Impressive stone house with landscaped gardens and panoramic countryside views
£1,400,000 guide | EPC D
 Lancashire: 01704 651029



MAJAGUAL ESTATE

San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua
23 Bed 110 Acres \$31,500,000 Property ID: 047680
Listed by Robert F. Davey,
Christie's International Real Estate Costa Rica



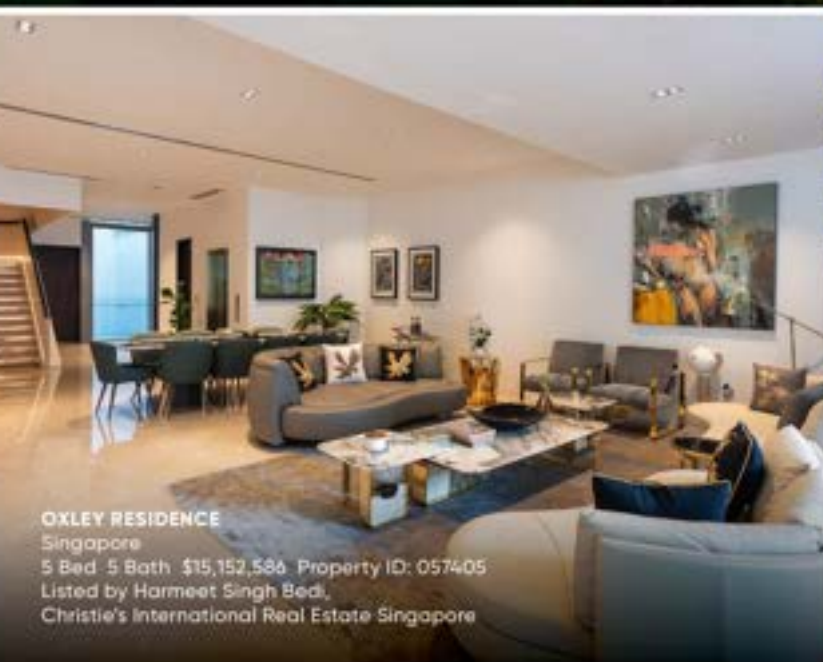
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Heber City, Utah, U.S.
8 Bed 11/5 Bath \$31,000,000 Property ID: 12602909
Listed by Cameron Boyd,
VUE Christie's International Real Estate



970 POWDER LANE

Aspen, Colorado, U.S.
9 Bed 9/3 Bath \$42,000,000 Property ID: 193399
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Singapore
5 Bed 5 Bath \$15,152,586 Property ID: 057405
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6954 VERMONT ROUTE 17 WEST

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4 Bed 5 Bath \$5,200,000 Property ID: 5091992
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Guide price

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COUNTRY LIFE

VOL CCXXVII NO 37, SEPTEMBER 9, 2026



Danielle Reuther Forbes, Viscountess Forbes

Danielle is an artist, stylist and founder of second-hand clothing business I Have Something Better. She is the daughter of Natalie Zimmerman and the late Stephen Reuther of Los Angeles, US. She married Jonathan, Viscount Forbes, last year.

Photographed in her east London studio by Aliona Adrianova



Russell Sach

Sculptor Amy Goodman works on a bronze statue of a young Elizabeth II ahead of its unveiling at Romsey Abbey in Hampshire



The garden at Ham Court in Oxfordshire (Clive Nichols)

COVER STORIES

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With a seemingly endless array to select from, COUNTRY LIFE contributors reveal the tulips they will be planting for spring

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Playing the long game

HOW good it has been to see that, after the first proper rains, perennials have put on fresh growth almost overnight and lawns are already returning to green. Even ride-on mowers might be due for a runaround soon. Our relief mirrors that of our poor parched plants. After weeks of heat and drought, gardens have come into high relief, not least because so many leafy plants have drooped or curled up in response to the sun, making evergreen structure almost as important in summer as it is in winter. The endless lugging of buckets to water precious plants that might otherwise be lost has been a necessary chore for weeks.

On the other hand, mowing has hardly been needed and hand-weeding has been much less onerous—except of the bindweed and thistles, which pushed on without a care. A glut of ladybirds did for the aphids early

in the year, but the dry weather has encouraged the mildew on the sweet peas.

Gardens are about making choices and this summer it has been what to spot-water with a can and when to deliver the precious liquid. The little-and-often mantra, we learnt, is not what plants want from us. They like a good slosh to the roots when thirsty. The reassurance has been in seeing that nearly all gardens, private and public alike, have suffered the same privations and displayed the now-familiar crispy yellow lawn.

How to plan for next year? Bulb catalogues have started dropping on doormats packed with promise and offering every possible variant of spring colour—a welcome sight for eyes wearied by lawns and leaves in various shades of toast. Turning the pages is the usual joy, but which of the thousands of bulbs to choose from? Many gardeners and designers are being drawn to naturalising

bulbs in lawns or gravel. Delicate little species tulips such as *Tulipa acuminata* and *T. batalinii* have won many votes among the horticultural friends of this magazine (see page 58), many of whom worry about the throwaway culture of discarding bulk tulip orders after they have flowered once.

Gravel gardens are increasingly being seen as a way to manage drier summers, as well as easier to maintain than wide flower borders. That's not to say that the traditional English border has had its day—far from it. By all means consider cultivars better able to withstand dry conditions and order plants such as shrubby salvias, ornamental grasses, Mediterranean species and American prairie plants. Best of all, ask for advice from growers at specialist nurseries who really know their plants. Yet don't dig everything up in a panic. Gardening is a long game. Who knows what the weather gods will deliver next year?

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Editorial

Editor-in-Chief
Mark Hedges

Editor's PA/Editorial Assistant
Bella Fulford 6022

Telephone numbers are
prefixed by **0330 390**

Emails are
name.surname@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
Kate Green 4171

Managing & Features Editor
Paula Minchin 07971 923048

Architectural Editor
John Goodall

Gardens Editor
Tiffany Daneff 6115

Executive Editor and Interiors
Giles Kime 6047

Art and Antiques Editor
Carla Passino
(carla.passino@futurenet.com)

News and Property Editor
Julie Harding

Deputy Features Editor
Victoria Marston 07908 171497

Associate Features Editor
Agnes Stamp

Acting Assistant Features Editor
Emma Hughes

Lifestyle Editor
Will Hosie

Acting Luxury Editor
Amie Elizabeth White 6102

Head of Design
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Deputy Art Editor
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Group Picture Editor
Lucy Ford 4072

Deputy Picture Editor
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Digital Director
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Rosie Paterson 6591

Deputy Digital Editor
James Fisher 4058

Digital Writer
Lotte Brundell

Social Media Editor
Florence Allen

Property Correspondent
Penny Churchill

Country Life Picture Library
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Executive

Cindie Johnston 6538

Commercial director

Clare Dove
Advertisement director
and Classified
Kate Barnfield 07817 629935

Advertising (Property)
Lucy Khosla 07583 106990

International Property/Travel
Scarlett Glendenning
07938 735212

Luxury
Katie Ruocco 07929 364909

Interiors
Emma Hiley 07581 009998

Art & Antiques
Julia Laurence 07971 923034

Advertising and
Classified Production
Stephen Turner 6613

Senior Ad Production Manager
Jo Crosby 6204

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Historic Houses highlights heritage policy in need of repair

THE nation's heritage is 'fragile' and, with an increasing number of listed buildings falling into states of disrepair and appearing on Historic England's annual Heritage At Risk Register (HARR), urgent policy changes are required to turn the tide and save them. Since 2023, when there were 1,419 secular buildings or structures listed on the HARR, there have been rises every year—to 1,442 in 2024 and 1,460 in 2025. Those increases are even more stark for Grade I- and Grade II*-listed secular buildings: compared with 766 entries in 2020, 820 were recorded in 2025, a 7% hike.

A positive, however, is the register itself, which, although not complete or comprehensive, in highlighting buildings at risk, can help to incentivise positive action for their restoration. Indeed, many structures have been saved and subsequently removed from HARR, including Barrington Park in Gloucestershire, Castle Howard in North Yorkshire and Stonor Park in Oxfordshire—and, once removed, properties tend to stay off for good. However, according to a new report by Historic Houses, which represents more than 1,400 of the UK's most significant heritage sites, the devolved nations have fallen behind in record-keeping and better updating and sharing is essential. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) paused its Buildings at Risk Register (BARR) in 2024 (although SAVE Britain's Heritage has partly filled the gap by recording a record number of vulnerable Scottish sites on its own register) and Wales's Cadw register was last updated in 2015. Northern Ireland's 'heritage at risk' list is maintained, but isn't particularly accessible.

The report, *Endangered Spaces: Protecting 'at risk' Heritage*, goes on to advocate investment in heritage skills, training and supply chains



Knebworth House in Hertfordshire was given a grant lifeline during covid, but many other historic properties haven't been so fortunate since, according to Historic Houses

to ensure a healthier future, as well as calling for new entrants to an insurance market that has become increasingly unaffordable. The creation of a more favourable fiscal environment through tax incentives, such as a VAT rebate scheme to support the repairs on listed buildings that are open to the public, is also put forward as a solution by the report's authors, as is better and increased funding, because grants have fallen in real terms. As the system stands, Historic Houses points out that although private owners 'almost always make the best stewards of these properties', they are often forgotten during funding allocations. Fiona MacConnacher, Historic Houses's director of policy and public affairs, added: 'Our

historic buildings are measured in centuries, but the funding that sustains them arrives in short-term cycles—that has to change.'

Introducing Listed Building Consent Orders (LBCOs) on the likes of energy-saving measures would also 'unblock the planning system, efficiently and effectively, at no cost', according to the report. Despite being introduced in 2013, not a single LBCO has come into effect.

'The report identifies where targeted change would ease... pressure,' said Ms MacConnacher. 'The right targeted actions ensure that these places remain active centres for community and engines of economic growth, rather than preventable losses to the UK's remarkable, but fragile, built environment.'

Bovine business



Female White Park cattle, which are well suited to outdoor conservation grazing, are now roaming on the Castle Howard estate in North Yorkshire. The cattle, which are listed in the Rare Breed Survival Trust's 'Priority' category, form part of a 30-year, 440-acre Nature restoration and rewilding project of the Bog Hall Habitat Bank.

Britain's dairy-cow numbers have hit a record low, according to analysis from the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB). On July 1 this year, there were 2.2% fewer cows, at 1.57 million, than there had been during the previous year. Although 34,500 animals were lost to the system in this period, milk productivity rose by 3%.

Retailer M&S has taken animal welfare to the next level and is now using AI-powered video analytics to monitor the cows at its 46 British dairy farms. Employing the cameras that are already installed in dairy parlours, the animals are monitored frequently, for mobility, body condition scoring and behaviour, including social interactions, providing a backup to in-person welfare checks.

Garden guru's new chapter takes root

GARDENER, landscape designer and writer Dan Pearson is closing Dan Pearson Studio, the eponymous firm he founded 23 years ago and through which he has transformed landscapes and gardens such as those at Chatsworth in Derbyshire, Sissinghurst in Kent and Lowther Castle in Cumbria—not to mention forging an international following with projects such as the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Hokkaido, Japan. He plans to 'embark on a new, more reflective chapter' that includes working the land and exploring new creative avenues.

The move was sparked by a three-month sabbatical Mr Pearson took two years ago. 'In Mexico, I spent time with Chilean landscape architect Teresa Moller discussing her small practice with its big reach and, having averaged 12 staff at my company, I found that you need a number of projects on your books to keep the machine running. This means that you can only go so deep with each



New direction: Dan Pearson is seeking a fresh challenge

project personally,' Mr Pearson told COUNTRY LIFE. 'I would prefer to have a smaller number of pieces of work, and be able to spend more time going deeply without the responsibility of keeping everything else going. I've always been interested in the work rather than running the business. I'm not going away; I'm just going to re-emerge with a more refined approach. I'd like to have a small practice again—but that will be in the future.'

Mr Pearson's short-term plans include working in and developing his own garden and landscape at Hillside, the Somerset home he shares with his partner, Huw Morgan, where he will also organise small-scale guided tours. Other plans include writing (including his online magazine *Dig Delve*) and working within the media, education and charity sectors. One major *pro bono* charity project is 'Lambeth Green' at the Garden Museum, London SE1, which will see 5½ acres of council-run land adjacent to the museum turned into a climate-aware garden. He will also work informally with Sissinghurst and, in Essex, Beth Chatto Gardens, steering the latter's master plan.

'I want to make sure I'm putting my energy into public places, where I can make a real difference in terms of reaching out to a wider audience,' added Mr Pearson. 'I've also been trying to do a gardening day for the past two years, but it's been hard. Gardening is my soul food and now I will get that day back.'

Poll ignites moorland management debate

REGIONAL MOORLAND GROUPS (RMG) is calling on the Government to champion land stewardship that keeps wildfire risk in check across moors following a turbulent summer in which England and Wales's fire and rescue services tackled 1,132 wildfires from January 1 to August 16—more than during the whole of 2025.

The plea follows an Opinion Research poll of 2,050 UK adults commissioned by RMG that showed 41% of respondents in favour of management—controlled burning, cutting or grazing—as a means of thwarting wildfires, with 32% believing that leaving moorland to natural processes, perhaps with controlled access, was the way forward.

'Fires spread where fuel has built up and they slow where it's been managed. Grazing, cutting and controlled burning can be the difference between a fire you can fight and one you can't,' said Richard Bailey of the Peak District Moorland Group. 'The public clearly gets it and it's time the debate caught up with what people who live and work on the moors have known for years.'



More than 1,130 wildfires have raged this year

Those living in rural areas showed more support for land stewardship than those living in urban constituencies (46% versus 40% respectively), with fewer rural respondents advocating natural processes (29% versus 32%).

RMG is urging the Government to give wildfire prevention equal weight to emergency firefighting.

Good week for

Architectural landmarks

Half a million pounds has been secured for the restoration of the Lyceum building in Port Sunlight, Merseyside, and an application has been submitted by West Norfolk council to repair the Grade I-listed South Gate in King's Lynn, which is suffering from rot. Arundel Lido in West Sussex, which has suffered a series of recent break-ins, has launched a £500,000 crowd-funder to renew parts of its ageing pool infrastructure. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/4sfzt4ax> for details

Native breeds

The Rare Breeds Survival Trust is inviting farmers to complete an updated survey on the uses and benefits of native cattle to build a clearer picture of their versatility and economic contribution. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/3ptx688u>

The name Shaun

As rain lands and tempests brew, the public has submitted a number of names for those storms that will appear this winter, including Shaun (for Shaun the Sheep)

Novelty brews

An East Sussex brewery located near where the Battle of Hastings took place has launched limited-edition, Pilsner-style Bayeux Lager, celebrating the British Museum's unveiling of the Bayeux Tapestry

Bad week for

Own goals

Royal Shrovetide football, a centuries-old game held every February in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, which involves the entire town and puts the goalposts three miles apart, is likely to be threatened by the development of hundreds of new homes

Waste gangs

A new heat map created by the Environment Agency (<https://tinyurl.com/v9nnz78n>) will help to identify illegal dumping hotspots more rapidly amid the Government's crackdown

Old souls

The upcoming renovation of the Kew Gardens Palm House will sadly spell the end of the road for several



Raising a glass to surviving perry orchards

A NEW round of funding has been secured to help preserve the rare perry-pear orchards—among the most important in Britain—at the Three Counties Showground in Worcestershire. The £10,000 Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant has been earmarked for a programme of maintenance to continue to improve the showground's three large orchards that enjoy National Collection status. Currently comprising in excess of 250 trees and more than 115 different varieties of perry pear, 100-plus trees were planted during 2025 and 2026, also with FiPL grant funding.

The often giant and long-lived perry pear (some trees survive for three centuries) enjoyed a heyday in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, but then fell into decline and, by the 1950s, 80% of orchards had been lost. The survivors, not only at the showground, but also in the 'heartland' of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, probably owe their existence to Gloucestershire farmer Charles Martell, who launched the Perry Pear Rescue Project in 1991. This saw in excess of 59 varieties planted at the showground. Additionally, Jim Chapman has helped to curate and promote the collection.

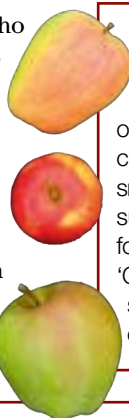
'This conservation project has been growing for more than 30 years. We're proud to be building on the remarkable work of Charles Martell, Jim Chapman



Bearing fruit: the future of rare perry-pear orchards is more secure thanks to £10,000 in funding

and the many volunteers who have helped protect our region's unique orchard heritage,' said Helen Williams of the Three Counties Agricultural Society.

Perry pears are fermented and turned into a floral and fruity sparkling alcoholic drink, which has been consumed in Britain for centuries. Visit www.threecounties.co.uk/national-collection-of-perry-pears



Apple harvests could bring smaller fruit

The upcoming apple harvest this year could be one that shows variation across apple varieties and orchards regionally, according to the National Association of Cider Makers. 'Some growers are reporting smaller fruit, but that's often paired with more concentrated sugars and flavour, which isn't necessarily a bad thing for cider-making,' said the association's Mark Hopper. 'Overall, we're coming off two relatively strong harvests, so cider-makers have reserves to draw on. The current rain will set things up nicely for the autumn.'

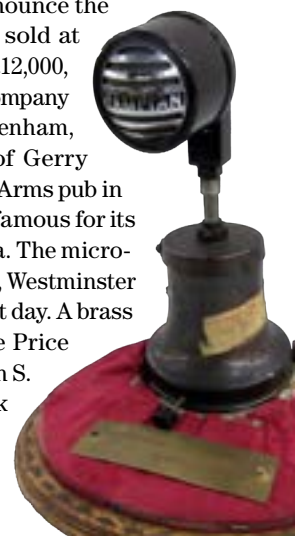
A century of pursuit

THE Old Berkeley Beagles is celebrating its 100-year anniversary with a garden party in the grounds of The Manor, Aston Sandford, Buckinghamshire, on September 19. The pack, often termed the OBB, which trail-hunts in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire with hounds kennelled near Aylesbury, became subscription based in 1926, when it received its name. It had originally been formed as the RAF Uxbridge Beagles by Maj H. Ellershaw in 1919, when hounds were hunted by Flt Lt H. C. Pyper, a First World War veteran who had lost an arm in combat. Robert Wigram then hunted the pack for three years until 1926. Tickets (costing £25) for the garden party, where Charlie Pye-Smith, whose most recent book is *Real Lives, Real Voices*, will speak on hunting and countryside traditions and guests can meet hounds, can be purchased from www.zeffy.com/en-GB/ticketing/pre-season-100th-anniversary-garden-party



Churchill's victory mic goes under the hammer

THE Grampian DPL PA radio microphone used on VE Day by Sir Winston Churchill to announce the end of the Second World War is being sold at auction. Carrying an estimate of £10,000–£12,000, it is being sold via the Cotswold Auction Company on September 22 at its Chapel Walk, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, premises on behalf of Gerry O'Brien, former landlord of the Churchill Arms pub in Kensington, London W8, which became famous for its large collection of Churchill memorabilia. The microphone was used for Churchill's May 8, 1945, Westminster Chapel speech—one of four delivered that day. A brass plaque is engraved with the words: 'The Price of Freedom is Eternal Vigilance. Winston S. Churchill.' Visit www.cotswoldauction.co.uk





High-street heritage: the 'broad' expanse of Bridgeland Street in Bideford

Opening doors to history

THE Bideford Bridge Trust Office and several historic properties along Bridgeland Street in the Devon town will be opening their doors on September 17 as part of Heritage Open Days, England's largest festival of history and culture, which this year features more than 6,200 free days out. Bridgeland Street—proclaimed by *Robinson Crusoe* author Daniel Defoe as 'broad as the High Street of Exeter'—was developed by surveyor Nathaniel Gascoyne in the 1690s and was one of the first streets ever built with brick. Fitting in with this year's Heritage Open Days' theme of Everyday Histories, which celebrates the 'working lives and daily routines' that have shaped places, its exceptional merchants' houses, 25 of which are listed, were soon occupied by those who made their fortune from the tobacco trade.

The National Trust and Postcode Lottery-supported Heritage Open Days will also feature Lyme Park in Cheshire (Pemberley in the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice*), The British Library at the former munitions factory in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire, which plays host to three-quarters of its collection of more than 170 million items, and Broseley Pipe Works and Coalport

China Museum in Shropshire, where the lives of ordinary women working in the ceramic industry during the Industrial Revolution will be highlighted. The British Optical Association Museum, London WC2, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary, is also taking part. Interactive events include 'Rhetoric, Rhythms & Roots', at Leicester Creative Business Depot, Leicestershire, an exploration of black British identity through live music, fashion and individual experiences, and Migration Stories, a collaborative sari workshop marking Buckinghamshire town Chesham's diverse community. 'By inspiring curiosity today, the festival helps to build a stronger sense of connection, care and action for the future,' said the National Trust's Annie Reilly.

For details of England's Heritage Open Days (September 11–20), visit www.heritageopendays.org.uk. Also, Open Doors will see 200 historic sites and landmarks in Wales offering free entry, events or tours in September (<https://tinyurl.com/462xv7rt>); Scotland hosts Doors Open Days weekends in September (www.doorsopendays.org.uk); and European Heritage Open Days take place across Northern Ireland on September 12–13 (<https://tinyurl.com/2wax42sr>).

Plans to turn David Bowie's childhood home, No 4 Plaistow Grove, Bromley, London BR1, into a visitor attraction (*Town & Country*, August 5) by the Heritage of London Trust (HOLT) have been greeted with 58 objections from residents. The gripes to Bromley Council include 'the scale, nature and operational intensity of the proposed scheme' and its unsuitability 'for a small mid-terrace house in a residential street'.



Country Mouse

Finding order in chaos

THE hornbeam hedges that we planted around the property and the wildflower meadow we sowed as soon as we bought the place (my top tip is that the sooner you do the planting, the sooner your new house will feel like a home) have both now been cut, giving a bit of shape and order. The garden had become somewhat wild during the watering-can summer.

Now is the moment to plan and order new trees, but there is so much to consider. I need to be more thoughtful as to where to put them: the cedar of Lebanon that The Judge gave me is far too close to the house—although it grows so slowly that it will block someone else's view. There is a small 'arboretum' patch, too, with half a dozen misfits, but I struggle to do the obvious thing and start again. I don't like cutting down trees.

Then there's what to plant. I'm tempted by white beams, medlars or weeping willows, which are so completely different that the selection shows the state of my disordered mind.

On the radio, as I write this, they are talking about the biggest El Niño for 1,000 years, with ministers advising us to stock up on canned food. Perhaps I should increase the size of the orchard? **MH**

Town Mouse

Danse Macabre



LAST week included a memorable trip to South Wales. The weather was mixed, but, after such a prolonged dry spell and a drought across the whole region, it felt like a return to normality. One delight was a visit to Pembroke, where the castle presides so magnificently over the town and former harbour. It's a shame that traffic engineers have tried so hard to prevent anyone from getting to the gate alive or enjoying the fine Main Street without contending with a continuous stream of vehicles.

The highlight of the trip, however, was a visit to St David's, which claims to be the smallest city in Britain. Arriving on a still, clear evening as the light faded, the dell in which the cathedral and bishop's palace sit was filled with the sound of hundreds of crows. As they gradually settled into the trees and their cries subsided, it became possible to hear the cathedral organist practising Saint-Saëns's *Danse Macabre* in the empty church.

Sitting alone surrounded by graves and monuments in the gathering darkness, with the sharp note of the cathedral bell striking nine, it felt like a perfect conjunction of art and Nature. When the music stopped, the only thing to be heard was the distant sound of the sea. Perfection. **JG**



Quiz of the week

- 1) The horn of plenty is also known by what Latin-derived name?
- 2) In the game of pontoon, how many points are players aiming for?
- 3) In cookery, what does the term 'to chiffonade' mean?
- 4) A kelpie is both a mythical creature and a breed of what animal?
- 5) Zazu and Pumbaa are characters from which musical?

Riddle me this

If there are three apples and you take away two of them, how many do you have?

100 years ago in COUNTRY LIFE September 11, 1926



THE truth is that few people study heather, and that fewer still know anything about it. In certain areas it has a hard fight to overcome grass and bilberries or blaeberreries. The former is a persistent fighter, and by sheer weight of seed will beat out the heather; the latter is a quick grower, and it is when the fight with the blaeberry is most severe that the heather will grow fastest. There have been few seasons like 1926 for brilliance of heather flower. Hills and dales in heather country have been clad in a purple mist. Visitors from every corner of the globe have seen and marvelled, for the colour of the heather in bloom adds a softness and luminosity to the landscape that no other country can show. For those who crave peace of mind and body there is nothing that can equal heather-clad hills.

1) Cornucopia 2) 21 3) To slice leaves into fine ribbons 4) Dog 5) 'The Lion King'.
Riddle me this: Two



St Wulfhilda, Abbess of Barking (September 9)

ST WULFHILDA'S escape from the libidinous clutches of her very determined overlord, King Edgar—in other contexts labelled 'the peaceable'—proved her mettle: like that of many female saints, hers is a story of resistance under considerable pressure.

Wulfhilda was brought up in the abbey at Wilton in the third quarter of the 10th century. By the time Edgar proposed to her, she was already convinced of her vocation. Nothing daunted, Edgar enlisted the help of Wilton's duplicitous Abbess Wenfleda, Wulfhilda's aunt, who lured her to her own

convent at Wherwell. Only when Wulfhilda secretly returned to Wilton and concealed herself among relics did Edgar finally admit defeat and turn his amorous attentions instead to her cousin Wilfrida.

With such a family, it's no surprise that Wulfhilda's inclination to put her faith in God grew. She founded a convent in Dorset; later, she became Abbess of Barking. Her horrible kinsfolk were not yet finished with her. After Edgar's death, his widow tricked Wulfhilda out of the abbey at Barking and she returned to Dorset, where miracles were recorded.

Matthew Dennison

Time to buy



WOLF x Liberty Ianthe Travel Jewellery Portfolio in Burgundy: embossed with the timeless Liberty pattern, £265, WOLF (www.wolf1834.com/uk)

Walnut Brownie 60% Dark Milk Chocolate: contains British-grown walnuts from Sharpham Park in Somerset, £9.95, Pump Street Chocolate (01473 356445; www.pumpstreetchocolate.com)



On this day... September 9, 1543



Mary Stewart was crowned Queen of Scots at Stirling Castle, aged nine months. The only legitimate child of James V to survive him, she was born six days before her father's death. By the time of her execution for treason on February 8, 1587, aged 44, she had spent 19 years in captivity.

A novel note

'The present changes the past. Looking back you do not find what you left behind'

The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai

Poet's corner

'To-night the winds begin to rise
And roar from yonder dropping day:

The last red leaf is whirl'd away,
The rooks are blown about the skies'

In Memoriam, Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Britain's greatest battles The Plains of Abraham, September 13, 1759

AFTER months of fighting near Quebec during the Seven Years' War, 32-year-old Maj-Gen James Wolfe devised a daring plan to boat down the St Lawrence River at night with 4,000 troops and scale the 200ft steep cliffs west of the city. At dawn on September 13, after a brief skirmish with pickets, his army reached the Plains of Abraham—named after a farmer who had once grazed his cattle there—and formed in double rank before the numerically superior French could properly take up defensive positions. Their general, the 47-year-old Louis-Joseph de Montcalm, decided to attack immediately. The French advanced quickly and volleyed, but the double line of redcoats let them approach to 50 yards before delivering a powerful volley, then advancing a few yards and delivering another. The French broke, retiring in disorder. It was all over in less than an hour.



The great historian of the British Army Sir John Fortescue called it 'the most perfect volley ever fired on a battlefield'. The perfection was not so much its delivery, but its strategic effect: Britain took Quebec and subsequently all of 'New France' (lower Canada), a major turning point in history. Both Wolfe (*above*) and Montcalm were killed during the volleying, however. *Allan Mallinson*

Unmissable events

Until November 14

**'Elizabeth Blackadder:
A Life in Colour'**

(pictured), Dovecot Studios, Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Retrospective marking five years since the death of one of Scotland's most celebrated artists, including new pieces inspired by her work (0131-550 3660; <https://dovecotstudios.com>)

September 10–October 17 Attention All Shipping: A Celebration of the Shipping Forecast, various venues. Writer and broadcaster Charlie Connelly goes on a UK tour with the show inspired by his bestselling book (www.shippingshow.co.uk)

September 11–13 Staithes Festival of Arts & Heritage, various venues, North Yorkshire. Celebration of art, heritage, music and community spirit in the historic fishing village on the North York Moors coast (www.staithesfestival.com)



September 14–19 A Tale of Two Cities, Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury, Kent.

The stage adaptation of Charles Dickens's French Revolution novel will premiere here before embarking on a national tour, visiting Leeds, Bath, Cheltenham, Chichester, Edinburgh and Clwyd, with more venues to be

announced (01227 787787; <https://marlowetheatre.com>)

September 19 The Wick Court Harvest Gathering, Arlingham, Gloucestershire. Festival of food, farming and heritage celebrating 50 years of Farms for City Children, the charity founded by Clare and Michael Morpurgo (01392 276381; www.farmsforcitychildren.org)

September 13 High House Gardens, Thetford, Norfolk

Enjoy this three-acre plantsman's garden developed by the current owners over the past 40 years. There are colour-themed herbaceous borders, box-edged rose and shrub borders, a woodland garden, a pond and bog area, an orchard and a small arboretum, plus a vegetable garden (www.ngs.org.uk).



Wine o'clock

Punchy confit lemon
**Cape Point Vineyards,
Fairtrade Sauvignon Blanc-
Semillon, Western Cape,
South Africa, 2023. £9.95,
Co-op, alc 12.5%**

Sauvignon Blanc with 30% Semillon. It's not subtle, with punchy confit lemon and crunchy grapefruit flavours, plus a caressing and toasty length. There's a little oak influence (oak staves were used in production) and it rounds out the vibrant, aromatic fruit character. **Visit www.decanter.com**



Time for tea Chá da Vovó



Brazil is better known for coffee than tea, yet hidden in the lush Vale do Ribeira lies one of the world's most fascinating family tea gardens. I remember exploring the region in an ethanol-fuelled hire car that promptly disappeared into a crater-sized pothole—an unforgettable introduction to this little-known tea landscape. The Shimada family are descendants of Japanese immigrants who brought generations of tea-making knowledge to Brazil. Their Chá da Vovó ('grandmother's tea') honours Ume Shimada, who revived the family's abandoned tea garden in her late eighties.

Large tea leaves produce a rich amber liquor with flavours of malt, ripe fruit, gentle minerals and sweet citrus. Full-bodied, yet beautifully smooth, it demonstrates how Japanese craftsmanship and Brazilian *terroir* can create something entirely distinctive.

