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Welcome

Winter 2021



Are you a winter person or a summer person? Do you love the crunch of frost under your boots or do you long for the days when you can run barefoot through the grass? Here at Conservation News we embrace every season as inspiration to create a new, exciting edition of the magazine, but we know that dark days and long nights can leave some people struggling.

If you're one of those people then browse through our magazine to bring some warmth into your life and read about all the good things that winter can bring. If you're already a fan of the colder weather then let our articles remind you of why you love this season!

We've got the low down on winter gardening, places to visit in Kent and a special feature on exploring the history of your property, plus many more articles, ideas and tips for making the most of your home.

So read on and enjoy this wintery edition of Conservation News!

Dawn and Nadene

Competition winner from Autumn 21: Mrs A Crosbie-Cowley, Bearsted



CONSERVATION NEWS

conservationnews.co.uk

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BOXING CLEVER!

It's during winter that evergreens really come into their own. But sarcococca, more popularly known as Christmas box, has more to offer than just neat glossy leaves. From late December onwards sarcococca produce masses of creamy-white flowers. They might not be spectacular to look at, but they emit an intense honeyed perfume. Unlike true box (buxus), sarcococca are immune to box blight and thrive in shade.

Pared-back beauty

The National Trust's Sissinghurst Castle Garden is open during winter, allowing visitors to enjoy the architectural structure and pared-back beauty of this celebrated garden. It is in winter that the brilliance of Harold Nicolson's design comes to the fore.

Head Gardener Michelle Cain said: "We'd love to change the perception that gardens are only interesting in summer."

In winter, the clever use of hedges, used to define the now-famous series of garden rooms, is particularly obvious. And with the abundant flowers and foliage of the high season pared back, the long vistas take centre stage.

Garden NOTES



Winter doesn't have to be white in the garden, even if there is a blanket of snow covering the soil. Most of the colour comes from berries: hollies, firethorn, and other winter fruiting plants that add unexpected splashes of reds and oranges to your winter garden.



Winter wonders

At this time of year birds become bolder, venturing into gardens in search of scraps and well-stocked bird tables. Keep feeders full of calorie-rich food such as peanuts, sunflower hearts and suet products. Put seed mix, chopped apples and grated cheese on ground-feeding stations for robins, thrushes and blackbirds and leave the seedheads on herbaceous plants such as fennel, Verbena and echinacea for birds such as sparrows and goldfinches. Finally, don't forget January marks a really important event for the UK's garden birds as it is the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch.



TREES FOR WINTER GARDENS

Fruit trees are good because they don't grow too big. Choose trees with spring blossom and autumn colour, or ones that hang onto fruits and berries for a long time. Crab apples are perfect and are great even in small gardens. *Malus 'Gorgeous'* looks particularly lovely with its masses of white flowers in spring and long-lasting colourful fruits that resemble the most perfect miniature apples, and hold well into November. They're also ideal for making a tangy, pink jelly.

CONTAINER COLOUR

As the days close in and the first frosts arrive, bedding plants will need removing and replacing if the garden is to offer much winter colour. Here are some of our favourite container plants to brighten up your winter pots.

- Winter flowering heathers
- Violas
- Winter-flowering pansies
- Cyclamen
- Ornamental cabbages
- Skimmia japonica
- *Cornus* (dogwood)



What to do now

- Dead-head autumn-flowering plants and prune summer-flowering shrubs.
- Avoid walking on your lawn or you will damage it fairly easily.
- Add cloches to winter salads to protect from the weather and pests, and wrap pots of half-hardy plants in bubble wrap or fleece.
- Put feeders out. Birds will appreciate nuts, seeds and fat balls. Remember to freshen up water regularly and ensure it doesn't freeze.
- There's still time to get bulbs in the ground in November to guarantee winter colour from January onwards.
- Tidy and clean your garden tools.
- Winter prune apple trees.
- Divide snowdrops.

TIMELY TRIM

With its prolific sprays of fragrant flowers, wisteria is one of the highlights of late spring. Despite its delicate appearance it is an extremely vigorous plant. If you don't prune it back now, whilst it's dormant it will soon run amok. So sharpen your secateurs and set to work. Aim to create a simple, open framework that lets light through to the flowering spurs that will produce next spring's flowers.



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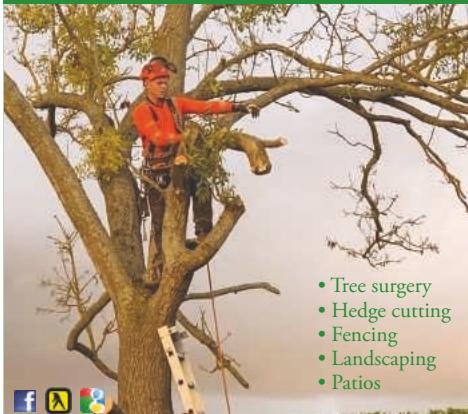
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Winter warmers for outdoor spaces

Photo: neptune.com



The garden can be a great alternative space to 'chill out' with family and friends even during the colder months. So enjoy your garden this winter with these warming tips...



Photo: uniquehomestays.com

Add some ambiance

If you're going to sit out in your garden over the winter then you're going to need some decent lighting. Somehow candlelight instantly warms a space, if not literally then certainly psychologically. Twinkling fairy lights will also enhance the cosy atmosphere by creating strong contrasting shadows and will frame your designated space beautifully. Solar-powered lights are a great idea as they do not need a power source and most come on automatically when it begins to get dark. They come in all shapes and sizes from wall-mounted lights to strings of pretty fairy lights.

Take shelter

Adding shelter will not only increase intimacy but will, of course, shield you from the elements. A gazebo is a great all-round refuge.



Vintage style lights, £45, Cox & Cox

Feed a cold

The best part of alfresco entertaining is of course food and what better way to warm the cockles of the heart than by hosting an Alpine-style gathering? Make hot drinks and cook warming stews indoors and serve in mugs outside. Or even better, spark up the BBQ as an extra source of heat.



Wrap it up

Keeping your guests warm is essential if you want to throw a comfortable, winter garden party. One of the cheapest and easiest ways to stay cosy in the garden is to wrap up in blankets or throws. Lie them over your lap, wrap them around your shoulders or cuddle underneath one with your loved ones, and as the night gets colder, keep close toasty hot water bottles to keep extra warm.

When not in use, look out for large rain (and snow) proof storage boxes that you can stash cushions and throws in. If you get one sturdy enough, they can make excellent alternative seating option in smaller outdoor spaces too.

Photo: uniquehomestays.com



Make sure your outdoor furniture is dry and then soften it up with plenty of faux fur throws and wool cushions.

Cosy seating

In the summer you might want to lie out in the sunshine on a sun lounger or perch on a cool and airy wooden chair in the heat but in the winter a different type of outdoor seating is called for. Get next-level cosy on a padded outdoor sofa with thick, washable cushions add extra comfort and warmth for those chilly winter evenings.

Or what about the outdoor Phoenix chair which heats up at the touch of a button leaving you warm and cocooned, ready to enjoy the colder days or stay outside longer while the sun goes down. The chairs are beautiful, smooth and heat up like a rock warmed up naturally from the sun. Made from cast stone, they are ergonomically shaped, tactile to the touch and very comfortable to sit in.

