

2020
VISION

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www.visionmagessex.com
brentwood@visionmag.co.uk | 01277 554045

 @visionmagessex  @visionmagessex
 Vision Magazine Essex

FOUNDER | Nik Allen CREATIVE DIRECTOR | Misha Mistry
CO-ORDINATORS | Rebecka Fryer, Amy Pollard
CONTRIBUTORS | Tabatha Fabray, Dean Shaw, Ruby Ward

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Editor's notes...



Nik Allen, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION** BrentwoodOngar.

We're now entering the final chapter of 2020, a year with many 'unprecedented' times. In fact that word unprecedented I have

heard more times this year than ever before.

The message has certainly become more positive recently, with the hope of a vaccine being close to being rolled out. It really does feel like the positive ending to a Hollywood style 'disaster' movie, and hopefully it's the positive news we all need to end 2020 and write it off as a year most would want to forget.

For me, I'm taking the positives (as always). We've made a lot of changes in business and in our personal life, and some of the old ways (pre-COVID) I don't want to go back to. I've certainly enjoyed the flexible working from home more; in fact, my team and I have found that we are more productive than working in an office at times.

In our personal life, we've enjoyed more walks as a family exploring more of the beautiful Essex countryside we have on our doorstep. At home we sometimes get caught up in the day to day, and weeks go swooshing by, but these months of lockdowns and more time at home certainly make me appreciate the little things in life that are most special.

However your year's gone, let's look forward with positivity to 2021. Wishing you all the very best.

Nik

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At 77 years young, Joe Biden's journey to the White House has been a long one, but the US Presidential Election winner won't delay in attempting to bring back together a fractured nation.

After a tumultuous four years as the most powerful man in world politics, it perhaps shouldn't have come as too much of a surprise to find Donald Trump refusing to go quietly in the aftermath of a US Presidential Election defeat that left Democrat Joe Biden at the door of The White House... albeit without a set of keys.

Republican Trump's assertion of ballot box fraud in light of what, admittedly, even his fiercest critic would deem a farcical voting process, will mean the intricacies of the November 3 election will play out in the Supreme Court. And yet, where US politics is concerned, we shouldn't be surprised – four years ago all similar accusations of malpractice were shot across the bow by those same Democrats who are now up in arms over Trump's claims. His suggestion was that thousands of new voting papers were added to the mix, that some were in the name of people long deceased, and that many duplicated votes were received after a chaotic postal vote system that allowed individual states to decide their own rules.

When the dust settles, however, 77-year-old Biden will be inaugurated as the leader of the free world. A lifetime ambition, the Pennsylvania-born former lawyer has been at the forefront of politics for well over five decades, having become a senator in January 1973. Re-elected six times, he was vice president to Barack Obama for eight years, and considered running in 2016, but made way for Hillary Clinton.

He is a passionate advocate of raising the minimum wage and investing in green energy, notably in rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement that Trump controversially left. He promotes criminal justice reform and grants for minority communities, and will also look to expand Obamacare, enlarge the free college system, and challenge China's questionable environment and trade practices. And, most notably, he brings with him to the top table of world politics Kamala Harris, America's first female, first black and first South Asian vice president.

Here in Britain we will look on with interest to see if prime minister Boris Johnson can configure the same buoyancy, trust and commercial parallels he enjoyed with Trump. Our long-term alignment with the States on corporate, social and political levels has been essential for the economy, and now more than ever before the government will be seeking reassurance that this can continue under a new regime.

Despite a desperately narrow winning margin, Joe Biden will enter The White House having achieved the most votes ever for an incoming president – more than 77 million. And yet those celebrating the supposed new dawn of American politics should be wary. Putting aside the somewhat ambitious legal claims that will fill the scrolling new tickers over the coming weeks and months, it remains the case that, even in defeat, Trump's vote total was more than any other elected president in history, Obama included. The brand of confrontational, partisan politics that he popularised continues to resonate with America, and with the Senate still under the control of the Republicans, Biden knows he'll have to fight hard to steady the United States' uneasy global reputation.