How to serve

Infuse at 90°C–95°C for 2–3 minutes. Re-infuse once or twice.

Where to buy

From £3 at Curious Tea (07799 900500; www.curioustea.com)

Jonathon Jones tastes tea and exports English-grown tea worldwide



The return of the harvest party

OF all the parties I expected to attend in 2026, I hadn't anticipated that the most fun would be had from vegetables. 'Rovi has always been about great produce,' says chef and cookbook author Yotam Ottolenghi of his restaurant in Fitzrovia, London W1, which hosted the capital's foremost harvest party last Thursday. 'It is about vegetables from root to tip, with a menu shaped by our growers and our kitchen garden near Tottenham.' The shindig, harking back to Athenian tradition, was also an excuse for a hoedown. Moonlighting as disc jockeys for the night were Aimee Phillips, former manager of The Scissor Sisters, and Femi Koleoso, the live-tour drummer for Gorillaz.

As the country gets back to work and diners return to their old watering holes, restaurateurs are finding renewed success in celebrating the ancient food network. 'We wanted an evening that had growers, cooks and consumers in the same room,' Mr Ottolenghi



A Grecian Harvest Home by James Barry, a scene being re-created across the UK in celebration of our beleaguered farmers

taken place at the time. 'Our supper will be for 26 people,' Mr Overington explains, 'and to mark the occasion, we have invited chefs from far and wide to shine a light on a different aspect of British farming: meat, dairy, horticulture...' Each chef

says of his party. Despite 2026 proving fatal for many crops—our winter saw torrential rain; the summer, now drawing to a close, baked in record-breaking heat—the UK's best kitchens are refusing to put on the brakes. Joshua Overington, co-founder of Mýse in Hovingham, North Yorkshire, is hosting the restaurant's inaugural churn supper on October 4. 'We had no idea, when we decided to do this, how challenging this summer was going to be for farmers,' he notes.

The churn supper is a northern tradition that was first named as such in the 19th century, perhaps after the jug of cream that would have been passed around the table or for the first churn of butter that would have

will serve a different course.

'Far too often,' Mr Overington continues, 'kitchens are self-celebratory and overlook the fact that the hardest work is done by its suppliers. Yet without our farmers or growers, restaurants like mine wouldn't exist.' These events, then, are an opportunity for customers to engage in a more direct dialogue with the people who harvest the ingredients that end up on their plate. 'There's a real desire to feel closer to our food again,' says Mr Ottolenghi. 'To know who grew it, where it came from, and understand why it tastes better at certain times of year.'

'A harvest party,' he concludes, both 'makes that connection and celebrates it.'

New dimensions

As the glitterati readies itself for Frieze London in October, a more discerning coterie of collectors will gather from September 24–27 at the Saatchi Gallery, SW3. The 36th edition of the British Art Fair, it will feature 72 dealers, 65 of whom are specialists in modern and contemporary art. Works by two of the most covetable painters on the market—Bridget Riley and the late David Hockney—are included.

Yet it is sculpture, says the fair's co-founder Gay Hutson, 'that seems to be enjoying a moment'. On sale are several works by Henry Moore (with Osborne Samuel) and Lynn Chadwick (*below*; with Pangolin London). 'These market shifts seem to happen by osmosis,' says Ms Hutson, nodding to this year's installation of Chadwick's work at Houghton Hall, Norfolk, and Moore's at Kew Gardens.

'When I started out, all anyone wanted to collect was Victorian watercolours,' she laughs. 'Art creates its own momentum.' Besides these notable names are those of living artists, such as Annie Morris (*above*). Prices range from £1,000 to the high six figures. 'It's open to connoisseurs of all kinds,' Ms Hutson beams.



What you might have *missed*

'Is adding someone you've been flirting with on LinkedIn funny or weird?' a friend asked me last week. 'That depends,' I answered. 'Are you already connected?' Perhaps more importantly: 'Is he currently a colleague or someone who might help you move into a different role?' Don't hold your breath—a gentleman never tells—but one thing is certain: young people, fed up with dating apps, are turning to left-field platforms to woo their beloveds.

It was reported, in 2024, that the country's top 10 dating apps by market share had seen a nearly 16% drop



in customers. The downturn has only worsened since. Where, besides LinkedIn, are young lovers flirting instead? The BBC suggests that multi-player video games are a popular medium; anecdotes from those near me, however, suggest the airport lounge. 'It is a lawless place,' says a friend, who was 'hit on by a 34-year-old actor at Nice the other day, seemingly because I was travelling alone.' Attractive? 'Yes, thank God.'




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Letter of the week



All white now

I WAS saddened to read of the plight of the Regent's Canal swans (*Town & Country*, August 26). If it is any consolation, I can report a thriving family of two attentive parents and six bonny cygnets in London's South Dock Marina, SE16 (*above*). Thankfully, the marina is practically litter free. This model family brings immense joy to many locals, proving how well the genus *Cygnus* can flourish when given a clean environment.

Jeannette Gregson, by email

The writer of the letter of the week will win a bottle of Pol Roger Brut Réserve Champagne



Sehr gut!

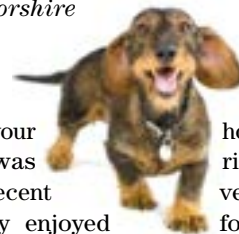
I REALLY enjoyed reading about my opinions of dachshunds in your feature (*'Do your wurst'*, August 26). One of the most remarkable I have owned was called Echo. I bought her when soldiering in Germany on a large farm where her father was used for hunting wild boar and her mother for hunting foxes. What a dog. After the dreadful quarantine periods, she turned out to be a wonderful companion, out shooting and even winning endless prizes at dog shows. She was the subject of a telegram that I still have when she reappeared after being AWOL down a badgers' sett for about 24 hours.

Jonathan Reeves, Radnorshire



Long story

MY family agree that your August 26 cover was the most enchanting in recent history and we greatly enjoyed Matthew Dennison's hymn of praise to dachshunds. However, my three wire-haired dachshunds—Jedediah, Theodora and Myrtle—wished me to point out that, unlike their smooth-



hounds with a great deal of terrier ancestry, of which they are very proud. The exact recipe for the creation of the wire-hairs is a matter of some debate, but perhaps as early as the 18th century smooth dachshunds were being crossed with rough-coated terriers to create this beloved variety.

Sir Loyd Grossman, by email



A model demonstration

READERS who saw the model Merryweather fire engine in your August 26 issue (*Art market*) may be interested to see a photograph I took at one of the Essex country shows a few years ago, of experienced stud groom Bruce Smith, with two Suffolk Punch horses from the Suffolk Punch Trust, demonstrating the use of a Shand Mason fire appliance (*above*).

Chris Miller, Suffolk

Bright ideas

THE letter from Sir Gerald Howarth on August 19 misses key points. What farmers do is convert the power of our sun into usefulness—traditionally by producing food, nowadays by producing electricity. Solar panels are less of a blot on the landscape than wind turbines and farmers can graze chickens or sheep beneath them, thus doing both their jobs at once. That said, tidal power is probably the best solution, once the technology is good enough.

Cllr Mike Stanton, chair, Somerset Rivers Authority

Contact us (photographs welcome)

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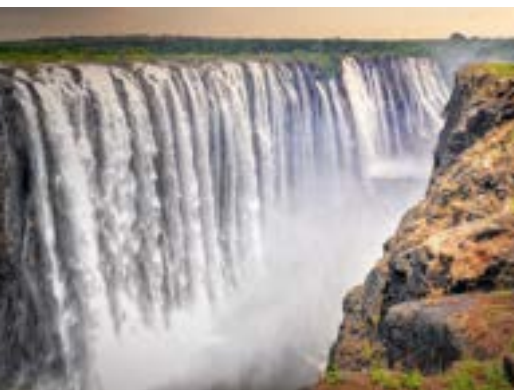
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Out of Africa

I HAVE just returned from a trip to Zimbabwe to see the magnificent Victoria Falls. I took the two latest issues of COUNTRY LIFE and read them on the safari-lodge verandah looking down on a water hole where elephants, zebras, water buck, baboons and impala came to drink. When I departed, I left the magazines behind as Swiss guests were due the next day. Could this be the furthest outreach that COUNTRY LIFE has achieved?

Patricia Wilson, Hertfordshire

Hello, Dolly

RESEARCHERS have traced the late Dolly Parton's family origins back to rural mid Wales, where her eighth great-grandfather, William Owen, was born in Machynlleth [now in Powys], in 1584. Sadly, she never wrote a song about her ancestor's hometown, although admittedly rhyming might have been a challenge.

Sue Balsom, Ceredigion



COUNTRY LIFE SEPTEMBER 16

Visit Britain's quirkiest museums displaying everything from spotted dick to dog collars. Plus historic Cotswold dynasties, haunting but beautiful bogs, elegant redstarts, glorious Greece and Victorian posies



Balance of power

THE Government plans to devolve power from Westminster by reforming local councils and introducing more regional mayors. There is much to be said for moving to single-tier authorities and building on Michael Heseltine's original and visionary introduction of directly elected mayors with real power and accountability. However, the current proposals ignore the needs of the countryside and will further exacerbate rural disadvantage. Already, in many counties, there is real concern that some of the new authorities have boundaries designed to benefit Labour rather than be the best bases to deliver rural services.

These issues emerged more clearly when it was decided that the mayors would not draw their funds from the Government, but would retain part of the local business rates that would otherwise have gone to the Treasury. In principle, such a system of retention is sensible, but, without a carefully balanced structure, it is bound to favour the urban areas because they have a much denser tax base.

Without safeguards, it would increase the present funding discrimination against the countryside. Under the present system, upper-tier rural authorities receive about 31% less support than the average. This local-government reform should, therefore, be an important opportunity to right that balance and, at the same time, to provide local government with the resource necessary to improve rural productivity, which is only 82% of the English average.

This would not demand new legislation either, because the powers needed have already been taken. What matters is that the Government faces up to the present concerns and makes detailed changes in its plans for the implementation of the reform. Above all, there must be an insistence that Local Growth Plans and Spatial Development Strategies must be developed under a statutory duty that gives full weight to rural

needs. It is here that a recognition of the sparsity factor is important. The legislation already provides for sparsity weighting and an equalisation floor in the retention formula, but unless there is statutory duty to take this fully into account, urban interests will continue to dominate. It also means the whole nation loses because the countryside will continue to underperform. The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has produced detailed research to show that the economy could gain £11 billion if we could close that rural productivity gap. The new authorities will, therefore, need clear direction to build their plans in this way or we will simply continue our failure to recognise both rural needs and rural opportunities.

The new Prime Minister says he wants growth in every postcode. His MPs now represent very many of the rural postcodes where productivity growth is needed and can be delivered. Local-government reform is a real opportunity to show the nine million people who live in the countryside that

'This is a ready-made opportunity to ensure fair dibs for the countryside'

they are properly served and that they are given greater opportunities to play their part in building the nation's prosperity. This is a policy change that this Government should seize with both hands. After the debacle of the family-farm tax, it will have to do a lot of heavy lifting to recover the support of farmers—especially after yet another poor harvest. By contrast, this is a ready-made and relatively simple opportunity to right the rural balance by ensuring fair dibs for the countryside. What's more, ministers will be able to make use of the recently published proposals made by Equal Ground, a broadly based group designed to concentrate on righting the balance between town and country. Its careful analysis of the effects of the local government changes is designed to find the best ways of making them work, not to be a challenge to them. Andy Burnham should take up this well-prepared and timely gift.





Athena Cultural Crusader A glimmer of hope for Mentmore Towers

IN May 1977, the contents of Mentmore Towers, Buckinghamshire, were sold up over nine days for the staggering sum of £6.4 million. It was dubbed the sale of the century and came at the end of a sustained—but ultimately unsuccessful—campaign to save the house in its entirety as a branch of the V&A Museum. Mentmore Towers was built in 1851–54 for Baron Mayer de Rothschild by Sir Joseph Paxton of Crystal Palace fame. His design was inspired by the great Elizabethan house at Wollaton, Nottinghamshire, and incorporated the latest technology, including a central-heating system, running hot water and plate glass. The quality and richness of the contents were proverbial (*Stuff & nonsense*, September 2). In the words of a COUNTRY

LIFE leader at the time of the sale, Mentmore ‘was conceived as a treasure-house of objects that would evoke... all the richness of 16th-century Venice, 17th-century Flanders and 18th-century France’. The property eventually passed to the Baron’s daughter, Hannah, and by her marriage in 1878 to the Earls of Roseberry. It was the death of the 6th Earl in 1974 that prompted the sale.

‘It was “conceived as a treasure-house that would evoke all the richness of 16th-century Venice”’

Unwelcome as it was, the sale dealt with the contents. The house, with its fixtures, including such objects as a fireplace reputedly from Rubens’s house in Antwerp, was sold in 1977 for £220,000 to the Maharishi Foundation, for use as its headquarters. Then, in 1997, it was offered for sale again and, since 1999, it has been the property of Mentmore Towers Ltd. Permission was given for a scheme to convert it into a hotel and conference centre, but

this never came to fruition. Since that time, the fabric has steadily deteriorated and, despite some emergency repairs, this Grade I-listed building has been on the Buildings at Risk Register since 2009. As early as 2013, it was described as being of the highest priority and as being ‘at immediate risk of rapid deterioration or loss of fabric’. Repairs to the roof were agreed in 2016, but the work was again never completed.

Athena was pleased to hear, therefore, that just over a month ago, on August 4, the local planning authority, Buckinghamshire Council, served a repairs notice on the property (*Town & Country*, August 26). It gives the owner two months to show that the necessary repairs are in prospect and, if not, leaves open the possibility that Mentmore Towers could be compulsorily purchased. With so many other more immediate responsibilities, councils are often nervous of repairs notices. Indeed, as a tool they threaten so many complications and costs that it’s questionable how useful they are. Buckinghamshire Council should be particularly congratulated, therefore, on taking a stand in this case. Mentmore Towers is an astonishing building capable of modern use and there is no good reason why it should be allowed to fall down as it waits for a purpose.

The way we were Photographs from the COUNTRY LIFE archive



1973^{Published}

This photograph shows the stables at Erdigg, Clwyd, in 1973, when they were in a state of picturesque collapse. It was published by COUNTRY LIFE five years later—on April 20, 1978—to illustrate the far-reaching changes effected by the restoration of the building by the National Trust. The stables were built in 1774.

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A photograph of a garden scene. In the foreground, a gravel path leads from the bottom left towards the center. To the right of the path is a dense row of blooming purple lavender bushes. Behind the lavender, there are three tall, conical wooden trellises made of thin poles tied together. In the background, a stone cottage with a thick thatched roof and a brick chimney is visible. The sky is a soft, hazy blue, suggesting late afternoon or early morning light. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and rustic.

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My favourite painting George Saumarez Smith

Cat by Sheila Robinson



Cat, 1961, linocut in colours, 16¼in by 23¾in, by Sheila Robinson (1925–88), private collection



George Saumarez Smith is an architect and a director at Adam Architecture (see page 78)

‘Having made linocuts when I was at school, I love the bold graphic character of this medium. Once I started on the path to becoming an architect, I realised that making linocuts would only ever be an occasional hobby for me, but I did start collecting linocut prints by artists who had worked in and around the village of Great Bardfield in Essex. A few years ago, at a local auction, I bought this print. Cats were one of Sheila Robinson’s favourite subjects and, as did several of the Great Bardfield artists, she also designed wallpapers. This image of a cat sitting on a Windsor chair is given a more abstract quality by being printed over one of her wallpaper designs. I love the composition and also the stylish choice of colours, orange, brown, grey-blue and black. Perhaps it is a strange choice for a Favourite Painting, partly because it is a print rather than a painting, but to me it is a powerful image that also evokes a sense of homeliness’

Charlotte Mullins comments on *Cat*

SHEILA ROBINSON was born in Nottingham in 1925, where she studied at the city’s art school before heading to London and the Royal College of Art. It was here that she met her husband, Bernard Cheese, whom she married in 1951. More importantly, it was also where she also met her tutor Edward Bawden.

Bawden, a generation older, lived in Great Bardfield in Essex, where a community of like-minded artists and printmakers had formed in the 1930s. Befriending the young students, he, Robinson and Cheese worked together on murals for the Festival of Britain in 1951 before Bawden persuaded the couple to move to nearby Bardfield End Green. Their marriage only lasted six years, but Robinson remained close friends with Bawden until her death.

In 1957, Robinson moved into Cage Cottage in Great Bardfield, where she lived for 10 years until it was destroyed by fire. She designed posters for London Transport and the BBC and stamps for the Royal Mail, but also continued the Great Bardfield tradition by becoming an exceptional printmaker. She was unable to install a press in her cottage because it was too small, so she made small-edition linocuts by standing on her printing blocks and walking up and down to print each image.

Her two great passions were gardening and cats. Her linocuts often feature cats in domestic interiors, lounging on striped rugs or prowling against vibrant wallpaper. She had an economy of line, but a love of texture and pattern, seen in this tabby cat’s distinctive markings. 🐾



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Country-house treasures



**Castle Howard,
North Yorkshire**

A triumphant return

NICHOLAS HOWARD stands in the Tapestry Drawing Room, an interior refurbished as part of an ambitious wider renewal of this great Baroque house unveiled this year (*March 11*). The room, which was reduced to a shell by a destructive fire in 1940, has been rehung with Vanderbank tapestries of *The Four Seasons* made in 1706. They were specially purchased from the factory in Soho, London, for this space and survived the blaze. The cornice, dado and fireplace, by contrast, are new creations designed by Francis Terry. Inset within the overmantel of the new fireplace is *The Judgement of Paris* by Marco Ricci, who was born in the Veneto, Italy. He came to England with Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini, who is credited with the original decoration of the great domed hall for its builder Charles Howard, 3rd Earl of Carlisle. The overriding majority of his work is still intact. Ricci also worked for the Earl and this painting was returned to Castle Howard after its sale in 1991. It now felicitously serves to link the new work with the personalities of the original build. 'When I look at this painting,' notes Mr Howard, 'it seems to epitomise our intentions for the room: it is at one and the same time both old and new, yet you can't see the join.' *JG* 🐉

Visit www.castlehoward.co.uk

Photographs by Andy Hook



‘It epitomises our intentions for the room: it is at one and the same time both old and new, yet you can’t see the join’





The legacy The Pulham family and Pulhamite artificial rock



Rock by name only: the Pulhamite rock garden at Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, created to the Pulhams' still-secret recipe

Bull's bull

Obadiah Pulham created a black bull 5ft long and weighing 4½ tons that once sat on a ledge advertising the Black Bull Tavern in Holborn, London. When the inn was demolished in 1904, the beast was saved by Sir William Bull, MP for Hammersmith who set it outside his offices. Today, the bull stands on a plinth further down King Street, Hammersmith, W6



KEEN observers of the pelicans in St James Park in central London might have spotted the birds perched on rocky outcrops in the lake. What they are residing on are not actual rocks, but were made in the late 19th century from Pulhamite, an artificial stone, made to a still-secret recipe involving clinker and cement invented by the Pulham family. From the 1830s to the 1930s, James Pulham and Sons (as the four-generation family firm was eventually named) used Pulhamite to build grottos, waterfalls, ferneries and caves, thus fuelling the late-Victorian and Edwardian craze for rockeries.

The Pulhams worked at more than 170 parks, private estates and even seaside towns, such as Blackpool in Lancashire and Folkestone in Kent. They built a boat cave for the Prince of Wales at Sandringham in Norfolk, a rock garden for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild at Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire—complete with a grotto to house his goats—and a rustic bridge at Buckingham Palace. They made the rockwork cliffs and waterfalls beside the lake in Battersea Park and the original rocks for the sea lions, monkeys and polar bears at London Zoo. Perhaps their most impressive projects were the drama-filled rock-works at Madresfield Court, Worcestershire, and a replica of the Matterhorn at Friar Park in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (later owned

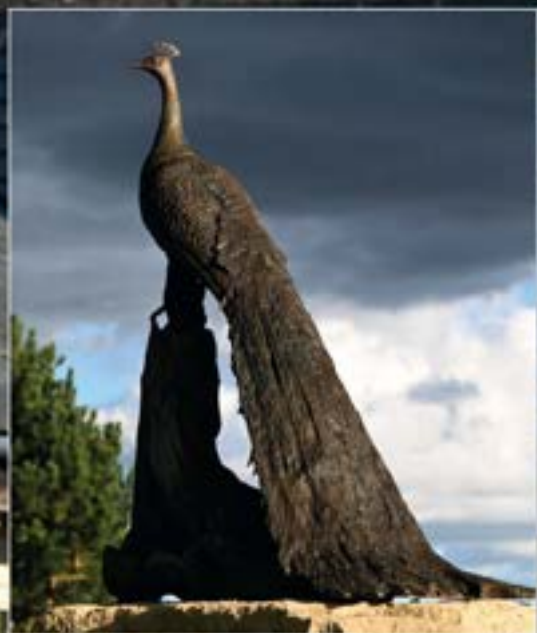
by George Harrison; *'The summit of achievement'*, *September 11, 2024*), which contained a concealed entrance into a tunnel of fabulous subterranean 'ice' caves lined with stalactites of Pulhamite.

The founding father of this dynasty of plasterers and landscapers was James Pulham (1793–1838), the son of a shoemaker from Woodbridge, Suffolk. Together with his brother Obadiah he joined the local firm of William Lockwood as plasterer, embellishing buildings with decorative keystones and other stonework. By 1824, the brothers were working in London and the Pulham Manufactory opened at Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, in 1845, turning out garden ornaments from artificial stone and terracotta. Notable projects included decorating the ground-floor windows of what is now the Henry Cole Wing of the V&A Museum.

Pulhamite rocks were made by first assembling a core of rubble, which was cemented over and worked to look like the local stone. Had the recipe been written down, it would have been lost when the business closed during the Second World War. The fourth and last James Pulham died in 1957, aged 84. He was involved in building the rock garden at RHS Wisley in Surrey (1911–12) and succumbed to the rock-garden craze himself, serving as secretary of the Alpine Garden Society, of the Horticultural Club and of the British Fern Society. *TD*

Hamish Mackie

HAMISH MACKIE SCULPTURE
LIFE IN BRONZE





Grandstand views

The garden at Mount St John, Felixkirk, North Yorkshire
The home of Chris and Jill Blundell

The starting point for making this magnificent garden
was its awe-inspiring views, writes Kendra Wilson

Photographs by Clive Nichols





NORTH YORKSHIRE retains a good number of former monasteries around its hills and, at Mount St John, near Felixkirk, the outlines of a preceptory of the Knights Hospitaller can be seen in the park just below the garden, with York Minster a smudge on the far horizon. The present house, which dates from 1720, was built on the site of the

12th-century 'Commandery on Mount Hill' and overlooks the Vale of York.

The site's many blessings (including protective woodland behind the house) had, sadly, not resulted in a joyous garden when Yorkshire businessman and former trustee of the RHS Chris Blundell and his wife, Jill, moved here 26 years ago. Old photographs show acres of steeply sloping lawns that made

little use of the south-facing position and the walled garden lay unkempt and uncared for. This last did not remain derelict for long. Kitchen and cutting gardens now operate at full throttle, supplying the pubs and inns, including the local in Felixkirk, that form part of Mr Blundell's portfolio. The remainder of the 20-acre garden and the parkland, he knew, would need some outside help.



The answer came in 2001, when the landscape designer Tom Stuart-Smith was awarded his first Gold medal at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Mr Blundell looked no further.

Mr Stuart-Smith's contribution has been to develop Mount St John's garden (including a ravine on the west side) into a contemporary pleasure ground. He has fulfilled his brief and more, with a client who is a highly energetic

plant enthusiast and clearly embraces the idea that a garden is never finished. Part of the plan was to leave space for at least one marquee, to which end a series of formal flower gardens with expansive lawns unfold as they descend in two generous terraces from the Palladian house, culminating in a curved ha-ha. The lowest level, edged by immaculate stone walls, resembles an infinity pool, hanging →

Preceding pages: Acres of sloped formal lawn have been replaced, in a design by Tom Stuart-Smith, by repeating perennial plantings on a scale befitting the dramatic view to the Vale of York. *Above:* Sharp-cut yew hedges and bands of *Miscanthus sinensis* edge the formal pool below Mount St John, which was built on the site of the 12th-century 'Commandery on Mount Hill'

over the paddocks and fields that spread out below. Extensive earthworks were carried out to balance the garden with the surroundings including the striking outline of Sutton Bank, looming over the nearby Hambleton Hills. It's a monumental size, at about three acres on this south side. 'Mount St John had to be big because the view is so awe-inspiring,' explains Mr Stuart-Smith. 'It would be easy for a garden to feel very feeble in the face of those views.'

Whereas the flower garden creates a sense of occasion, a different kind of formality is at play over the hedge. Precision-cut yew is fringed with a wide canal of *Miscanthus sinensis*, an introduction to the broad strokes of prairie perennials, grasses and domed topiaries that are repeated on the grand scale, from a gravel garden at the top to a parterre sliced with lawn paths at the bottom. It is carried out with the kind of panache one expects from Mr Stuart-Smith, making an unlikely, but seamless connection between the recently built house extension and the miles of farmland below.

‘The design was partly inspired by a local Ordnance Survey map from the 1870s’

Generally called the Meadow Garden, the design here reflects Mr Stuart-Smith's interest, at the time of making, in using landscape pattern in a garden's layout. This one was partly inspired by an Ordnance Survey map from the 1870s. 'I was very interested in the garden being a condensation of landscape pattern,' he recalls. Beyond the park's edge, the old field pattern was used to form lines of planting within the garden, starting with the ribbons of miscanthus that run through the parterre on the bottom terrace. It hardly matters that, after 20 years, this pattern is barely traceable; it created 'a nice constraint' and a guide in how to plant it.

The prospect from the meadow garden is more wooded than it is from the lawned terraces, which overlook parkland. On this eastern side, a series of domed beech topiaries make a graphic connection between the garden and the trees below. The clipped beech tumps effectively mimic distant tree canopies and their slowly changing autumn foliage adds richness to the developing scenery. Likewise, the colours and textures playing out in the perennials on the descending terraces interact with the farming seasons in the fields below. →

The colours and textures of the planting are designed to echo the distant trees and the changing colours in the landscape







The former stew ponds in the valley garden, which provided fish for the Knights Hospitaller, have been cleared, sealed and restocked

On looking back to the house, the tumps also mark the beginning of a planting diagonal, continued in domes of box and repeats of hawthorn, *Crataegus x lavalleei* 'Carrierei', cutting across the axial pattern made by the terraces. Contrast is key at Mount St John and the meadow garden also takes time to pause with a large and narrowly rectangular pool with a plain wooden deck, its stillness enhanced by the slightest smattering of water lilies across its surface.

Mr Stuart-Smith's way with hard materials adds extra refinement to the landscape of giant perennials, as well as fitting seamlessly among more conventional lawns and flowers. Holding walls have flat tops for walking on, creating changing perspectives across the garden. Next to the great arms of yew that are the site's partitions, simple lines of sandstone make a beguiling tracery, leading sometimes to dead ends and at others to viewpoints: the flower garden offers a tantalising glimpse down a steep bank to the valley garden,

which is the continually evolving counterpart to Mr Stuart-Smith's original 2004 design.

The remains of three stew ponds, where fish were kept for the tables of the Knights Hospitaller, had lapsed into giant puddles that Mr Blundell and a team of gardeners sealed using clay from the surrounding ravine, which is well supplied with springs.

‘This is mostly an inward-looking garden, a place apart’

Brambles and weed trees were removed from the edges of the reinvigorated and restocked ponds, and planting began. Although Mr Stuart-Smith has been involved in the development of the valley garden, the area has been mainly in the hands of Mr Blundell and his head gardener, until recently Tim Marshall. An experienced plantsman, who had

worked with the Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf as well as on previous occasions with Mr Stuart-Smith, Mr Marshall was as delighted as his employer by the possibilities of the site. The valley garden is sheltered by old sycamores—eventually to be replaced by beech and oak—creating a microclimate that has opened up opportunities for rarer species. Sourcing plants from Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones at Crûg Farm Plants near Caernarfon has been part of the pleasure in steering this area of the garden. Discussions are in progress about planting a middle storey to balance the existing Scots pines.

The valley garden is traced with paths and the ponds are crossed with stepping stones, creating more viewpoints in this garden of views. From certain angles, the magnificent Sutton Bank hoves into view, but this is mostly an inward-looking garden, a place apart, where the enjoyable discussion of plants and ideas continues to engage Mr Blundell, his family and the gardeners. 🍂

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Choices, choices

Overwhelmed by the mass of tulip bulbs on offer? Friends and contributors of COUNTRY LIFE tell us which tulips they will be planting for next spring



Alan Titchmarsh

I love what I call the 'stained tulips'—those with contrasting venations and stripes that smack of the old Dutch flower paintings. I plant up 10in terracotta pots with 10 bulbs of each: varieties such as 'Gavota' (plum purple and yellow), 'Rem's Favourite' (purple and white) and 'Princess Irene' (dusky pink and salmon). My wife adores red tulips, so in the rectangular beds on either side of the house we planted two different varieties: 'Ile de France' and 'Kingsblood'. At the risk of being unpatriotic, I have to say that 'Ile de France' (a really deep, rich red) was far better and much longer lasting than 'Kingsblood'. I'd recommend it heartily.

'Chatsworth: the gardens and the people who made them' by Alan Titchmarsh is out now

**'*Tulipa batalinii*
'Bronze Charm'
is just the scented
thing for fashionable
gravel gardens'**

Charlotte Harris

When it comes to tulips (as with many things), I'm drawn to the extremes. At one end are the species tulips that speak to where they're from such as *Tulipa acuminata*, an elegantly wiry Turkish heirloom tulip with unusual twisted petals, or *Tulipa sprengeri*, native to Turkey's rocky, scrub-covered slopes; scarlet, delicate, happy in dappled shade, with gorgeous senesced seed heads (as seen in our Chelsea September 2021 garden).

At the other far end is the bold flamboyance of two-tone Rembrandt tulips, named after the painter. These look best combined with solid, single-colour tulips for high contrast. My personal favourite: 'Rem's Favourite,' purple flames streaking across ivory petals. *Harris Bugg Studio will begin work next year on designing the Centenary Garden at Newhailes House and Gardens in Musselburgh for the National Trust for Scotland*

Arne Maynard

Although I love all kinds of tulip—especially historic tulips with their flamed and feathered markings—my absolute favourites are the species. These perennial bulbs naturalise well in meadows, lawn edges

Facing page: Tulipa 'Rem's Favourite', selected by Charlotte Harris and Angel Collins, will flower for several years in the ground or in pots. For best effect, plant it with single-coloured tulips



Miniature *Tulipa clusiana* 'Lady Jane' is a favourite of the garden designer Arne Maynard. As with other species tulips, it is perfect for naturalising in meadows, beneath trees and on the edge of a lawn. Unusually, its petals curl back after opening

or beneath trees and, provided the ground is well drained, don't require lifting over winter. I've been experimenting with *Tulipa clusiana* varieties and am fascinated by the difference in their habits. *T. clusiana* opens and closes without a change in petal structure, whereas *T. clusiana* 'Lady Jane' opens, then gradually curls its petals back reminiscent of Elizabethan hair curls, completely spiralling before fading. I am introducing them into the borders at home at Allt y bel in Monmouthshire, Wales, to give contrast to the larger flowering Rembrandts, adding a delicacy to be discovered close-up.