Available from www.capital-garden.com



Fire bowls

Fire bowls are a popular alternative to chimeneas, providing warmth and ambience for when you want to sit around a nice glowing fire on a chilly evening with friends and family.

The Original Kadai Fire bowls®, made from recycled oil drums which have been riveted together for strength and durability, originate from a traditional India design, the word Kadai is an Indian word for a Balti shaped cooking pot. Kadai firebowls are great for BBQs and open outdoor fires. They add a warm feel to any BBQ or cool evening, for sitting round the fire. (Available locally from Preston Garden Centre, www.prestongardencentre.co.uk)



Don't forget to style your outdoor table top just as you would inside with candles, a table cloth, napkins and lots of platters so that your outdoor meal will look extra special.

Photo: layeredlounge.com



Photo: uniquehomestays.com



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A very British craft

We're experiencing a huge craft revival. It reflects a renewed love of the handmade, but it's also about rediscovering designs that are simple, useful and long-lasting.

Craft has been a part of British life since prehistoric times, when pottery was mostly homemade, and hand-woven woollen textiles shielded us from the elements.

Many types of craft have been made in Britain over the centuries, but the ones that have stood the test of time are the simplest and most functional. Often, they've been made from home-grown materials, so learning about them can help us to understand our landscape and history. Take basket weaving, which may be the world's oldest craft. Our native plants – such as hazel, willow and rushes – were once widely used for weaving baskets. These were the most common form of packaging in olden times – the historical equivalent of plastic cartons and cardboard boxes.

Up until a century ago, most villages would've had their own weaver. There were endless different types of basket for everything from transporting bread and linen to catching fish, trapping birds and carrying bricks and coal; the craft helped, quite literally, to build Britain. The earliest potters used basket 'moulds' to shape their vessels, long before the potter's wheel was

invented. Not many ancient baskets survive because they were used until they fell apart, but today's versions are made just like they were long ago; of all crafts, this is the one that's changed the least.

Woodworking is another British craft that has stood the test of time. Native hardwoods like oak, elm and beech lent themselves to





being carved into furniture, bowls and spoons, and, as with basket weavers, villages would once have had their own wood-turner. By the 18th century, handmade timber furniture was one of Britain's biggest exports. This tradition had a huge influence on the Arts and Crafts Movement and continues to shape our tastes today; modern makers are reviving interest in wood as a sustainable, long-lasting material. Many of our rising furniture designers train at Buckinghamshire New University in High Wycombe, a centre of chair-making for centuries thanks to its beech woodlands (the area is the birthplace of the rustic Windsor chair, and lends its name to Neptune's Wycombe collection, which began with a dining chair).

While craft is essentially about the handmade and the small scale, there are times when it has crossed over with bigger industry. With

pottery, for example, factories like Wedgwood showed how traditional craftsmanship could be combined with thoughtful, ethical mass production. Ironmongery was also initially a homespun affair, with local blacksmiths making basics like tools, cooking pots and nails, but it was transformed by the modern postal service, which brought a huge demand for letterboxes, door numbers and knockers. The change drove craftsmen to be more creative with their ideas, proving that industrial methods can help old skills to thrive.

Perhaps one of the most interesting materials crafted in the UK is wool. Woollen cloth powered Britain's medieval economy and was often referred to at the time as 'white gold'. Everyone from peasants to wealthy landowners kept sheep, whether for cottage weaving or large-scale trade. It's sometimes said that





the roots of Britain's class system lie in this industry, as it was much easier for landowners with big flocks to sell high quantities of wool abroad. Although wool crafts declined after we began to import cotton in the 19th century, there are still reminders of how powerful they once were. In the House of Lords, the Speaker sits on the Woolsack, a 14th-century symbol of wool's importance to the nation's prosperity. One of England's most well-preserved medieval towns, Lavenham in Suffolk, owes its beautiful half-timbered buildings to fortunes made

from wool. And today, a revival of interest in natural materials has brought wool back into the spotlight: Harris Tweed, woven in the Outer Hebrides, is once again in fashion, as are hand-knitted woollen blankets.

Today, globalisation has brought artisan skills from around the world to Britain, ensuring that the craft movement is richer than ever. But traditions like the ones described here help to connect us with our past too. They're even present in the surnames – Weaver, Potter, Turner – that we've inherited from our crafting ancestors.

Article and photos courtesy of Neptune (neptune.com)



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Dressing up

Windows are an essential part of the home for admitting natural light and providing ventilation as well as a view to the outside world, but there's no reason that your windows should be drab and boring. There's a huge range of window dressings available to ensure that your windows are not only functional but beautiful.

From traditional curtains and shutters, to beautiful stylish blinds, there is something to complement every kind of living space.

Blinds

More adaptable than curtains and more versatile than voiles, the newest blinds come in a whole host of modern materials and super-chic colours, that not only make a feature of your windows, but provide flexible sun protection too. The latest fabrics also offer solar protection, so no more faded fabrics or floors. They also block out heat, so rooms stay comfortably cool. With moisture-resistant, anti-fungal and dust-repellent options too, it's easy to keep window treatments in top condition.

If you need to reduce glare, choose one of the many sheer fabrics that provide an effective and modern alternative to nets. A mid-tone grey will take out glare but still provide good visibility. White reacts with the light and is harder to see through, whereas black gives the best visibility but will become totally transparent at night – fine if you're not overlooked, but otherwise you'll need a secondary window treatment to provide privacy. These mesh blinds gently filter out the sun's rays without completely blocking

out light, making them ideal if you work from home – no more struggling to see your computer screen if you're sat near a window.

Make sure that you consider more than just the look of the blinds when purchasing though: you may need blackout blinds in one room but not another and, if you have large windows, you may need either custom-made blinds, or two or three smaller blinds that can be opened independently.

Ensure that you have measured your windows carefully before going shopping and remember that all ready-made blinds will have metric





Roman blind, made in Mika stonewash cotton in Rose, £52 per m, Susie Watson Designs

measurements on the packet, but not all will tell you the imperial equivalent. If in doubt ask the assistant, or go to an established company who will install as well as supply your new blinds.

ROLLER BLINDS

Roller blinds provide excellent protection against heat and light and give the room a neat, uncluttered look. Choose sheer to soften sunlight, patterned fabrics to introduce colour and texture or blackout blinds to block light completely.

VERTICAL BLINDS

Vertical blinds have shaken off their dowdy office image with companies now offering sheers, patterns, even metallics to their ranges. Ideal for high windows and doors, tilt them to let in a lot or a little light, or pull back entirely.

VENETIAN BLINDS

For an easy way to control light levels in a room, Venetian blinds are the perfect option. More affordable than sought-after shutters, they have sleek fuss-free design and are available in a range of finishes to match your decor. Often period homes have irregular sized windows, so in this case, opting for bespoke blinds is a great option.