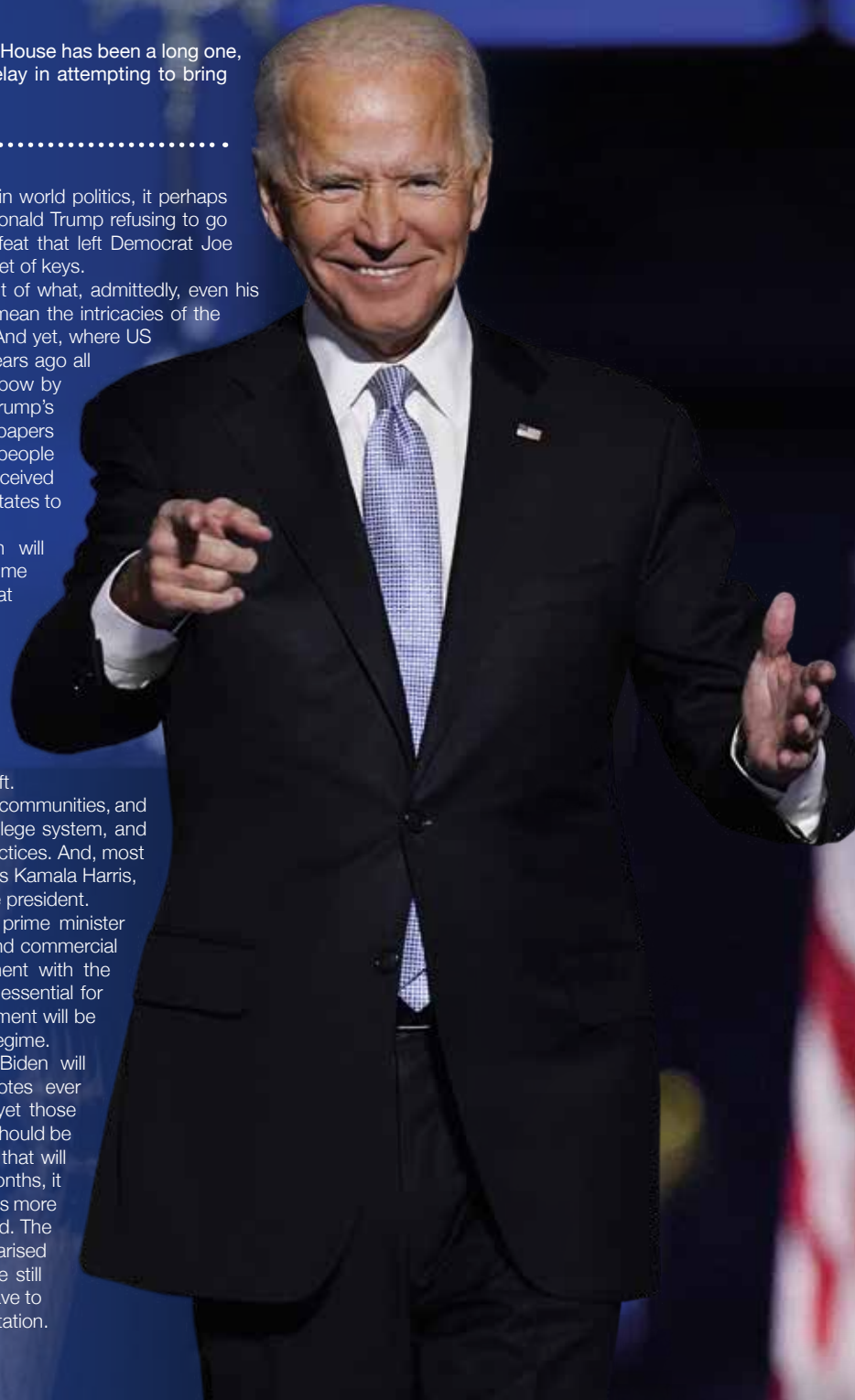


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BIDEN: His Time

THE WORLD AROUND US

Part 2

In the second of our environmental series that looks at the key drivers in the health and well-being of the planet, we're looking at the legacy of our rainforests.

At the end of the 1980s, the realisation that the world's rainforests were being removed at an alarming rate truly propelled a green revolution – one that continues to thrive today.

Where eco awareness and the preservation of our planet are now a part of everyday life, the way we embraced the saving of the Amazon rainforests had never before been seen.

The realisation that deforestation was claiming an area the size of 20 football pitches every minute – for the acquiring of timber and repurposing of land for cattle ranching – was profound, but the deafening screams of those early environmentalists are now just faint murmurs. So what has happened to those green expanses?

Sadly, the problem still exists. A quarter of the Amazon has disappeared, probably never to return, while some speculation suggests the remainder may be felled within 50 years if tighter restrictions are not forthcoming.

Globally, one in four people depends directly on forests for their livelihood, and as many as 120 prescription drugs worldwide are derived directly from rainforests.

And yet, there are two sides to every story. Many South Americans will point to the economic necessity of monetising a natural resource, just as the UK has done with oil and gas. Even the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has called the destruction of these plant- and animal-rich expanses “cultural”; and in a country that has more than 20 million people living in poverty, it's not difficult to see why resistance is strong.

To conclude, it seems that while the days are gone where almost every other charitable programme was driven towards preserving these incredible habitats, it's simply a case of having our attention diverted to other ills. Three decades after we first reached out to our rainforests, the battle to save them lives on.

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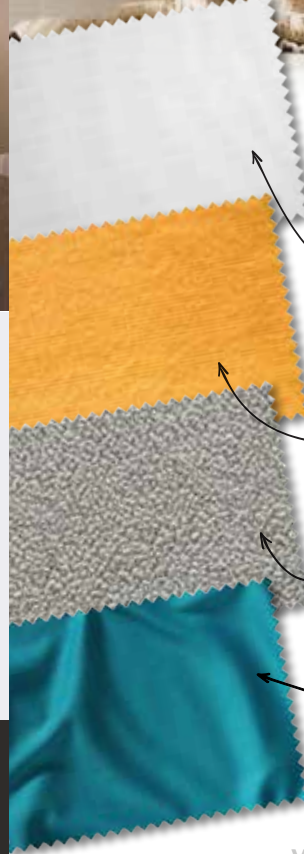
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Banish the brrrr!



HOME & DIY



If you spend all day every day in the winter months longing to return to the comfort and cosiness of your bed, then you may be interested to find out what the best bed sheets are for winter warmth.

From fleece to flannel, cotton to silk, keep reading to discover what fabric you should choose for your winter safe haven.

Cotton: Although you may think that cotton is more fitting for the summer, if you are the type of sleeper who ends up kicking off your covers halfway through the night, then cotton might be the ideal material for you all year round. A natural fabric, cotton is known for its moisture-wicking abilities, meaning it is great for regulating your overall body temperature. If you have sensitive skin, opt for organic cotton sheets which are both breathable and good for the environment.

Flannel: Synonymous with warmth, flannel is one of the most popular choices for winter bedding. A cross between cotton and fleece, this fabric is soft, airy and breathable, making it the perfect choice for anyone who loves a bed that is warm but not overwhelmingly so.

Fleece: Arguably the warmest material you can choose for your bed sheets, fleece is a synthetic fabric that is ultra-soft and built for insulation. Often used in winter sports gear, fleece is designed to insulate heat in even the coldest conditions, meaning it is ideal for those below-freezing winter nights.

Silk: This may be the last fabric that you would think of when it comes to choosing winter bedding, but silk has the unique ability to retain heat while at same time remaining lightweight and smooth to touch. Opt for pure silk bedding if possible as this has moisturising properties; something that your parched winter skin so desperately needs.



DIY Glass art



Nobody likes to look at a big, bare wall, but there are only so many family pictures that one room can take, so why not have a go at this simple, yet stunning, DIY glass wall art? You only need a few basic craft materials and a little bit of creative flair and you are good to go.