Other lovely varieties to try are *T. clusiana* 'Honky Tonk', *T. cretica* 'Hilde' and *T. clusiana* 'Peppermintstick', which complement each other beautifully.

Garden designer Arne Maynard has several projects in progress in America, together with his British and European work

Isabel Bannerman

Squirrels have made it impossible to plant tulips except in highly fortified pots and my conscience has stopped me growing mass-produced bulbs. That means it's only delicate, long-lived, species tulips grown in grass or gravel for me now. Pheasants ate my *Tulipa sylvestris*, but both they—and the squirrels—seem to abhor *T. humilis* 'Persian Pearl' and 'Odalisque'. They were both here already, so they must be tough. *T. clusiana* 'Lady Jane' and 'Cynthia' are miniature pink-and-white striped sweeties. *T. batalinii* 'Bronze Charm', is the colour of evening primroses with buff reveals. Formerly sold for rock gardens, it is just the scented thing for fashionable gravel gardens. The clue to longevity is to plant deep, even in sustainably sourced crushed concrete. *Garden designer Isabel Bannerman is making a wildflower meadow with species tulip bulbs at her home in Somerset* →



Left: Deep purple ‘Havran’, ‘Helmar’ with a yellow stripe—selected by designer Tom Stuart-Smith—and the rich red ‘Jan Reus’.
Right: The little species *Tulipa orphanidea* Whittallii Group from Western Turkey is planted in vast swathes by Jo Thompson

Fergus Garrett

This year, we are trying perhaps 30 new varieties and will test these out in pots to see how we like them, looking for distinctive flowers held above the foliage, a long season and an elegant habit. In the garden, elegant species *Tulipa orphanidea* Whittallii, with pointed petals of burnished orange with flashes of yellow and a hypnotic smoky centre, will sit in the cracks on Christo’s terrace—and we’re hoping that it will self-sow and naturalise. *T. sylvestris*, with long, elegant, fluted flowers of rich yellow on awry stems, will be planted in the grass under the mulberry tree. *T. ‘Apricot Impression’*, with bold, large, apricot and pink flowers, will float among self-sown blue forget-me-nots, mauve sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) and acid lime-green *Smyrniolum perfoliatum*. Finally, jazzy *T. ‘Banja Luka’*, yellow with dramatic flames of fiery red, will run through a sea of blue forget-me-nots. *Fergus Garrett is head gardener at Great Dixter, East Sussex (former home of the late COUNTRY LIFE columnist Christopher Lloyd), and CEO of the Great Dixter Charitable Trust*

Jo Thompson

I’ll be going for masses of *Tulipa orphanidea* (Whittallii Group) ‘Major’ among pale narcissi to follow the oxlips. This tulip is invariably described in terms of its main colour—copper orange—but it’s the deep golden-flushed blood-red-to-black base that makes the impact. Appearing a deeper red in the shadows, this

rare, yet easy little tulip becomes more coppery depending on the amount of light upon it. The lightest scattering of red and yellow against green is all it takes to create an atmosphere that is simultaneously gentle and uplifting. The calmness of a backdrop of green grass is perfect, so dry patches of grass under the yet-to-emerge canopies of orchard trees is where I’ll be putting these little jewels.

Jo Thompson is currently designing gardens in the Cotswolds, Sussex and the south of France. Her next book, ‘Small Garden Design’, will be published in March 2027

Tom Stuart-Smith

I use tulips in three different ways in the garden here. Firstly, we plant a mêlée of brightly coloured tulips to give a real intensity of oranges, purples, rusts and cerise. (No yellows other than as a stripe in ‘Helmar’, an all time favourite.) We use them to edge the vegetable beds and in the courtyard, which is full of brick and tiles and corten steel, so the colours here are very powerful. I always order ‘Havran’, ‘Dolls Minuet’, ‘Ballerina’, ‘Princess Irene’ and ‘Paul Scherer’. We use lots of *Tulipa saxatilis* in the prairie, mixed up with cowslips and anemone blanda—the yellow at the base of the petals is rather wonderful with the cowslips.

Last of all, we use some more polite tulips in loose drifts through planting in the garden. Things such as ‘Maureen’, ‘Attila’, ‘Merlot’ and ‘Spring Green’—single-coloured and/or a bit quieter, in among herbaceous plants. These

never get lifted, whereas many of the others do. We replant a lot of tulips, but they do fade of course... I’m thinking of veering towards using more long-lived tulips only. The things they do to tulips to store are pretty terrible and the organic ones are very expensive, so a wake up is on its way, I feel.

Tom Stuart-Smith’s design for the Clore Garden at Tate Britain opens next year

Angel Collins

I prefer to plant tulips in either pots or long grass. In many gardens, I’ve created what I call a ‘parterre meadow’ and tulips are the perfect bulb to complement this design. Their glorious heads bobbing above the fresh green grass of spring create a wonderful sight.

When choosing tulips, I consider several factors: height, colour, bulb size (preferably 5in), and the bonus of flowering for a second or third year. ‘Rem’s Favourite’ is now with me for its fourth year, together with the lovely pink tulip ‘Discovery’. The viridifloras are also excellent at longevity (including ‘Spring Green’, ‘Artist’ and ‘Virichic’), as are, of course, the reliable Darwins.

However, my favourite tulip of all time—no, not the beautiful ‘Belle Époque’—is actually ‘Mystic van Eijk’. It has huge flowers of soft apricot pink and it seems to get taller and its flowers grow bigger as every day passes. *Garden designer Angel Collins is working on a number of projects, including Bruern Abbey, Oxfordshire* ➔



Left: Huge apricot-pink flowers on tall stems make 'Mystic van Eijk' stand out for Angel Collins. In planters, it looks beautiful on its own. *Right:* The designer also admires Viridiflora tulips such as 'Artist' ('Spring Green', 'Virichic' and 'Doll's Minuet' are popular, too)



Left: The lily-flowered 'West Point', which is the choice of Rupert Golby, flowers for weeks and looks lovely growing through a carpet of forget-me-nots or in a verdigris planter. *Right:* Sturdy stems support the large goblet-shaped flowers of this tall Darwin tulip 'Apricot Pride', which will stand well in a border, suggests the COUNTRY LIFE contributor Charles Quest-Ritson

Where to buy tulip bulbs

Bloms Bulbs (01234 709099;
www.blomsbulbs.com)

J Parker's (0161-848 1100;
www.dutchbulbs.co.uk)

De Jager (01622 840299;
www.dejager.co.uk)

Jacques Amand International (020-
8420 7110; www.jacquesamandintl.com)

Sarah Raven (0345 092 0283;
www.sarahraven.com)

Avon Bulbs (07425 833906;
www.avonbulbs.co.uk)

Peter Nyssen (0161-747 4000;
www.peternyssen.com)

Scamp's Bulbs (07826 067175;
www.scampsbulbs.co.uk)

Tilly Ware

A freshly gravelled perimeter bed in the kitchen garden is my new playground for all things Mediterranean. I'll be planting *Tulipa orphanidea* Whittalli Group in the impeccably drained soil, aiming for vigorous colonies that spread. The form is beautiful: neat, sharp buds with pointed petals that glow with the dusky smokiness of a fire's ember, the burnt caramel and rich orange irresistible against silver foliage. At 1ft high, they will bob up among artemisia and euphorbia in late April; by summer, *Eschscholzia* 'Milkmaid' and *Nigella papillosa* 'African Bride' cover the gaps. Until now, my species tulips lived year on year in terracotta pots as treasures; now, it is time to set them free. *Tilly Ware is a garden writer and COUNTRY LIFE contributor*

Charles Quest-Ritson

I always plant some Greigii forms to brighten the garden in early spring, with red-and-yellow 'Stresa' being a particular favourite. Likewise, 'Carnaval de Nice', double-flowered with red-and-white stripes and variegated leaves—the last of all to flower. Both look best in pots near the main door of the house. This year's RHS trial had some promising novelties to try, too: 'Apricot Pride' will make a fine border plant, exceptionally large in height and flower, but I also fancy the spectacularly vulgar 'New Santa'—bright-red petals rimmed with a hoar-frost edging of white—and the ruffled parrot-tulip 'Flaming Memory', rather rudely described as rhubarb and custard in colour. Yum yum! *Charles Quest-Ritson wrote the 'RHS Encyclopedia of Roses'*

Mary Keen

I was once a tulipaholic, ordering them in thousands to be composted at the end of spring. This is far from sustainable, so I have changed



***Tulipa* 'Absalon', a true Rembrandt tulip (Division 9) dates from 1780, is robust and produces good offsets, finds Polly Nicholson**

my ways. I always want 'Ballerina' for its scent and its graceful habit, so those go in pots and, when the leaves have withered, the bulbs are saved. In the beds, multi-headed 'Antoinette' and 'Queen of Night' are so far perennial, but the best bet for lasting tulips are the species ones planted in grass. My favourite is 'Honky Tonk'. The name is ghastly, but the flower is pale yellow, scented and lovely with cowslips. *'Diary of a Keen Gardener' by Mary Keen is out now*

Rupert Golby

Lily-flowered tulips have a very appealing elegance in stature and form that extends their value far beyond their flowering period—for some weeks before flowering, their elongated necks have a swan-like quality. The flower buds are presented as refined spears, developing into pinched and waisted Champagne flutes that fill and evolve into flamboyant explosions of petals, all over two to three weeks. 'West Point' has clear acid-yellow colouring initially of a green hue, ripening to a sharp and powerful citrus yellow. Flowering in late April, it can be strikingly partnered with a carpet of forget-me-nots. Planted in

large verdigris copper containers, the contrasting colour combination offers a strong sense of spring. Where 'West Point' cannot be found, 'Flashback' offers a worthy alternative. *Rupert Golby designs and consults upon gardens across the country. His work at Ferne Park in Dorset was featured in COUNTRY LIFE (May 13)*

Polly Nicholson

I will be ordering a handful of *Tulipa* 'Absalon' to supplement the National Collection of *Tulipa* (historical) that I hold with Plant Heritage. 'Absalon' is a true Rembrandt (Division 9) tulip dating from 1780, with flames and feathers of the richest mahogany red over a base of primrose yellow. With a real aura of antiquity, it stands apart from modern cultivars, but is surprisingly robust and produces good-sized offsets. It should be lifted once the foliage has died back in July and stored carefully before being planted back in a pot again in the depths of winter. The investment and effort are well worth it. *Polly Nicholson is curating an exhibition on tulips at the Garden Museum, London SE1, opening March 2027*



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This classic-style Tazza da Cancelli frostproof terracotta urn is handmade from Galestro clay in Tuscany and costs £725, from Vaso Toscano (01376 802123; www.vasotoscano.com)

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Inspired by classical Greek design, the Olympian urn is made from cast stone and costs £769, from Haddonstone (01604 770711; www.haddonstone.com)



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A still life composition featuring various rectangular blocks of different materials and colors (yellow, grey, black, white) arranged on a light-colored surface. A small yellow bowl is placed among the blocks. A sprig of yellow flowers is visible on the right side.

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Catch a falling leaf

Are we heading for an autumn of unparalleled colour? If the days stay warm and the nights are cold, Charles Quest-Ritson is optimistic

GLORIOUS leaf colours are one of the joys of autumn. They fill our landscapes and gardens with red, orange and yellow—colours unknown in summer. Yes, the process is actually a by-product of the leaves dying, but it also serves a definite evolutionary purpose and brightens our way from summer sunshine to winter gloom. Autumn colour is a time to celebrate. Why and how do trees and shrubs do it? The ‘why’ question is easy to answer. Trees started to evolve about 390 million years ago. All were evergreen and operated in warm, sunny climates. The emergence of deciduous plants about 135 million years ago was a logical development. They learnt to shed their leaves so that they could survive in cold areas with long, dark winters.

‘Beechwoods of the Chilterns are at their best in early November’

However, that does not explain why the dying leaves take on such brilliant colours. Everyone knows that leaves are green because they contain chlorophyll—a photosynthesiser that uses the sun to create the foods, mainly sugars, that plants require to live and grow—but other colours are present in foliage that are overpowered by chlorophyll’s green. Autumn’s hues come from useful flavonols and carotenes—respectively yellow and orange—and, later in the season, from red anthocyanins, which are a by-product of change. These compounds, and their colours, occur all through the vegetable kingdom, not only leaves: raspberries

contain anthocyanins; yellow raspberries are dominated by a carotene called lutein.

Chlorophyll does not live forever. Scientists tell us that the individual chloroplasts break down and are constantly replaced throughout the summer. However, as autumn approaches, rather less green chlorophyll is recycled, so the underlying colour of the leaves is revealed. Some leaves turn pure yellow and others mainly red, with endless variations in between. The exact mixture of these compound chemicals varies between individual plants, as well as between species—hence the degree of yellow or red colouring in the dying leaves. An important part of the process is called abscission: the tree or shrub starts to lay down a layer of cork where the leaves are attached to the branches and, eventually, the leaves fall off.

Frost accelerates the process. The best autumn colour comes from hot, sunny days and cold, cloudless nights—what we call an Indian summer. If autumn is mild and wet, the process slows down and enough chlorophyll survives to mix with the reds so that the leaves appear brown. Most of us had a hot and sunny summer. Provided we have cold nights, autumn colour this year will be all the better for it. That said, the leaves of our red maples *Acer rubrum* and scarlet oaks *Quercus coccinea* will never match the splendour of those in New England and Canada because our summers—even this one—are cooler than theirs and our autumns usually damper.

You can see the carotenes in such trees as poplars, ginkgos and birches, each of which turns to a distinct and uniform shade of brilliant





yellow or gold, but without even the merest hint of the reds that come from anthocyanins. Not all trees and shrubs make anthocyanins. Unlike the ever-useful carotenes—which help with photosynthesis—anthocyanins are not present in the leaf throughout the growing season, but a sign that the sugars are breaking down in the presence of bright sunlight. Japanese maples, liquidambars and rowans are some of the best—the most dependable—trees for good leaf colour in our climate.

Anthocyanins have another significant purpose: when the leaves fall to the ground they inhibit the development of rival plants. The technical term is allelopathy. Walnut trees and sycamore are good examples, but so are the tree of heaven *Ailanthus altissima* and the Canadian sugar maple *Acer*

saccharum: they keep their competitiveness by killing off their rivals.

How long does autumn colour last? It varies between species. The tupelo *Nyssa sylvatica* may hold its brilliant scarlet colour for a week or 10 days, but the sweetgum *Liquidambar styraciflua* retains its autumn leaves for up to six weeks. The process is gradual and individual leaves die by stages, so a tree will have leaves of many changing hues as autumn progresses.

Hot, dry weather can also bring on a change of leaf colour. If you saw birch trees turning yellow in August, it's because they are surface-rooting and suffered more than most trees from the heat and drought of summer. Their survival strategy is to shut down prematurely.

Japanese maples and cherries are among the first to show their autumn colour. Normally

The Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*), including this one at Ramster Hall and Garden in Surrey (above), are among the first trees to assume their autumn hues

we have to wait a couple of weeks before our native trees start to turn. The beechwoods of the Chilterns and the oakwoods of Sherwood and Savernake are at their best in early November. The brown tinge to their leaves comes from tannins left inside when the chlorophyll fades away; they overwhelm the carotenes. Elm trees are among the last to turn colour and drop their leaves. Young beeches and hornbeams hold onto their dead leaves until spring. Marcescence is the scientific word for this phenomenon and there are many reasons for it—but that is another story. 🍁



The ripe stuff

EUROPOM IS coming to England. Every year, it choreographs a spectacular show of autumn fruits in a different European country. This year's event will be held at RHS Rosemoor in Devon on October 3–4. Try to get there—you will learn a lot and enjoy yourself enormously.

Europom was founded in Switzerland in 1989 as a Europe-wide association of fruit-lovers determined to preserve ancient and local varieties. Its members are the fruit societies of Europe's nations, but, as we do not have a national society in Britain, we are represented by the Royal Horticultural Society—hence the choice of Rosemoor, in Devon's cider country.

Exhibitors bring mainly apples, pears and quinces from about a dozen countries across all Europe for a feast of learning, talking and tasting. You will be encouraged to admire, taste and talk about the fruits—it is a revelation. Why do we not have apples as aromatic as 'Ananas Reinette', introduced in 1820 and which, despite its name, is a denizen of the Rheinland? Why do we not grow 'Münsterbirne' and 'Gelbe Wadelbirne' pears? Answer, because English nurserymen do not sell them and, since Brexit, we have been unable to import them directly.

In 2018, I went to a Europom in France. One apple of every variety at the show—there must have been about 2,000 different cultivars—was taken and laid out on long trestle tables, graded as closely as possible by colour so that visitors could try to identify those whose names had been lost or never known. They were encouraged to handle and smell the apples. Some exhibitors brought other fruits—you will probably see feijoas, persimmons and figs, too. I remember a splendid exhibition of walnuts from an Austrian enthusiast, including the red Danube variety known as *Juglans regia* 'Rote Donaunuss'. The skin of the kernel was red or purplish-red, but



'Court Pendu Plat' is a French dessert apple that dates back to Roman times

'There are more than 100 Welsh pear varieties, most for making perry'

the other major difference was the taste—very mild, with no hint of bitterness, and with a delicate smell. I admired hazelnuts, too, such as the giant 'Hallesche Riesenuss' from central Germany and the historic Piedmontese 'Tonda Gentile delle Langhe', the best, I was assured, for making *gianduja*.

It was the apples that I went to see in 2018. Apples may be our national fruit, but it is fair to say that the heartland of modern apple history is Continental Europe, from Russia to Spain, and especially in Germany, France,

Scandinavia, Benelux and the Alpine countries, where social and economic conditions in the 19th and 20th centuries made possible the development of a very large number of different varieties. Nevertheless, I was surprised to discover that the French did not know our best English apples, from 'Discovery' to 'Egremont Russet', 'Pitmaston Pine' and 'Ashmead's Kernel'. Mind you, the French invented the word *chauvinisme*: the only English apple you will ever see in a French market is 'Cox's Orange Pippin'.

I asked the exhibitors about their favourite apple varieties. The Danes recommended 'Filippa' and the Swedes suggested 'Bodil Neergaard'. The Italians spoke up for 'Annurca' and claimed that the Romans brought the variety now known as 'Court Pendu Plat' to France 2,000 years ago. The Germans had dozens of cultivars—aromatic 'Freiherr von Berlepsch', for example, and pineapple-tasting 'Prinz Albrecht von Preussen'.

Did you know that the biggest producer of apples in the world is China? Or that there are more than 100 Welsh pear varieties, most of them selected for making perry? That Ireland's National Heritage Apple Tree Collection in Co Clare conserves more than 200 apple cultivars of Irish origin? That German nurseries list 50-plus varieties of quince?

Europom always lays on a series of lectures and the RHS has excelled itself in asking experts to speak at Rosemoor. Dr Matt Ordidge is one of them—he is the scientific curator of our National Fruit Collection at Brogdale Farm in Kent. The promising young horticulturist Lawrence Weston, who trained at Rosemoor, will be talking about the wild fruit forests of Central Asia. Among the visitors, Hans-Thomas Bosch will be lecturing about Heritage Pear Trees of southern Germany. Mr Bosch is one of Germany's experts in apple identification (as well as grapes); there are thought to be about 1,500 apple varieties cultivated in the country.

Go and discover Europom for yourself. Alas, it clashes with Brogdale Collections's annual Apple Fair in Kent—wonderful Brogdale has 150 acres and nearly 3,500 varieties of apples, pears, quinces and more. What a pity one can't be in two places at once. 🍷

Horticultural aide-mémoire

Attend to dahlias

The dahlia, having gone in our time from no-no to must-have, is now at its peak. Its floral performance is unceasing, provided you keep encouraging it by deadheading. This is a routine task for a few minutes at the end of each day, interrupted only by the tap on the window to draw you back indoors. Look carefully over the crown, removing all those buds that have assumed a birdlike appearance. If a flower is beginning to think about going over, off it comes. With your secateurs, search down the shoot until you come to the next joint and there make your cut. **SCD**



Charles Quest-Ritson wrote the *RHS Encyclopedia of Roses*

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Forever flowers

No garden should be without *Hydrangea paniculata*, which can bloom until the end of October. Charles Quest-Ritson sums up the results of the recent four-year trial at RHS Bridgewater near Manchester

Photographs by Clive Nichols

HYDRANGEAS are very useful late-summer shrubs. The typical mopheads, however, are not so easy to grow in the colder parts of our island. That is when and where the white-flowered species *Hydrangea paniculata* comes into its own.

The wild species comes from Japan and parts of south-eastern China and its flowers are invariably white, but with a tendency to turn pink as they age. They are happy in shady woodland or in open sunny positions, but all hydrangeas give of their best if they are grown in soil that does not dry out. The great value of *H. paniculata* is that it remains in flower for a very long time, sometimes through to the end of October.

‘They are usually scentless, but butterflies and bees nip busily in and out’

One unusual feature of *Hydrangea paniculata* is its flower buds, which are completely round, like oversized green drums. The flowers, however, open out as long, conical panicles, which may hang from the branches or grow more upright, according to the strength and thickness of their stems. These panicles have large, sterile florets that attract pollinating insects towards the pollen and nectar of the insignificant fertile flowers. They are usually scentless, but butterflies, wasps and honey bees nip busily in and out of them. The flower spikes of the wild species are fairly open, but almost all garden varieties are a mass of overlapping sterile florets, presenting a solid cone, slightly reminiscent of a very large lilac, but always white, and opening from green buds.

A stream of new cultivars has been arriving in garden centres on these shores in recent years, from breeders in Japan, France, the Netherlands and the US. There isn't a single dud among them—all will grow well in our conditions, flower for many months and give great pleasure. ➔



Facing page: The early, pale-green flowers of *Hydrangea paniculata* Pastelgreen develop deep-pink edges. Above: *H. paniculata* Living Little Passion, from the Creation Series







Preceding pages: Breeders from Japan, France, the Netherlands and the US have introduced many new varieties of *Hydrangea paniculata*, of which 83 were trialed at RHS Bridgewater, Manchester. *Above left:* *H. paniculata* Living Colourful Cocktail. *Above right:* *H. paniculata* 'Levana' would suit a woodland edge, where it will produce clusters of flowers as much as 18in to 20in in length

There are nearly 200 cultivars now in the National Collection of *Hydrangea paniculata* at Darley Park in Derby. Almost all have massive flower spikes, but some have been developed for their ability to turn unusual shades of pink or crimson with age. Others have been chosen because they remain white right to the end or because the florets are green and slow to turn to white. Small cultivars are also emerging—Pinky-Winky, now overtaken by newer varieties, is a July-flowering favourite that combines moderate growth with a rich pink colour as it matures. These shorter varieties reach about 3ft in height, whereas some of the larger ones,

useful for landscaping, may end up closer to 8ft or 10ft, with vigorous upright and spreading branches if left unpruned.

The RHS four-year trial, organised by Debbie Roe, RHS trials officer, at Bridgewater Garden near Manchester of *Hydrangea paniculata* cultivars ended last autumn and the great number of Awards of Garden Merit the judges conferred reflects the excitement it generated. It was an important exercise because it was linked to similar trials in eight European countries, including Belgium, Germany and France, run by the Royal Dutch Horticultural Society under the auspices of the Euro-Trial organisation. Exactly the same 83 cultivars

were simultaneously propagated by the Dutch and circulated to all eight nations, so that the trials would have the same starting point and the RHS's results, together with those from all the other trials, will be published in the Netherlands in a final overall report.

‘They will flower perfectly, even if caught by a late frost’

Each of the 83 varieties was represented by three plants: one was hard-pruned to ground level each year in spring, one lightly pruned and one left unpruned. All performed very well. The results confirmed every gardener's experience: pruning delays flowering, but the flowers are larger. Unpruned plants bloom sooner and have more flowers, but they are smaller. The RHS recommends cutting them to the ground every year—some nurserymen do this with a chainsaw—but, whatever régime you adopt, you will not be disappointed: all

Highlights from the RHS Trial

For crimson stems The short-growing July-flowering Early Harry and the taller compact Living Infinity

Distinctive florets Magical Lime Sparkle has florets more yellow than green when they first open

For small spaces Polestar flowers early with lacy flowerheads, almost flat, and a mass of large, infertile florets that quickly turn a very pretty pink. It looks wonderful in a shapely pot

On the edge of a woodland garden 'Levana' will grow to 8ft or 9ft and produce flower clusters at least 18in or 20in in length



Above left: The deep-red flower spikes of *Hydrangea paniculata* Living Infinity are handsomely offset by its rich crimson stems and dark foliage. *Above right:* The strong stems of *H. paniculata* 'Phantom' support large panicles of densely packed florets

Hydrangea paniculata varieties are reliable garden plants. The fact that they bloom only on this year's new growth means that they will flower perfectly even if they are caught by a late frost, too.

The trial judges were told to mark the plants for their vigour and health, the colour of their stems and the size, shape, colour and season of their flowers. They also considered a number of characteristics that many of us would not have considered. For example, the judges looked for plants with strong, sturdy stems, because the large panicles fill up with water in rainy weather and may flop down and be spoiled by contact with the soil. One very effective way to grow varieties such as Pinky-Winky, the stems of which cannot always bear the weight of its beautiful flowers, is to graft them onto the upright stem of a vigorous variety and grow it as a standard.

With many cultivars of *Hydrangea paniculata* now available and so many excellent new ones launched every year, it is increasingly difficult to choose between them, but you can be certain that all will be healthy, tough, easy to grow—and beautiful. 🌸

Five of the best

'Le Vasterival' (pictured)

A vigorous and distinctive old cultivar with unusually long florets, folded and twisted into quirky shapes. 'Levana' is similar, but more compact

Living Little Passion Large, loose panicles, late to open and staying an attractive shade of green

Graffiti Short and compact, with strong stems and rounded white flower heads that turn a pleasing shade of pink

Living Infinity An outstanding variety with strong crimson stems and a broad dark flower spike set off by pink florets

Candlelight Short, but floriferous, with large upright cones that take on a good shade of pink. An improved Pinky-Winky





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Above: New materials of quality soften naturally and quickly. Facing page: A Bath-stone façade, the render scored to simulate masonry

Why build a new country house

To celebrate the publication of a book on houses he has designed, George Saumarez Smith reflects on why some people choose new rather than historic homes

Photographs by Peter Dixon

WHEN Clive Aslet, former Editor of *COUNTRY LIFE*, wrote a book called *The Last Country Houses* in 1982, the future of the English country house looked bleak. It had been eight years since the landmark exhibition at the V&A Museum, 'The Destruction of the Country House', which had told the stories of many houses lost to fire, neglect and the wrecking ball. It was a time when a resurgence of the English country-house tradition would have been unthinkable.

It was a couple of years later, in 1984, that John Martin Robinson brought out a book called *The Latest Country Houses*, covering the period since the end of the Second World War. By then, there were enough green shoots to suggest that the English country house was not dead and buried after all, with the latest examples suggesting the start of a new revival. More recent books on the subject, such as Alan Powers's *The Twentieth Century House in Britain* (2004) and David Watkin's *The Classical Country House* (2010), both illustrated with photographs from the *COUNTRY LIFE* archive, have concluded with chapters

on new country houses, showing that their spirit is now alive and well in the 21st century.

Yet, despite the impressive number built in the past 40 years, there remains a certain nervousness around the building of new country houses. It is something to do with old-fashioned English taste that has always been suspicious of anything that looks too new. I even feel it myself, loving the worn, lived-in look that is so indelibly associated with the English style of decoration. Surely, one of the things that makes country houses so lovely is their patina of age.

Another question that often comes up is why build a new house when there are so many lovely old buildings in need of restoration? Without passionate owners to love and care for these houses, what future do they have? Again, I find myself agreeing with this and, indeed, much of my work as an architect has involved breathing new life into homes through gentle re-ordering and sensitive repair.

All of this may make it surprising that the main focus of my architectural career to date has been in designing new country houses. To some extent, this has been inherited;

my grandfather was the architect Raymond Erith (1904–73), who worked on many country houses, both old and new, in the post-war years. His career was unusual in that he had rejected the Modern Movement and practiced traditional architecture at a time when this was very unfashionable. In 1962, he had taken on a pupil, Quinlan Terry, and, in time, they formed the partnership Erith and Terry Architects. After my grandfather's death, Mr Terry continued the practice and by the mid 1980s had become the foremost country-house architect working in Britain (*A life in architecture*, August 5).

After studying architecture in Edinburgh, I joined the Erith and Terry office in the mid 1990s, by which time the practice was working on projects all over Britain and also abroad. Country houses were at the core of everything, employing a language of traditional detail and construction that had been refined over many years since my grandfather's days. Having spent seven years training in this office, in 2003 I left to join Adam Architecture, becoming a director the following year and gradually starting to build up a portfolio →





Left: An arcaded first-floor landing, each alternate bay offering natural top-lighting. Right: A capital design for a current project

of my own. Since then, over the past 20 years, it has included many country houses.

What, then, has been the motivation of my clients who have chosen to commission new country houses? What has tipped the balance for them away from a restoration project and towards the seemingly daunting prospect of starting from scratch? The reasons are not universal, but, over the years, I have seen that there are definitely a few common trends.

Firstly, the owners might have a connection or fondness for a particular site. We are currently building a house in a valley where one of my clients used to play as a child and realised it was their favourite place on earth and, in another case, we built a new house next door to where the owner's mother lived so that they could be close at hand. Sites with strong personal connections such as these are irreplaceable and signify a family finding its place in the world and committing to the long-term management of the surrounding land.

Next, I often find that clients have lived at different times in old houses and, as much as they may have loved them, they realise how inflexible they can be. The nicest houses will be listed, at the very least at Grade II, but possibly at Grade II* or Grade I. This means that any alterations need to be approved by a conservation officer and, at the higher

designation, also by an inspector from Historic England. Anyone with experience of going through this process will know that it can be incredibly frustrating and inconsistent. Something as apparently straightforward as moving a kitchen from a draughty wing into one of the larger rooms with a higher ceiling and a better view can be a major battle. Similarly, it can be a tussle to put bathrooms into a house where there are not nearly enough to go around or even remove indifferent Victorian or Edwardian extensions that spoil the outside. "These are an important part of the social history of the house," says the conservation officer, apparently blind to their ugliness. There are no such problems with a new house, where the layout can be planned around modern living with the kitchen at its heart and as many bathrooms as bedrooms.