ROMAN BLINDS

Still a firm favourite in homes, Roman blinds provide a softer look than wood or metal Venetian blinds and look better when combined with dress curtains, a trend which is growing. When pulled up, they make a



Venetian blind from a selection at CGS Blinds, cgsblinds.co.uk



Roman blind from a selection at CGS Blinds, cgsblinds.co.uk

neat stack at the top of the frame that is still visible, so they remain a feature in any decorative scheme.

Designing a country kitchen? Opt for a lightweight, pretty floral blind to create a welcoming environment. Roman blinds are perfect if you like the softness of a fabric window treatment but don't have space for curtains in your kitchen.

Shutters

Shutters are an authentic option for period homes from many different eras, and offered a practical solution before glazed windows were even in use. If you have original shutters they will need to be preserved and maintained, although fitting new shutters will add a beautiful feature. Sales of shutters have grown massively in the last few years. Taking their name from the sprawling 19th-century mansions in America's deep south, the most versatile are plantation-style shutters. These feature louvres that open and close to minimise heat and provide ventilation and privacy when needed.

Café-style shutters are hung only on the bottom half of the window and are more cost-effective. Ideal if you live at street level and need privacy, but still want to allow light in. Tier-on-tier shutters are more versatile, with two sets hung

one above the other, working independently giving greater flexibility.

Full-height shutters are the best option for taller windows. There is usually a dividing rail halfway up which makes them sturdier and enables the louvres in the top and bottom half to move independently.

Quality window shutters are very durable and long lasting. Once you have them, you don't need to replace or repair them due to wear and tear, unlike other window treatments. They come with long warranties and do not require the same amount of cleaning that other blinds and curtains require. As they are typically left inside



Shutters from a selection at pro-fitblinds.co.uk

the house when sold, they can also increase the selling value of a property.

Tier-on-tier shutters have two sets of panels sitting top and bottom, giving you the flexibility to operate them separately, and greater control over the levels of light and privacy. Furnishing a period room? Pick smaller slats for a more traditional appeal; wider slats for a more contemporary one.

Shutters are big news in the interior design world, thanks to a European influence and trends such as the 'Scandi' look, which have been flooding the nation for the past few seasons. Not only do shutters look great, they are also a durable, high-quality window treatment which, whilst a little pricier in the first instance, represent an excellent long-term investment. They're considerably easier to keep clean than fabric window dressings and they're very adaptable, coming in a variety of materials, colours and designs.

With styles including café, plantation and solid, you can get shutters to suit any house or room, but it's a good idea to avoid readymade varieties and instead have them professionally made and fitted, as they're less forgiving than curtains when it comes to unusual sizes or shapes.

Of course that shouldn't stop you from getting them. A reputable fitter will be able to create a



*Shutters from a selection at CGS Blinds
cgsblinds.co.uk*

custom product that will suit any size or shape of window and will make a beautiful and practical addition to your décor.

Curtains

Whilst blinds may be a popular modern option, a more traditional approach with curtains is increasingly coming back into fashion, with a new range of rods and hanging systems giving you the chance to make an old idea transferable to a modern setting.

Curtains can be extremely useful when it comes to conserving energy and lowering heating costs and add a strong statement of colour to a more minimally decorated room. Opting for loose draping materials with plenty

of embellishments is a great option if you are looking to create a luxurious style in your home.

We know pelmets may be associated with the chintzier end of traditional country house design, but when they are done right they can lend style and elegance to a window.

From cracks under doors to poorly glazed windows, period homes are no stranger to draughts. Changing the doors and windows may not be an option, but a heavy-lined curtain can offer a quick and affordable draughtproofing solution while also adding a welcoming wash of colour to rooms, plus if you pick a patterned print it's a really quick and easy way to add some interest to a space.

Velvet's a huge trend for sofa upholstery and is

just as appealing used for curtains. While roller blinds and shutters both work well in traditional space, nothing beats the luxurious look of velvet curtains with deep swags, lush fabrics and ornate pelmets.

People regard soft furnishings as integral to the overall look of the room and are prepared to pay for high quality. There has recently been a return to traditional decorative dressings with lots of trimmings, pelmets, swags and tails. It seems we are no longer afraid to be bold with interior design in the 21st century and the window has become a fantastic place to add a block of vibrant pattern or colour to a room and complement more neutral furniture and decoration.



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ST JOHN, RYE

Marta Nowicka & Co has transformed a former St John Ambulance Station in East Sussex to create a family retreat featuring exposed brick walls and industrial-style finishes.

Located in a private residential courtyard, this twin-pitched building has undergone many changes over the last century. Having started life as a groundskeeper's house for the Grade II listed Whitefriars property, it was knocked down and rebuilt in the 1950s

to create a large garage/ workshop for St John Ambulance whose HQ was then located at Whitefriars. They then downsized in the 70s, converting one side of the garage and its uppers into their offices.



Located in the medieval town of Rye in East Sussex is St John Rye, a detached house converted from a former St John ambulance station. The building sits back from the steep cobbles of Conduit Hill, sharing a courtyard with an elegant, listed Georgian building. Its unfamiliar appearance caught the eye of owner Marta Nowicka, an architect who had been visiting the town for 20 years. "I fell in love with the atmosphere, its medieval streets, stone and timber warehouses," she recalls. She had been living nearby in a cottage on Camber Sands beach, waiting for something "wildly interesting and challenging" to come up in Rye.

"As it was a former ambulance station, the ground floor was very spacious and the roof spaces had quirky attic-like rooms,"



explains Nowicka. "It had this perfect spatial juxtaposition, plus it required a total refurbishment as it had not been touched since the 1970s."

Nowicka purchased the property in 2013, but the project was beset by hurdles from the beginning: She was faced with the stringent planning laws of a conservation area,



neighbours objected to her plans, and town planners refused permission to enlarge the footprint of the original building. The project took six years in total and won an Architects' Journal Retrofit Award in 2018.

A side extension that was added to the building in the 1970s was rebuilt to form an entrance hall and study on the ground floor and a bedroom and family bathroom on the first floor. The pitched roof visually extends the pitch of the existing building. Local, handmade clay peg tiles, added to clad the walls of the extension, reference the style of surrounding

buildings and complement the existing red brick structure.

Original materials were repurposed throughout wherever possible. "The old existing roof was made watertight, saving all the original tiles, including the moss that was growing on it," explains Nowicka. From nearby Conduit Hill, the juxtaposition of weathered red brick and clay with flush, aluminium windows gives the onlooker a sense that something interesting is happening inside.

The garage doors were remade to meet building regulations, but Nowicka kept the



originals, stripping them back and using them as wall cladding.

Inside, a double-sided wood-burning stove stands on a large concrete plinth in the middle of the space, creating a central heat source and focal point. Medieval dwellings were often arranged around a central hearth, and Nowicka sees this as a nod to the far-reaching history of the area.

Nowicka set about reorganising the floor plan. By removing an unoriginal central wall, she transformed the ground floor into a 780 sq ft space that is divided into two zones: kitchen and dining on one side of the wood stove, seating on the other. The flooring throughout is wide riven oak floorboards. Textured materials bring warmth to an otherwise minimalistic interior.

Oak is used to clad the walls of the double-height stairwell. Robust materials have been used throughout, making the space suitable for large gatherings.