YOU WILL NEED

- > Multipurpose, water-based craft paints (small pots) in your preferred colours
- > Masking tape
- > Glue gun
- > 1 glass picture frame
- > Paint brush – soft acrylic or watercolour brushes work well

HOW TO MAKE

- > Ensure the glass within the frame is secure; if not, use a glue gun to stick it in place
- > Allow the glue to fully dry before continuing
- > Mask the edges of the frame and use a clean, dry cloth to dust the glass

- > Decide upon your design – you could use your initial, a flower or a simple inspirational quote
- > If using a stencil, position your chosen design under the glass or go freehand
- > Paint your design in layers, allowing the paint to dry between each coat
- > Once your design is fully dry, remove the masking tape and display proudly on your chosen wall

TOP TIPS FOR PAINTING ON GLASS

- > Always clean the surface before painting
- > Handle the glass carefully to avoid fingerprints
- > Choose the right brush – synthetic brushes can create visible brushstrokes, whereas natural hair brushes allow for more paint to be applied in one stroke and provide a smoother coverage
- > Do not apply too much pressure with your brush
- > Avoid overworking the paint
- > Always blot your brush after rinsing it to eliminate any excess water
- > Clean away imperfections while the paint is still wet, using a wet brush, toothpick or paper towel
- > When the paint has dried, use a razor blade to scrape or trim off any imperfections

OTHER IDEAS FOR DIY GLASS ART:

- > Use markers to write out your favourite quotes
- > Press flowers (two pieces of glass required)

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Chic OR UNIQUE

THE RETURN OF SHABBY CHIC AND HOW TO PULL IT OFF

The revolving circle of décor and design has, over the years, gripped a nation of amateur interior designers. Shabby chic, a style that first came to prominence in the 1980s, is making a concerted return to prominence.

Its invention was as a rebellion to the hard, shiny, ultra-modern, clean-cut image of three decades ago, when yuppies and electronica ruled the roost. The term 'shabby chic' was thought up by fashion journalist Min Hogg.

And the concept hasn't strayed too far since – from distressed furniture to unmatching fabrics and colours, a rustic, rugged essence that's based on comfort and quantity, rather than image and minimalistic posturing.

To achieve the shabby chic look really is to open your imagination, either by pooling existing items or exploring flea markets, thrift stores and antique shops.

Many people think repainting and running a grooved spatula across an old set of drawers is the sum total of shabby chic, but it's about much more than that. Soft background colours flatter furniture and make items the focal point of a room, so think about using whites, beiges or even light greys.

Pastels – baby blues, pale pinks, grainy greys and warm yellows – work best, while that base of brightness means retro, darker shades of wood can match and contrast, be that on tables or chairs. Meanwhile, wicker and throws soften edges and enhance comfort, and wrought iron provides structure.

As far as the walls and surface tops go, flowers, mirrors and pictures using worn frames will assist you in topping off the perfect shabby chic room, with knick-knacks, signs and cushions adding to the mix.

Past that, the only limit is your imagination. And the best thing about shabby chic is that it needn't cost the earth – adding wear and tear to your own items is cheap, if not free.

Photo credit: Spike Powell and Lisa Cohen via idealhome.co.uk



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Time to breathe better



To keep out the cold and to keep energy costs down, buildings have become increasingly airtight, with improved insulation and high-efficiency windows and doors. Although this is good for your bank balance, it is not so beneficial to your health.

Fortunately, there are ways in which you can improve the air quality in your home this winter.

KEEP YOUR HOME CLEAN

During the winter, when you are unlikely to have your windows open, dust, animal dander and mould can become a problem. Therefore, you need to stay on top of your cleaning regime. Vacuum at least twice a week, regularly wash your bedding and clear away any clutter.

CHANGE YOUR AIR FILTERS

If you have a forced-air heating system in your home, you need to ensure you are changing the filters on a regular basis. This is because electrostatic filters work to trap dust and other airborne irritants rather than

allowing them to circulate around your home.

INVEST IN AN AIR PURIFIER

If you struggle with allergies but can't control the source of the problem, for example you do not want to give up a family pet, an air purifier can help to catch some of the irritants that trigger your symptoms. A dehumidifier can also be a great idea if your home is prone to damp as it can help prevent the growth of mould.

HAVE YOUR CHIMNEY SWEEP

Wood-burning fires are lovely in winter but they need to be used responsibly. Avoid burning wet logs or coal as these can produce hazardous particles. You should also ensure that your chimney is cleaned at least once a year so that smoke can escape.

INSTALL A CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR

Carbon monoxide is odourless and can be deadly. However, even at non-fatal levels it can be dangerous for people with weakened lungs.



HOME & DIY

Stylish storage solutions FOR FIREWOOD



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5

Photo credit: sheilerness.com, ideallhome.co.uk, vanellensternyn.com, aplaceforeverything.co.uk, houzz.com

If you are lucky enough to have a wood-burning fire in your home, then you probably can't wait to start torching some timber and heating it up. However, where are you supposed to keep all your lovely logs?

1. Fill any gaps: If you have supporting pillars of wood, or you are using a partial dividing wall to separate two rooms, why not take advantage of any hollow spaces or gaps and fill them with logs? Not only does this look stylish, but it is also a great way of using up an otherwise wasted space.

2. Pile high: For those who want to make a statement with their logs, this big and bold solution is for you. Effectively building a feature wall of firewood, you can utilise any unused alcove in your home to create this eye-catching display. This is not advised if you have young children owing to the risk of injury.

3. Create a cubbyhole: If you have a wood-burning stove rather than an actual fireplace and you are looking to build a surface for it to sit on, you should remember to factor storage into your design. This multitasking brick stage includes both room for both logs and kindling.

4. Go rustic: One of the simplest ways to stylishly store your logs is to use a large, country-style basket. Make sure you pick one that is big enough to fit all your log-burning supplies and is both sturdy and strong. Alternatively, for a more contemporary look, opt for a metal design.

5. Be sneaky: If you have an outdoor storage area for your logs, you only need to display a handful in your home, so look for unused space in your property, such as under the stairs or eaves where you can create a bespoke storage space.

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I think we can all agree that the sooner we see the back of 2020 and this dreadful corona virus the better. That said, there are also some heart warming positives that we can take out of this situation. It has often been said that we can only really get to know one another and realise what is truly important in times of crisis. I think few would argue that in this case what has proven to be important is local community spirit.