Then there is the question of running costs. An old house with single-glazed windows and solid walls is likely to come with an astronomical heating bill. Upgrading insulation, even if desirable, may be resisted by a conservation officer and will involve a significant cost. The same goes for the fuel source: out goes the old oil tank and in comes the new geothermal heating system, all a big step forward, but with a massive price tag attached. Halfway through a restoration project, the realisation

begins to sink in: old houses are unpredictable money pits. On the subject of cost, too, everything that forms part of the restoration will be subject to VAT. The costs of building a new house, by contrast, are VAT exempt.

When you put all these factors together, the appetite for restoring an old house can start to dissipate and the benefits of a new one take on a sharper focus. The last piece of the jigsaw puzzle is to find someone to design it: the one thing you definitely don't want is for a new house to look not quite right when it is finished. This was more difficult in, say, the 1960s, when architects had turned their backs on the past and there was a wilful desire to reject traditional forms, no matter how attractive they might be, but there are now quite a few architects with the training and experience to design country houses to a high standard.

Once the decision to build a new home has been made, a world of possibilities opens up about its design. Some of my clients have brought with them a lifelong interest in architecture and have very definite views about styles, perhaps even down to having a favourite decade of the 18th century. Others are keen to explore a range of options and to be guided along the way, when a key part of the design process is for us to go and look at other houses that might serve as inspiration.

Little by little, the design starts to take on a character all of its own, shaped by the site and by the owners' requirements and taste. When approached with care in every detail, there is no reason why a new house, given a bit of time, should not look every bit as good as the old houses that we all admire.

This is the key thing: the importance of time. I would be the first to admit that a brand-new country house, when first completed, is likely to look much too new. Clients over the years have asked my advice: should we smear manure or yoghurt over the brickwork to accelerate the weathering process or choose a more faded colour palette for the paintwork? My advice is always the same: have patience. The great thing about new traditional buildings is that, although they might look uncomfortably new at first, it will not be long before the effects of weather start to show. Within a year or two, a stone or brick house will have begun to soften and, as the plants flesh out in the flowerbeds around the house and trees begin to grow, the appearance of newness will start to fade. Within five years, the more exposed parts of the house—the roof, chimneys and hard landscaping—will no longer look new at all and within 10 years the house will be entirely established within its landscape. It continues to improve and, in only 20 years, you would not even know that it was a recently built structure.

‘My advice about a house looking too new is always the same: have patience’

About 10 years ago, I made this point in a talk to a group of students and concluded that traditional architects really ought to wait a few years before photographing and publishing their work. A new house will look so much better, I said, if you leave a bit of time for it to bed in. Then, a couple of years ago, I was approached by a commissioning editor, Philip Reeser, about writing a book on country houses and realised that this was the opportunity for which I had been waiting. Happily, the owners all agreed to me doing it and, with the architectural photographer Peter Dixon, I spent a few weeks last year taking new photographs of 12 different houses. Without exception, the owners were extremely welcoming; indeed, it has been wonderful how many of my former clients are now counted as friends. Meanwhile, I wrote down my thoughts on the design of each house, all of which have now made it into the book as a guide to anyone contemplating a similar journey.



A cottage-orné pool house, which was completed in 2025. The columns are oak trunks



A new dining room in the manner of Sir John Soane. The wallpaper is hand painted

Ultimately, the building of new country houses is a statement of confidence: of putting down roots for this and future generations, investing in building well, not needing to follow the latest trends and being safe in the knowledge that time will take care of the rest. It is, of course, also a creative endeavour: since time immemorial, building has been a way to leave one's mark on the world. For most clients, it is immensely enjoyable to work not only with an architect, but also a landscape

designer and an interior decorator, collaborating with the common goal of making something as beautiful as possible. For me, it has been hugely rewarding not only to be so involved in the design and construction of new country houses, but to see over many years how they take their place in a tradition that stretches back deep in time and will, I hope, also have a long future. 🐉

‘The Romance of Classicism’ by George Sauer-Smith is published by Rizzoli (£47.95)



Fig 1: The summerhouse interior, with its walls of glass and floor of radiating boards

A point of prospect

Doddington Place, Kent

The home of Richard Oldfield and Amicia de Moubray

A new prospect tower and family memorial forms a stylish addition to a fine Edwardian garden.

John Goodall reports

OVER the course of last year, a striking new prospect tower appeared in the formal gardens of Doddington Place in Kent. As well as being a delightful new creation, this is a commemorative monument to two brothers, Henry and Christopher Oldfield, who grew up here and both died tragically young. It has been commissioned by their father, Richard Oldfield, who chose the position of the tower at the end of the main garden terrace. From there, it enjoys views both over the formal gardens and the wider

landscape as it falls away towards the park. Enclosed by trees on one side, it is slightly masked from the house.

The architect of the tower, Thomas Croft of Thomas Croft Architects, has a family connection with the house, which was rebuilt in its present form after 1862 for his ancestor Sir John Frederick Croft. Sir John also commissioned Markham Nesfield to design new gardens, although it is not clear how fully his surviving plans, dated 1874, were realised. The Croft family sold the estate to Gen and Mrs Douglas Jeffreys, who, in 1909, commissioned

the architect J. D. Coleridge to extend both the house and the gardens. Mrs Jeffreys was Mr Oldfield's great-aunt.

Doddington Place's gardens are listed Grade II and open to the public. The Oldfields' brief was that the tower should be in stylistic contrast to the other garden buildings, but visually understated so as not to intrude too aggressively. They also wanted an easy climb for visitors to enjoy the views from the upper floor, as well as a room within the structure, so it could be used as a summerhouse. These choices suggested a steel-frame





Fig 2: The ground level of the tower is embraced by the two curving stairs. A single, central post supports the whole structure

structure on a single supporting column. An initial, rejected design was for an ‘inhabited tree’ in steel and glass.

Another element of the brief was that there should be two stairs, which agreed with the demand imposed by building regulations that there should be two means of access to the tower’s viewing platform. The result was a double-helix stair around a central volume, a design that also felicitously expresses in architecture the character of the tower as a memorial for two people.

‘The double-helix stair felicitously expresses in architecture the character of the tower as a memorial for two people’

It further echoes their connection as brothers that, as completed, the two stairs rise from two circles of paving, with the central column set in the area where they overlap (*Fig 2*).

The central column gives the design a clear visual focus and suggests a degree of structural daring as well. It also means the tower is designed to move very slightly—and safely—in strong wind or when people walk up it.

Each of the three tiers of the structure has a different architectural character. At ground level, the impression is of a gazebo embraced →



Fig 3: The symmetrical elevation of the tower faces along the main garden terrace. Its colour echoes the red brick of the house

by the rising stairs. On the first floor, the central volume of the tower opens out to form the summerhouse. This room is polygonal in plan and enclosed by walls of glass (**Fig 1**). Doors lead to it from the landings on either side. It has a matching floor and ceiling pattern of panelled oak with a central roundel, the latter forming a shallow, central pendant.

‘It’s a very unusual structure in that it reveals its interest more from within’

The viewing platform on the top level is open to the elements, but enclosed by a skeletal structure with a pitched crown (**Fig 4**). This shape was inspired by the eight-sided Tower of the Winds in Athens, Greece, built in the 1st century AD. It was first made familiar to British audiences through the engravings published by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762) and has been widely copied in the design of garden buildings. Rising through it is a central flagpole that continues the line of the central supporting column below.

The double-helix design means the tower reads in different ways, depending on the



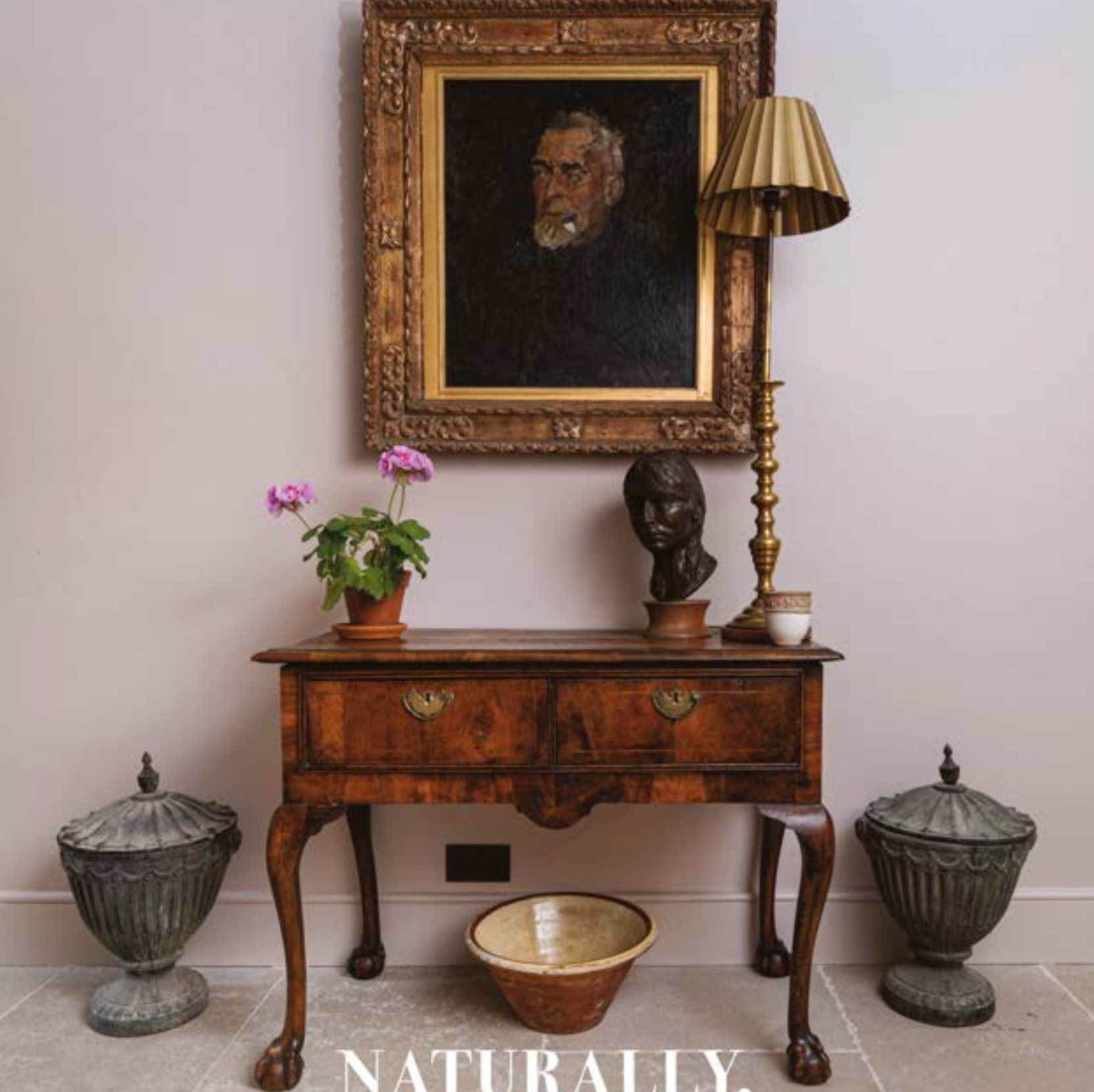
Fig 4: The viewing platform is enclosed in an open cage. A flagpole rises through it

viewpoint. After some discussion, the decision was taken to orient it so that it appears symmetrical when viewed from along the terrace (**Fig 3**). This arrangement also serves to reduce its visual impact. It was with the same purpose in mind that the frame of the stair rails is infilled with a fine steel mesh rather than multiple spindles. Another point of debate was the colour of the main structural members

and a two-tone scheme was considered. In the end, however, the tower was painted brick red, a colour that sits comfortably with the surrounding foliage and also references the materials of the main house.

The local authority, Swale Council, enthusiastically embraced the idea of the tower. The structural engineer was Michael Coombs, who has recently retired as a managing partner at Alan Baxter Associates, and it was manufactured by Littlehampton Welding. The whole was prefabricated and shipped to the site for erection. Now it is completed, Mr Croft sees echoes of other buildings, including the astonishing Monument to the Third International of 1919–20 designed for Petrograd (St Petersburg) by Russian architect Vladimir Tatlin. This vast and unrealised building was intended to incorporate glazed rooms that rotated at different speeds.

The new tower is a magnificent addition to what is already a delightful and varied garden. It’s also a very unusual structure in that it somehow reveals its interest more from within—when enjoyed as a point of prospect—than from without. In that regard, it inverts the usual character of a memorial. Rather than draw the visitor in and command their attention, it offers them a platform that dignifies the views outwards into the world. At Doddington Place, that is a world well worth an easy climb. 🐉



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Who let the dogs out?

Sometimes, inspiration can be found in the form of a gentle nudge from a cold wet nose, reveals **Harry Pearson**, as he takes a look at musical muses of the canine world

I'd like a spot of Chopin now, please: dogs have long sparked memorable tunes, not least the Polish composer's 'Minute Waltz'

ALTHOUGH Domenico Scarlatti's cat Pulcinella evidently played its part in the creation of the Italian composer's Sonata in G Minor, and Michael Jackson's cloying 1972 hit *Ben* is about a boy's friendship with a rat, nothing quite inspires songwriters and composers like a loving hound. 'There's something about dogs' energy, their soul and their sheer joy in life that is inspiring to us all,' enthuses Charlotte Hawkins, presenter of Classic FM's

Pet Classics and Dogs Trust ambassador. 'I have a vision of artists and composers sitting at their keyboards waiting for inspiration to strike, looking fondly at their hounds and the magic happening. There are so many pieces of music that might not exist if it weren't for our four-legged friends.'

One of Mrs Hawkins's favourite dog-inspired compositions is Frédéric Chopin's 'Minute Waltz', she continues: 'It reminds me of my dog Moose, my seven-month-old Dogs

Trust rescue. He's still in his playful phase and spends a lot of his time zooming around.'

The canine that inspired the Polish composer's famous melody was Marquis, who belonged to his girlfriend, French novelist George Sand. Soft, white and fluffy, Marquis was, the pianist noted, 'as intelligent as can be'. In 1845, Sand—mindful of the way her boyfriend doted on Marquis—commented: 'If I had your talent, I'd write a piece to music about that dog.' Rising to the challenge, the



What is it they say about dogs and their owners? Iggy Pop with a cool canine

composer did just that. His Waltz No. 6 in D Flat Major (Op. 64 No. 1), is a three-quarter-time canter that mimics the frenzy of Marquis chasing his tail. Sadly, by the time the composition (sometimes called *Valse du Petit Chien*) was published, the couple had gone through an acrimonious parting. Chopin never saw Marquis again.

Heartbreak also attaches itself to Sir Edward Elgar's beloved Cairn terrier, the subject of his 1933 piece *Mina*. Dogs became the focus of the composer's life after the death of his wife, Alice, and *Mina* mixes the playful use of glockenspiel and clarinets with a melody that hints at loss and melancholy. Much jollier is Elgar's Variation XI from the 'Enigma Variations'. The composition was inspired by a comical misadventure of a bulldog named Dan, owned by George Robertson Sinclair, the organist at Hereford Cathedral. The two friends were walking along the bank of the River Wye one afternoon when Dan tumbled in and paddled frantically upstream before hauling himself triumphantly up a grassy bank to safety. A sandstone statue of the unintentionally inspirational Dan was unveiled at the scene of the incident in 2025.

Another musical dog with a taste for misadventure was American composer George Gershwin's wire-haired terrier, Tony. Bought in 1929, the mischievous little chap quickly became a feature of the New York newspapers thanks to his frequent disappearances from the family home on West 103rd Street. Whether escaped, misplaced or—occasionally—dognapped, Tony somehow always made it back eventually. In 1936, the terrier travelled overland in a car driven



Dolly Parton sang for all dog owners: 'The best friend I ever had was Cracker Jack/ But he was more than that/A playmate, a companion/He was love and understanding'

by the composer's butler to join his master in Hollywood, California. Predictably, drama ensued. Tony became so ill he had to spend a week recuperating en route. Shortly after his pooch's arrival in Beverley Hills, Gershwin composed *Walking the Dog* as a number for the 1937 film *Shall We Dance?*. The music

‘Chopin’s girlfriend George Sand said: “If I had your talent, I’d write a piece to music about that dog”’

accompanies a scene in which Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers walk their dogs on the deck of a luxury liner. Had Tony been involved, it seems certain lifeboats would have needed to be launched.

On October 3, 1945, a 10-year-old boy in a cowboy outfit clambered onto stage at the Mississippi-Alabama Fair. Barely tall enough to reach the microphone, he crooned *Old Shep*, a tear-jerking ballad about the demise of a beloved pet dog. Dabbing at their eyes,

the judges of the talent show awarded the lad fifth prize and wondered, perhaps, if they'd ever hear of him again. They did, of course, because the youngster in the Stetson singing of canine devotion was none other than a young Elvis Presley.

Old Shep was his mother's favourite tune and was the first song that the King of Rock 'n' Roll sang in public. Written in 1933 by country-music star Red Foley, the song tells the tale of the friendship between a boy and his dog that ends, as these things all too sadly do, with the faithful companion growing old and sick before going to the place 'where all the good doggies go'. The story of the dog that inspired the ditty, Foley's childhood pet, Hoover, was even sadder—a vengeful neighbour poisoned him.

Tears tend to fall as regularly as Lakeland rain when dogs turn up in country-and-western songs. A mongrel stray, which befriended a young Dolly Parton and helped her negotiate a bleak childhood, is the subject of her song *Cracker Jack*. Parton described Cracker Jack as 'the best friend I ever had... he was a playmate, a companion/ He was love and understanding'. Steadfast to the end, this brave fellow reportedly died after a fight with a rattlesnake. →



The ‘tangled ball of wool’ that was Old English sheepdog Martha bounded into Beatle Paul McCartney’s lyrics: ‘You have always been my inspiration/Please be good to me’

Although many pop songs include the word ‘dog’, or variations, in the title, most are not actually about dogs at all (*Hound Dog*, for example, is about a feckless lover, whereas Rufus Thomas’s *Walking the Dog*—covered in 1964 by the Rolling Stones—is a dance). However, real-life canines do make an occasional appearance. The love life of Sir Paul McCartney’s labrador retriever inspired the Wings hit *Jet* and, in 1965, he paid 10 guineas for an Old English sheepdog puppy he described as ‘a huge tangled ball of wool’. She’d eventually become the inspiration for the song *Martha My Dear* on The Beatles’ *White Album*. The title of the track could have been rather different—he originally intended to name his dog ‘Knickers’.

Although Martha, like poor Hoover, played her part in inspiring pop music, she didn’t

actually perform any. This was not true of the dog that has strong claim to being history’s most rock ‘n’ roll canine, Seamus, a Border collie belonging to Steve Marriott, frontman of The Small Faces. Seamus provided what we might call ‘backing barks’ on the band’s 1969 hit *The Universal*. He was not destined to stay in the background for long, however. When Seamus’s owner went off to tour the US, his care was entrusted to David Gilmour, lead guitarist of Pink Floyd. To his delight, Mr Gilmour discovered that when he played blues harmonica Seamus would howl along. The result was recorded on the song *Seamus*—with Seamus himself on lead vocals—which featured on Pink Floyd’s 1971 album *Meddle*. Later that year, the group made a concert film and album *Pink Floyd Live at Pompeii*. Unfortunately, Seamus was



Howling in harmony: in his Hollywood act, Clyde McCoy growled on a trumpet to the accompaniment of his toy poodle Jacques

unable to tour due to quarantine regulations and his place was taken by Nobs, an elegant Borzoi who was owned by the daughter of an Italian circus director. Critics still argue over which of them nailed the performance more cleanly. 🐕



The Caroling Canines of Copenhagen

One of the surprise worldwide music hits of 1955 was a Danish production of *Oh! Susanna*. The record featured the piano playing of producer Don Charles and combined the harmonic vocals of a poodle called Dolly, a pinscher named Pussy, a terrier titled Pearl and a pair of German shepherds, Caesar and King. The group was billed as The Singing Dogs. Despite howls of protest from music critics, the doggy disc sold more than one million copies and got to Number 22 on the US Billboard Chart. Others tried to cash in, but the likes of Ole Svensson’s *Canine 9* proved altogether less successful.

A woman with long, wavy red hair is shown from the waist up, looking upwards and to the left. She is wearing a dark navy blue, short-sleeved button-down dress. She carries a large, white, cylindrical bag with a tan leather strap and a tan leather band with buckles across the top. The background is a light-colored wall with horizontal lines.

CHAPMAN

HANDCRAFTED IN CUMBRIA



Picture this

Weathering the storm of streaming and multiplexes, independent cinemas still offer the best seat in the house for rural film buffs, says **Madeleine Silver**

Illustrations by Bryony Fripp



As well as putting on a popular programme of films old and new, Bridport's Electric Palace cinema hosts live-music events, theatre broadcasts and comedy nights

THE National Anthem strikes up as the credits roll. Earlier, the caped commissioner had greeted the audience as they arrived, with the usherette in a 1950s outfit; the Tiny Wurlitzer pipe organ rose majestically through a trap door at the front of the stage during the interval; and tea was served in dainty cups. This is the 70-seat Electric Picture Palace in the Suffolk seaside town of Southwold.

'I'm not making this up,' clarifies broadcaster Emma Freud as she relays these details of her local cinema, where, a few years ago, she was invited to take the role of organist during the interval of *Calendar Girls*, in which a group of women create a nude calendar to raise money for charity. 'I decided to lean into the plot by playing the organ topless. Luckily, the organist's stool is positioned with its back to the audience. Hilarious, I thought.'

After climbing commando-style through the passage that runs from the front bar, under the auditorium, to the tiny waiting area beneath the stage, Ms Freud stripped to the waist, hauled herself into the organist's chair, pressed the 'UP' button at the

appropriate moment and rose into view playing *I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside* entirely topless. 'I had optimistically assumed that, after an hour of Helen Mirren and Julie Walters warming up the audience, I might get a small round of applause for the topical derring-do,' she recalls. 'I was greeted with utter silence. For 10 long minutes, I played

'I decided to lean into the plot by playing the organ topless'

perky seaside ditties as the Southwold residents ate their wine gums and drank their sherry, until blessed relief came as the lights dimmed and I descended back down below, waving to the horrified crowd. It's still my favourite cinema in Britain, but I'm never doing that again.'

Southwold might take the Oscar for eccentricity, but hidden down cobbled alleyways, on windswept peninsulas and behind unlikely

looking shop fronts are more of Britain's best independent cinemas, those that have weathered the storm of streaming and multiplexes, each plaza and palladium a red-velvet jewel for film buffs in the sticks. These are the kind of places where you're likely to get change from a tenner for tickets, ice cream is local, the bar is full and, as the lights come up, it can feel a little like a community drinks party.

Electric Palace, Bridport, Dorset

'It was a romantic purchase,' says Alasdair Warren of his decision to buy the Grade II-listed Art Deco cinema in west Dorset more than a decade ago. 'I watched my first film there with my dad, *The Spy Who Loved Me* in 1977, and that was the start of my love affair with the building. Growing up here in the 1970s, there wasn't a lot for young people to do, so the cinema was an important piece of social infrastructure.'

You could easily walk past the entrance on South Street without a second glance, but inside is a wonderworld: hanging lamps, moulded swags and Art Deco-style murals painted by local brewery sign writer George Biles in 1936. 'When you walk into the →

The show must go on

Campbeltown Picture House, Argyll & Bute

Constructed in 1913, this cinema was one of the first purpose-built examples in Scotland. Known locally as The Wee Pictures, the Art Nouveau spectacle was designed by architect and Glasgow School of Art graduate Albert Gardner. In 1935, Gardner refurbished it to afford the ambiance of a Mediterranean courtyard by projecting a blue sky—complete with moving white clouds—onto the auditorium ceiling and flanking the screen with two plasterwork buildings.

www.campbeltownpicturehouse.co.uk

The Magic Lantern, Gwynedd (below)

A 1901 silent news reel of the Boer War was the first recorded film to be shown in the Assembly Rooms in Tywyn on the edge of Snowdonia National Park. Ticket sales were buoyed by an influx of military personnel during the Second World War to this part of Wales, but, even if fortunes have wavered over the past century, it's kept on going, showing everything from Hollywood blockbusters to Welsh language films.

01654 710260; www.tywyncinema.co.uk



The Kinema In The Woods, Lincolnshire

Once a cricket pavilion in the village of Woodhall Spa, it opened its doors as a cinema in 1922 (using rear projection, still in use today) and is now a step-back-in-time delight: there's a cabinet of filmic curiosities in the foyer, an old commissioner's uniform on display, walls lined with vintage posters and an interval accompanied by a live organ on Saturday nights.

01526 352166;

www.thekinemainthewoods.co.uk

auditorium, there's a total "wow" moment, it really is spectacular,' adds Mr Warren, who put the cinema on the market as he turned 60 this year.

The theatre has been in almost consistent operation since 1926, when a local brewing family, J. C. & R. H. Palmer, opened what was then known as The New Electric Palace, which generated its own power in the engine room, pulling a crowd of more than 500. Today, the likes of Julian Fellowes, Stephen Frears and Mike Leigh are among its patrons and the red carpet has been rolled out for the premiers of *Tamara Drewe* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, where Dorset is put up in lights.

01308 424901; www.electricpalace.org.uk

The Parade Cinema, Marlborough, Wiltshire

'When I was young, cycling to the Odeon in Woking to watch a double-feature film was a big part of teenage life. Of course, when you had a girlfriend, the flicks were an excuse to hold her hand,' reminisces Robert Hiscox, chair of the single-screen Parade Cinema in Marlborough, where he's lived for the past 40 years. 'There's an intense pleasure sitting waiting for a film to start, a feeling of anticipation.'

Until The Parade opened in 2021, in a Grade II-listed former non-conformist chapel (the then Duchess of Cornwall cut the ribbon), the market town had been without a cinema for almost 50 years. 'It gives the town a heartbeat,' notes Mr Hiscox, who

enjoys the reaction of younger cinema-goers to vintage showings ('They come out astonished after watching an epic such as *The Third Man*'). 'It felt like great fortune to be able to build a proper cinema here, so that films can be seen as they were meant to be—in the dark and without distractions.'

01672 646232; www.theparadecinema.com

'There's an intense pleasure waiting for a film to start, a feeling of anticipation'

The Birks Cinema, Aberfeldy, Perthshire

Head 60 miles north-west of Dundee and you'll reach Aberfeldy, where, in the town square, stands The Birks Cinema: a haven in the Highlands with 104 seats, tubs of Scottish Mackie's ice cream and pints of Argyllshire Fyne Ale at the bar. Curtains are made from Glenlyon tweed, volunteers' badges are by Aberfeldy craft company The Workshop and, for the morning screenings, there's Glen Lyon Coffee to hand.

A record of a British Army recruitment film being played at the Town Hall dates back to 1914 (5s was on offer for anyone bringing along a potential recruit), but it wasn't until 1939 that the Birks Cinema opened, with *Sixty Glorious Years*—the first film shown on the



Marlborough's popular Parade Cinema is already taking bookings for showings in 2027



A bit of inclement weather won't put off viewers enjoying The Taybank Hotel's open-air cinema

town's new silver screen. Now, there are the usual blockbusters and live performances, as well as the Birks Wilderness Festival.

'Where we are, you can fish, Munro bag, shoot, mountain bike and kayak—the festival is a way of reflecting our outdoor community,' enthuses chair of the cinema's trustees Shonaig Macpherson, who began work here as a volunteer usher. 'When we moved from outside Edinburgh, I insisted to my husband that there were two things I needed: a cultural asset and being no more than an hour's drive from the sleeper to London,' she explains. Aberfeldy fitted the bill with its cinema—a beacon of community and culture in this corner of the Highlands—and an injection of Hollywood glamour thanks to its Aberfeldy-born patron, Alan Cumming.

01887 822845; www.birkscinema.co.uk

Aldeburgh Cinema, Aldeburgh, Suffolk

'We always know half the people in the audience,' observes author and journalist Craig Brown of his local cinema, a theatre that film critic Peter Bradshaw once wrote 'was like going to what looked like a creaky museum and finding inside, not fragments of Saxon spears under dusty glass, but a film'. Mr Brown was first entranced by the cinema, housed in a half-timber, 18th-century building, when he was living on the other side of Suffolk. 'My wife and I stayed to see the wonderful 14-hour German film *Heimat*. It remains one of my favourite films, perhaps the favourite. We spent longer watching the film than

Under the stars

Alnwick Castle, Northumberland

Inside the spellbinding walls of Alnwick Castle (the set of Hogwarts in the early 'Harry Potter' films), you'll find the Adventure Cinema, with outdoor film screenings throughout the summer in the Outer Bailey. Its other venues are equally A list: think Althorp, Belton and Burghley. www.adventurecinema.co.uk

Corfe Castle, Dorset

For 30 years, there's been a film festival on the Isle of Purbeck, with the 11th-century Corfe Castle as its showstopping venue for the big screen under the stars.

Other spots include the old-school Knoll House Hotel (with views that stretch to the Isle of Wight) and a film among the vines at Langham Wine Estate. www.purbeckfilm.com

The Taybank, Perthshire

Sink into a deck chair on the banks of the River Tay for The Taybank Hotel's open-air cinema, with its 13ft LED cinema screen, audio via Bluetooth headphones and a shack serving popcorn and scoops of Luvians Ice Cream. 01350 677123; www.thetaybank.co.uk



experiencing life outside, so it was properly immersive,' reflects the man who went on to become artistic director of the Aldeburgh Documentary Festival, now in its 32nd year.

Opened in 1919 by local draper Walter Hill, the cinema was at first in competition with the Jubilee Hall, which had been showing 'pictures' from 1917, with silent films and magic lantern shows popular with soldiers on leave. When the weather was too rough for rowing races on the sea on August 19, 1919, the local press reported: 'Both the Jubilee Hall and the new Picture House recently opened by Mr W. Hill did excellent business in the evening.'

Mick McAloon is now the film programmer at the cinema, balancing offbeat films with

blockbusters. 'With the mainstream films, we try to pick the best,' he explains. 'If we think that something is on hundreds of screens across the UK, we ask whether we need to be playing it here as well.' Mr McAloon's earliest childhood memories of the cinema are of watching *Where Eagles Dare*, where 'the sound was particularly booming', he remembers. 'Some might say: "Oh, shall we just stay in tonight?" But some films are made for the big screen. It's about the collective experience. There's nothing like all laughing in unison or being moved together. I don't think that experience will ever go.'

01728 454884; www.aldeburghcinema.co.uk



Well, hello Salar!