“Any interesting brickwork has also been exposed as a feature,” explains Nowicka. The walls of the hallway mirror the view from the narrow window in the stairwell, connecting the interior to the town outside.

In the kitchen, cabinets were made from

“Generous circulation spaces upstairs and down give the building a convivial feel. The space was conceived as a place to come together with friends and family.”



sand-blasted greyed timber. The worktops and backsplash are Carrara marble, whilst the brushed stainless-steel kitchen island is intended to reference the medical industry.

Generous circulation spaces upstairs and down give the building a convivial feel. The space was conceived as a place to come together with friends and family and is now available to rent.

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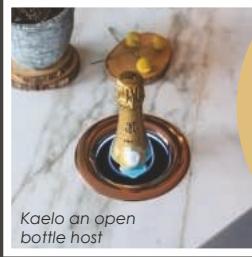
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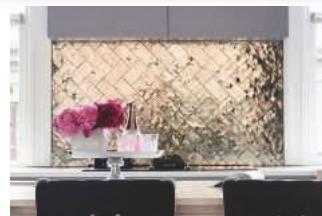
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COHABITATION AGREEMENTS

Just under 40% of couples move in together after six months to a year of the start of their relationship. Living together without any recognised legal status is referred to as "cohabitating".

About 69% of young people between 16 and 29 years of age live as a cohabiting couple whereas only 4.5% of those aged 70 years or over, living as a couple, are cohabiting. In the past living together before marriage was frowned upon and viewed as 'living in sin'.

Nowadays it is generally considered the next natural step in a relationship. It allows time to get to know each other and could reduce the risk of later separation.

A partner's actions could be really irritating, for example, poor personal hygiene, leaving month-old leftovers in the fridge, leaving one partner to carry out all of the domestic chores. What if a partner is financially irresponsible?

Putting aside the romantic ideas about living together, it is wise to consider the full implications before doing so and most importantly talk about expectations of each other. Concerns about cleanliness, chores, general upkeep, who will be welcome in the home

should be discussed.

If you are moving into a partner's property or home, will you be able to put your own or new items in it, decorate it or even have a financial interest in it? How are incomes to be treated and how are the bills to be shared or paid?

What happens if things don't work out and you have put all of your money into your partner's property? How can you fund re-housing yourself? What about inheritance expectations? What will happen to jointly owned property?

Consideration should also be given to matters such as the support of any children and, if relevant, expectations regarding parenting roles.

A couple planning to live together (without being in a civil partnership or being married to each other) should enter into what is known as a Cohabitation Agreement. This is a legal document recording their intentions from the outset. A properly prepared Agreement reduces the ever-increasing number of disputes between cohabiting couples saving unpleasantness, anxiety and the potential costs of thousands of pounds in litigation. Your Future is our Business. Contact Veronica White for more information on: info@elitelegalservices.co.uk.



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Researching the history of your home



Using a few fairly easily accessible tools, you can trace the history of your home and discover a wealth of information about its past owners and uses. We've assembled a few tips for you on how to go about this fascinating project.

For many years now, avid amateur history buffs have been tracking their family trees and discovering their roots, using everything from local records to specialist internet sites. It's a fascinating process and one that makes you feel truly connected to your lineage.

However, it's not just people who have interesting backgrounds: we're incredibly lucky

to be living in a part of the world where the buildings themselves can have a rich and varied history, and the latest adventure for those of us who love discovering the past is house-hunting – in a historical sense!

ESTABLISH THE AGE

The first thing you need to do is establish the age of your property. For slightly newer houses this could be as simple as looking through



your own paperwork, but for older houses this may be a bit more challenging. Start by reading up on your local history and chatting to neighbours or local historians. You can even look to the property itself for clues such as Tudor beams or Victorian slate roofs, and debris found while digging the garden can offer further insight (although you should take this with a pinch of salt – I found a stone arrowhead in my vegetable plot, but I’m fairly certain the prehistoric locals weren’t fans of 1950s architecture).

Finding out which administrative area your house is in is also important. Knowing the names of the county, registration district and parish in which your property stands will be invaluable down the road.

CONTEXT

Don’t neglect to consider how much things change with time. Street numbers and even

names may have been altered, and this was particularly common practice in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Additionally, up until the start of the First World War, around 90% of houses in the UK were privately rented (the Rent Act of 1915 was introduced to stop landlords taking advantage of the increased wages of munitions workers, and this ultimately paved the way for legislation that would allow more



Photo: The Landmark Trust



tenants to buy their homes). Therefore you need to be aware that the owner of your house was not necessarily the occupant.

Because most of the relevant documents tend to list occupants rather than owners, you will need to look up title registers and deeds if you

want to know more about the actual owners. You can request these from solicitors and mortgage providers and, if necessary, from local archives and council record offices. They can also be ordered online from the HM Land Registry. Go to gov.uk/government/

organisations/land-registry, search the register for free and fill in a request form.

ONLINE

If you're looking for more recent information (19th century and on) you will do well to check out the electoral registers for your area,

as they're second only to the census in terms of the information they provide – just remember that not everybody was eligible to vote in the early days.

Although the census has been established since 1841, there is a notable gap: the 1931 census was destroyed by fire and there was no census in 1941, so the

1939 register is your key document for this era. It will tell you the names of the occupants at the time and what they did for a living. It details every household member (including visitors, boarders and servants), and may list the details of neighbouring properties.

Go to nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/census-records. Other useful sources that can be found online are rate books, Ordnance Survey maps, hearth tax records and land tax records. These take some digging, but there are dedicated sites such as [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) and [findmypast.com](https://www.findmypast.com) that operate on a paid subscription service and have collated all this information.

PARISH RECORDS AND MORE

Similarly available online, parish records of baptisms, marriages and burials tended to include the addresses of those involved. Wills and administrations included residence details, as did court records. All these can be helpful in researching properties that predate the census.

One of the best records for history hunters are old newspapers. Thanks to somewhat lax privacy laws, old papers will often include



the addresses of persons involved in stories, including victims, criminals and witnesses. They also often feature associated photographs, sketches and even maps. The previously-mentioned research sites have scores of old articles, as will your local archive service.

OFFLINE

Speaking of which, take a trip to your local archive service. Staffed by experts, these facilities are a mine of information and act as repositories for those documents as yet unavailable online, such as estate maps and plans, as well as legal documents like title deeds. If you're finding that your online research has led you down a bit of a rabbit hole, the experts at the archive service can put you back on track. Finally, contact your local historical societies (on or offline) – these intrepid researchers may already have done much of the work for you and will be more than willing to share their knowledge.

Most of all, enjoy yourself – there's so much information out there just waiting to be discovered and you never know quite what you'll find.



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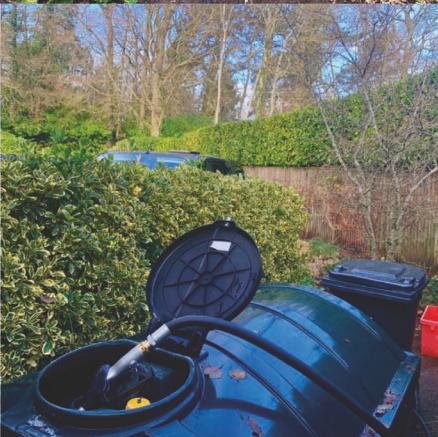


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Winter Wonderlands

Kent has no shortage of places to offer to those looking for a fun family day out, but people often worry that, once summer is over, there will be nothing left to do.

