

Living

YORKSHIRE

SEPTEMBER 2018

COMPLIMENTARY

BON APPETIT

What's on at York Food Festival

WIN

Afternoon tea for four at the Talbot in Malton

FASHION STARS

On the runway at Great Yorkshire Show

SO WELL HEELED

Westwood shoes at York Castle Museum

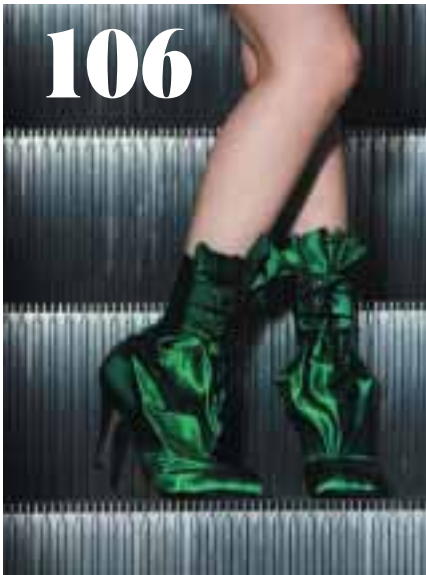
SHOW AND TEAL

Go for bold and all things bright and beautiful

SIMPLY THE BEST

Inside York's top hotel Grays Court





106

Contents



34

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Yorkshire Living • September 2018

20 Drawing on nature

Artist records a stunning wildlife garden

34 Rustic glamour

Boho chic interiors revealed at wedding barn

50 Button and bowls

See exquisite ceramics from one of the UK's greatest potters in York

96 Time to feast

Whet your appetite for the York Food Festival

106 Well-heeled by Vivienne Westwood

Iconic shoes from the avant garde designer at York Castle Museum

108 It's a mystery

York's medieval Waggon Plays roll into the city every four years

121 Competition

Win afternoon tea for four at the Talbot in Malton and support York charity

REGULARS

PROPERTY	2
HOMES & INTERIORS	28
FASHION	80
SOCIETY	90
FOOD & DRINK	96
DIARY	118
MY YORKSHIRE	130



Front cover: Fabric and wallpaper from Giardino Segreto collection
W: designersguild.com

Competition winners: The following readers won a family ticket to the Great Yorkshire Show: Joan Rambridge, New Earswick; Gill Rossiter, South Cave; Ian Cameron, Acomb; Ann Selby, Claxton and Amanda McTaggart, Shipton-by-Beningborough

Complaints – Who to Contact

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Drawing on nature

Catherine Turnbull
meets artist Kate Pettitt,
who has recorded
the glorious seasons
at Stillingfleet Lodge
wildlife garden





Art by Kate Pettitt, artist images by Olivia Brabbs and garden photography by Catherine Turnbull



“ I LOVE THE IMMEDIACY OF SKETCHING OUTDOORS, CAPTURING THE ENERGY OF THE ELEMENTS, WORKING FROM LIFE TO DOCUMENT A PLACE

York-based artist Kate Pettitt loves to set up her easel and palette outdoors and work “en plein air” in all weathers. During the last few months she has endured biting cold winds and scorching heat to record the plants and animals that thrive in a beautiful natural garden at Stillingfleet Lodge, six miles south of the city.

Her sketches and paintings, graphite and watercolour works on paper, beautifully illustrate the vibrant life in the organic wildlife haven, where they will be exhibited throughout most of September.

“I work outdoors on projects, but this is the first time I’ve recorded the seasons in one place,” Kate says. “I love the immediacy of sketching outdoors, capturing the energy of the elements, working from life to document a place. I have loved the experience at Stillingfleet Lodge, from drawing the carpets of early snowdrops, the winter grasses and seed heads and the twisted stems of witch hazel to capturing the elusive guinea fowl, who kept running off when I got out my sketch pad. I was determined to draw the little devils and first I had to be content with painting their giant feathers.”