Heading west to follow in the piscatorial footsteps of his great literary and fishing hero Ted Hughes, our correspondent finds much fun to be had on the banks of the Torridge, Tamar and Ottery

IT is just after dawn on midsummer's morning when my friend Mark Wormald collects me and we drive down to the West Country. It was something of a literary pilgrimage, in the footsteps of Ted Hughes, an occasional fishing companion of mine whose work was suffused with piscatorial energy and elemental motifs.

Dr Wormald is a distinguished English don from Pembroke, Cambridge (Hughes's old college), and his outstanding 2022 book, *The Catch*, charts the poet's fascination with fish, including a study of his unpublished angling diaries. For many years, Hughes's home was by the Taw in Devon (he died in 1998), deep into what is known as 'Tarka Country' after the Henry Williamson novel. Tarka's author later published that lovely, shining tale *Salar the Salmon*, also set in this magical terrain. By noon, we are already in our waders and marching down the hillside pasture to where (in Hughes's words) the River Torridge 'walks in the valley singing'.

Guests on the Brimblecombe syndicate stretch, we tackle up in the hope of a daytime sea trout—or 'peal' as they are hereabouts, from an old word for 'pale'. The stream always carries a little colour, so I begin at Baggeters Pool with a small yellow tube, swung off my new Loop switch rod through the throb of the heat-stricken current.

This ancient landscape (Hughes's 'bulging green hills over deep cleaves and coombes') was also the subject of another writer—Lindsay 'Lemon' Gray, a maverick hotelier, who ran the nearby Devon Lodge in the 1950s and reckoned that, by July, each mile of the river should hold some 800 peal.

'Fishing is my way of breathing': the great piscator and poet Ted Hughes



In *Torridge Fishery*, he recounts hooking a huge 'portmanteau' salmon ('probably 50lb') below Brimblecombe wood, which eventually broke him off around a root. Well, hello Salar!

Next, we try that prolific, mysterious holding pool 'The Bump' where, 30 years ago, the novelist Graham Swift and I managed a brace of salmon each before luncheon. However, today, the river is low and we amuse ourselves with fishing for brownies before retiring to The Half Moon, a 16th-century inn in the agreeable village of Sheepwash, a renowned haven for anglers. We are to meet Charles Inniss, whose family for years ran the place and who, having been here since 1949, remains effectively its *genius loci*. As we leaf through

'They caught an eight-pounder there. I don't really see how you can fail!'

his compendious record books (one entry ends: 'Well done, Graham Swift', but alas no mention of your humble correspondent), Mr Inniss says he has put us on the Junction Pool for our evening session. 'They caught an eight-pounder there earlier in the week. I don't really see how you can fail!'

At 8pm, I wade stealthily out above where the Okement tributary comes in off Dartmoor—a spot that used to be known as Watersmeet.

Night fishing is a peculiar business and can be an eerie experience. You are uncertain what is out there—Hughes spoke of 'this hopeful sort of dread' at what you might encounter—and I am certainly no aficionado (Hugh Falkus was once so exasperated at my crepuscular incompetence that he stormed

off and left me in the gloaming). A few peal are showing over the rocky gullies ('cribs', Gray termed them), but they prove disdainful and, when I finally clamber up the iron ladder at the tail of the pool, I am still fishless.

I first met Hughes in the 1980s (he was generous enough to contribute the foreword to one of my books) and we fished together in the Hebrides and on the chalkstreams. He once rebuked me for nymphing during a rise, which was a bit rich, considering the time I caught him spinning a Toby lure through a fly-only pool. Yet he was a great taker of fish and their pursuit informed his later life, together with the hydraulic vigour of both his verse and prose. 'I dream every single night that I am fishing,' he wrote in a letter; and once told a girl: 'Fishing is my way of breathing.'

Next morning, we were assigned another spot the Laureate loved—the mighty, shaggy-banked Beam Weir pool, in the river's heyday a tremendous place for salmon (the Victorians would net out 1,000 per season). This was also the birthplace of Tarka—later, Dr Wormald did see an otter surface under the far





beech trees, precisely as in the book. The beat holds many numinous, shaded runs and is not far above tidewater; recently, a rare Allis shad was caught here and I saw several sizable grey mullet. Later, I plucked my only peal from the small music of the little Wall stream, on a classic Butcher, just as dusk was blooming. Fish come and go, but the highlights of an angler's life often involve other memorable things.

Dr Wormald's masterful itinerary had us next heading south to Lifton and another sporting hostelry: the Arundell. I first stayed here back in 1976, with my undergraduate girlfriend (now the long-suffering Mrs Reel Life), and later befriended the glamorous proprietor, Anne Voss Bark, whose husband, Conrad, was the fishing correspondent for *The Times* when I was his counterpart on *The Daily Telegraph*: he used to like calling me his 'hated rival'. For many years, the chief instructor here was the legendary David Pilkington, who originally taught Hughes to cast for salmon. Now officially retired, Pilks kindly invited us for a day on the charming little River

Ottery, just over the border in Cornwall. He is the most sprightly and knowledgeable of companions (although not fond of invasive balsam or beavers) and he kitted me out with a 7ft 'flea' rod for picking off the small, enamelled-bright wild brownies. I held onto seven before we withdrew for a cooling picnic, with bumpers of collegiate Chardonnay.

Our final day was on the Tamar at Endsleigh, by invitation of Sir Richard Dearlove (erstwhile Master of Pembroke and former 'Chief' of MI6). The hotel and resplendent Humphry Repton garden were once part of a vast estate belonging to the Dukes of Bedford (they owned one-third of Devon), but now the 12 miles of immaculately maintained fishing is in the hands of a syndicate. The Tamar—its name means 'great water'—is less intimate than the Torridge, which is a small spate river, and still it supports a reasonable run of salmon. John Dennis, the amiable and enthusiastic head keeper, told us the flow and temperature were both fair and that some nice sea trout had been taken early that morning. Mr Inniss promptly hooked one off

Welcome shade in summer heat: where Hughes's Torridge 'walks in the valley singing', our correspondent casts in his wake to less success, but equal pleasure

the Leigh Wood croy and we fished on into the evening, when Mr Dennis guided me through the fabled Joles and Underhill pools. I missed one offer—you must set the hook promptly—and we only reeled up at 11pm, when mist began creeping along the meadows.

En route home to Cambridge, where he was hosting a conference, Dr Wormald took me to the Ginger Beer beat of the Test, courtesy of Orvis, and there we joined the novelist Luke Jennings with his son, Rafe, plus my son, Tom. Despite the heavy weed cut and intense sun, we happily rounded off our piscatorial safari with a goodly haul of stocked rainbow trout. I confess I resorted to a nymph—the late Laureate would not have been impressed.  *David Profumo lives up a Perthshire glen with Pompey, his spaniel that only understands dog Latin. His memoir 'The Lightning Thread' is out in paperback (Scribner)*



Celestial beings

Three years after the 1929 stock-market crash, when the world was still in the depths of depression, Coco Chanel staged a dazzling exhibition of astronomically inspired jewellery

WHAT was the single most important jewellery event of the past 100 years? For me, there can only be one answer: Coco Chanel's exhibition of about 50 (no one knows the exact number) spectacular diamond jewels, which took place in Paris from November 7–19, 1932.

The event was staged in the richly decorated *étage noble* of her 18th-century mansion at 29 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. The word 'staged' is an appropriate one. Each piece was presented on a fully clothed wax mannequin complete with real hair and eyelashes (or, in some instances, part of a wax mannequin—a be-sleeved wax arm, for example) and placed in glass vitrines. The overall effect bordered on the surreal, especially as the mannequins had realistic facial expressions. Visitors paid 20 francs for entry, and the proceeds were donated to charity. Chanel's 'Exposition de Bijoux de Diamants' was attended by the great and the good—princes and politicians, artists and actors—photographed by the filmmaker Robert Bresson, featured in the newsreels and covered, often on the front page, by the world's press. Why the fuss? By the 1930s, Chanel was an international celebrity. What began in 1910 as a millinery establishment had become one of the largest couture houses in Paris.

Chanel had created a style so unique, so timeless, so desirable that it is still in vogue today. She had been paid one million dollars to design costumes for only three Hollywood films and her perfume sales alone made her one of the richest women in Europe. A 10-year affair with the 2nd Duke of Westminster, the wealthiest man in England, added to the Chanel magic. Timing played a part, too. To unveil jewellery with an estimated value of \$55 million (in today's money) during a period of widespread economic hardship—it was the depths of the Depression—was, to say the least, audacious; which brings us to the story behind the exhibition. The collection was commissioned by the Diamond Corporation of London with the express purpose of reviving demand after the 1929 stock-market crash. It loaned the diamonds and paid for all the pieces—many of which involved complex settings as thin as wire—to be made. De Beers stock, by the way, rose



Coco Chanel's Allure Céleste necklace, glittering with heavenly bodies, with a 55-carat sapphire at its lunar heart

‘We must assume that the collection was dismantled: a tragedy’

20 points after the exhibition opened. At least two pieces from the show were purchased on the first day. Yet such was the power of the Parisian jewellery guilds that they were able to stop sales on the grounds of unfair competition. What of the jewellery itself?

The majority of pieces followed a celestial theme. Janet Flanner in *The New Yorker* wrote: 'Mlle Chanel's mountings for the jewels are in design dominantly and delicately astronomical. Magnificent lopsided stars for earrings; as a necklace, a superb comet whose nape-encircling tail is all that attaches it to a lady's throat; bracelets that are flexible rays; crescents for hats and hair; and, as

a unique set piece mounted in yellow gold, a splendid sun of yellow diamonds.' There were also *trompe-l'oeil* textile motifs—ribbons, fringes and feathers—and a few with simple geometric patterns. It is widely believed that Chanel's inspiration came from the orphanage where she spent much of her childhood. This was attached to the medieval Cistercian abbey at Aubazine in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, the coat of arms of which incorporates the sun, moon and stars and where stained-glass windows and mosaic floors contain other symbols found in the collection.

The show was surrounded by mystery. Chanel never said why she agreed to hold the show; she was famous for her costume jewellery and for combining real gems with fake ones, for wearing pearls with tweed instead of ballgowns, so the move into high jewellery was out of character, to say the least.

What happened to the pieces when the show closed? Long after Chanel had died, the company spent a small fortune trying to find out and we must assume that the collection was dismantled. I don't think it is an exaggeration to describe this as a tragedy. Yet, although the originals are denied to us, all is far from lost. In 1993, Karl Lagerfeld relaunched Chanel Fine Jewellery, and eight pieces from the original Bijoux de Diamants selection were reissued. In the years that followed, further designs were reissued and new pieces, inspired by the originals, were released.

I've not had the opportunity to visit the Chanel jewellery mansion in Paris, but I will confess to being a customer of its London sister. After making an extremely modest purchase—considering the fabulous jewels on display—one of the assistants patiently waited as I breathed all over their display cabinets and then showed me one beautifully decorated salon after another. The interior, based on Chanel's own private apartment, is almost as breathtaking as the jewellery. 

Read *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life*, Justine Picardie; *Chanel High Jewelry*, Julie Levoyer and Agnès Muck-ensturm. **Watch** The 1932 Pathé newsreel on YouTube. **Drop over** Chanel Fine Jewellery, New Bond Street, London W1

Welcome to Bruar country

House of Bruar invites us to share its love for the Highlands with its Autumn Collection

SINCE the days of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, visitors from all over Britain have flocked to the Scottish Highlands—to shoot, fish, unwind and plug into a different sort of landscape; a majestic, untamed space studded by rugged Munros and pristine lochs. It is also the location of The House of Bruar, the palatial retail store positioned unmissably in a scenic beauty spot just off the A9 that *Tatler* nicknamed 'The Harrods of the North'—albeit one that switches opulence for open space and gold leaf for turning leaves.

'Bruar is particularly excited about the company's generously specced new waterproof field coat'

Bruar launches two country-clothing collections each year, with the Autumn Collection taking ultimate precedence—a heady mix of pure cashmere, lambswool and pure wool knits, tailored separates in British tweed, worsted wool Highland tartans and everything else needed to dress well, on and off the moor.

What's striking about this year's collection is the subtle use of colour. Bruar's approach to developing tweeds is something of an art, with mood boards and pages of cloth samples pored over by its designers and their British mill partners,

each passing the final 'squint test' to assess the colour balance under blurred conditions. This year's fabrics seem to have grown out of the landscape itself, with forest greens, burnished oranges and deep maroons woven into a harmonious blend. These are not simply

The Highland Bothy Slipover, adorned with a scenic loch



At home in the Highlands: House of Bruar's new tweeds blend beautifully into the moors

blazers and skirts to wear *in* the Highlands—they are visual evocations of the Highlands.

The concept takes a more literal turn within Bruar's knitwear, as the team depicts scenic Scottish lochs (see if you can tell which ones) on a tank top and a cosy jumper in soft lambswool. Others portray mallards, foxes, red squirrels and, of course, Beatrice and Benji, Bruar's teddy-bear mascots—but those with more traditional tastes in knitwear will find Aran, Fairisle and Argyle styles in abundance.

Bruar is particularly excited about the company's new waterproof and breathable field coat for him or her. Its entry into this type of technical wear is typically generously specced—it can withstand a 10-yard column of water, but retains a breathability rating suitable for 'vigorous activity'. As well as keeping shooters dry, it's also the ultimate dog-walking coat and has been priced to give industry rivals some sleepless nights. Unisex waterproof overtrousers and a men's gilet round out the range.

The complete collection is out now. A visit to The House of Bruar, with its delightful informal Restaurant, Lobster, Fish and



The new field coat for the worst of weather

Chip Shop and the Guild of Fine Foods' 'Best Food Hall in Scotland' is a treat, but if a trip to Scotland isn't imminent, you can request a catalogue or browse the collection online, as well as peruse offerings from other renowned country-clothing brands, plus hampers and gifts. 

For more information or to buy items from the collection, please telephone 01796 483236 or visit www.houseofbruar.com





If you only buy one...

Flower trug from Sussex Trugs



The Sussex Trug (*right*) is a long-standing royal favourite, having been noticed first by Queen Victoria in 1851 and used by the then Duchess of Cornwall in 2022 (*above*)

WHEN the then Duchess of Cornwall was photographed for the cover of the July 13, 2022, issue of COUNTRY LIFE, she had next to her a Sussex Trug filled with pelargoniums. She is not the first member of the Royal Family to recognise that there is no better basket for gathering flowers and produce from the garden.

On May 1, 1851, Queen Victoria stopped at Thomas Smith's trug stand at the Great Exhibition and was so impressed by his display that she ordered several to give to her relations. According to Smith family legend, he returned to his workshop at Herstmonceaux in Sussex, made each one by hand and then walked 'the 60 miles to Buckingham Palace' with his brother alongside, pushing a handcart heaped with the precious cargo. A Royal Warrant followed, which the company, still hand-crafting each trug, holds to this day.

The idea for the Sussex Trug came from the local Sussex 'trog', used by farmers in the 17th century to weigh grain and liquid. Smith took the basic shape, but used materials such as chestnut, coppiced from local



‘The idea came from the Sussex “trog”, used in the 17th century to weigh grain and liquid’



Trug making is now an endangered craft

woodland, which is lighter in weight and, being a hardwood, does not rot easily. Each 'cooper pole' or 'trug bat' (chestnut pole) is cleaved with an axe and then shaved to the desired thinness by a craftsman on a shaving horse. These pieces are then steam bent to form the handle and frame. The base of the trug can be made from split boards of light-weight cricket bat willow (*Salix alba* var. *caerulea*), which Smith would have gleaned from the nearby Pevensey Marshes or, as now, made with Finnish birch.

Trug making is a critically endangered craft with fewer than 10 people involved in the industry at present, despite Thomas Smith's Trug Shop's worldwide sales and dedicated following—a bittersweet testimony to the trug's longevity. TD 
Handmade trug, from £80 (www.sussextrugs.com)

A glittering evening at Bruton Place

Kiki McDonough's iridescent jewellery is pairing with acclaimed developer London Square for a showcase that's shining with promise



London Square's transformation of County Hall, Kingston upon Thames, into contemporary living spaces is nearly complete

COUNTRY LIFE has joined forces with London Square to present an evening promising rather more sparkle than the average drinks reception. On Wednesday, September 23, from 6pm–8pm, readers are invited to No 25, Bruton Place, W1—the newly established private venue of London Square and parent company Aldar, whose reputation for delivering some of the capital's most covetable addresses precedes it—for a showcase of Kiki McDonough's fine jewellery.

Holder of a Royal Warrant and a long-time favourite of The Princess of Wales, Kiki McDonough has built her eponymous house on a simple, joyful premise: that a coloured gemstone, chosen for its character as much as its beauty, need never apologise for delighting the eye. Guests will hear the story behind the brand's founding and view a selection of her bespoke and signature pieces at close quarters.

London Square has gained a fine reputation for the sensitive restoration of heritage buildings, giving them renewed purpose for the 21st century.

Among its notable projects are the remodelling of the Grade II-listed Royal Star and Garter Building on Richmond Hill, TW10, the renovation of Toynbee Hall in Spitalfields, E1, and the conversion

of a former pickle factory and a tannery in Bermondsey, SE1.

The occasion marks the latest grand project for London Square: the transformation of the former Surrey County Hall, a Grade II*-listed essay in the classical manner, set upon 5½ handsome acres in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. Long the seat of local governance, the building's stately bones now shelter boutique apartments and duplexes of considerable quality, complete with contemporary new builds. Completion is anticipated from late autumn 2026, with prices starting from \$450,000. Two show homes now stand open for viewing.

Residents shall want for little: a round-the-clock concierge, a yoga studio, a private screening room, a games parlour and co-working spaces besides.

Glasses will be kept topped up throughout by Gusbourne, which will be providing the sparkling wine for the evening. The estate planted its first vines in Appledore, Kent, in 2004, with a vision to craft the world's finest sparkling wines. That ambition has shaped a quality-obsessed approach, continually pushing the boundaries of what is possible in English wine, and Gusbourne remains unwavering in what makes it distinctive: producing vintage-only wines from estate-grown, hand-harvested grapes.



Above: Pieces from Kiki McDonough's collection. Below: Gusbourne's Kent vineyard



GUSBOURNE

Kiki McDonough's Detachable Drops can transform any hoop

COUNTRY LIFE readers wishing to attend the Bruton Place event on September 23 please RSVP@londonsquare.co.uk. Those interested in arranging a private viewing of County Hall Kingston may contact the London Square Sales Team by telephoning 0333-666 0107, emailing countyhallkingston@londonsquare.co.uk or visiting www.countyhallkingston.co.uk

Bespoke with true meaning

Blackacre's founder, Samuel Stirrat, tells COUNTRY LIFE how a childhood encounter led to a career creating delightful, one-of-a-kind jewellery

FOUNDED in 2017, Blackacre has quickly established an exceptional reputation for bespoke engagement rings and fine jewellery. With an emphasis on sourcing exquisite stones, elegant designs and a highly customer-focused approach, every piece is crafted to be imbued with meaning and deeply personal. Blackacre is one of only a handful of luxury jewellers to be B Corp Certified, meeting remarkably high standards for sustainability and traceability, and has won awards including Bespoke Jeweller of the Year at the National Association of Jewellers Awards 2025. The company's founder, Sam Stirrat, talks about his journey and the service that makes Blackacre extraordinary.

You began collecting gemstones at nine years old—do you remember the moment it evolved from collection-building to creating something?

As a child, I went to art and craft fairs with my Mum, who worked as an artist restoring paintings. One year, I met a lady making jewellery from

Alderwood earrings with diamonds and rubies in 18K gold bezel settings



wire and beads and ended up having a lesson with her. I immediately felt a sense of purpose, as if I had found 'my thing', uniting my creativity, fascination with gemstones and the feeling one gets from making something meaningful for somebody. I had one lesson and taught myself thereafter—I'm still driven by this purpose today.

You have a 'stone-led' design ethos. What does this mean in practice?

My passion began with the stones and a desire, beyond creating meaningful pieces, to showcase them as beautifully as possible. We begin with a concept or idea and then adapt this around the unique peculiarities and personality of each stone before formalising a design. From choosing settings,

metal types, accompanying gemstones and personal details, a vision is brought to life one step at a time and means that the diamonds and gemstones are seen to their full potential. The jewellery is proportionate, elegant and thoroughly personal.

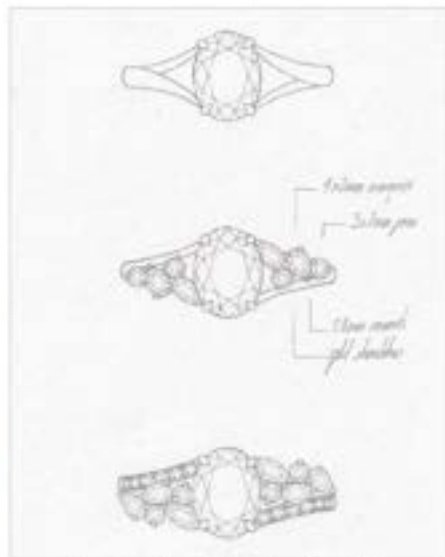
What are the benefits of your bespoke approach to engagement rings?

Jewellery should carry meaning, and an engagement ring created specifically for someone epitomises this. We work collaboratively with individuals to create one-of-a-kind engagement rings tailored to their unique stories and desires. Each step of the journey is tailored to a client's need and we pride ourselves in going beyond what is expected—from hand-drawing designs to sourcing or cutting specific stones from across the world—and treat each piece as if it were our own. We pride ourselves on traceability and transparency, immersing people in the creative process and bringing the design to life together. Bespoke says 'I love you' in a way that no off-the-shelf ring could.

Is there a client story that best explains why people keep recommending you to friends?

We have grown through word of mouth based on the quality of our work and the experience we provide. We go to lengths

'Blackacre has quickly established an exceptional reputation for bespoke engagement rings and fine jewellery'



From left: Samuel Stirrat in Sri Lanka; designs of the Treless ring; the final ring with a brilliant cut diamond as its centrepiece



Clockwise from left: Blackacre's Origins Collection celebrates the company's beginnings as a jeweller; Covent Garden engagement ring with a royal blue sapphire and diamonds; an asymmetrical pink diamond design; a bespoke blue sapphire Toi et Moi

others will not go to and take joy in delivering unexpected moments of delight, from simple things such as welcoming clients as we would friends to cycling through the snow in winter to deliver in time for Christmas as I did some years ago. We recognise the importance of jewellery, are not restricted by corporate frameworks, and show we care. If you look after people, then people look after you.

If somebody reading this has never heard of Blackacre, what's the one thing you would want them to understand about how you work?

Blackacre is all about creating beautiful, meaningful jewellery, whether that's bespoke engagement rings or our core collections. We balance exceptional craftsmanship

with a level of care that we believe is unmatched in the industry. The people you will meet are expert gemmologists, designers and jewellers who share the same aim of giving people the most amazing experience and expertise. More than anything, we want others to share in the joy of the creative journey, from showing you where we sourced the stones to regular updates from inside the workshop. We want to welcome you into our world. 🐉

Sam Stirrat spoke to Amie Elizabeth White, COUNTRY LIFE'S Acting Luxury Editor. For further information, visit www.blackacreldn.com or telephone 07568 499544



From left: Origins pink sapphire ring; Dunkeld, a bespoke natural green sapphire engagement ring; Sapling pendant with a star-set aquamarine

A feast of ideas

This month, events at Focus/26 and beyond will offer an opportunity to see new launches and be inspired by the wit and wisdom of leading experts in the world of design, including Rita König, George Saumarez Smith, Henriette von Stockhausen, Darren Price and Edward Bulmer



↑ Layered look

Prints and plains can be combined to create an attractive layered effect: curtains and ottoman in Nori Ochre, £86 per m, with chairs in Emile Copper velvet, £90 per m and cushions in Leon Stripe Green, £92 per m, all from Jane Churchill (020-8874 6484; www.janechurchill.com)



← Classical accent

The 6in-diameter Tracery velvet rosette with floral motif, from the Velaré collection by Samuel & Sons, features embroidery, cutwork and appliqué. Each rosette costs £138 and can be used to add decorative embellishment to upholstery and soft furnishings, including cushions (020-7351 5153; www.samuelandsons.com)



↑ Decorative appeal

Floral brass castings sit beneath each wicker shade and crown the central stem of the Edith chandelier, resulting in a Parisian-inspired flourish. Shown here in Indian Red, it costs from £4,998 for the large size from Porta Romana (01420 23005; www.portaromana.com)



↑ Rug and roll

Julian Chichester is launching his debut rug collection in collaboration with Amy Kent Rugs, drawing inspiration from his favourite Tapa barkcloth designs from the Pacific Islands, which traditionally feature patterns in black and rust-brown dyes. The Harvest rug costs £845 per sq m (020-7622 2928; www.julianchichester.com) →

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Interiors



↑ Lighting the way

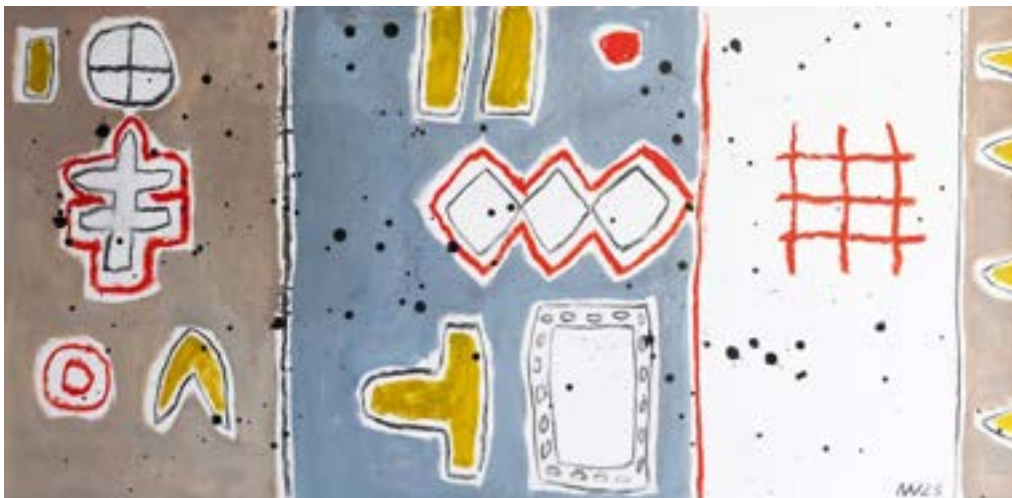
A pierced brass ring and pagoda top add to the decorative appeal of the Artemis lantern from Hector Finch. It costs £4,158 for the large size in Verdigris finish and is suitable for indoor and outdoor undercover use (020-7731 8886; www.hectorfinch.com)

→ Star attraction

Fabric and wallpaper house Zoffany will be hosting a pop-up at Focus/26 in partnership with interiors brand Sharland England, featuring its indoor-outdoor collection of fabrics produced with celebrated American interior designer Michael S. Smith. The collection includes Kyoto Stripe (chair, *left*), Lily Stripe (chair, *right*) and Thorny Vine (blind), from £134 per m (020-3457 5862; www.zoffany.design)



Words by Amelia Thorpe



← A parallel career

Alongside creating an evolving collection of lighting and furniture of enormous stylistic depth and breadth with his wife, Lucy, Michael Vaughan is also a talented painter whose work has been exhibited in New York and London. A new exhibition of his recent work, 'Two Experimental Years 2024-2026', opens at No 11 Avenue Studios, Sydney Mews, London SW3, on September 24-25, 12pm-7pm, and then on September 26, 11am-1pm (www.michaelvaughanart.com) →



An established company with a sought-after range of products, Aspect Window Styling offers potential buyers an exciting future

An exceptional prospect

A successful interiors business in Bath is searching for an ambitious new owner

THE opportunity has arisen to acquire a thriving business in Bath this autumn. The new owner can step into it knowing it is a going concern, able to grow and expand for many years into the future. Located in the heart of this historic Georgian city, Aspect Window Styling has been an integral part of the interiors scene in the South-West for more than 35 years. Founded by the late furniture and interior designer Sarah Hewett, who was later joined by her husband, Nick Hewett, Aspect Window Styling grew into a family business specialising in made-to-measure blinds, curtains, shutters and awnings for private clients, designers, architects and housebuilders.

During this time, Aspect Window Styling has established a reputation for delivering exceptional quality across an impressive

range of projects, from historic estates to hotels and prestigious newbuild developments in the South-West, London, the Home Counties, and overseas. With few direct local competitors, its busy showroom is a spacious, well-stocked two-storey building in the city's historic centre. Accustomed to running between 50-60 live projects at any one time, the company enjoys a healthy turnover, an excellent profit margin and an order book built on word-of-mouth and repeat customers.

**‘Expansion potential is considerable—
notably in smart-home
integration systems’**

The potential for expansion is considerable—notably in smart-home integration systems for blinds and external solar shading solutions, where there is particular demand. There is also scope to utilise the first floor as a further showroom, client consultancy rooms or as a workshop or workroom.

‘Getting ready to sell Aspect Window Styling is an exciting moment,’ explains Mr Hewett. ‘With new developments in technology, there is huge potential to shape and develop the brand over the coming years.



An ideal setting: Bath's bustling city centre

It feels like the right time to pass the keys to a new owner with the vision and enthusiasm to make it their own.’