When talking to the Manager of Cloudy2Clear windows Chris Miller it became clear that these values have been held dear for a number of years. Since starting the business some years ago Cloudy2Clear have remained true to their core values of

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Photo credit: Ruby Ward @theartoflondon

Popular leisure centre could be closed for good

The Brentwood Centre has been forced to close its doors – possibly for good – after financial difficulties meant it could no longer operate.

The leisure centre and community hub, which is operated by the Brentwood Leisure Trust (BLT), closed on October 27 after a 97 per cent fall in revenue as a result of the pandemic.

Despite help from the government, the Trust said it needed more support “to survive moving forward”.

The financial pressures have been building for some time, and the BLT said it has been discussing how to save services and jobs with Brentwood Borough Council (BBC) since July.

However, the BLT says that a deal that was agreed with BBC was then rejected, leaving it with no option but to close.

BBC said “contingency planning” will now take place as it continues to try to protect the centre’s future.

A statement by the BLT said: “It is with regret that we have to announce the immediate closure of the

Brentwood Centre.

“The trustees and senior managers have been in good faith discussions with BBC since July in trying to find a way to keep the services open and protect the jobs of all associated with the business.

“In spite of a deal agreed in principle, this has been subsequently rejected by BBC. Following further meetings with no resolution, the trustees have been left with no option other than to wind up the business with immediate effect.”

Councillor Chris Hossack, BBC leader, released his own statement regarding the rejected deal.

He said: “This happened suddenly as the BLT realised it could not meet its payroll obligations for October.

“The council is progressing its contingency planning with an interim operator to get the centre back up and running. Our plan, even in the event that the trust were to fold, which it has, was always to get the centre and halls reopened as soon as possible.”



Greener homes to be built

LOCAL NEWS BRENTWOOD



Brentwood Borough Council (BBC) has set an ambitious target to build green homes in the town.

The council is planning to build more than 300 new council homes over the next seven years, with at least the first 61 set to be what the council describes as “zero carbon in use”.

They will be built at Brookfield Close, where existing empty and derelict homes will be transformed.

They will meet the Passivhaus Standard, which is internationally recognised as a leading low-energy-build standard.

Councillor Maria Pearson said: “These houses are going to be state of the art and they are the first examples of this type of housing for social housing in the south east of the country.

“They are going to be modern, energy efficient and green homes, and this is the least our residents deserve. Everyone should have a safe, warm place to call home and we intend to deliver that.”

Violent robber jailed for 10 years

A robber who committed a string of offences in Brentwood has been jailed for 10 years.

Ky Ellis, 42, was found guilty of robbery at Coral in Ongar Road, in which he and a second suspect threatened two staff members and stole a three-figure sum of cash.

He previously robbed the BP garage in Rayleigh Road, Hutton, as he jumped over the front counter, armed with a knife, and forced the tills open.

He had also been charged with shoplifting offences in Brentwood as well as the robbery at knife-point of a pregnant woman elsewhere in Essex.

Ellis, of no fixed address, was sentenced at Snaresbrook Crown Court on October 15 after admitting all the offences.

He was jailed for 10 years, with an extended licence of three years.

PC Charlotte Appleton said: “We worked closely with our colleagues in the Metropolitan Police to put this dangerous man behind bars, and I hope his victims can feel reassured and safer now he is off our streets.”

PM praises founder of community café

A woman from Brentwood who founded a community café has been recognised by the Prime Minister with a Points of Light award.

Lisa Whymark runs the Hutton Daily Bread Café at St Peter’s Church in Hutton, which she has turned into a community hub since the start of the pandemic.

When the café had to close in March, it was transformed into a food hub, where Lisa allowed those in need within the community to pick up free bags of essential food items.

The Points of Light award recognises outstanding UK volunteers who are making a difference in their community.

An extract of a letter to Lisa from Prime Minister Boris Johnson read: “I wanted to write to thank you for the magical way you have transformed your café into a thriving community hub filled with food parcels, cakes and flowers.”

Honoured by the award, Lisa said: “It was a complete shock and I only feel able to accept it on behalf of the amazing team of volunteers that make all of the work possible at Daily Bread. It has been a mammoth effort by everyone involved and I thank them all hugely.”





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V25



Pair set to bring festive cheer to the community

LOCAL NEWS BRENTWOOD



Getting ready for Christmas is going to be easier for people in Brentwood this year thanks to two friends who have set up a festive delivery service.

Alex and Tom (pictured) both worked in the events industry until COVID-19 hit and have joined forces to create Deliver Me Christmas.

Deliver Me Christmas delivers Christmas trees, wreaths and luxury accessories to the Brentwood and Billericay area.

All of its trees are sustainably grown Premium Nordmann Fir (non-drop) and grown in Wales. Then Deliver Me Christmas offers a recycling service, putting the trees through a chipper so they can be used as fertiliser.

The Christmas trees are due to be delivered in the first half of December.

Wreaths and accessories can also be ordered for delivery anywhere in the UK.

Alex and Tom told **VISION**BrentwoodOngar: "The pandemic changed everything but we are really excited about Deliver Me Christmas and the feedback we've had so far.

"We are also focused on a personal service with the trees being delivered by us, so you know what you're getting and who from.

"We're hoping this is just the start, with Deliver Me Easter and much more to follow next year."

Visit www.delivermechristmas.co.uk for more information.

Band and salon team up to create new music video

A Brentwood band have teamed up with a hair salon to create their new music video.

Band Ocean Flaws, who describe themselves as an alternative/indie band, worked with The Brentwood Hairdresser, based on St Thomas Road, to create the

video for their latest track, *Spirit Level*.

The band describe the new video as a "spooky body horror", inspired by David Cronenberg's 1983 film *Videodrome*. The music video also stars the salon owner, Roman MacGowan, as a "creepy, Sweeney Todd-esque barber".

Alex Pattle, the band's drummer, said: "Against a backdrop of prolonged social distancing measures, bands of all sizes – as well as businesses – are having to identify new ways to promote themselves.

"Having been a friend of The Brentwood Hairdresser's owner for more than 10 years, we decided to join forces and help each other out by shooting a socially distanced music video in the salon."

The music video can be viewed on the Ocean Flaws' website, www.oceanflaws.com

Groups win funding to develop community projects

Two projects aiming to reconnect people to the local landscape in Brentwood have each won £5,000 in funding.