Whilst it's true that many of the county's stately homes and historic buildings do shut for the winter, the grounds and garden of these historic treasures can be just as enticing for those of us who love to take in the winter air.

We've put together a list of some of Kent's stately homes with gardens (and houses in some cases) that open throughout the winter.

Make sure that you keep hold of this article because we've also added a little bit of info about the houses themselves to keep you inspired come spring.

(Please check the websites for these amazing locations.)

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The house is an 18th century construction designed by Samuel Wyatt, and contains the collections of five generations of the Harris family; including paintings, objet d'art and a renowned clock museum.

- Gardens open through winter 10am – dusk
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- Garden adult entrance fee £7
- Parking available
- Events on at various times: see website
- Dogs on leads welcome in gardens.

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CHARTWELL family home and garden of Sir Winston Churchill

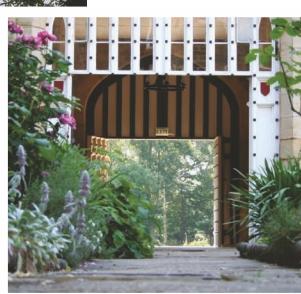


Chartwell is famous for being the family home of Winston Churchill, and the house itself boasts a magnificent collection of Churchill memorabilia, as one might expect. The house is still much as it was when the family lived here. The spectacular gardens offer a wonderful view across a private lake and provide a relaxing haven for winter walks.

- Gardens open through winter 10am – 4pm
- House open for events some weekends
- Studio open throughout 12pm – 5.30pm
- Restaurant and shop open 10am – 4pm
- Garden and Studio adult entrance fee £14*
- Parking £4* (* free for NT members)
- Dogs on short leads welcome in gardens

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CHIDDINGSTONE 35 acres of informal grounds



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- Gardens open through winter 7am – 6.30pm
- Suggested £3 donation
- Parking available
- Dogs on short leads welcome in gardens

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HALL PLACE & GARDENS one of the south east's best kept secrets



Hall Place manor house was built in 1537 for ex-Lord Mayor of London, Sir John Champneys. The interior great hall is Tudor complete with original panelling and overlooked by a minstrel's gallery. The gardens are set within a 65 hectare estate offering some outstanding examples of horticulture and wildlife.

- Gardens open through winter 9am – 5pm
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- No entry fee for gardens
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IGHTHAM MOTE a medieval moated manor house



Ithe impressive and dramatic entrance to Ightham Mote tells you all you need to know: this immaculate 14th Century manor house is heaven for history buffs, while the gardens feature lakeside and woodland walks. The estate itself is also worth exploring if you have the time and the weather; as its rambling land is conveniently divided into three suggested walks.

- Gardens & House open through winter – times vary (see website)

- Restaurant and shop open 10am – 4pm
- Gardens and Estate, adult entrance fee £5.40
- Parking available £3 (* free for NT members)
- Dogs on leads welcome in gardens during winter

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www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ightham-mote

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The 12th Century estate at Knole was purchased in 1456 by Thomas Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury. Bourchier's transformed the old medieval manor into the beautiful house we see today. It was passed into the ownership of the Sackville family, who still live there today, and who have adorned it with artistic treasures to fascinate and inspire visitors.

- Gardens & House open through winter times vary (see website)
- Café and shop open 10am – 4pm
- Whole property adult entrance fee £10
- Parking available pre-booked only
- Dogs on leads welcome in park (there are wild deer on the property)

Sevenoaks, Kent, England, TN15 0RP

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/knole

SISSINGHURST CASTLE & GARDENS



Sissinghurst has a diverse history, but it's perhaps most famous for being the home of writer and poet Vita Sackville-West. Vita and her husband worked tirelessly on the castle's gardens throughout the 1930s and the National Trust have endeavoured to maintain much of what she created, leaving visitors with a fantastic day of exploring ahead of them.

- Gardens & House times vary (see website)
- Restaurant and shop open 10am – 4pm
- For events see website
- Whole property adult entrance fee £11
- Parking available £4
- Dogs on leads welcome (not in gardens or house)

Biddenden Road, Sissinghurst,

nr Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 2AB

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sissinghurst-castle-garden

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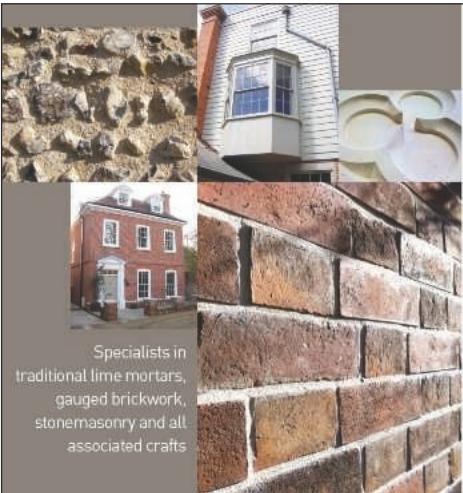
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KENT Manor House

Leading south east architectural practice and listed building specialists, Clague Architects, were commissioned to remodel, restore and extend this splendid Grade II Listed manor house in the stunning Kent countryside.



The house grew in size over many centuries, with major elements of construction dating from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries as various families' fortunes came and went. The principal elevation of the house embraces you with a Georgian frontage, epitomising country living.

George Eddaile, of Clague Architects, worked closely with the local planning department, conservation officer and the property's owners to carry out a sympathetic and careful restoration, whilst bringing the house up to date to make it a welcoming and comfortable home.

The main front entrance of the house leads



into a spacious hallway; its major feature is an elegant staircase that leads up to an intermediate central landing with twin flights of stairs branching off in opposite directions to the upper storeys.

The wall at the back of the staircase has been opened up along nearly its full length, creating a gallery effect to the upper landing on the other side of the wall, giving a view through and allowing light to flood the area, creating a feeling of space and grandeur. Matching spindles on the bannisters and the gallery balustrade establish continuity, as does the custom hand-printed wallpaper chosen by the client, who has led the interior design on the refurbishment with bold and inspired ideas to suit their taste and lifestyle.

Leading off from the reception area is a stylish and characterful study. The owners have bravely chosen to decorate the handcrafted walls with a dark peacock blue-green gloss







finish that contrasts elegantly with the restored original coving and pale woodwork. The bold choice of gloss finish has paid off, as light from the large double-aspect sash windows is reflected throughout the room that is tastefully furnished with warm orange accents picked out in accessories and original artworks. All the sash windows in the property have been restored with the addition of permitted slim double-glazing, to retain the period character of the property whilst updating the thermal performance of the house.

Nestling in the Kent countryside, the manor house has extensive views over downlands.

Throughout the house, all the rooms have been stylishly brought up to date and have been sumptuously decorated in a blend of traditional and modern design, with original colour choices, custom wallpapers, mixtures of materials and textures that all knit together to create a joyful, comfortable and gorgeous home.