This business opportunity would suit an ambitious designer or partnership with an interest or specialism in interior design and window treatments, entrepreneurial flair, and a keen interest in becoming part of Bath's independent retail and design network. This sale constitutes an extremely rare opportunity to invest in a profitable and creative business with a reputation for excellence and a loyal customer base. ➔

Interested parties are invited to telephone Nick Hewett on 07771 851150, email nick@aspectwindowstyling.co.uk or visit www.aspectwindowstyling.co.uk



A glimpse of Aspect's wide range of blinds

Interiors



↑ Moveable feast

Made from solid brass with a fluted glass shade, the Cotswold rechargeable table lamp can be moved around the home with ease—without trailing wires. It has a touch-dim function and costs from £174 from Corston Architectural Detail (01249 549332; www.corston.com)



↑ Glossy good looks

The tapered, high-gloss base of the Malmo table lamp in Cocoa pairs elegantly with its wide shade in Almond Cream to create a striking look. The lamp costs £288 with shade, from £174, by David Hunt Lighting (01295 672628; www.davidhuntlighting.co.uk)



Antiques in Colour

From September 1 at Westland London, five distinguished designers demonstrate how thoughtfully considered colour can transform the way we experience antiques and enhance their enduring relevance in today's interiors. Henriette von Stockhausen (VSP Interiors), Edward Bulmer, Marco Mansi, Aliénor Cros and Darren Price (ADAM Architecture) have each designed their own gallery space, using pieces from the company's expansive antique collections, with each room focusing on a distinct historical period. The designers will be in conversation with COUNTRY LIFE's Executive and Interiors Editor Giles Kime on September 24, 6pm, at Westland London, No 295 Willesden Lane, London NW2, discussing Antiques in Colour: The Role of Colour in Reimagining Interiors. Tickets are free of charge. To secure a place, please email nicole@rawlingsgeorge.co.uk



Edward Bulmer (top) Marco Mansi, Aliénor Cros and Darren Price will speak on the day

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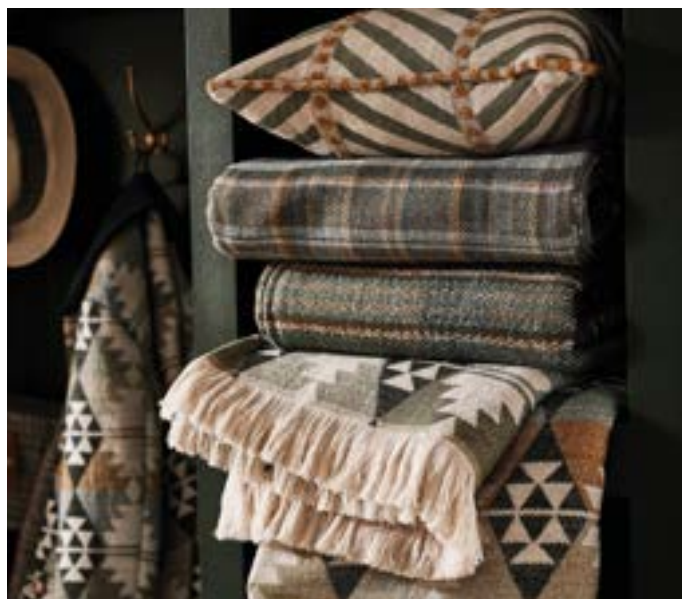


COUNTRY LIFE at Focus

Working on a multi-year interior-design project requires shifting from a sprint mindset to a marathon strategy. Join an exceptional panel of experts, including George Saumarez Smith, a partner at ADAM Architecture; Ben Holland, the co-founder of HollandGreen; and Henriette von Stockhausen, the founder of VSP Interiors, as they discuss *The Long Game* with COUNTRY LIFE's Executive and Interiors Editor, Giles Kime. Get the inside track on maintaining momentum, protecting the budget and delivering exceptional results on historical renovations and custom new-builds alike on Wednesday, September 16, 3pm–4pm, in the TALK Theatre, Third Floor, Design Centre East, SW10. Tickets cost £10, visit www.dcch.co.uk to purchase. The talk will be followed by a book signing of *The Romance of Classicism: Designing the English Country House for Today* (Rizzoli, £47.95) by George Saumarez Smith



See Ben Holland, George Saumarez Smith and Henriette von Stockhausen at *The Long Game*



↑ The wonder of wool

The Rannoch Wools collection from Osborne & Little includes wool checks and geometric patterns in a palette of soft neutrals, heathered tones and rich earthy colours that have been inspired by the Scottish landscape. From top to bottom, Glencoe, Fyne, Kyle and Caledonia fabrics, prices from £105 per m (020–8812 3000; www.osborneandlittle.com)

↓ Chelsea calling

Head to the London Design Social on September 23–24 to meet the creative people behind an enticing collection of boutique fabric, wallpaper and home-ware brands, including Parker & Jules, Barneby Gates, Eadie & Crole and Speronella Marsh. Explore their designs and enjoy talks by celebrated design experts at Chelsea Old Town Hall, King's Road, London SW3. Visit www.thedesignsocialpopup.com for more details and to purchase tickets, from £27.33

Focus/26 on Design

The annual interior-design event takes place at the Design Centre, Chelsea Harbour, London SW10, on September 14–18 and offers an opportunity to enjoy talks and view the latest launches from a host of leading brands that do not exhibit anywhere else in the UK. Everyone is welcome and entry is free of charge. For the full timetable and details, visit www.dcch.co.uk





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Highway to heaven

WILTSHIRE'S

Wylde valley is known for its picturesque villages and crystal-clear chalk-stream—a habitat for wild brown trout, grayling and Atlantic salmon. Much of it sits within the



Cranborne Chase National Landscape. Amid this rural idyll is a Georgian house in Corton that, in a past life, was a pub called The Royal Oak. According to village legend, it was a favourite meeting place for highwaymen.

Bought by the Prideaux family from Sutton Veny, it was renamed Saracens House and now has six bedrooms. It has benefited from substantial improvement, with new bathrooms and cabinetry, but many period details, such as panelling in the dining room, have been preserved. Outside, a timber-frame garage has a home office above. Gardens of just over an acre have been laid out by landscape designer Catherine Thomas. £1.3m through Blue Book (07969 960839).

Set on the north bank of the Dyfi Estuary in the seaside resort of Aberdyfi, Gwynedd, and in the Dyfi Biosphere, Smugglers Cove presents an unusual investment opportunity. The collection



of two self-catering cottages, two beached glamping boats and four camping pitches is on a coastal nook and there is a boatyard for up to 15 moorings. One of the standout features is *The Boy John* (above), a restored trawler providing accommodation for up to six people. £975,000 through Carter Jonas (01248 360414)

A château's shot at glory

CHÂTEAU L'ETOC (above) on Alderney in the Channel Islands was originally conceived as a sea fortress to defend the island from the French. Sitting on a peninsula with the English Channel on three sides, the site was a Neolithic burial ground dating from about 4300BC.

When the fort was constructed in the 1850s, sappers uncovered burial chambers, human remains and pottery, much of which was reportedly thrown over the ramparts into the sea. Built with 23 guns and accommodation for 128 soldiers, it was inspected by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1854. During the Second World War, the occupying Germans added gun emplacements, reinforced bunkers and searchlights to the site.

The current owner's family bought the property as a wedding present in 1935. Today, it offers 18,000sq ft of internal space, including 20 bedrooms, and it stands in 5¾ acres of grounds. Selling agent Pollyanna Hunter of Harding & Green believes that Château L'Etoc offers significant potential for commercial use, such as corporate gatherings, weddings and cultural events. 'Its scale, seclusion and authenticity make it a one-of-a-kind venue for those seeking to combine privacy, creativity and legacy,' she says. As part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, Alderney offers a similarly favourable fiscal environment, but without the restrictions on property purchases as is the case on other islands. The property is on the market for £3.75m (01962 436100).

My first house in the country Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen

Where is it?

In Cirencester. My first, my only and my last house in the country. We have tried to sell it, but it didn't want us to. It's raising the standard for multigenerational living, with [my wife] Jackie and I living next door to our daughters Hermione and Cecile and their families

A quick description

A Grade II-listed farmhouse sited at the slummy end of the Cotswolds, close to The King and the late Jilly Cooper rather than the Beckhams. It was pretty affordable at £1.2 million

How did you find it?

Twenty years ago, when we were living in Greenwich, Jackie saw

it advertised in COUNTRY LIFE. There was no shopping around, she viewed it and bought it

What sold it to her?

It ticked a lot of our boxes; for example, it had a cottage for Jackie's PA, it was a project and it was near a station—Kemble, the smartest in the world

Was it a smooth purchase?

We were more or less cash buyers and nobody lived there, so it was pretty straightforward

Favourite aspect?

I adore our drawing room, and it's as 1980s as

I could make it. It is now shades of salmon and apricot and there's a large, unrepentant pattern going on. I described it to Dame Jilly, who laughed like only she could and it's a great sadness to me that she died before she got to see our Jilly-inspired, *Rivals*-esque room

Best memory?

I can't commit to one as the memories keep coming. You need to see your home as the museum of you and the background to everything important that



ever happens to you. It's a big emotional investment. Don't treat it lightly and think 'I'll find something better and make a couple of quid'

Biggest indulgence?

Laying an orange and lime-green tile motif vinyl floor in the kitchen. To make it worse, I covered the large fridge in the same pattern

Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen is an artist, interior designer and television personality. He helped to set up the Llewelyn-Bowen Emporium, No 42 Castle Street, Cirencester, Gloucestershire. He is also the design curator for Rangeford Villages luxury retirement villages

What's hot...

Listed-building consent

As part of changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, listed-building owners will find it easier to get permission for energy-efficiency or low-carbon improvements from local authorities.

Country heads

Will Matthews is taking over as head of Knight Frank's national country department from Edward Rook, who spent 31 years with the agency. Mr Matthews has advised on some of the UK's most significant rural property deals over the past 14 years.

The Algarve

Portugal's most southern province has retained its position as the most popular destination for British holiday-home searches on the property portal Rightmove, ahead of Cyprus and Mallorca.

... and what's not

Mortgage deals

The Bank of England reported that net approvals for house purchases decreased in July. Knight Frank Finance partner Hina Bhudia notes that geopolitical tensions and elevated energy prices pushed rates higher in the summer.

Home preference

The Government seems to have shelved plans to restrict overseas investors from buying new-build homes before they are built, according to the *Financial Times*. The plan was to give locals first refusal.

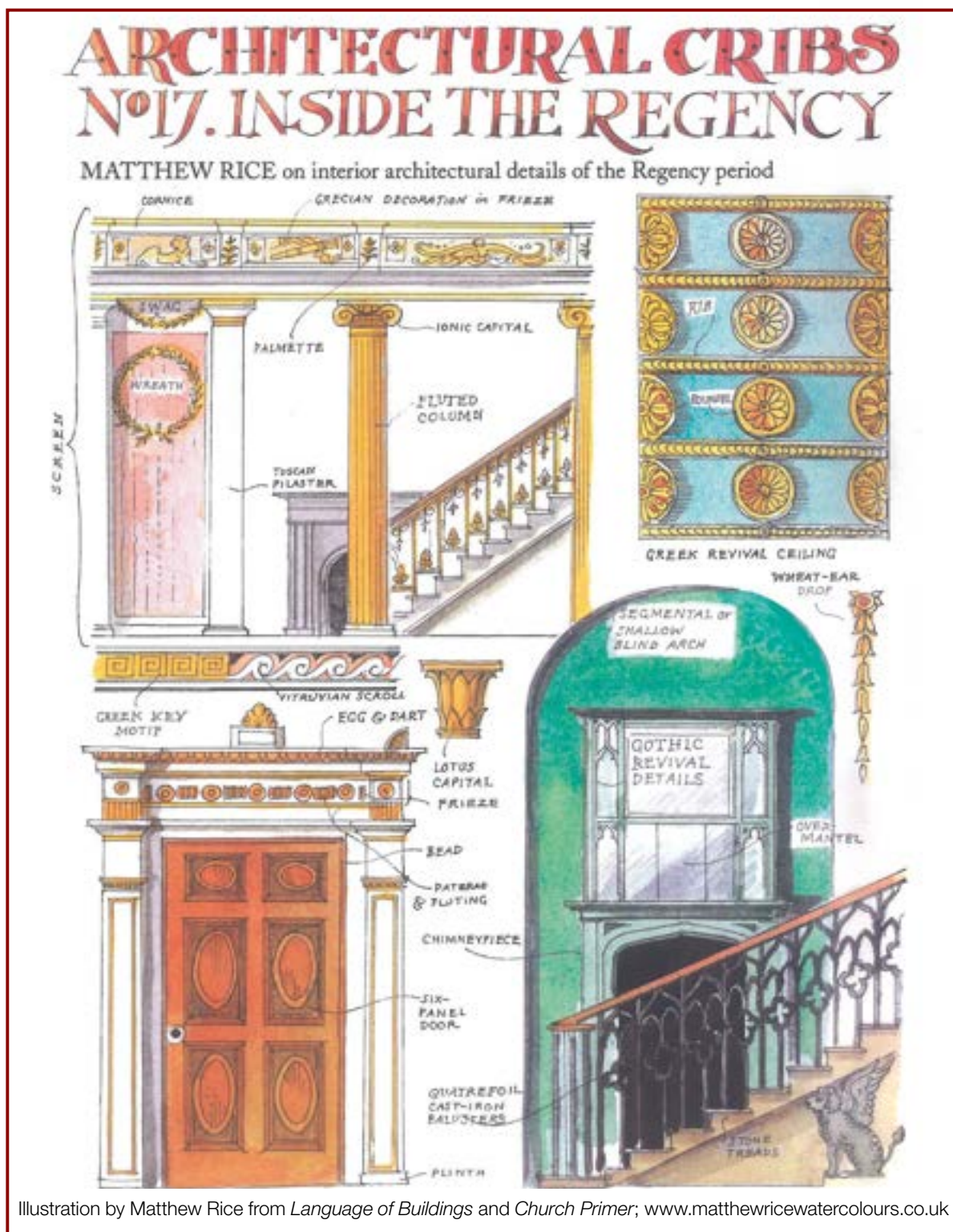


Illustration by Matthew Rice from *Language of Buildings and Church Primer*; www.matthewricewatercolours.co.uk



A two-bedroom apartment within Lake Como's *Casino Royale* villa has come to the market with Italy Sotheby's International Realty. Villa La Gaeta, built in 1929, served as the setting for the final scenes of the 2006 remake of the James Bond film starring Daniel Craig. The apartment, in a south-facing annexe, was fully restored in 2023 (00 39 031 538 8888)

The Round House near Bishop's Waltham in Hampshire was constructed as a part of the town's water-supply system in 1894. Covering 5,000sq ft and standing in 12½ acres of grounds, it has five bedrooms and five reception rooms. £3m through White & Guard (01489 893946). 🐉



Our friends in the north

A northern cast of characters takes centre stage, these five distinctive British Isles homes proving that there is plenty of life beyond Watford Gap



↑ **Dunbartonshire, excess £635,000**

In 1806, Isambard Kingdom Brunel was born, Admiral Lord Nelson's state funeral was held and Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger died in office. Category B-listed Ardmore House was also built. Today, it is a 'once seen, never forgotten' kind of house, thanks to its striking central tower with crenellated parapet. Housed within this, on the second floor, is a study, together with two of the six bedrooms, the others being on the first floor. A circular cupola crowns the entrance hall and its sweeping staircase, flooding this welcoming space with light. Although a little updating here and there wouldn't go amiss, Ardmore House currently combines 'period proportions with contemporary artistic flair,' according to the agent. Situated on the northern shore of the Firth of Clyde on the accessible Ardmore Peninsula, between Cardross and Helensburgh, the views over the Firth of Clyde and north to the Arrochar Hills and Western Argyll are glorious. Ardmore House sits in about 22 acres of land, where the ruins of the listed Ardmore Tower, possibly a defensive structure dating to the 16th or 17th centuries, are situated.
Strutt & Parker (0131-718 4489)



↑ **Scottish Borders, £1.25 million**

'The grounds are a defining feature of Old Greenlaw, extending to about 16 acres in total. They comprise formal gardens, sweeping lawns, mature trees and well-enclosed paddocks, creating a highly attractive and private environment,' says the agent of Old Greenlaw farmhouse. Dating to the Georgian era, the façade of this property, which is close to the historic Berwickshire town of Greenlaw, is clearly of the period, as are its high ceilings, sash and case windows, fine cornicing and open fireplaces. The rooms are spacious and lend themselves to family living and welcoming guests—there are five bedrooms, as well as four reception rooms. A traditional two-bedroom stone cottage in the grounds offers income-generating opportunities or multi-generational accommodation. 'Old Greenlaw represents a rare opportunity to acquire an elegant Georgian country house with land, cottage and outbuildings, offering considerable charm, flexibility and significant potential,' adds the agent.
Knight Frank (0131-222 9606)



↑ Cheshire, £1.25 million

Period character and tasteful modern interiors marry perfectly at the four-bedroom Mill House, which is located in the peaceful hamlet of Cuddington near Malpas, where it is surrounded by rolling countryside. The Cheshire brick exterior is elegant and the ideal introduction to the equally sophisticated and generously proportioned rooms within, not least the reception spaces that include a 21½ft by 19¾ft sitting room, an adjoining light-filled orangery, which the current owners use as a formal dining space, and an open-plan kitchen/sitting/dining room. The kitchen boasts hand-crafted cabinetry and an eye-catching, granite-topped central island where keen cooks, or even those who don't find so much joy in culinary endeavours, will surely savour lunch and supper prep. The gardens combine lawns with mature plantings and contain a garden room, summer house and several outbuildings. Chester is only 15 miles away. *Savills (01244 323232)*



↑ Lincolnshire, £350,000

It may be a well-worn cliché, but White Cottage truly is chocolate-box material. Thatched, white walled and immaculate, this property—which dates back to the late 1600s, with alterations from 1800—feels, according to agent Jade Chapman, as if it's part of a 'fairy tale'. 'This isn't just a home; it's a rare and beautiful piece of our heritage,' she says, using adjectives such as 'captivating', 'authentic' and 'timeless' to describe the Grade II-listed home that is situated centrally in the village of Holton le Clay. Exposed timbers proliferate, including in the spacious dining kitchen that forms the hub of the cottage, and in the adjoining sitting room, where there is also a sizable inglenook fireplace. Ground-floor living is possible, as what could be transformed into another reception room is currently furnished as a bedroom that has an adjoining bathroom. The other two bedrooms have sloping ceilings and are tucked beneath the thatch. The mature gardens run to about half an acre. *Fine & Country (01652 237666)*



↑ → Lancashire, £2.35 million

The parish of Dalton is defined by quietness. 'Its character [has been] little altered over generations: pasture and woodland, dale and hedgerow, criss-crossed by footpaths linking the village to its farming neighbours and the wider countryside beyond,' says the agent of the place where Dalton House is located. Built in the 1880s for the rector of nearby St Michael, this spacious five-bedroom family home still retains many of the features from the Victorian era. This begins at the front door, where there is a Gothic arch, carved stone surround and the original panelled door. Inside, the imposing drawing room, one of five reception rooms, has an ornate ceiling rose; there is Italianate plasterwork in the library; and the original cast-iron fireplace in the dining room will thwart those winter chills. Loxley of Nottingham cabinetry graces the open-plan kitchen. The first floor of the detached coach house is being used as a gym. The mature gardens that wrap around the house ensure privacy. *House & Heritage (01257 441990)*



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Shell we?

All a freshly caught and picked crab demands is that you dress for success, says Tom Parker Bowles

THERE'S something uniquely British about dressed crab, a dish that is at once smart and splendidly laid back, as happy in the hushed booths of Wiltons as it is in some shabby seaside shack. For this is a thoroughly modern crustacean that, having climbed out of tracksuit and trainers, lowers himself into a hot bath, before slipping into top hat and tails. Don't, however, be fooled by his elegant attire. For beneath that suave façade lies a hint of full fathom five, of darkness and the debased.

This is, of course, part of its eternal appeal, the essential mix of bosky brown and virginal white, bass versus treble, where thud and grumble meet the choir celestial. This is a dish that not so much requires the dark meat as demands it. It's also a dish that insists upon the very freshest crab, preferably killed, boiled and picked yourself. Pasteurised meat has no place here.

Ok, so I appreciate that live crabs are not always the most practical of ingredients. I once bought a pair of particularly boisterous browns from a fishmonger in London's Chinatown. Travelling back home on the Tube, they made a sudden bid for freedom, ripping through their plastic prison and scuttling down the carriage. My fellow travellers were less than amused. If you can't buy them live, ask your fishmonger for his most freshly boiled beasts. This year, they may be a little more expensive, thanks to a rampaging invasion of octopuses (never octopi).

As coastal waters continue to warm, in they swarm, finding easy feasts in the crab and lobster pots scattered across the seabed. For the cephalopods, it's one endless 'all you can eat' buffet. For the fisherman, however, it's less than ideal, as they haul in pot after pot filled with depressingly empty shells. I had stopped eating octopus after watching *My Octopus Teacher*. The eight-armed hero of that documentary seemed so sweet,

‘Once you get into a rhythm, the cares of the world slip away. I find the process not only deeply satisfying, but therapeutic, too’

so human, that it seemed awful to even contemplate throwing him on the *plancha*. But then pigs are every bit as sentient and intelligent and I still devour them with conscience clear. No one likes a hypocrite. So, in solidarity with our fine fisherman, it's time to embrace octopus once more.

Back to the crabs and, for maximum gratification, you want to pick them yourself, twisting off the limbs and claws, cracking the carapace in half, digging and gouging into

each tiny joint and crevice to extract every last morsel of sweet white meat. A specialised crab pick is ideal, but the handle of a teaspoon will do the job just fine. Use a rolling pin to crack the claws lightly. Brown meat is the easiest to remove, lurking at the top of the shell, simply peeled or spooned away. Once you get into a rhythm, the cares of the world slip away. I find the whole process not only deeply satisfying, but rather therapeutic, too. Like artichokes and whole prawns, much of the joy lies in the undressing, but do beware the errant shard. Nothing ruins a dressed crab like the jarring, incongruous crunch of cartilage or shell. Sift through the white meat with your fingers, then sift again.

When it comes to the dressing, I err towards the simple. No surprises there. There's little need for breadcrumbs, nor elaborate, baroque garnishes involving anchovy fillets, capers and olives. Sure, the recipe below incorporates a boiled egg, but that merely gives the brown a little more body. A half lemon and homemade mayonnaise is all you need at the side, together with soft brown bread, lustily buttered, a non-negotiable part of the deal—and, perhaps, a few drops of Tabasco.

For those who can't face this most civilised of picking processes, you'll find dressed-crab perfection at Wiltons, J Sheekey and Bentley's in London, as well as The Company Shed in Colchester, Essex, and The Lobster Shack in North Berwick, East Lothian. Serve with a glass of something dry, white and cold. 🦀

River Cottage dressed crab

This comes from *The River Cottage Fish Book*, written by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and the late Nick Fisher, and still one of the great works on all things piscine. 'This is our favourite way to eat a really fresh crab', they write, 'usually one that we've caught, cooked and picked ourselves. It can be served up in the main shell of the crab or on a plate.'

Ingredients

Brown and white meat from 1 medium-large brown crab	1 large hard-boiled egg, peeled and coarsely chopped
The crab's main shell, scrubbed under a hot tap and left to dry (optional)	2tspn mayonnaise
	½–1tspn English mustard
	Freshly ground black pepper

To accompany

Buttered brown bread
1 small red onion, very finely chopped
A few lemon wedges

Method

- Lightly flake the white crab-meat, doing a final check for any slivers of shell, then pile it up in the middle of the carapace shell or on a medium-size serving plate.
- Put the soft brown meat in a bowl and combine with the chopped hard-boiled egg, the mayonnaise, some English mustard to taste and a twist or two of black pepper. Make two mounds of the

brown-meat mixture on either side of the white meat.

- Serve the crab with the brown bread, red onion and lemon wedges.
- The idea is to put some white meat on your buttered bread, top with a little of the brown-meat mixture—use it almost like a sauce—then sprinkle the whole with a little chopped onion and a squeeze of lemon juice.



Lord of the skies

They may be tiny pests with a taste for fermenting produce, but fruit flies are both a gift to scientific research and the first living creature in space, discovers Ian Morton



With 60% of its genes coinciding with those of humans, the diminutive fruit fly is becoming increasingly important to medical research

WHEN the fruits of autumn beckon, with them will come those pestilential little flies. Across every continent and every island where fructification is celebrated, they will take to the air in search of sustenance and reproduction, an abiding nuisance wherever the pomaceous perfume of decaying orchard mesocarp ascends, sugary cooking odours arise and picnic goodies and wine glasses attract. Diminutive they may be, but they bear a big name, *Drosophila melanogaster*, a classification vested on them in 1830 by German entomologist Johann Meigen. It means 'black-bellied dew-lover', a strange description for flimsy brownish insects with big red eyes and a taste for fermenting fruit. However, what they lack in stature they make up for in numbers, and here's an extraordinary thing—as we wave them away, we should also celebrate the little blighters, for this creature is entomology's greatest gift to scientific research.

Learned papers concerning fruit flies run into thousands, many confirming previous work, and six Nobel Prizes have been awarded for medical and physiological findings based on this humble pest. Investigations were first triggered in 1901 after California-based entomologist Charles W. Woodworth bred fruit flies in captivity, noted variations over generations and suggested that the species could be used as a model organism for research into the genetic results of inbreeding. This notion was taken up by a Columbia University team led by Thomas Hunt Morgan, whose studies into sex-linked inherited traits (such as the insects' eye colour) resulted in

the monumental conclusion that the units of heredity were genes strung on chromosomes inside cell nuclei. Not surprisingly, Morgan was duly awarded one of those coveted prizes. Today, as ever, it demands a leap across the credulity gap to attribute this seminal discovery to the constitution of a flimsy fly barely one-eighth of an inch long.

‘Its name, *Drosophila melanogaster*, means black-bellied dew-lover’

The mass of research that followed included putting fruit flies into a US space ship in 1946, when they became the first living creatures to be subjected to a rocket trip. Another batch was retrieved safely from a second launch the following year. However, the greatest significance of the huge body of study into fruit-fly genetics has been the conclusion that 60% of their genes coincide with those of humans and that 75% of human genes linked to disease find an equivalent function in the insects. This is increasingly important, for the humble fruit fly has accordingly become the genetic laboratory model for research into neuro-degenerative disorders, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases. It has also been pivotal in an extensive range of other vital studies, from immunity and addiction to stress, cancer, diabetes, dementia and the mechanism of ageing. A further element in this insect's contribution to research is the presence of a 'fat body', a component

Ripe and ready

- When the season is right, infestation can occur rapidly. The female fruit fly lays 500 eggs at a time and their development to adulthood takes only a week. Their lifespan is about 50 days and the population can triple every two days
- Rotting fruit and vegetables are favoured as egg sites—the insects are also called banana flies and pomace flies—but any moist location may suffice, including drains and damp domestic items, such as mops and sponges
- The most effective way to keep fruit flies away from domestic processes is said to be a jar or bowl of cider vinegar with a few drops of washing up liquid. The cider beckons them, the soap breaks the surface tension and the flies sink and drown

that stores nutrients and is the equivalent of the liver and body adipocere in mammals, including us. It regulates the circadian cycle, the natural 24-hour biological oscillation whereby nights and days are managed to maximise physical condition.

Where will this creature's contribution to our knowledge of the human condition eventually lead? It is estimated that 50 million fruit flies are reared annually in more than 3,500 laboratories in 72 countries and their study involves some 10,000 scientists. They are also the basic subject of most biological and genetic university courses. It is clear that this tiny nuisance has more to tell us about ourselves. 🐛

Reinventing the country house

Next month, leading experts in architecture, interior design, stonework and cabinetry will share the secret of creating a country house suited to life in the 21st century at Daylesford's Heritage Barn



The Cotswolds will be the setting for a COUNTRY LIFE panel discussion featuring four industry experts at Daylesford's Heritage House

THE past decade has seen a quiet revolution in the history of the country house. As properties are passed from one generation to the next, they are reshaped by new approaches to space, design and both family and working life. Together with this evolution, there is a renewed focus on materials and craftsmanship that is elevating country houses both large and small—as are leaps and bounds in technology, sustainability and thermal efficiency, bringing levels of comfort rarely enjoyed by previous country dwellers. The panel at this event will feature experts in their

fields, including Ross Sharpe, one of the UK's leading architects with a depth and breadth of experience in both contemporary and classically inspired homes; Pippa Paton, who has transformed a broad range of Cotswolds houses with her pared-back aesthetic; Edward Smith of Artorius Faber, the specialist in British stone; and Andrew Petherick of cabinetry specialist Guild Anderson, which has built a significant reputation for its unswerving commitment to craft, materials and painstaking design. The event, at the magnificent Heritage Barn, will be followed by lunch and an opportunity to seek advice from the panel. ➔

Date Friday, October 2

Time 11am–2pm

Where Daylesford, near Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire

Tickets £65, to include a two-course lunch and a glass of wine.

To book, telephone **01608 692871**

or visit www.daylesford.com/shop/events/upcoming-events/country-life-reader-event-the-secret-of-reinventing-the-country-house

MEET THE PANELLISTS



From left: Pippa Paton founded her design studio in 2006, specialising in the sensitive renovation of historic Cotswold houses and repurposing estate outbuildings. Her work combines an understanding of a building's evolution with contemporary living, creating spaces that respect their heritage. Her third book, *Twenty First Century Cotswolds, Volume III*, has just been published.

Andrew Petherick is a director at Guild Anderson, specialising in kitchens and



back-of-house spaces for country houses. He founded the Inspiring Makers Conference, supporting emerging cabinetry and furniture-makers, and is a guest lecturer at The King's Foundation, established by Charles III.

Ross Sharpe studied Architectural History and Architecture at St John's College, Cambridge, and has practised architecture for nearly 30 years. His award-winning work, recognised by RIBA, the Georgian Group and the Historic Houses



Association, spans the country. Specialising in classical and traditional design, he is a director at Yiangou.

Edward Smith is a founding director of Artorius Faber, a family-run Somerset business specialising in bespoke British stone. The company embraces a classic English sensibility, creating stonework suited to both traditional and contemporary design styles, with an emphasis on craftsmanship, quality, character and timeless detailing.



Cramping my style

For former Boy Scouts, cramp balls offer a fun-filled way to pass an afternoon, suggests John Wright

Illustration by Kateryna Kyslitska

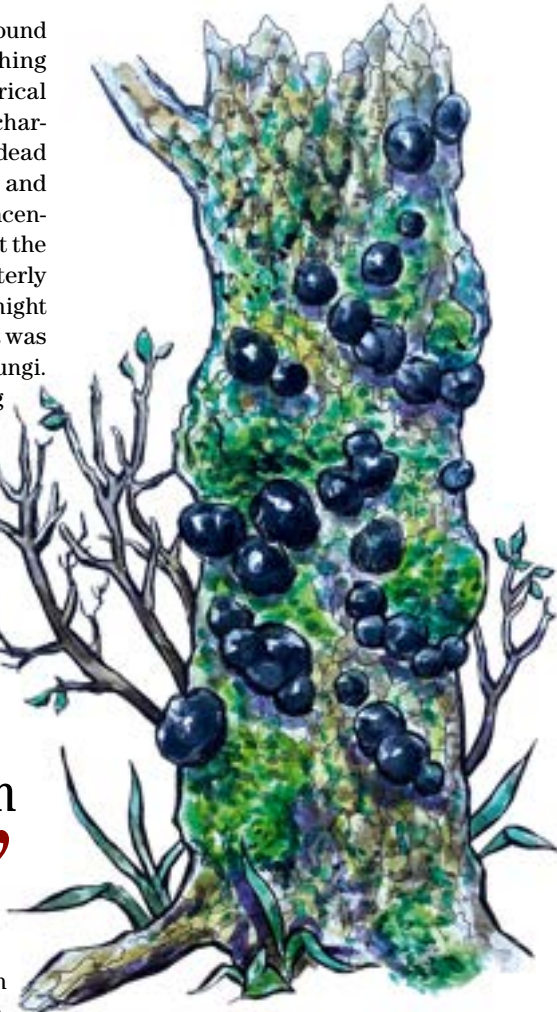
MORE than 60 years ago, I found myself looking at something infuriating. It was a spherical lump of what looked like charcoal, 1½in in diameter, growing on the dead trunk of an ash tree. I broke it away and found it light in weight and sporting concentric rings when broken in half. I had not the slightest idea what it was and felt utterly humiliated by my ignorance. My mood might have lightened somewhat had I known it was the beginning of a life-long passion for fungi.