Her first visit was on a freezing cold February day. Donald, the Bengal cat kept her company, as did the very stylish bantams.

“After being ‘rained off’ for most of the spring, I returned on a hot day in June. Ironically, after

such a wet spring, the ground was now bone-dry, but the flowers were out in abundance. The guinea fowl could be heard, taunting me, from the other side of the fence,” Kate writes in her sketch book.

“In July I went back to draw the gorgeous white eryngiums. It was a bit cooler this time, so I could sit in the Pear Tree Garden without burning (it’s a sun-trap). I love the graphic shapes of eryngium flowers, and the negative spaces they create against the darker backdrop. They are almost luminous.

“Back again on an overcast, humid day and the midges were biting, but the garden was as beautiful as ever. Particularly drawn to the fat, red cherries on the ivy-clad wall by the house and the fragrant sweet peas with their wild tendrils. I still want to paint the huge thistles, but I’m aware that I’m naturally drawn to drawing spiky or dead things, so I forced myself to paint softer subjects this time.”

Kate trained at York College of Art in graphic art and illustration and she has worked as a designer for over 20 years. She is based in Castlegate at her design practice Bivouac. “I’ve always been a scribbler and am passionate about colour. I like to paint at a scale that allows me to be gestural, using light and shade, colour and texture to create work that is from an emotional source. Sketchbooks and scrapbooks are used as references for my paintings, and I use them to trigger memories and feelings when I am back in the studio.”





Kate's work aims to evoke the memory of a moment and is often elemental and textural. Inspired by movement, shifting light and changing weather conditions, she loves to capture the character and uniqueness of people and place, working quickly and instinctively

Forty years ago, the garden and nursery in Stillingfleet was derelict farmland. The quintessential English garden managed to be as wildlife friendly as possible has been planted-up over 40 years by Vanessa Cook and her husband John. The beauty of her abundant cottage gardens, overflowing with trees, shrubs, unusual and rare plants, colours and scents, and buzzing with insects and birds, seems so natural that it is easy to forget they represent years of devoted hard work.

The couple and their four children began to live the good life. They took on sheep, pigs and poultry, and restored an old vegetable patch that was the only piece of garden in the surrounding land. This was when Vanessa began gardening at Stillingfleet. Already a keen botanist, she had also been back to college to study horticulture. "The planting emphasises a cottage garden style and every part is maintained organically. We purposefully leave

seed heads as food for birds and limit cutting back to provide habitat for insects," she said.

Wildlife is attracted by the insects and bugs which live in the left over tree stumps and nettle patches, and hundreds of butterflies and bees thrive thanks to plants in a traditional hay meadow. There is a formal water garden, traditional and wildflower meadows, a large pond, woodland, and colourful scented cottage gardens, with different unusual plants all year round.

Many wildlife groups use the gardens for research, including the British Trust for Ornithology, Butterfly Conservation, the Hedgehog Society and the Dragonfly Society. Rare species of bumblebees and moths have been found and the gardens are always alive with different birds, and butterflies, with frogs, toads, newts and dragonflies around the pond.

Vanessa sells seeds from an amazing catalogue, around 800 plants from the nursery, offers gardening classes and talks, a wildlife day and the art exhibitions.

"In 2018 we converted one of our 18th century barns into a café and since then we have had monthly art exhibitions," she says. "I have been interested in

pictures and collected prints and ceramics for many years, so I was delighted to be able to support and show local artists in an ideal setting.

"Artists are chosen, whose work is relevant to the ethos of the garden, so wildlife, flowers and landscapes are our usual exhibits. We have had etchings, linocuts and watercolours as well as botanical studies and photography. Each artist has the café to themselves for a month which allows them to show a wide range of pictures and each month another artist moves in."

The exhibition at Stillingfleet Lodge Gardens runs from September 2 to 30 and will feature framed works on paper and limited edition giclée prints of sketches and studies of gardens and the natural world. The gardens are open between 1pm and 5pm every Wednesday and Friday and on the first and third Saturday and Sundays of each month.

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