The Weald Country Park Volunteer Group applied for funding to restore the main lake at Weald Country Park, by undertaking scrub clearance and opening up views in keeping with the spirit of the original historic landscape, which was once a deer park.

Meanwhile, the Essex Rock and Mineral Society will use the funding to restore the geological section and associated geological items at Thorndon Country Park.

The money comes from the Land of the Fanns Landscape Partnership Scheme. Over the last four years, it has awarded £75,000 to projects across the Land of the Fanns area, helping local groups and organisations both big and small to protect, restore and preserve important community assets. This opens up new opportunities for local people to discover the heritage and environmental treasures on their doorsteps and improve the environment for wildlife and for everyone to enjoy for years to come.



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Alex Burghart MP for Brentwood and Ongar



LOCAL NEWS BRENTWOOD



When I wrote for the December edition of **VISION** BrentwoodOngar last year, we were in the midst of a General Election campaign. Twelve months on and we have experienced a year like no other. COVID-19 has changed everyone's lives in ways we could not have imagined only a short time ago.

To meet the challenge, the government has stepped in with a world-beating package of support for businesses and jobs through grants, loans, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

It's been a huge task to roll this out, while supporting the NHS, establishing new Nightingale and Seacole Hospitals, setting up a vast testing programme and backing the UK scientists in their bid to find an effective vaccine to protect us against COVID-19.

This Christmas, the government is giving additional support to those most in need with a £170million COVID Winter Grant Scheme for England. This will help families with the cost of food and utilities until Easter.

Locally, Essex County Council has received £3.8million of government funding to make sure vulnerable families can get some help.

As I write this, there are some good reasons to be optimistic. Already we have a better understanding of COVID-19 and how to treat patients, meaning that patients are not becoming as ill and fewer people are requiring intensive care. We also have the immediate prospect of many millions of cheap, reliable and rapid-turnaround tests which we will be able to use ourselves to find out if we are infectious. And now there is the very real prospect of a vaccine in the near future.

Through all the difficulties, however, the most heartening thing has been the way in which local communities across my Brentwood and Ongar constituency have come together to look after each other, and this is something we should hold on to once these strange times are behind us.

We do not yet know how Christmas will be, or what 2021 will bring, but please take care of those around you.

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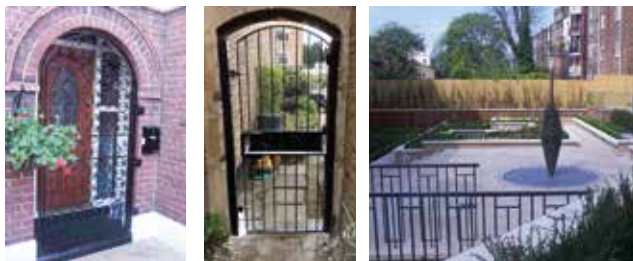
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The showroom at Phoenix is large and everything is laid out to make it easy to view. The staff are friendly and very helpful and we were impressed with the enthusiasm and knowledge that Triston had. His advice on how to choose the right product was of enormous benefit and



we felt confident that he was steering us in the best direction for us. They have a range of products that seems unequalled, and certainly ranges like Vision Trimline, Acquisitions, Capital, Dik Geurts, DRU and Spartherm don't seem to be available elsewhere.

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Leisure centre's £1.3million refurbishment progressing well

A group of councillors recently visited Ongar Leisure Centre to see how the £1.3million refurbishment is progressing.

The huge investment will be spent mostly on increasing energy efficiencies, with the focus on a new pool plant room, and reducing maintenance costs.

The visit was hosted by Peter Charman from the council's leisure team, with members of the contracts team on hand to answer questions from councillors.

Few councillors had seen the pool plant room before, and many commented on how antiquated it looked before being shown how small and efficient the new plant would be by comparison.

The leisure centre roof is also being refurbished, with new LED lighting installed and the electrical systems upgraded.

During the visit on October 26, councillors were told

that the project will provide an extra five to seven years of life to the Epping Forest District Council-owned centre.

Budget permitting, further changes to the pool viewing area will be made to improve the experience for parents watching children's swimming lessons.

Deputy leader and Shelley ward councillor, Nigel Bedford, said: "Ongar Leisure Centre is a much-loved community facility in the northern part of our district and it is right that we should invest in the facility.

"Not only will the investment increase the life of the centre, but it will also bring excellent benefits in terms of increased energy efficiency."

The project has a tight deadline to ensure that the pool reopens immediately after Christmas, although COVID-19 restrictions may have an impact on the final reopening date.

Volunteers come together to clean up



Ongar was looking a lot tidier after a team of volunteers came together for a litter pick prior to the second lockdown.

Residents joined the council's Community, Culture And Wellbeing Team (CCW), members of the Youth Council and Voluntary Action Epping Forest to take part in a Shelley ward litter pick during the October half-term.

Residents worked in their support bubbles of up to six people, keeping their distance from others, and were armed with litter pickers, high-vis jackets, bin bags and gloves.

They collected 17 big bags of litter, helping to make Ongar a greener, cleaner place to live.

Councillor Holly Whitbread, portfolio holder for housing and community, said: "Events like this are great for bringing the community together to do something positive that will benefit everyone."

"Well done to all those who took part for braving the cold, miserable weather and clearing up as much as possible."

The Youth Councillors got their families involved too. Frank Cullis, Youth Councillor from Roding Valley High School, said: "It was great to have my younger sister help us, and it gave us something different and useful to do as a family during the half-term holiday."

Lit cigarette causes sofa fire after woman falls asleep

Fire crews were called to a blaze at a house in Ongar after a woman fell asleep on the sofa while holding a lit cigarette.

Crews from Ongar and Harlow were called to the house, which has multiple occupants, on Ongar High Street on October 31 at 6.18am.

A woman had fallen asleep while smoking and her cigarette set fire to her chair.

The property did not have smoke alarms, but thankfully she woke up, got out, stayed out and called 999.

Firefighters extinguished the fire at 6.54am, and fitted smoke alarms to the property.

Essex Fire and Rescue confirmed: "The property suffered substantial smoke damage.

