

Welcome

What an exciting two weeks this has been!

In this issue we report on our launch and announce the winner of our competition to win a two night stay in Peel Castle.

Speaking of winners, we've won a competition ourselves—find out more below.

We also start our series of features about our business partners, giving you an insight into their businesses and a real feel for what they're about and what makes them so special. Today we meet Sophia Monkman from Sophia's Gardens who has followed a rather unusual career path!

We're also pleased to announce that the Products Section of our site is undergoing final testing and will be launched by 1st December, just in time for the next issue.

You can look forward to: more features about the wonderful businesses on our site; topical issues; competitions; offers and hints and tips on all aspects of your home. We'd love to hear what you think and receive your letters, questions and diaries of your own renovations and self-builds.

Why not follow us on Twitter or Facebook.



Paula Smith and Christine Pearce

Christine Pearce & Paula Smith

Founder Directors

Open for business after Harrogate launch

Restoration & Beyond was officially launched at the Home Building & Renovating Show in Harrogate, North Yorkshire at the start of November.

The launch, on Friday 6th November, was a highlight of the three-day event. We were joined for the launch by Francis Shaw, owner and renovator of Hellfield Peel—of 'Grand Designs' fame. Francis is pictured third from right, along with our business mentor James Robson.

It was a tiring few days but good fun and all the feedback from both visitors and other exhibitors was very positive.



Prize draw winner

Our stand attracted a lot of visitors—if you were one of them, thank you for coming to see us and we hope you all liked your 'goodie bags'.

Thanks also to everyone who entered our prize draw. Unfortunately there could only be one winner and we're delighted to announce that Gill Cregeen (right) of Heswall, Merseyside won the 2-night stay at Hellfield Peel.

Gill and her husband David will be spending their 35th wedding anniversary next March at Hellfield Peel. We hope they have a lovely weekend.



Restoration & Beyond proves to be 'One to Watch'

We were delighted to receive this year's 'One to Watch' award at the Women Into The Network (WIN) awards for North East women entrepreneurs, sponsored by Business Link.

The awards, in their 10th year, honoured enterprising women from throughout the North East at an awards dinner at Hilton NewcastleGateshead, hosted by TV's Wendy Gibson. The 'One to Watch' award recognises "vision, determination and a business idea that demonstrates real market and commercial understanding."

Sophia's choice results in the best of both worlds

A career change from chemist to garden designer may not be typical. But as Sophia Monkman of Sophia Gardens told us, there's no such thing as typical in the world of garden design.

R&B: Where did your business inspiration come from?

SM: Before starting the business I was working as a biological chemist. That was quite a stressful job and I realised that, once I'd accounted for childcare and commuting, I was actually working for very little financial gain so I decided it was time for a change.

I became a full-time mum for 18 months and ran the local playgroup where I unearthed previously undiscovered creative skills.

I then visited the Harrogate Spring Flower Show and walking round the student garden design section found myself thinking that I could probably do better myself. That was on a Friday. The next Monday I rang the horticultural college. They offered me a place on a garden design course starting the next day and everything just seemed to fall into place.

R & B: Having then studied garden design, what was it like making the switch from student to professional designer?

SM: My first commissions came through friends and family contacts which helped. My first job was for a neuro physio-therapist who lived in a very symmetrical house with only a small garden. That proved to be a good introduction to work - a very good learning experience in a nice nurturing environment.

I then moved onto a much bigger project which went really well - the client still has the design framed and hung in her hallway. It was on this job that I met my favourite contractors. It's great for me to know that the client has people on site whose cheerful company they enjoy and who are respectful of everything they do and where they work.

R&B: Where do you start with a new design?

SM: I like to try and get inside the client's head and work out what will suit them. At the enquiry stage I send out a questionnaire together with a price guide and we take it from there. Some clients are very decisive and know what they want and why - others need a bit more help and guidance.

R&B: Once the garden is created, is that the end of your involvement?

SM: You do feel a sense of responsibility for what you've produced and you want to keep it looking its best. I am hoping to link up with my old college to find suitable people who can take on the garden maintenance tasks on a sub-contracted basis - something I've not done before so another new challenge awaits!

R&B: How does life as a garden designer compare to that of a biological chemist?

SM: The job satisfaction is amazing - being able to create something beautiful from something unattractive - and I get to meet so many really interesting people.

Every day is different - there's no such thing as a typical day - and you really don't know what opportunity is just around the corner. And I can still draw upon the scientist in me to make sure that my gardens are practically functional, so I get the best of both worlds.

Find out more about Sophia's Gardens on our website—follow Services/Outdoors/Garden Designers/Sophia's Gardens