Cramp balls—also known as King Alfred's cakes (not 'King Alfred's balls', as my young daughter once declaimed)—are very common on ash trees and are found sometimes on beech. They are the fruiting bodies of a fungus that grows inside dead or dying trees, *Daldinia concentrica*.

‘This fungus and its close relatives evolved in desert conditions’

I often collect a cramp ball if it is at the spore-production stage—something clearly to be seen by the black ‘dust’ on and around it. At home, I place a large sheet of white paper (white tablecloths never recover) on an otherwise bare table and place the cramp ball in the middle. The surrounding paper will slowly display a corona of black spores. However, none will appear until sundown, as the spores are only produced at night—something, you will agree, that requires an explanation. This fungus and its close relatives evolved in desert conditions and the spores must stick to their woody host to germinate. With the dry conditions in the day preventing spore adhesion, they wait for the dew of night.

Each fruiting body is covered in thousands of tiny holes, each of these being the neck of a flask-shaped structure (perithecium) embedded in the black surface. The spores are fired (actually, they are squirted) at



Cramp balls, which are also known as King Alfred's cakes, are long burning and often employed as firelighters

high velocity from multiple sausage-shaped structures (asci) arrayed on the inside surface of the flask. They elongate to reach the neck, fire their eight spores, wither, then the next ascus does the same. The spores will keep coming for a couple of weeks at home, but in the wild they can keep going for three months. We are talking about a large number of spores here, so I once collected those fired from a single, medium-sized fruit body, then made the measurements and did the maths. The result showed the number to be about 16 billion spores, taking up about a cubic centimetre.

The concentric layers seen in these fruiting bodies have caused much confusion over the years. They look like annual tree-rings, but all of the layers are produced in a single year. One cramp ball will form these layers, then produce one fertile (spore-producing) layer, then die. The rings are, in fact, layers of alternately oriented fungal tissue, one purpose of which is to act as a water reservoir.

I suspect that is enough science for one day, but there is one interesting and arguably useful purpose for cramp balls. We are in Boy Scout country here, so, as a one-time follower of Lord Baden-Powell, I show it to people on my various walks. It only works with dry specimens, so choose some that are disintegrating and that appear dry or use specimens you have dried yourself. Break them open, if necessary, then pick up your trusty fire steel and striker and use it to direct sparks onto the broken surface of your cramp ball. It all takes a bit of practice, but a red glow should appear, which will benefit from some gentle blowing. More-or-less-intact specimens can keep burning for half an hour, although other people report a duration of several hours with large examples.

There is one potential problem: cramp balls burn hot, but very slowly and their ignited state is not always noticeable. This has resulted in them being casually consigned to a waxed-jacket pocket, where they cause frantic pocket-bashing and emptying for the victim and much amusement for onlookers. Yes, I have made this mistake myself. 

As rare as hen's teeth

There are six other cramp ball species recorded in the UK, but the only other one I have found is *Daldinia fissa*, which grows on partially burned gorse bushes. There are a few hundred records of these species, but more than 16,000 for the one described in this article (*D. concentrica*). The rest do not—or barely—reach double figures. It is a total mystery in the world of fungi why some species within a group are extremely common and many more are extremely rare.



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High and mighty: Taos in New Mexico is tipped to benefit from a super El Niño, with greater snowfall predicted for southern US states



Go west

Brits rarely need encouragement to chat about the weather, but this winter presents a particularly compelling reason to do so. A powerful El Niño is brewing in the Pacific—already dubbed a super El Niño—and it could redraw the American ski map. Named by Peruvian fishermen after the Christ Child, El Niño is a natural climate pattern that produces

unusually warm Pacific waters, which tend to peak around Christmas. Returning every few years and generally reaching its height during the northern-hemisphere winter, it can push the Pacific jet stream south, carrying storms and moisture with it. Although the knock-on effects for European winters are harder to predict, across North America the pattern is clearer: El Niño years historically tilt the odds for snow in California and southern US mountains, with resorts further north often missing out. Among the more intriguing beneficiaries is Taos, New Mexico, where Aspen locals go to escape ‘silly season’

in Hollywood-on-snow. Founded in the 1950s by German-Swiss émigré Ernie Blake, Taos retains an old-school, European mountaineering streak: steep chutes, bumps and glades, with some of its finest terrain still reached by hiking along the high-altitude Highline and West Basin ridges (12,000ft). In Taos itself, low-slung adobe buildings house art galleries, margarita bars and laidback restaurants serving blue-corn enchiladas, with the desert stretching towards the Sangre de Cristo Mountains beyond. Will El Niño deliver? Ask us in April. Until then, it provides a splendid excuse to ski somewhere new (www.skitaos.com).



It's all down from here

For decades, Courchevel's hierarchy has been expressed in altitude. Courchevel 1850 had the palaces, Michelin stars and eye-popping chalets, then, as one descended the valley, things became progressively more relaxed—and affordable. That distinction is beginning to blur. This winter, Maisons Pariente, founded by the fantastically stylish French family behind Le Coucou in Méribel and Crillon le Brave in Provence, unveils the 37-room Hôtel Saint Roch (*left*), with richly layered, *dacha*-inspired interiors and laidback intimacy. Perhaps the more interesting shift, however, is downhill. Courchevel Moriend (1,650m) gains two five-star hotel-residences, Sundance Courchevel and Steamboat Lodge, as La Tania, the valley's low-key, wooded outlier, welcomes the four-star ski-in/ski-out La Bârma hotel and Residences. Courchevel's appetite for the high life remains undiminished, but you no longer need to climb quite so far up to find it (www.maisonspariente.com; www.alpine-resorts.fr; www.barmahotelcourchevel.com/en).

The long way round

Verbier has spent the past 15 years trying to solve a peculiarly Swiss inconvenience. Savoleyres and La Tzoumaz—the sunny slopes rising above the left side of town—form part of the Verbier 4Vallées ski domain, yet reaching them from the resort's main ski area has traditionally required a bus journey across town. The solution, a new lift linking Savoleyres with Les Esserts, was first proposed in 2011, but

Swissness intervened. Local objections, including a determined challenge from a Savoleyres chalet owner, raised concerns over forest clearance, landscape and environmental impact, ultimately reaching the Swiss Federal Tribunal. In 2016, the court partially upheld the appeal and demanded further environmental assessment, leading to a redesign.

This December, the full Esserts–Planards–Savoleyres Télémixte (a blend of gondola

cabins and chairlifts) is set to complete the missing link. In preparation, Verbier has retired its 56-year-old Savoleyres gondola—Switzerland's oldest operating gondola—until last month—and added a new piste from Carrefour to Les Esserts. Visitors arriving to inspect the hard-won new connection can also check into Norwood's shiny new 36-suite Ski Lodge, opening this December in the heart of town (www.verbier4vallees.ch/en; www.norwoodalpineretreats.co.uk).



Verbier, a mecca for skiers since the 1960s (*above*), will become more accessible courtesy of a lift linking Savoleyres with Les Esserts →



A home from home

The best hosts know that a comfy bed and well-stocked cellar are only the beginning. Invite close friends to stay and part of the pleasure is knowing what will interest them, whom they might enjoy meeting and how best to share the place you love with them. It is an ethos that defines Iconic House, a collection of 'Maisons Hôtelières' founded by brothers Robin Michel and Thibaud Elzière and dotted across France. The brothers own all seven houses, each of which is selected to reflect their passions and the way they like to spend time with family—from skiing in the Alps to surfing on the Atlantic coast and lazy Provençal wine harvests. Each is fully staffed and impeccably equipped, yet retains the privacy and ease of a family home.

This winter, that idea extends beyond the houses with Compositions, a new approach that begins with getting to know guests before they arrive, then suggesting days around what might interest them. At Le Sarto in Megève (above)—a classic chalet designed by Henry Jacques Le Même—a day's ski touring far from the lifts might be followed by a guided tour exploring Le Même's architectural legacy in the village. At Le 1550 in Courchevel, guests can drive a piste basher before enjoying a cheese tasting at a local farm.

It is a pleasingly personal alternative to the ubiquitous menu of 'money can't buy experiences' proffered by many properties, rooted in the simple truth that the best hosts are those who anticipate what their guests will enjoy (www.iconic.house/en).

Bottoms up

Three years ago, Matteo Oddo, the genial bar manager at Badrutt's Palace in St Moritz, Switzerland, stumbled upon rows of forgotten spirits and wines in the hotel's dusty cellars. The Ports, whiskies and vermouth wines, among others, had been collected by generations of the Badrutt's family. A bottle of honey liqueur, bottled, according to its label, in 1870, was in perfect condition thanks to the subterranean room's steady temperature and dim light. A carefully curated selection of cocktails, made using some of these rediscovered alcohols, are available to sample in the Renaissance Bar. Quantities are restricted and service is only available to guests whom Mr Oddo and his team feel will understand the messaging behind these very special drinks. The bottles are symbolic, he explains, of the hotel's heritage and pioneering hospitality philosophy. 'My name is not Badrutt's,' he concludes, 'but I am honoured to be here and to provide exceptional service' (www.badruttspalace.com). *RP*



Beyond the piste

Set amid rolling meadows with views over Mont Blanc, Megève has always understood that there is more to a ski holiday than skiing (just ask Audrey Hepburn's character in *Charade*, 1963, right) and this winter offers fresh temptation for those who prefer their mountain air served with a long lunch and an excellent facial. The Sibuet family, whose cluster of rustic-chic hotels has helped shape Megève's particular brand of Alpine living, has been busy. Lodge Park enters its centenary year with the region's first Longevity Spa, offering advanced therapies, including photobiomodulation and cryolipolysis, and the adjoining Chalet du Lodge, complete with its own pool and wellness facilities. Les Fermes de Marie is also adding a three-bedroom family chalet in its grounds and the group's skincare brand, Pure Altitude, takes its Alpine credentials a step further with SkiCare,



a six-piece limited-edition collection formulated specifically for skin exposed to altitude and winter weather. It might all sound suspiciously like an excuse not to ski. In Megève, of course, nobody has ever required persuading (<https://en.maisonsethotels-sibuet.com>). *Compiled by Gabriella Le Breton*

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Worth its salt

Benvenuto Cellini's golden Saliera had Francis I, King of France, in raptures, but perhaps this wasn't only because of the cellar's extraordinary beauty

IT was currency for the Romans, a foundation stone of Venice's riches and even, in 1877 Texas, a cause of conflict: salt is a pillar of human history. Without it, preserving food would have been almost impossible in antiquity and because of it trade flourished across cultures. Such a prized seasoning deserved its own vessel and, as tableware evolved over time, the salt cellar was born. It's hard to pinpoint exactly when dedicated containers were first developed, but they were certainly in use on the best medieval tables, so much so that they gave rise to an idiom. Above the salt referred to the people of highest status, the distinguished guests who would have sat at the upper part of the table, closer than the salt cellar to the lord of the house. Below the salt was everyone else. One of the most spectacular



Benvenuto Cellini presents a model of his Saliera to Ippolito d'Este, cardinal of Ferrara

examples of early salt cellars was created in 1543 for Francis I, King of France, by none other than Florentine sculptor, goldsmith and self-confessed murderer Benvenuto Cellini (he killed, among others, a professional rival and his brother's assassin).

Made of part-enamelled gold over an ebony base, his Saliera features two figures, male and female, 'seated with their legs interlaced, suggesting those lengthier branches of the sea which run up into the continents,' as the artist wrote in his autobiography. 'The sea was a man, and in his hand I placed a ship, elaborately wrought in all its details, and well adapted to hold a quantity of salt...

The earth I fashioned like a woman, with all the beauty of form, the grace, and charm of which my art was capable. She had a richly decorated temple firmly based upon the ground at one side; and here her hand rested. This I intended to receive the pepper.'

'His Majesty could not satiate his eyes with gazing at it'

The design was originally conceived for Ippolito d'Este, cardinal of Ferrara, but when Cellini showed him the wax model, the good reverend was put off by his advisors, who suggested the piece would never be completed in his lifetime—or perhaps it was the sheer cost of the enterprise that frightened him. Instead, he took Cellini and his model to the French king. Francis was smitten and declared, according to the artist's recollection: 'This is a hundred times more divine a thing that I had ever dreamed of. What a miracle of a man! He ought never to stop working.'

The King gave Cellini 1,000 gold crowns, which didn't fail to attract the eye of some greedy servants. Lo and behold, four brigands attacked the artist as he was walking home with the money, but, sheltering the gold with his cape, he fought them off single-handedly—or so he wrote in his biography anyway: 'Then crossing my sword boldly with them, I more than once spread out my arms, in order that, if the ruffians were put on by the servants who had seen me take my money, they might be led to judge I was not carrying it. The encounter was soon over.'

Cellini fashioned his salt cellar between 1540 and 1543—a long time, albeit not quite the lifetime feared by Cardinal d'Este's



Fit for a king: Cellini's magnificent gold Saliera caught the attention of French king Francis I, who had one eye on lucrative salt-tax reforms



Pinch of salt? Cellini fights off a quartet of brigands in defence of the 1,000 gold crowns he received as payment from Francis I for the opulent Saliera

most ambitious in 1541. At the same time, the King sought to enter the lucrative spice market dominated by the Portuguese and particularly the race for pepper.'

Symbolic as it was of Francis I's reign, the Saliera left France less than 30 years after his death, passing to the Habsburg dynasty. Francis's grandson Charles IX, himself King of France, gave it to Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria, who had acted as his proxy in the wedding to Elisabeth of Austria. Today, it is at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, where it endured an adventure worthy of its maker. In 2003, a thief, Robert Mang, climbed on the scaffolding that covered the museum, broke a window and display case and escaped with the cellar. Having initially agreed to give back the Saliera for a ransom, he later changed his mind. It seemed he might get away with it—until a mobile phone brought about his downfall: he was caught on camera buying a new one and identified. It turned out Mr Mang was an alarm-security expert. As for the salt cellar, it had been buried in waterproof wrapping inside a metal box and was recovered unscathed.

advisors—and Francis was as delighted with the real thing as he had been with the model: 'When I exhibited this piece to His Majesty, he uttered a loud outcry of astonishment and could not satiate his eyes with gazing at it.'

However, in *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, art historian Marina Belozerskaya suggests that, as much or more than for its beauty, the King appreciated the latest addition to his tableware for other reasons:

'Although it is best known today as an example of Florentine Mannerist style and the Italophile tastes of Francis I, the vessel bore more complex meanings for the King and his entourage. The magnificent container reflected the monarch's territorial and mercantile endeavours: his schemes regarding pepper and salt.' Salt, she explains, had long provided income for the French crown. 'Intent on obtaining still greater returns, Francis implemented a series of salt-tax reforms, the

The thrill of the fight

JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER (*right*) had a temper that belied his diminutive size. His rows with John Ruskin, whom he sued for libel after the critic wrote harsh words about his *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, *The Falling Rocket*, and art patron Frederick Leyland, in whose house the artist painted a revenge mural of two fighting peacocks after a disagreement over a fee, have made (art) history. Lesser known, but no less spectacular is his quarrel with surgeon, scholar and etcher Francis Seymour Haden (*far right*)—who happened to be his brother-in-law.

In 1848, Whistler had lived for a time with Haden, his half-sister Deborah and their family, and was a regular at their house, often painting family members. Haden was an important influence in the American artist's development, encouraging him to work from Nature. He was also a collector of Old Masters prints and it's to him that Whistler dedicated his first print portfolio, *Douze eaux-fortes d'après nature* (*Twelve Etchings after Nature*), published in 1858.

Not even a decade later, however, the two men had come to blows. The first strain emerged early in the 1860s, when the artist began a relationship with model Joanna Hiffernan, of whom Haden and his family disapproved. The final rift followed in 1867 when James Reeves Traer, who was Haden's medical partner and Whistler's



own physician, died in Paris of alcoholism, possibly in a brothel. Haden arranged a quick burial and tried to distance himself from his late partner, which Whistler viewed as disrespectful. During a heated row, the artist pushed his brother-in-law through a café window.

They never spoke to one another again, but that was not the only consequence of their falling out. Back in London, Haden wrote to the Burlington Fine Arts Club, to whom both belonged, accusing Whistler of assault and requesting his expulsion.



The artist wrote a passionate defence, not denying the facts, but explaining that the Parisian quarrel was the last straw that had brought to an end 'years of insufferable insolence and insults... already deeply grieved by the coarse and brutal way he spoke of a dear friend just dead, I was at last roused beyond endurance by the insults he chose to address to myself. I struck him'. Despite this and the support of his friends, brothers Dante Gabriel and William Rossetti, Whistler was booted out of the club on December 13, 1867.

Arts & antiques

WEIRD & WONDERFUL

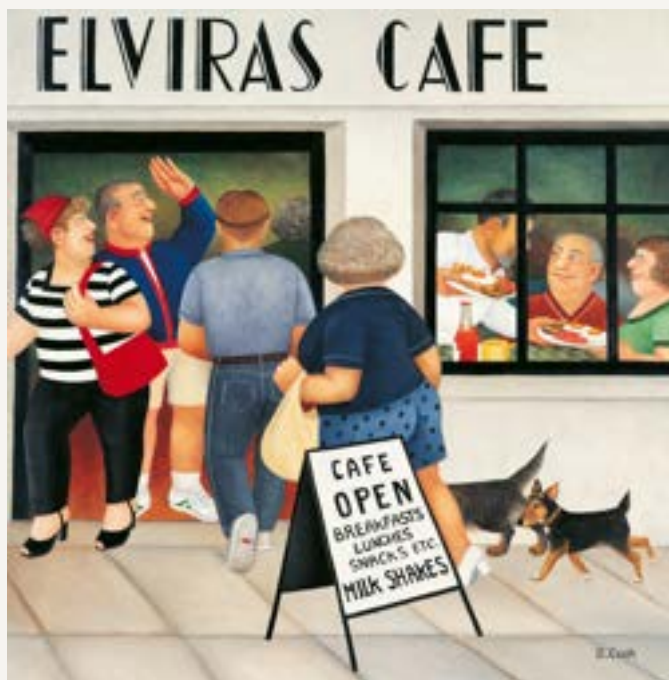
FORD MADOX BROWN owes his reputation to social scenes: the poignant *The Last of England*, which portrays the heartbreak of leaving the country behind to find a better life elsewhere, or *Work*, which captures the different layers of Victorian society and gives manual labour an heroic dimension. Historic pictures are readily associated with him, too: the Manchester murals chronicling notable moments in the city's past, or his depiction of Harold's dead body at the foot of William the Conqueror (*Arts & antiques*, September 2). Furniture, however? Much less so. Yet, Madox Brown was a founding partner of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co, the first company created by William Morris, and did design some pieces himself, including an Egyptian Revival chair dating from about 1861. Reminiscent of a stool found at the British Museum and influenced by a pair of chairs conceived by another painter, William Holman Hunt, Madox Brown's creation would later inspire Liberty's own Egyptian-style seating, the 1884 Thebes stool. One of his chairs (*right*) is now going under the hammer at Woolley & Wallis's Arts & Crafts sale on September 22. It has an estimate of £1,500–£2,500 (www.woolleyandwallis.co.uk).



Take five: facts about Beryl Cook

IN his later years, Katsushika Hokusai, the 19th-century Japanese artist of *The Great Wave* fame, called himself 'the old man mad about painting'. The same could have been said, with the appropriate gender swap, of Beryl Cook—even though she came to art very late.

1. Cook was born Beryl Francis Lansley in Egham, Surrey, on September 10, 1926. She met her husband, John Cook, when they were both children—he was her neighbour—and they married in 1948. By then, he was an officer in the merchant navy and she worked as a cook, after brief stints as a model and a showgirl. In the 1950s, John left the navy and the Cooks ran a pub in Stoke by Nayland, Suffolk. They also kept livestock, although soft-hearted Beryl couldn't bear to have the animals slaughtered. Later, they moved to what is now Zimbabwe. Although she found it hard to adjust to life in Africa, it was there that, in about 1960, she embraced art when, in a bid to entertain her son, also called John, she suggested they copy a painting. 2. Upon their return to England in the mid 1960s, she put her newfound passion to good use, decorating the walls of the



family cottage in East Looe, Cornwall, painting primarily on driftwood and plywood. However, her artistic career took off in earnest in the early 1970s, some time after the Cooks had opened a guest house in Plymouth. One of the guests really admired her work and put her in contact with Bernard Samuels of the Plymouth Arts Centre, which held her very first exhibition in 1975. 3. About a year later, Cook had her second show, this time with the Portal Gallery in 1976, which would continue to represent her until her death. Her paintings—and the book illustrations, prints

and even BBC cartoons that followed—proved a great success with the public at home and abroad, albeit less so with critics, at least until a recent reappraisal. Shown dancing, playing bingo or even having tea in the nude, her bold, humorous, flamboyant figures (*above*), which comedian Victoria Wood once compared to 'Rubens with jokes', were surprisingly at odds with her personality: by all accounts, she was a shy and private woman. 4. In 1995, Cook was recognised with an OBE—and on envelopes the length and breadth of Britain, after the



Post Office reproduced one of her paintings on a first-class stamp. A few years later, she would paint Elizabeth II and a corgi in *The Royal Couple* for the Golden Jubilee. She died on May 28, 2008, but even her death didn't dim her popularity: her latest solo exhibition was at The Box, Plymouth, Devon, earlier this year.

5. This autumn, two shows mark the centenary of her birth. This week, retail outlet Bicester Village, Oxfordshire, in partnership with House of Voltaire, is launching, on what would have been Cook's 100th birthday, 'Beryl Cook and Friends', a one-mile installation featuring cutouts and murals from her paintings (September 10–October 25). An exhibition will then follow at the House of Voltaire pop-up at Frieze's year-round gallery space in London W1 (November 27–December 19, www.houseofvoltaire.org).

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The Beauty Room at Petworth, West Sussex, after the 3rd Earl of Egremont ordered Michael Dahl's portraits of Society ladies reduced in size, their legs bent up behind

Back to the future

Science meets art as the past meets the present in painting restoration. Harry Pearson talks to the conservators that bring pictures back to life

PAINTINGS wear their years as people do. Colours fade, surfaces craze with cracks and spot with age. Although it is natural to think of them as permanent, in truth they are constantly evolving, nursed along the way by teams of highly trained and dedicated conservators. 'The longer I've worked in my profession, the more I have come to see that we are walking beside these great paintings through time,' says Rebecca Hellen, head conservator of easel painting for the National Trust. 'They are changing just as we are.'

How to deal with those marks of passing time is a question with which every picture restorer wrestles. 'There are contrasting

traditions in conservation in southern and northern Europe,' explains Alisa Vincentelli, a freelance conservator who has worked at Tate Modern, The Bowes Museum and Auckland Castle, as well as for Christie's. 'My first experience as a picture restorer came as a volunteer in the conservation room at the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens. In northern Europe, we tend to try to make "invisible" repairs, whereas in Italy and Greece, damage is often integrated into the painting—it becomes a part of its story.'

Pinpointing exactly which moment in its life to which a picture should be taken back is a key part of the restorer's role. 'Leaving aside the repair of damage, for most private

clients the judgement is aesthetic,' says Marine Andrieux, who trained as conservator at the Sorbonne and, after spells at the V&A Museum and Tate, is now a painting restorer with the long-established family firm of Everett Fine Art in Somerset. 'Paintings that have been in families for generations are often simply so dirty [people] can't see them anymore. At the moment, I'm working on a Cedric Morris still life that's been hanging in the owner's sitting room more or less since it was completed. Morris used very thick impasto, which forms a surface that dust and dirt really cling to, so it requires very extensive and careful cleaning'.

Dust and dirt deposits are removed using a soft, wide goat-hair brush, together with





Petworth's portraits of the Duchesses of Ormonde (left) and Devonshire (right) were returned to their full-length beauty in 2022

pecially adapted vacuum-cleaner nozzles, with specialist solvents that can remove yellowed varnish without damaging the paintwork beneath. In the past, treatment was not always so gentle. Before the 1950s, the everyday job of caring for pictures was generally entrusted to household cleaners and restoration was carried out by local artists. 'They came in and removed layers of oxidised varnish, often using caustic substances such as lye, vinegar and even urine. It not only took off the varnish, but often some of the surface paint, too. Then, they'd retouch it with oil paints as they saw fit,' Ms Hellen explains. Today, notes Ms Andrieux, restorers are trained to be more

'In Northern Europe, we make "invisible" repairs; in the south, damage becomes a part of a painting's story'

cautious and minimal. 'We want to repair the damage, not add to it.' The appalling vision of the notorious 2018 'Monkey Christ' restoration of *Ecce Homo* in the Sanctuary

of Mercy church in Borja, Spain, haunts the nightmares of conservators the world over.

'We base restoration on historic facts and scientific analysis,' explains Ms Hellen. Her work on Thomas Moran's *Nearing Camp, Evening on the Upper Colorado River*, 1882, for example, involved 'X-rays, a chemical analysis of the paint and a cross section of the canvas that revealed red pigment bubbling up through the greens and browns like a miniature volcano.' Alongside that came a two-week field trip to Washington DC to consult with American conservators who had worked on Moran's epic landscapes. 'The decisions you make as a conservator in caring for a painting →



What lies beneath: a false-colour image collected by infrared reflectance imaging spectroscopy revealed Rubens's earlier workings on his *The Judgement of Paris*

‘The work combines the theoretical with the practical, art with analysis’

Hidden behind a door and undisturbed for centuries, this magnificent painting, proved to be *The Judgement of Paris* by Francesco Trevisani. Its discoloured, dark varnish was cleaned by Everett Fine Art

are based on the time you meet the artwork in its life and the time that you are in your own life,’ Ms Hellen says. ‘As much as we try to understand the painting, the judgements we make will always be subjective.’

For that reason, believes Ms Vincentelli, when it comes to the modern art restorer: ‘The most important thing is that we never do any work on a painting that is not reversible—because, however much we try to avoid it, there will always be some input from the era we are working in, whether that’s in terms of the materials or the aesthetics.’

Picture conservation is a profession that straddles the past and the present and even



(almost) the future, requiring as it does both a detailed knowledge of materials that have been in use for centuries and an understanding of the latest scientific developments, such as the use of nanomaterials and lasers. It is work that combines the theoretical with the practical, art with analysis. Today, a large conservation department may use infrared reflectography to see through the top layers of the paint and pick out changes made by the artist. (In the spring of 2026, National Trust conservators discovered a ‘horse-drawn carriage, a lady in a bonnet, a gentleman and carriage dog’ hidden beneath the surface of a painting, *Stourhead in its Infancy*, by this very method). X-ray fluorescence examinations, meanwhile, map the chemical compositions of pigment and can reveal hidden under-drawings. Pest infestations—common in old paintings—can be killed off in nitrogen chambers without damaging the canvases.



A light touch: conservator Britta New delicately coaxes *The Judgement of Paris* back to unbridled life at the National Gallery, London

However, not every conservator works in laboratory conditions. Living in rural Northumberland with three small children to raise, Ms Vincentelli created a studio in her home and worked on private commissions. 'I'm pretty sure we were the only family in the village with a Salvator Rosa painting sitting on an easel in the spare bedroom,' she says.

The joys and challenges of the conservator's job come from both expected and unexpected quarters. The National Trust collection of about 13,500 paintings contains many that have had 'interesting' lives. 'Often they were commissioned to display in London townhouses, before being transferred, as their owners' fortunes increased, to country

houses,' reveals Ms Hellen. 'There, they would be moved around, reframed to fit in with the décor or changing fashion; often, they were made smaller, too, to fit into a new space.'

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the latter is to be found at Petworth House in West Sussex, long a centre of artistic patronage. 'The celebrated Petworth Beauties, seven full-length portraits of Society ladies by Michael Dahl from the late 17th century were almost literally cut down to size by the 3rd Earl of Egremont in the 1820s,' explains Ms Hellen. 'The Earl had the portraits removed from their frames and their legs were folded up behind their backs before reframing. The Beauties were in this uncomfortable position

for nearly two centuries. We were given the task of bringing their legs back down again.'

Ms Andrieux took pleasure in restoring a Turner painting of Caernarvon Castle in Wales ('A tiny canvas that, amazingly, had one of his palettes stuck on the back of it'), but also found herself drawn in by the task of reviving an old metal sign from a West Country inn. 'It was a vivid-green coat of arms and had swung back and forth outside the pub in the wind and rain for more than a century. Working on that, and other pieces that form part of people's lives, is fascinating. The clients are so attached to these pieces that the reaction when we return them in their revived state is often quite emotional.' →



This poignant portrait, which bears the monogram of the artist Henry Graves and was painted in 1871, had been stowed under a spare bed when its canvas weakened and fell off its stretcher. Restored by Everett Fine Art, it once more hangs in the house for which it was commissioned

One of Ms Hellen's career highlights also involved Turner. '*Mercury Sent to Admonish Aeneas* was one of four paintings completed in 1850,' she explains. 'It was never sold and came to the National Gallery as part of the Turner Bequest. After that, it suffered some rather rough treatment. It [was] sent around the world on at least half a dozen occasions

‘The rollercoaster of trying to understand Turner’s process... was totally beguiling’

and for some years hung in the British Embassy in Athens. Turner used red and blue spermaceti wax in his paintings. It melts at 39°C, so having it on the wall of an un-air-conditioned building in Greece in summer is clearly not what a conservator would recommend.' This was not the only way the painting suffered: 'At some point, it had been re-lined and the restorers had attached the failing canvas to a new canvas by pressing down on the surface with heavy, hot irons.' Working next to Turner scholar Ian Warrell, Ms Hellen set about tackling the picture's restoration. 'It gave me more sleepless nights than anything I have worked on,' she recalls, 'but also the greatest pleasure. The rollercoaster of trying to understand Turner's process, rarely repeated from



one canvas to the next, to unravel what he was doing with that incredible non-linear surface... it was totally beguiling.'

Not all conservation work ends so happily, alas. Ms Vincentelli recalls restoring an abstract painted wooden relief by a leading British artist of the 1950s for a large institution (which shall remain anonymous). 'Shortly

after I returned the work, which was in muted shades of grey and brown, a firm of decorators came in to paint the room it was mounted in. They evidently thought it was some kind of fixture that was in need of brightening up and slapped emulsion paint all over it. They did quite a thorough job, apparently, but I've never had the heart to go and look at it.' 🐉

How to look after your paintings

'Prevention is always better than cure,' explains freelance conservator Alisa Vincentelli. 'Hang your painting in a pest-free and reasonably consistent environment—avoid exterior walls, or rooms with higher humidity. Minimise light exposure and dust levels. If possible, glaze securely

with UV blocking, shatterproof glazing and apply an inert backboard.