In the 17th century core of the house the open-plan kitchen and breakfast room is modern, light and airy, with a clever use of bench seating on the side of the island and breakfast bar that makes a handy additional dining area.

An old extension has been demolished, redesigned and rebuilt to create a superb new dining room extension and orangery. This isn't a traditional orangery where the glazed walls would stay firmly in situ: it has been given a much more modern and flexible feel with large glazed double doors allowing access to the landscaped gardens, terraces and the swimming pool, giving the all-important 'inside-outside' feel.

The contract works were beautifully executed by A T Palmer Ltd.

For further information, please contact George Esdaile of Clague Architects on 01227 762060. www.clague.co.uk

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Benenden School

Benenden School offers an insight into its history, ethos and educational opportunities.

For 97 years Benenden has been educating girls successfully. Our alumnae look back on their Benenden education as one that has taught them a great deal and offered them a wealth of very fond memories and friendships to take them throughout their lives.

Historical material held in the archives dates back to around the 17th century, with maps, documents, drawings and photographs chronicling the history of Hemsted House. The site on which the school stands is of great historical interest, as both the parkland and woodland are mentioned in the Domesday Book: "Robert of Romney also holds Benenden [Benendine] from the Bishop of Bayeux". Benenden had become sufficiently permanent by 1086 to have both a name and a church.

In 1216 Robert of Hemsted built the first house on the site; this was later visited by Elizabeth I before being demolished in 1860 by Lord Cranbrook, who replaced it with a new mansion slightly to the east. This newer building was remodelled by Sir Harold Harmsworth, later Lord Rothermere, into the Tudor-cum-Jacobean style we see today.

In 1923 three teachers from



Wycombe Abbey announced the foundation of a new public school, and 24 girls were registered for their first year at a temporary location in Bickley, while the founders searched for a permanent location. They were leased Hemsted Park the following year and began operating as Benenden School in 1924.

Today, there are 550 girls in the school, aged 11-18, and Benenden has earned a reputation as an expert in teenage girls and at the forefront of innovative education. As we approach our





centenary in 2023-24, we are about to open our most ambitious construction development in our history: our new School Hall and Music School. We have also recently welcomed our first day boarders, and in September we opened our new dedicated boarding house for the Fourths (Year 7 girls). In addition, our first overseas school will open in south China in 2023.

At Benenden we offer every girl A Complete Education, in which she realises her academic potential, grows as an individual and is well-prepared for life beyond school.

This is achieved through an outstanding academic offering which will help a girl achieve her very best, together with unrivalled co-curricular opportunities and a dedicated focus on developing every girl's personal and professional skills.

At Benenden we aspire for excellence in all that we do. Motivational teaching through a dynamic and challenging curriculum is central to our educational offering. All the girls are

expected to engage in the extensive range of subjects offered. They will leave us not only with excellent results at A Level, but very importantly with an understanding of the world in which we live, skills in critical thinking, practical skills such as financial management, a flavour of the world of entrepreneurship and business, as well as the knowledge of professional skills which will support them in the world of work beyond university.

Crucially, we work with every girl to discover and nurture the passion that will drive whatever path she might want to follow. We will support her in achieving more than she would have thought possible when she first entered the school and, by that, instil within her the self-belief that she can embrace her future with confidence. As we prepare the girls for life beyond Benenden, it is important to equip them with the skills to work effectively with others, lead with confidence, understand themselves and manage a healthy work-life balance.



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The King's School

We take a look at the long and illustrious history of The King's School in Canterbury; one of the oldest schools in the world.

With origins dating back to 597AD, The King's School, Canterbury is reputedly the oldest school in the world.

It is also one of the country's leading co-educational day and boarding schools located in the idyllic surroundings of the Precincts of Canterbury Cathedral (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), just one hour from Central London.

The School buildings are steeped in history with interesting and quirky tales from their past which make the School a truly unique place to live and learn.

The main entrance to the School, The Mint Yard Gate, was built in 1864 following the demolition of the old almonry building and leads into The Mint Yard, a mixed quadrangle of classrooms and boarding houses named after a short-lived sixteenth century royal mint.

The Grange, a former boys' boarding house was built on the granary ruins as a family house in the 1840s. It incorporates architectural features from the old Archbishop's Palace. Above



the main entrance are the arms of Cardinal Pole which acknowledge that he gave the Mint Yard to the School.

The Norman Staircase is one of the most painted, photographed and admired sites in Canterbury. As its name suggests it dates back to the 12th century. For formal occasions the School traditionally gathered here. Archbishops of Canterbury addressed the School from the Staircase during Visitations and King George VI, accompanied by Queen Elizabeth and Princess Elizabeth, presented the School's Royal Charter to the Dean on 11 July 1946.





The Dark Entry forms the link between the Green Court and the rest of the Precincts and the Cathedral. It was built in the late 14th century.

The Dark Entry is supposed to be haunted by the ghost of Nell Cook. R.H. Barham in *The Ingoldsby Legends* recounts 'A King's Scholar's Story' about a Canon in 'bluff King Harry's days' and his cook. Nell is buried alive and haunts the Dark Entry.

Linacre House is now a boys' boarding house. It is a fine Georgian building, incorporating part of the medieval prior's lodging. Horatio Nelson's brother William was a Canon here from 1803 to 1835, and Lady Hamilton visited him. It was later used by the Royal School of Church Music.

Meister Omers, popularly known as MO, is a boys' boarding house. It was built in the fifteenth century by Cardinal Beaufort and has one of the widest fireplaces in England. Edward IV held a Parliament here in 1470. Cardinal Coligny is said to have died here in suspicious circumstances in 1568, and the arms of Queen Elizabeth, originally in an upstairs dormitory but now in

the hall, probably mark her visit in 1573.

Abbot Fyndon's Great Gate, the entrance to St. Augustine's, forms part of the remains of the first Benedictine Abbey in England, established around AD598 following the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury, a Benedictine monk who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

It was rebuilt from 1301-1309 by Abbot Fyndon. In 1625 Charles I and Henrietta Maria stayed in the State Chambers over the gateway arch on their wedding night, following their marriage in Canterbury Cathedral. Elizabeth I is also reputed to have been welcomed to the State Chambers. After the abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII the abbey buildings were converted to a number of other uses. The gatehouse served for some time as a brewery under the ownership of Messrs. Bennett and Beer, who produced St Augustine's beer (naturally!).

The school has Open Mornings each term for prospective pupils and their families. To register your interest please visit - <https://www.kings-school.co.uk/admissions/open-mornings/>



The Old Oast House, Otford

This historic converted Oast house has been extended and remodelled to provide excellent living and entertaining space set over three floors. The entrance porch opens into a large and welcoming hallway which acts as a central hub to the house; providing access to the living rooms on the ground floor. A light and bright south facing formal sitting room with central feature fireplace sits to one side whilst a grand west facing dining room, full of light and character, then links the hallway with the family room.

The kitchen/breakfast room has been designed to fit the second roundel and is contemporary in style. Between the two oasts on the garden side of the house then fits a fantastic family room with an impressive glass roof lantern and double doors to the garden. A fully fitted utility room with second fridge/freezer and guest WC then links the kitchen with purpose-built office which also opens out onto the garden.