"The cause of the fire has been recorded as accidental."

Christmas at the railway set to go ahead

Just like many other organisations, Epping Ongar Railway has had to amend its proposed Christmas schedule to comply with new government guidelines.

The customers concerned were contacted and, in most cases, alternative arrangements have been made.

The Epping Ongar Light Fantastic Trains are now scheduled to commence on December 3 and run on selected dates up to January 10. There is limited availability and early booking is essential.

Santa Specials are due to commence on December 5 and run up until Christmas Eve. Currently these trains are fully booked.

These events are subject to change to reflect government guidelines. Visit www.eorailway.co.uk for the latest information on both events.

Most of the railway volunteers continued to work during the second lockdown, in accordance with government guidelines, to prepare the railway for the busy Christmas and New Year season ahead.

If you would like to join them and assist with the operational or maintenance programmes, email membership@eorailway.co.uk



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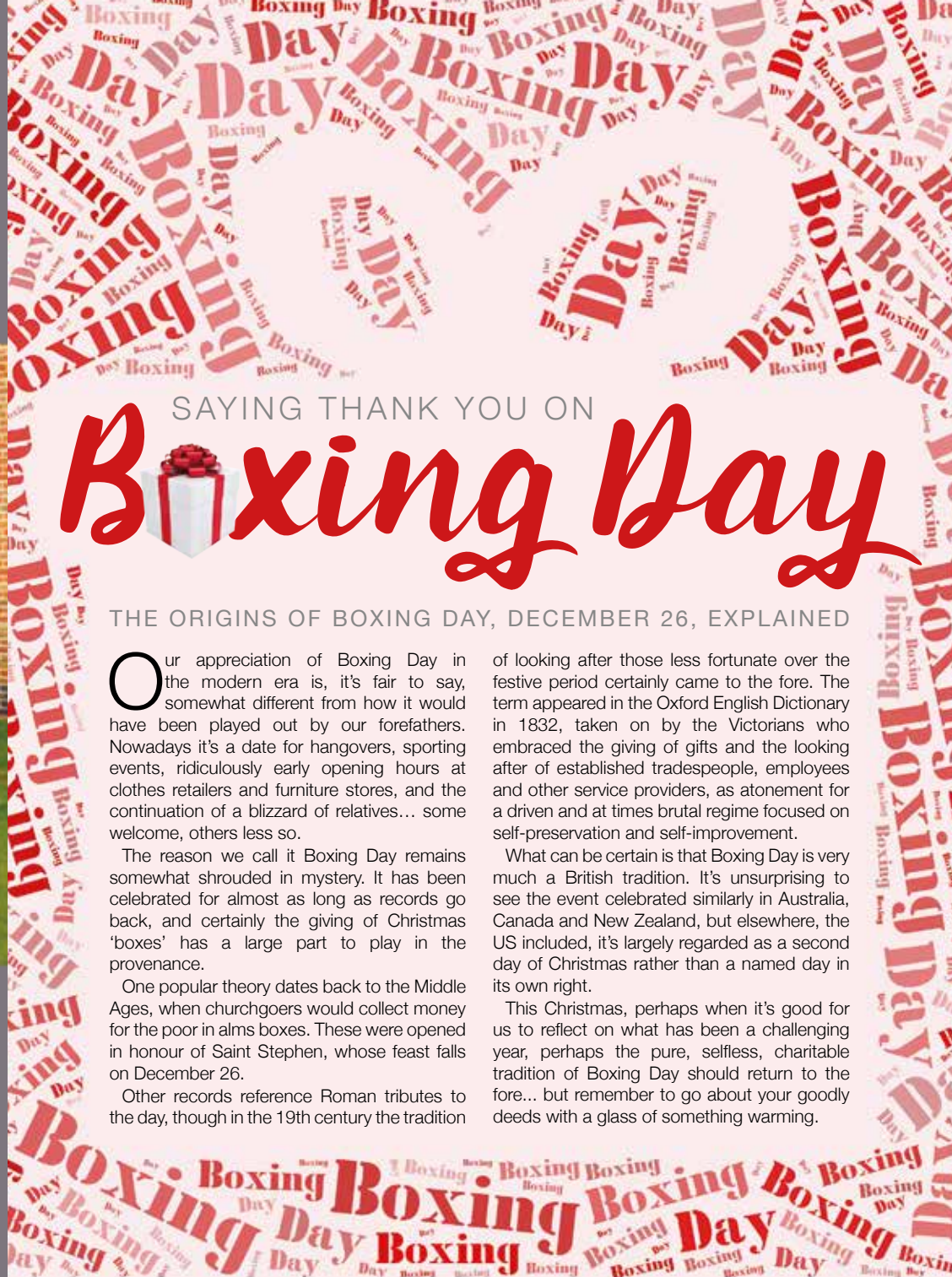
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Boxing Day

THE ORIGINS OF BOXING DAY, DECEMBER 26, EXPLAINED

Our appreciation of Boxing Day in the modern era is, it's fair to say, somewhat different from how it would have been played out by our forefathers. Nowadays it's a date for hangers, sporting events, ridiculously early opening hours at clothes retailers and furniture stores, and the continuation of a blizzard of relatives... some welcome, others less so.

The reason we call it Boxing Day remains somewhat shrouded in mystery. It has been celebrated for almost as long as records go back, and certainly the giving of Christmas 'boxes' has a large part to play in the provenance.

One popular theory dates back to the Middle Ages, when churchgoers would collect money for the poor in alms boxes. These were opened in honour of Saint Stephen, whose feast falls on December 26.

Other records reference Roman tributes to the day, though in the 19th century the tradition

of looking after those less fortunate over the festive period certainly came to the fore. The term appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1832, taken on by the Victorians who embraced the giving of gifts and the looking after of established tradespeople, employees and other service providers, as atonement for a driven and at times brutal regime focused on self-preservation and self-improvement.

What can be certain is that Boxing Day is very much a British tradition. It's unsurprising to see the event celebrated similarly in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, but elsewhere, the US included, it's largely regarded as a second day of Christmas rather than a named day in its own right.