'Try to use an experienced, qualified and conservation-aware framer. Paying a little extra to protect your artwork from the start will play a determining role in its future condition'.



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Limelight in Paris

The French capital's annual Fine Arts fair not only presents works by Henry Moore and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, but also a preview of France's newest major museum, La Musée du Grand Siècle



As it happens, I shall be in France at the time, but only passing through the capital, so I shall not be able to attend this year's Fine Arts Paris (September 19–23). I am sad not only to miss the fair itself, but also because it will provide a foretaste of France's newest major museum, La Musée du Grand Siècle, which is due to open at the Domaine de St-Cloud, west of Paris, in 2028. For France, the 'Great Century' is the 17th, including the reigns of Henri IV, Louis XIII and the Sun King himself. At its core will be the collection of the art historian Pierre Rosenberg, who was not only director of the Louvre and a member of the Académie Française, but Slade professor of Fine Art at Cambridge. Over his nine decades, as well as fine paintings, sculpture and furniture, he collected everyday items that illuminate the life of their times. Designed by François-Joseph Graf, the nascent museum's stand at the fair, with about 40 samples, should give a useful idea of what it will be like.

I should also like to have seen the new design for the fair itself. Despite the recent refurbishment of the Grand Palais, I have always felt that events held there, unless particularly large, seem almost awed by the building, with the stands cowering together in an inward-looking huddle. This time, Charles Zana has been commissioned to produce a décor that accepts the monumentality



Fig 2: A carved marble-roundel portrait of Louis XIV attributed to 17th-century sculptor François Fontelle. With Sismann

of the space, but ensures that the art remains the focus. I look forward to reports of his 'ephemeral city, composed of three villages linked by pathways and punctuated by squares. The idea is to offer visitors an almost urban experience, where works are discovered along the way, as if wandering through a neighbourhood'. Mr Zana's architectural and design practice is based in the rue de Seine, the village Paris art gallery

Fig 1 above: Henry Moore's Reclining Figure Curved, a unique, 56½in-long work in black marble. With Landau Fine Art

neighbourhood, so he will understand his customers' preferred ambience.

There seems to have been quite a turnaround among exhibitors this year, as although the total of 103 is much the same as before, 29 of those are first timers, including five of the six Britons, and 11 are emerging dealers and contemporary makers in the 'New Horizons' section. One of these new younger dealers is the Parisian gallery Ingert and I am intrigued and impressed by its 26in by 43in pastel *Souvenirs d'Andorre* (**Fig 3**) by Charles-Élie Delprat (b. 1987), who describes himself as a 'walking painter'. He does, indeed, walk the world, drawing as he goes in self-made notebooks and working up the sketches in 'the broad strokes and generous washes' of masters he admires.

The Parisian Galerie Sismann, eminent specialist in European sculpture from the Middle Ages to the 18th century, has a suitable example to complement the new museum's display. This is a 24in-diameter marble roundel carved in low relief of Louis XIV (**Fig 2**) attributed to François Fontelle (about 1629–90). Perhaps to lessen the weight, it is presented in a marbleised wooden frame (32½in overall). Fontelle was chiefly notable for his sculptural work for the palace and gardens at Versailles.



Fig 3 left: *Souvenirs d'Andorre* by the self-styled 'walking painter' Charles-Élie Delprat. With Inger. Fig 4 right: Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's *A Young Woman in Renaissance Costume*, possibly painted for the Russian Empress Elizabeth. With Charles Beddington

Sculpture of all periods from antiquity to modern is an important strand in the French market and it is emphasised widely this year. Landau Fine Art of Montreal and Switzerland shows a unique 56½in-long black marble reclining figure (**Fig 1**) by Henry Moore that is tactile even by his standards, perhaps because of the polished grain. Moore was not precious about people touching his work. At the Serpentine Gallery opening of, I think, his last show, he told curators to stop chivvy-ing away children who were clambering through the holes in large sculptures.

The specialist in 18th-century Venetian painting Charles Beddington not only has a *vedute* painting and drawing by Francesco Guardi, but a 28in by 21in fancy portrait of a young woman (**Fig 4**) by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696–1770). This is likely to have been painted for the Russian Empress Elizabeth and the model may have been one of Tiepolo's daughters.

A new artist to me is Alfred Smith (1854–1936), son of a Welsh father and a French mother, whose 23½in by 35in *The Miller* (**Fig 5**) is shown by Londoner Toby Campbell.

Smith was born in Bordeaux, where he became friends with a group of young artists who were influenced by Courbet and Corot, and, when he eventually took to art himself, he followed them to become a realist *plein-air* painter. In this study, the miller is concentrating fixedly as he assesses the quality of his grain; Smith builds a very effective tension between the sharp angles of the rafters and the cogged-wheels and the softening dust that covers everything, including the man. 🐞

Next week Back to British



Fig 5: *Study in concentration: The Miller* by Alfred Smith. With Toby Campbell Fine Art

Pick of the week

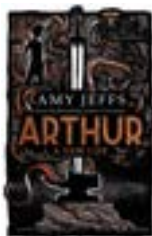
Two years ago, I met George Rowlett (1941–2026) at the private view of what turned out to be his last solo exhibition. It was the 19th held at the Art Space Gallery in Islington, N1, and his paintings also appeared in group shows there. I liked both them and him and was looking forward to meeting him again in two days' time. However, he died unexpectedly on June 18, so this view and show (September 11–October 1) will now be a memorial. A retrospective will come later.

Rowlett was the ultimate *plein-air* painter, finding subjects when tramping in the Alps, on beaches and muddy Thames marshes or hunting Kentish landscapes on his equipment-laden bicycle. Less mobile in recent years, he concentrated on his own flowery garden at Walmer in Kent. He also had a real love of paint, as a material rather than merely a surface. Working with the palette knife or plasterer's spatula, he sculpted his voluptuous flowers as much as painted them. As Michael Richardson, owner of the gallery, says in his forward to the catalogue, Rowlett accomplished this with the most extraordinary finesse. Howard Hull, director of Ruskin's Brantwood, adds in an essay that Rowlett's work has the grace of a relief by Desiderio da Settignano and the colour of a Titian, but 'this is the spirit of van Gogh. Hemingway would applaud'. Had he painted any violets for this show, they would not have been shrinking.





There is more to Arthur than we realise



**Arthur:
A New Life**
Amy Jeffs
(Quercus, £30)

THIS is the third book produced by Amy Jeffs that takes the reader on an exploratory journey through the astonishing and unexpected riches of Britain's legendary history. None of these books repeats material, but they all overlap and, on this occasion, they turn the scholarship and research that underpin the narrative into an important element of the text. As are its two predecessors, it's a treat to read and is once again illustrated with a small number of the author's own distinctive linocuts. Readers may remember these from the series of articles Dr Jeffs wrote for *COUNTRY LIFE* on cathedral saints in 2020.

The story of Arthur, the Once and Future King, is not a defined and linear narrative. Rather, Arthur is a figure to whom a whole collection of tales has attached themselves. Many of these tales bear no clear relationship to one another and only a handful has an obvious position as early or late events in his life. They are sometimes incomplete or survive in different versions that give completely different emphasis and character to their subject. What Dr Jeffs has done is to turn her back on what has become the standard account of Arthur's life in Sir Thomas Mallory's mid-15th-century rendering of the story in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. This is itself a rationalisation and retelling in English of Arthur stories that was popularised through its publication by Caxton and beloved by the Victorians. In place of this canonical narrative, she has taken a different foundational text, the *Brut*, an origin myth of Britain composed in about 1136 by the historian and Bishop of St Asaph, Geoffrey of Monmouth. It is in this highly influential narrative that Arthur is first given an historical biography and it is around the bones of this account that many medieval writers developed their own stories about the King.



King Arthur revisited: Amy Jeffs's compelling tales of the Once and Future King retold from medieval sources reveal a surprising and unfamiliar figure

with a gloss or discussion. In some cases, this contextualises an element of the narrative and explains its medieval political or cultural significance. 'The Hell Council' that opens the main text, for example, is followed by a short history of demon sex. At other points, Dr Jeffs describes the particular experience of looking at a manuscript or visiting a place connected with the book. There is a huge amount of learning here, but the touch is light and the content engaging. These digressions also serve to emphasise the extraordinary cultural richness of Arthur's legacy in buildings, art and literature.

What really shines out from the book are the stories. In our popular entertainment, we are so used to being spoon fed good and bad characters. These are clearly distinguished from each other and appear against well-

‘He is transfigured from a chivalric hero into something rather more elemental’

Not all the familiar stories about Arthur disappear by this approach; we still have the sword in the stone and the characters of Merlin and Mordred. The narratives and personalities, however, appear strangely transfigured and unfamiliar—as does the character of Arthur. There is a multitude of new tales besides. Dr Jeffs tells a series of more than 40 stories, all of them quite short. In each case, there is an introductory quotation from the source of the particular story followed by the narrative itself.

The tales are elegantly written and told in her own words, the detail freely imagined to give them shape and edge. Each is coupled

defined backdrops of place and time. Here, instead, we find something much more complex. It is a world that in location and time shifts confusingly. We begin in Etna, Italy, and travel not only around Britain, but across the Continent of Europe. No less disorientating is the political and religious context of the stories that sometimes seems Christian, but mostly not. There are Biblical as well as Roman connections and Arthur himself is transfigured from a chivalric hero into something rather more elemental. He is an extraordinary figure to whom extraordinary things happen. T. H. White's books on Arthur were childhood favourites. As a group, they capture the comedy, ambiguity and poignancy of one version of the Once and Future King. Here, we have something strikingly different: not a retelling, but a thought-provoking addition and alternative to our understanding of this familiar figure. There is yet more to Arthur than we realised.

John Goodall



All Around is Fairy Ground Timothy Mowl

(Reaktion, £35)

TIMOTHY MOWL has spotted a gap in the history of English taste: a proper account of Regency gardens.

Grand landscape improvements are not part of his narrative—he concentrates instead upon personal gardens designed around country houses and suburban villas. The subtitle of the book is *Pleasure and the Regency Garden*, although his study is not limited to the years in which George IV acted as Regent for his father, but extend to the broader period from 1795–1837, which other cultural historians describe as ‘Regency’. Prof Mowl describes it as ‘a period of sybaritic luxury, of gardens laid out for pleasure, leisure and entertainment, so redolent of artifice that a Regency garden could claim the epithet of fairyland’—hence the title of the book.

‘It was “a period of sybaritic luxury, of gardens laid out for pleasure, leisure and entertainment”’

Garden historians of the period have hitherto concentrated upon the introduction and cultivation of exotic plants, but Prof Mowl’s interest is the proliferation of garden styles that the horticultural activity obscures—‘the Cottage Garden, Swiss Picturesque, Chinese, Indian, Old English and, latterly, the Italian’. He describes with amused enthusiasm the ‘white stuccoed terraces of Greek, Italianate and Gothic villas in spa towns’ and their ‘long-lashed windows giving onto creeper-entwined pergolas and terraces... thatched *cottages orné* and marine villas’. It is a masterly analysis of a confusing period marked by the search for originality: inventive and eclectic, often eccentric. The search for style is matched by the sheer variety of ornamental fancies, such as aviaries, bowers, grottos, kiosks and no end of arty architectural follies, plus an abundance of conservatories, glasshouses, pineries and orangeries. Running through it all is an insistence that gardens are ‘for pleasure, leisure and entertainment’.

The author sums up this proliferation of ideas and garden experimentation as ‘stylish promiscuity’. Analysing it would discourage a lesser historian, but this book is thoroughly



The formal renaissance style can be seen in the gardens of Trentham in Staffordshire (above and below right); the Italian influence shines at Wilton in Wiltshire (below left)



researched and draws upon his lifetime of writing about gardens. He brings the enormous variety of movements, styles and influences together in chapters that look at the options through the experiences of such very different observers as Jane Austen, Lord Ongley and Prince Pückler-Muskau. The chapter on Austen refers not only to the gardens in such novels as *Mansfield Park*, but also to the real-life ones, such as Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire, that she knew well. Ongley’s Swiss Garden in Bedfordshire, however, is treated as an eccentric one-off and the chapter on Pückler-Muskau revels in the wandering Prince’s shrewd observations on English domestic habits as much as their garden styles.

Prof Mowl ties his story to people of the day and how they lived. He notes, for example, the increased involvement in gardens and gardening by the ladies of the house. He also analyses the importance of such publications as *Ackermann’s Repository* and books such as Papworth’s *Rural Residences*. He draws on the under-used Ackermann for many of the illustrations, too. The choice

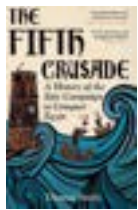


of images to illustrate every theme within his narrative is excellent.

All this confusion of styles ultimately finds its best expression in the extravagant and imaginative dottiness of Alton Towers in Staffordshire. Later on came the fashion for Italianate gardens, yet another reflection of that ‘stylistic pluralism which characterises the Regency garden’. Tuscan-style houses need formal renaissance gardens—Prof Mowl looks to Trentham in Staffordshire and Osborne on the Isle of Wight for proof. Alongside his celebration of such an inventive period in domestic history runs a nostalgia for gardens—and houses—that were influential in their day but have since been lost, including Cassiobury in Hertfordshire and Whiteknights in Berkshire. He also points out that garden historians tend to jump from Repton to Queen Victoria, with nothing about the excesses in between. Does this book fill the gap? Yes, most certainly. It is as comprehensive as is possible, full of intelligent allusions and picturesque detail—well written, too. It is a thoroughly good read.

Charles Quest-Ritson





**The Fifth Crusade:
A History Of The
Epic Campaign
To Conquer Egypt**
Thomas Smith
(Yale, £25)

A GENERATION ago, historians thought only five of the medieval crusades to the East, undertaken from the end of the 11th century into the 13th with the aim of securing Christian control of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, were worth numbering. Some later academics have extended the figure to eight. Western narrative histories have tended to focus most attention on the First Crusade (1096–1102), in which those fighting under the papal banner established the crusader kingdoms of Outremer ('overseas'), and the Third (1188–92), the so-called 'crusade of kings', woven around the somewhat romanticised, chivalric figures of Richard the Lionheart and his Arab counterpart, Saladin.

Contrastingly, coming at the end of the 'classic' period, the late historian Steven Runciman categorised the Fifth Crusade (1217–21) as one of the 'misguided crusades'. Following the fiasco of the Fourth Crusade (1202–04), which had been diverted from its original purpose and ended up attacking the Orthodox Christian city of Constantinople, the Fifth Crusade also ended in defeat for the Franks (the term used for Europeans in the East). Sir Steven's three-volume



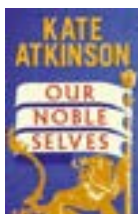
The tale of the Fifth Crusade is dominated by the absence of Germany's Frederick II

'The Fifth Crusade was important in the manner in which it opened up a new front in attacking Egypt'

A History of the Crusades, once the go-to general text for students, is seemingly now so out of date it is not listed as a source in Thomas Smith's study, even if, like his predecessor, he has written his book with an eye on readability. He has done an impressive job, not least because the Fifth Crusade lacks an easy narrative storyline or a 'hero' figure, the nearest to it being the magnanimous sultan al-Kamil.

Called by Pope Innocent III in 1213 (although he would die before the first participants left European shores in 1217), the crusade's lack of an authoritative military leader was apparent from the start. Hanging over the entire campaign was the anticipated, yet unfulfilled, arrival of the charismatic Frederick II, King of Germany. Having vowed to take the Cross, his departure was delayed as he waited for Innocent's cautious successor Honorius III to anoint him as Holy Roman Emperor. The Fifth Crusade was, nevertheless, important in the manner in which it opened up a new front in attacking Egypt ('Babylonia' to the crusaders), the breadbasket of the eastern Mediterranean. The protracted siege and capture of the massively fortified port city of Damietta was a considerable accomplishment. The siege is vividly described in this balanced account, as is the Franks' vainglorious march on Cairo, fatally mistimed weeks before the Nile's waters were about to rise.

Jack Watkins



Our Noble Selves
Kate Atkinson
(Doubleday, £22)

IN her latest wonderfully inventive novel, Kate Atkinson goes behind the scenes of the 1951 Festival of Britain.

This summer-long extravaganza funded by the then Labour Government to the tune of £12 million (it seems a bargain now) was intended as a tonic for a dispirited, postwar country, mired in austerity, and a showpiece for British industry, science and the Arts. It also created significant employment and here Ms Atkinson has brought together an eclectic collection of misfits and eccentrics working behind the scenes. These include the irrepressible Boy, wide-eyed at the sight of his first cow, the dour Welshman, Evans, who spent a week adrift at sea after his ship was torpedoed, the mysterious toff 'Badger' and the elderly Maud Ogilvie, who keeps a toffee hammer in her handbag and may or may not be a spy.

The central character is Harry Flynn, a former foreign correspondent who was in



The unforgettable Festival of Britain in the summer of 1951 provides the backdrop to Kate Atkinson's latest innovative novel

He is, however, very popular with women, although this nearly proves his undoing when he wakes up hung-over to learn that a date has disappeared.

Flynn then becomes trapped in a Kafka-esque nightmare involving the

the wrong place at the wrong time and spent the war on the Railway in Burma, surviving on live mice and snakes. His digestion is still shot to pieces, he drinks too much and he lives in a squalid flat, having abandoned marriage in Wealdstone to the monstrous Ivy; he sends himself to sleep by reciting the Stock List (Honiton lace parasol, original plate of Penicillium mould lent by Sir Alexander Fleming, stuffed Emperor penguin).

grotesque cook who won the Festival cake contest with a disgusting confection, her miserable husband, suspicious colleagues, the police and MI5. Salvation comes in the unlikely form of his self-possessed teenage stepdaughter, Veronica, and her terrier, Mrs Betty, so that eventually Flynn dares to hope for a better life. It's a brilliant fusion of history and mystery with a hilarious character ensemble—highly recommended. *KG*

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WE return to the most northern capital of the world, Reykjavik in Iceland, and the World Bridge Tour event. Did you know that Reykjavik became the capital as recently as 1918? Or that beer was banned until 1989? I'll resist the temptation to trot out that the locals have made up for lost time. Actually, the one pub my team visited was almost empty.

We played this board against the only other predominantly British team, Leslie. England international Ben Norton of Loughborough declared this Six Clubs very nicely against us—shucks.

Dealer North
Neither Vulnerable

♠ AKQ86
♥ J53
♦ 8
♣ KJ75

♠ J74
♥ AQ6
♦ Q1052
♣ 1098

♠ 9532
♥ 8742
♦ 763
♣ 63

♠ 10
♥ K109
♦ AKJ94
♣ AQ42

South	West	North	East
2♦	Pass	2♠	Pass
3♣	Pass	4♣	Pass
4NT(1)	Pass	5♥(2)	Pass
6♣	End		

1) Roman Key Card Blackwood agreeing Clubs.
2) Two of 'five Aces' (including the King of Clubs); no Queen of Clubs.

Wisely staying off the Ace of Hearts lead, West kicked off with the ten of Clubs. This was an exercise in combining your chances and I really like Mr Norton's line.

Winning the King of Clubs, declarer crossed to the Ace-King of Diamonds (discarding a Heart) and ruffed a low Diamond. If the Queen had appeared on the third round, declarer would have been able to draw trumps, cash ♦J9 then cross to ♣AKQ, dropping two Hearts; he'd have conceded only the King of Hearts at trick 13.

Both opponents followed to the three Diamonds, but no Queen appeared. Declarer now cashed the Ace-King-Queen of Spades, dropping two Hearts. He then crossed to the Ace of Clubs and ruffed a fourth Diamond (with dummy's remaining Knave of Clubs). Next, he led a fourth Spade and, when East followed, discarded his King of Hearts (in case East held the

Ace of Hearts and the defence could organise a trump promotion. He could now ruff East's Heart, draw West's last Club and cash the fifth Diamond—slam made.

At the other table, the auction began One Spade—Two Diamonds—Three Clubs. Six Clubs played by North was immediately scuppered when East led a Heart through the King.

However, things looked up when teammate Peter Crouch made this Three Notrumps.

Dealer East
East-West Vulnerable

♠ J5
♥ Q104
♦ AKQ73
♣ J43

♠ K10974
♥ 976
♦ 82
♣ 865

♠ Q82
♥ KJ53
♦ J5
♣ AQ109

♠ A63
♥ A82
♦ 10964
♣ K72

South	West	North	East
Pass	2♥(1)	Pass	2♠
Pass	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT(2)	End		

1) Transfer to Spades.
2) Not gilt-edged, but South hopes West has no side entry, whereupon he can withhold his Ace of Spades stopper the requisite number of times and keep West off play.

West led the ten of Spades and declarer won his Ace on the third round (discarding a Club from dummy), duly exhausting East of Spades. He proceeded to run all five Diamonds.

In the five-card ending, dummy held ♥Q104 and ♣J4; East had come down to ♥KJ5 and ♣AQ (nothing better); and declarer held ♥A82 and ♣K7. At trick nine, declarer led a Club towards his King, East winning the Ace and exiting with the Queen. Declarer won the King and led a low Heart to the ten. East won the Knave, but at trick 12 had to lead a Heart from the Knave. Declarer ran the lead round to dummy's ten and scored the last trick with his Ace, beating that Knave. Nine tricks and game made.

Team Allfrey began our charge up the field and were leading with four matches (out of 15) to play. We needed to finish in the top four to make the semi-finals. If we didn't, Mr Allfrey and I planned a day round the famous Golden Circle.

Crossword

A prize of \$25 in book tokens will be awarded for the first correct solution opened. Solutions must reach Crossword No 4947, Country Life, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, London, W2 6JR, by **Tuesday, September 15**. UK entrants only

ACROSS

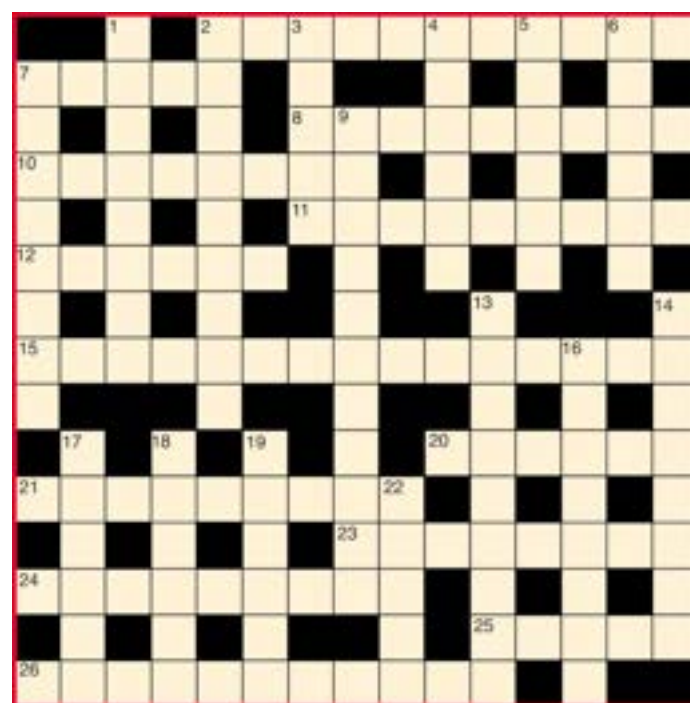
- Lilac tray is positioned in a mocking way (11)
- I slip into crowd for lift (5)
- Each way no time for tender cockney (4,5)
- Disappoints when reduces (4,4)
- Store has one mesh in soft elastic fabric (9)
- Minimum present is a fish (6)
- Fears to swap former loose money using conversion formulae (5,2,8)
- Leave filament (6)
- For example go back to declaring that idea slowly forming (9)
- Create no new pigment (8)
- One who pulls strings to get on (9)
- Lacks obligations (5)
- Countesses I perceive as needy (11)

DOWN

- Clear that not alike (8)
- Herds to us come from this (9)
- Clothing strewn about with no point (5)
- Complete with diplomacy (6)
- Relative is a loose woman (6)
- Fib that socialist made up German songs (6)
- First headteacher to get everyone to grade certification (8)
- Priority to apparent retrograde motion (11)
- Closures due to small shack floors (9)
- Small incision in baits is unnecessary (8)
- Tidied as want to hide that consumed nothing originally (8)
- Read each service (6)
- Fastener is predominant (6)
- Facts about university rank (6)
- Love the clothes of lady who wished to be alone (5)

4947

TAIT



SOLUTION TO 4946

ACROSS: 5, Race; 7, Europeanise; 9, Tench; 10, Emigrated; 11, Snipe at; 12, Pietàs; 14, Statuettes; 17, Cordon bleu; 20, Spoons; 22, Lewdest; 23, Imprudent; 24, Arena; 25, Netherlands; 26, West. DOWN: 1, Peter Pan collar; 2, Bought; 3, Degauss; 4, Mindset; 5, Retainer; 6, Concertino; 8, Photosensitise; 13, Everywhere; 15, All; 16, Covenant; 18, Batiste; 19, Usurers; 21, Ordeal.

The winner of 4945 is M. Ashby, Torquay, Devon

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Samuel Buck city view prints. Other Georgian/Regency prints and paintings, especially collections. Gillray etc.

Georgian/ Regency fender and fire related objects. Mechanical peat bellows with winding wheel. Peat buckets with provenance as above.

Georgian birdcage (see picture) Decorative architectural type.

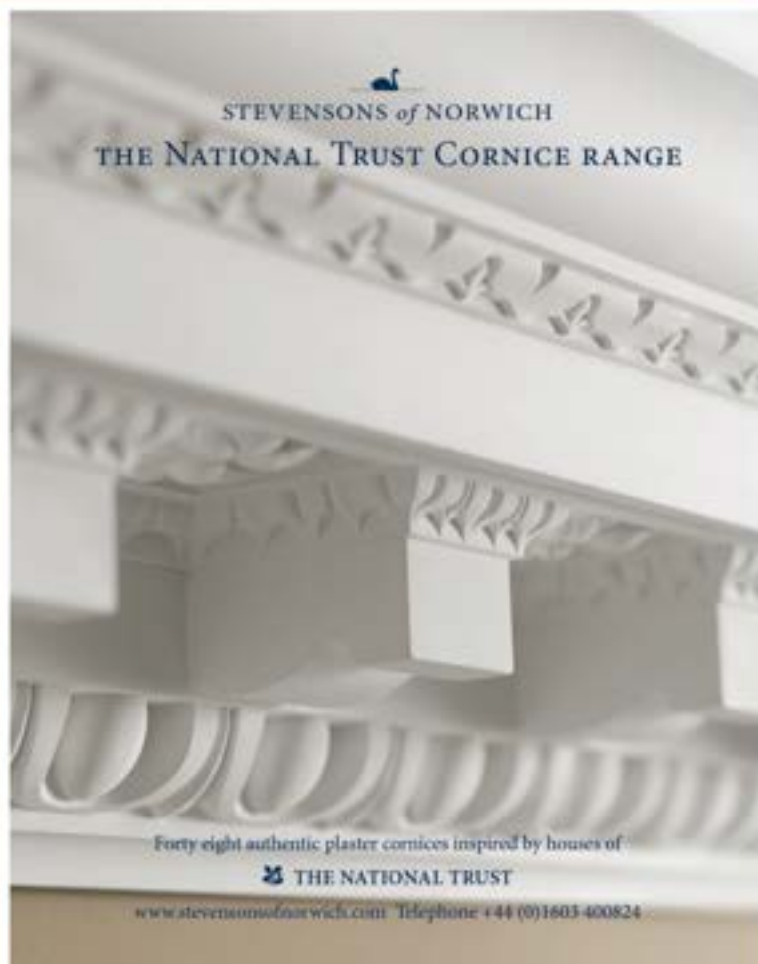
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Ploughing on

MY godfather, who was a vicar, loved decorating his church for the harvest festival. The pulpit would disappear behind sheaves of corn, oats, barley and wheat, so that he had to preach on tiptoes (he wasn't a very tall man) to be seen. He covered the steps to the altar with pumpkins, marrows, courgettes, beans, carrots, beetroot, potatoes, apples, pears, plums—almost all from his own garden. You could barely make your way up the nave for baskets full of his homemade bread. Elsewhere, there were jars of honey and jam and innumerable vases of sunflowers.

Come, Ye Thankful People, Come, we sang, and, of course, *We Plough the Fields and Scatter*. The highlight was when he read his favourite poem, Sir John Betjeman's *Diary of a Church Mouse*, which I can still more or less recite 60 years later:

Here among long-discarded cassocks,
Damp stools, and half-split open hassocks,
Here where the vicar never looks
I nibble through old service books.

He knew most of his parishioners only came for the slap-up meal afterwards, so he always gave special emphasis to the last stanza:

But all the same it's strange to me
How very full the church can be
With people I don't see at all
Except at Harvest Festival.

One feels that the man credited with inventing the modern-day Harvest Festival service, the Revd Robert Hawker (1803–75), an acknowledged eccentric who dressed up as a mermaid and excommunicated his cat for catching a mouse on a Sunday, would have approved. Sadly, I don't imagine that there is a congregation in these islands that will feel especially festive come this year's Harvest Festival, now only a couple of Sundays away.

‘What may be an inconvenience for consumers is a tragedy for the growers’

Thanks to the drought, our farm's vegetable yields are down by between a quarter and a half and, to meet our obligations, we have been forced to buy in at usurious prices. My heart goes out to small-scale farmers with animals to feed, many of whom will have already used most of their winter forage. The media is full of stories about potential potato-crisp and olive-oil shortages, but it doesn't seem to understand that what may be an inconvenience for consumers is a tragedy for the growers. There are many places where

a poor harvest means hunger, even starvation, which is, presumably, the origin of the thousands upon thousands of different types of harvest festival to be found all over the world. In India, the Tamils have *Pongal* (when the new rice they are cooking boils over, they all shout: '*Pongalo, Pongal!*'); in Ghana, the Ga people mark *Homowo* (which means 'hooting at hunger') and in West Africa the Igbo celebrate *Iri Ji* (the new season's yams).

Harvest festivals are not, of course, simply about gratitude and/or relief, but also about hope. Whoever or whatever one believes in, they contain a plea that the next harvest be sufficient, even bountiful. As we have been researching what fruit and vegetables will flourish if next year is as hot as this, a neighbour has been waxing lyrical about the benefits of autumn-sown hardy annuals: love-in-a-mist, larkspur, honeywort, bishop's flower, forget-me-nots (the Argentinian variety—who knew there even was an Argentinian variety?), cornflower, field poppies and marigold, among others. Apparently, the extra time allows their root systems to develop so they're larger and deeper. One should start them off, incidentally, in pots as the soil is still so hard and plant them out in late autumn. As Seneca said: 'Even after a bad harvest there must be sowing.' 🍷

Next week Patrick Galbraith

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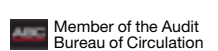
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