The stairs to the first floor then lead up to a main landing off which a large guest bedroom suite sits, along with two wonderfully sized



roundel bedrooms and a substantial and newly fitted family bathroom with separate bath and large stand-alone shower. The master suite with excellent countryside views, ample storage and en-suite bathroom, then the completes the first floor. An additional staircase takes you to two further bedrooms.

The garden is set to the rear of the building, providing excellent dining and entertaining space together with a lawn and numerous trees and shrubs providing a private family space.

The details

- Entrance porch • Formal sitting room
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THURSDAY: 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th
Hastings; Rolvenden; Shipbourne

FRIDAY: 3rd
Egerton; Sevenoaks; Tenterden

SATURDAY: 4th
Biggin Hill; Chatham; Deal;
Gravesend; Penshurst; Tunbridge
Wells; Whitstable Castle; Rye

SUNDAY: 5th
Tunbridge Wells

TUESDAY: 7th, 14th, 21st & 28th
Capel-le-Ferne; Hildenborough

FRIDAY: 10th, 17th, 24th & 31st
Egerton; Tenterden

SATURDAY: 11th
Bridge; Deal; Gravesend; Hythe;
Tunbridge Wells; Whitstable

SUNDAY: 12th
Herne Bay; Lenham; Tonbridge;
Tunbridge Wells

SATURDAY: 18th
Deal; Gravesend; Tunbridge Wells;
Wye

SUNDAY: 19th
Aylesford; Rochester; Staplehurst
Tunbridge Wells; Wateringbury

JANUARY

SATURDAY: 1st
Biggin Hill; Chatham; Deal;
Gravesend; Penshurst; Tunbridge
Wells; Whitstable Castle; Wye

SUNDAY: 2nd
Tunbridge Wells

TUESDAY 4th, 11th, 18th & 25th
Capel-le-Ferne;
Hildenborough

WEDNESDAY: 5th, 12th, 19th & 26th Rye

THURSDAY: 6th, 13th, 20th & 27th
Hastings; Rolvenden, Shipbourne

FRIDAY: 7th
Egerton; Sevenoaks; Tenterden

SATURDAY: 8th
Bridge; Deal; Gravesend; Hythe;
Tunbridge Wells; Whitstable

SUNDAY: 9th
Herne Bay; Lenham; Tonbridge;
Tunbridge Wells

SATURDAY: 15th
Deal; Gravesend; Tunbridge Wells;
Wye

SATURDAY: 22nd
Bridge; Cranbrook; Deal;
Gravesend; Hythe; Knockholt;
Whitstable

SATURDAY: 29th
Deal; Gravesend

FEBRUARY

TUESDAY: 1st, 8th, 15th & 22nd
Capel-le-Ferne; Hildenborough

WEDNESDAY: 2nd, 9th, 16th & 23rd Rye

THURSDAY: 3rd, 10th, 17th & 24th Hastings; Rolvenden;
Shipbourne

FRIDAY: 4th Egerton; Sevenoaks;
Tenterden

SATURDAY: 5th Biggin Hill;
Chatham; Deal; Gravesend;
Penshurst; Tunbridge Wells;
Whitstable Castle; Wye

SUNDAY: 6th
Tunbridge Wells

FRIDAY: 11th
Egerton; Tenterden

SATURDAY: 12th
Bridge; Deal; Gravesend; Hythe;
Tunbridge Wells; Whitstable

SUNDAY: 13th
Herne Bay; Lenham; Tonbridge;
Tunbridge Wells

SATURDAY: 19th
Deal; Gravesend; Hythe;
Knockholt; Whitstable

SUNDAY: 20th
Aylesford; Rochester; Tunbridge
Wells; Wateringbury

SATURDAY: 26th
Bridge; Cranbrook; Deal;
Gravesend; Hythe; Knockholt;
Whitstable





This lush chorizo and chicken stew recipe is inexpensive but delicious.
Try serving it with crusty bread.

Winter Warmers

Two's Company is a book with a positive message that cooking for two is exciting, fun and worthwhile. More than that – free from the demands of family or guests, liberated from a strict timetable, you can follow your mood, whether you fancy something homey, a fake-away or a creative culinary adventure.

**SERVES
FOUR**

YOU WILL NEED

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp clear honey
- 3 sprigs fresh oregano
- 350g can Fragata stoneless Manzanilla olives filled with chorizo, drained
- 8 dried apricots, sliced
- 8 chicken thighs, trimmed of excess skin
- 100ml white wine
- 400g can butter beans, rinsed and drained

METHOD

In a large mixing bowl or resealable food bag, mix the oil, vinegar, garlic and honey. Stir in the oregano sprigs, olives, apricots and chicken thighs. Season, cover if using a bowl, and set aside to marinate in the fridge for at least 1 hour (or up to 12 hours).

Preheat the oven to 200°C, gas mark 6. Pour the wine into a large roasting tin, then add the chicken, skin-side up, and the marinade ingredients. Roast for 40 minutes, basting the chicken in the juices every 15 minutes, until cooked through and the juices run clear, with no pink meat. Lift the chicken out of the tin and arrange on plates. Stir the butter beans into the tin and return to the oven for 6-8 minutes.

Spoon the hot olives, beans and juices over the chicken (or add the chicken back to the tin if taking the roasting tin to the table) and serve immediately with couscous, rice or mashed potato and some steamed greens, if liked.

COOK'S TIP

Plating the chicken while you heat the beans in the sauce allows it to rest and become more tender.

Recipe courtesy Waitrose.com

CHOCOLATE LAVA PUDDING

YOU WILL NEED

- 25g butter, plus extra for the dish
- 20g dark chocolate, chopped
- 4tsp cocoa powder
- 4tsp sugar
- 2 tbsp milk
- 1 egg yolk, any size
- 1tsp vanilla extract
- 25g self rasing flour, or 25g plus 1/4tsp baking powder (see Trick of the Trade)
- a pinch of salt

FOR THE TOPPING

- 3tbsp soft brown sugar
- 1tbsp caster sugar
- 4tsp cocoa powder, plus a little extra to finish

FOR THE SAUCE

- 120ml boiling water, or a mixture of boiling water and coffee
- double cream or whipped cream to serve

METHOD

Melt the butter, chocolate and half the cocoa powder together in a medium jug/pitcher or bowl in the microwave and allow to cool slightly. Whisk in the sugar, milk, egg yolk and vanilla, then the flour and a pinch of salt. Transfer to the prepared dish.

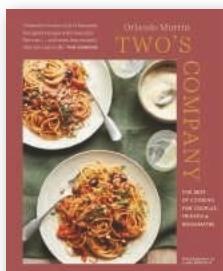
Mix the topping ingredients in a small bowl with a fork, and sprinkle evenly over the pudding. Finally, carefully pour the boiling water gently over the top.

Bake the unpromising mixture at 160°C/fan 140°C/gas 3 for about 35 minutes, until the pudding is firm in places, and gently bubbling. Leave for 5 minutes, dust lightly with cocoa powder, if liked, then serve with cream, because why not?