This Christmas, perhaps when it's good for us to reflect on what has been a challenging year, perhaps the pure, selfless, charitable tradition of Boxing Day should return to the fore... but remember to go about your goodly deeds with a glass of something warming.



PUZZLES & TRIVIA

PUZZLES

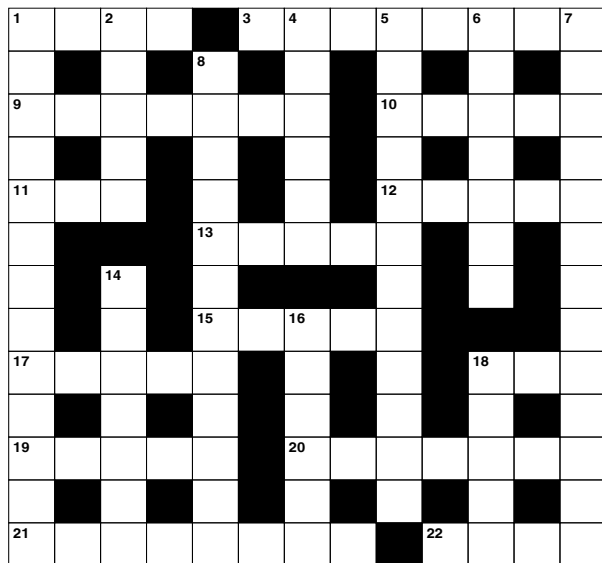
Answers can be found on the Contents Page 4

ACROSS

- 1. Set of playing cards (4)
- 3. Neck injury (8)
- 9. Genuine (7)
- 10. Kick out (5)
- 11. 17th Greek letter (3)
- 12. The beginning of an era (5)
- 13. Enclosed (5)
- 15. Bird sound (5)
- 17. Turned to ice (5)
- 18. Statute (3)
- 19. Exposes secret information (5)
- 20. Country whose capital is Reykjavik (7)
- 21. Longing (8)
- 22. Refuse to admit (4)

DOWN

- 1. Shamefully (13)
- 2. Showing a willingness to achieve results (3-2)
- 4. Doglike mammals (6)
- 5. Planned in advance (12)
- 6. Sanction (7)
- 7. Unenthusiastically (4-9)



- 8. Food shop (12)
- 14. Proportionately (3,4)
- 16. Banner or flag (6)
- 18. Lessen (5)

DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ Hummingbirds are the only birds that are able to fly backwards
- ▶ The short-horned lizard squirts blood from blood vessels around its eyes when defending itself. This is because the blood vessels rupture under pressure
- ▶ A giant panda will typically eat for around 12 hours a day
- ▶ Elephant ears help to keep the animals cool by radiating heat
- ▶ Young jaguars are blind at birth. They learn to hunt by living with their mother for two years or more
- ▶ Wolves can go for more than a week without eating
- ▶ A fox can communicate with other foxes by using its tail
- ▶ The bald eagle has a wingspan of around eight feet

SUDOKU

							2	9
1	8			2		5		
			5	9		8		
	7	4					8	
			9		6			
	9					6	1	
		2		4	3			
		7		8			4	2
8	4							

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As film icons go, there are few to rival James Bond; and as Bond actors go, there are none to rival Sir Sean Connery.

In a year that has been unkind on so many levels, fans of film perhaps felt an added sense of injustice at the end of October when it was announced that Sir Sean Connery had passed away, at the age of 90.

Of course, in many respects, the actor's work was done. Connery was the smooth-talking, sumptuously styled Scot who legitimised, developed and truly delivered 007 into the golden era of film. The first man to step into the secret agent's shoes, with 1962's *Dr No*, Connery, a former bodybuilder who finished third in Mr Universe in the early 1950s, proved to author Ian Fleming that he had the fervour and finesse to carry off the role, having previously been dismissed as "an overgrown stuntman".

It seems perverse that someone who would go on to become so decorated in the indulgence and luxury of 1960s cinema may have been cast aside before it even began, but it's fair to note that the actor's previous engagements had been in rather less salubrious guises, notably in crime drama *Hell Drivers*, fantasy adventure *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* and outward-bound action flick *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*.

That, within a decade, Connery would have elevated his worth from tracking the movements of a man swinging through the jungle to starring in iconic movies such as *From Russia with Love*, *Goldfinger*, *Thunderball* and *You Only Live Twice*, is remarkable.

What made Connery's sumptuously smooth portrayal of Bond so impressive was that, unlike the modern-day 007s, he interspersed international espionage with an array of other lead roles. Seventeen movies were made across the nine years he portrayed Bond, a sequence that ended in 1971 with *Diamonds are Forever* (although he did agree to reprise the character in 1983's *Never Say Never Again*).

"I got to the point where I felt I had nothing left to prove as far as Bond was concerned," said Connery. "It was a delightful run where the evolution of 007 and everything around him had gathered such pace with every new movie; yet in myself I thought I had probably evolved as much as I had wanted, and it was time to let someone else have a go."

Away from Bond, twice-married Connery flourished in the likes of *Murder on the Orient Express*, *A Bridge too Far*, *Highlander*, *The Untouchables*, *The Hunt for Red October* and as Indiana Jones' father in *The Last Crusade*.

There are the ones that got away too – he turned down the role of Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* despite being offered a \$30million bounty; he also rejected playing Architect in *The Matrix* trilogy. The truth is, Connery, who was knighted in the year 2000, was always focused on how he saw himself – as an actor, and as a person... how else can you explain turning down a direct invitation to join Manchester United by legendary manager Sir Matt Busby.

"I was 23 at the time and although I had the contract offer in front of me, I had long decided that football would take a backseat to acting. I felt I had more chance of doing something special, something unique, in the acting world; I felt I could give more and put smiles on more faces, my own included."

Sir Sean, you succeeded.

The Ultimate Bond?



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Holly

DECEMBER BIRTH FLOWER OF THE MONTH

If you were born in the same month Christmas, your birth flower is the festive holly. A popular plant for the season of winter, holly is instantly recognisable by its prickly leaves and ruby red berries. Plus, it's easy to grow and is great for garden security.

What is the symbolic significance of holly?