TRICK OF THE TRADE

I know from experience that many a cook gets hot under the collar with regard to plain and self-raising flour. I keep both in my storecupboard, purely for convenience, but you can convert plain to self-rasing by whisking 100g plain flour with 1 teaspoon baking powder. It's that simple – but don't use bicarbonate of soda by mistake.

While talking flour, scientific experiments have shown that whisking and sifting flour achieve the same thing. By all means sift flour if you wish – hold the sieve high over the bowl if you want to get flour over the entire kitchen – but a quick whisk in the bowl does the same job, believe me.



Recipes taken from *Two's Company* by Orlando Murrin, published by Ryland, Peters & Small (£18.99) with photography by Clare Winfield.



This could not be more different from lemon lava pudding – intense, fudgy and utterly decadent. Under the chocolate crust is a pool of chocolate sauce. To turn this into a delicious mocha lava pudding, swap the boiling water in the sauce for a strong, freshly brewed coffee.

The Secret Supper Club

The Secret Supper Clubs have become a not so well-kept secret within the Curious Eatery crowd.

www.thecuriouseatery.co.uk





From Victorian orchid houses to cider orchards, you could be feasting pretty much anywhere. Each Supper Club is held at a different top-secret location which even the guests don't find out about until two days before it happens.

The only way to get an invitation is to ask (very nicely) if you can join their invite list and only then will you be able to dine in one their weird and wonderful locations. In keeping with the experience-led dining, you will be taken to an enchanted supper where you'll drink great wines, feast on delicious food and meet wonderful people.

Working closely with the talented people at Hire Love, The Curious Eatery team turn any space into a magical and unforgettable evening. Each menu is devised to work with the surroundings and the land is an integral part of how the chefs showcase not just the food, but the venue and the season.

The latest Supper Club was held in Sissinghurst, at Crossways, a beautiful Victorian orchard house that was built in 1894. The venue had formerly been a pig farm which naturally lent itself to the chefs incorporating pork into the menu. As the event was held in the autumn, the chefs wanted to use produce from their allotment, and in what turned out to be a happy accident, they tried a perfect planting trio of pumpkins, sweetcorn and climbing beans from which they created their delicious 'Three Sisters' salad' which has become a staple part of their seasonal autumnal menus.



Vino wine shop & tastings

ROWENA HAWTIN DISCOVERS A LITTLE GEM IN THE HEART OF FAVERSHAM

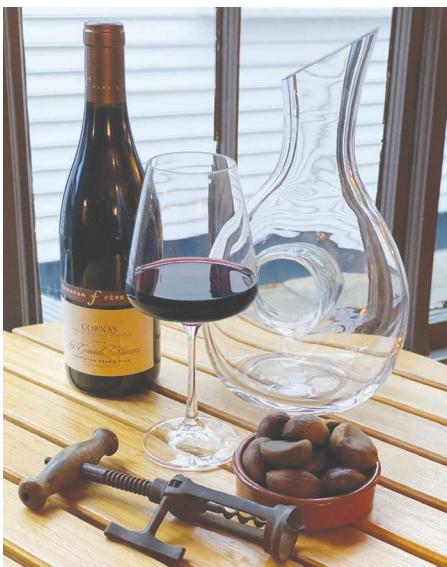
Strolling through Faversham High Street as winter approaches, the town has a unique charm with its historic buildings and variety of independent retailers. Vino is one of these – a wine shop that offers daily tastings, antipasti and coffee, where you can also stop off for an hour or so to sample their generous selection of wines by the glass and, if you're hungry, enjoy a delicious plate of charcuterie which can include Italian cheese, meat, olives, bread and other tasty offerings.

Owned and run by Italians, the inside is reminiscent of an Italian Enoteca – a local wine bar where locals (and tourists) gather to chat, drink and enjoy a glass or two of wine – a little

bit of Italy in the middle of Kent. The inside is very small – the front of the shop has a small bar where you can sit on stools and enjoy the ambience, and at the back there are two tables which can seat up to four guests each, and a further table for two where you can gaze out of the window enjoying a little bit of people-watching. The venue is so small that booking is essential for Friday and Saturday evenings, but during the week you can pop in any time.

We were bowled over by our welcome and how friendly and polite the staff were, and were even upgraded to a table in the back room. The blackboard has a generous selection of wines you can enjoy by the glass – not all Italian – a range of wines from a variety of different countries including red, white and sparkling.

We opted for the Nerello to start – a blend of Nerello Mascalese and Cappuccio which are black grapes native to Sicily – mostly associated



with the red wines from the volcanic soils around Mount Etna. Nerello Cappuccio is rarely made into a varietal and is usually used in blends with Nerello Mascalese to add perfume and colour and soften the tannins of this higher-quality, but slightly harder-edged wine. Nerello Mascalese is often grown at very high altitudes on the volcanic soils of Mount Etna – some of

the highest vineyards in Europe – and the cooler temperatures enable the grape to develop slowly over the ripening season to create immense character and depth. Our wine had fresh red fruit aromas, a herbaceous character, a touch of earthiness and excellent minerality – perfect to complement our Italian fare.

We were savouring this delicious wine when our plate of charcuterie arrived – cold meats, a variety of Italian cheeses, bread, and paté served with a hefty dose of smiles. Whilst we worked our way through the food, we were thinking of which wine to try next and, as we were in Italian mode, we thought we'd stick to Italian wine. They didn't have any more Italian reds on the blackboard, so we asked what else they had and hey presto, a magnum of Primitivo arrived – oh, sorrow, we were driving!

Primitivo is mostly grown in Puglia in Southern Italy – in fact it is the same grape as



Zinfandel, famous in California. It is a black grape variety frequently associated with the denomination Primitivo di Manduria DOC. A classic Primitivo is high in alcohol and tannin, intensely perfumed with black fruit such as plums and cherries and can age for many years, which helps to soften the tannins and integrate the flavours. Primitivo has experienced a revival recently, partly due to the fame of Zinfandel across the Atlantic.

The wine we had did not disappoint – deep purple in colour, beautiful soft black fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins which were silky smooth, with a touch of spice such as nutmeg and a hint of vanilla from the barrel ageing. Although the alcohol was high – I didn't see the label but would estimate it at around 14.5% – it didn't burn the throat because it was so well-integrated with the intensity of the fruit, coupled with good acidity, so that it slid down just a little too easily!

It is true that magnums are better than standard bottles for maturing wine (not only Champagne) because, with twice the volume of a

normal bottle, the wine matures more slowly and develops more complexity as it ages. This was definitely the best Primitivo I have tasted and we wanted to buy the bottle, but sadly this was the only one they had and naturally they would want to offer it to other guests. We keenly await the one on order but are told it might be a while.

The consistent positive online reviews for Vino are truly well-deserved and if you fancy a couple of hours relaxing after a hard day's work, popping in to buy a bottle to take home with the pizza or other takeaway, or spending a couple of hours with friends in the evening, then Vino will make you feel most welcome. Our time at the table was coming to its end, and the place was beginning to fill up with Friday night customers ready to relax and enjoy a glass or two of wine to wind down at the end of the week. We will most certainly be back. I think we'll take the train next time, though!

Rowena Hawtin (Dip WSET)

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