In ancient Celtic cultures, the Druids regarded holly as a symbol of fertility and believed it to have magical powers. Today, holly has been adopted as a symbol of Christmas by Christians, with the sharp leaves said to symbolise the crown of thorns worn by Christ and the berries representing his blood.

What does this birth flower say about your personality?

Those born in December are said to be fiercely protective. Not a fan of criticism, you are naturally defensive and are not afraid to stand up for yourself when required. You also love to make a home feel warm and inviting, both your own and those of your friends and family.

How to grow holly in your garden

The holly plant is fairly easy to grow and will thrive in both sun and partial shade, although it prefers moist but well-drained soil. You can choose to grow holly on your lawn, in a shrub border or even to make some hedges. Holly does not require much pruning, although if you want to cut some as a festive decoration, do so in early winter before its berries are eaten by birds.

Interesting facts about holly

- It is evergreen
- It can be grown in pots and containers for up to five years
- The berries are mildly poisonous
- Legend says that holly protects from thunder, lightning and witchcraft
- Real holly plants bloom scented flowers in spring

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GARDENING

HORTICULTURE HEROES: Diarmuid Gavin

Expert gardener Diarmuid Gavin made his name as the host of BBC teatime hits *Gardeners' World* and *Home Front in the Garden*, but he's been busy tending to different fields of late.

The Chelsea gold-medal-winning designer has tried his hand at ballroom in *Strictly Come Dancing*, proved a degree of culinary expertise on *Come Dine With Me* and made ripples on ITV's celebrity diving bonanza *Splash*.

The 56-year-old's flirtation with mainstream TV perhaps, for a while, threatened to take him away from a professional passion for horticulture that stretches back to the late 1980s.

Indeed, the Irishman has reinforced his commitment to returning to the innocence of the humble garden by refusing to exhibit for the past few years at the Chelsea Flower Show.

"I think with all these things there has to be a practicality to it – there has to be a take-out.

"If I am exhibiting an idea that is preposterously unachievable to the average gardener, then what is the point?"

Diarmuid's reconnection with his horticultural roots has restated the charismatic gardener with what truly thrills him, and his Instagram feed provides an almost daily delve into the passions of our plots.

"People always ask me for advice, and in terms of our own gardens, I'd just advise that people are careful when they plant," he says.

"Plants that are too tender will die very quickly, so spend longer planning and plant later – that's the golden rule... never rush things. Better to be exuberant once rather than spend the same amount by buying lower-priced items twice, because the first lot have died."

At his extroverted peak, Diarmuid produced a Willy Wonka-inspired giant garden that was deemed too big to enter the historic Chelsea Flower Show.

"I have calmed down since," he laughs. "It was way too big... nearly the size of a football field. I knew after that it was time to rein it in."



A GUIDE TO Rose pruning

If you want to ensure that your roses are as happy and healthy as possible, you need to make sure you prune them annually. You can carry out this task any time between November and March, although getting out the clippers in late autumn can help to stimulate new growth over winter.

STEP ONE: DE-HEADING

The first thing you need to do is prune off any dead or fading flowers from your rose bush as this will ensure your bush looks tidy. You can choose to leave every second flower if you want hips to decorate your bushes over winter.

STEP TWO: REMOVE BROKEN STEMS

Now you should look to remove any dead or broken stems and branches from your rose bushes, as a harsh winter could rip them off and cause damage to the healthy stems. Aim to cut any broken or diseased stems at least six inches into healthy wood.

STEP THREE: CUT OUT SUCKERS

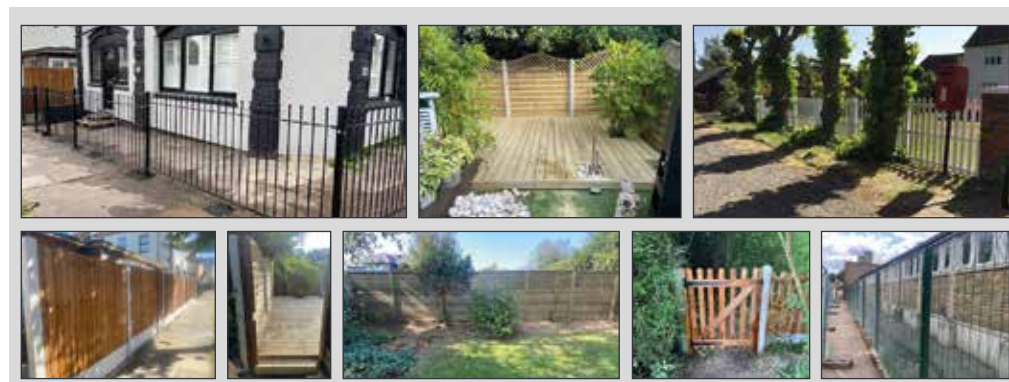
Suckers are shoots that grow directly from the rootstock and rob the energy supply from your roses. Therefore, it is vital that you cut out suckers as close to their point of origin as possible. It is also a good idea to seal the area of the cut with some tree wound sealer.

STEP FOUR: CLEAN UP

You must always make sure that you remove all leaves and cut branches from the surrounding area after pruning as you never know what diseases and pests could be lurking in there.

TOP ROSE PRUNING TIPS:

- > Never prune newly planted roses as they need at least one growing season to become established
- > After pruning, spray with lime sulphur to eliminate fungal spores and eggs from pests
- > Use bypass shears rather than anvil blades to achieve a cleaner cut.



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WAYS TO JAZZ UP YOUR Christmas beard



Whether you have designer stubble or a full-on Santa beard, there is no excuse not to get festive when it comes to your facial hair this Christmas. From baubles to bells, sweets to knits, check out these six fantastically festive beard decorations.

1. Beard Baubles: If you want a weird and wacky Christmas beard design, then look no further. Mini baubles hanging from your whiskers will ensure you start trending on social media sooner rather than later.

2. Beard Glitter: A simple yet highly effective idea, a glitter beard will ensure you are the centre of attention for all the right reasons. Simply apply some glitter glue to your beard and then sprinkle with your chosen glitter. Why not use multiple colours for even more oomph?

3. Beard Candy: If you or your kids love candy canes, then this

is the festive beard design for you. Best for bushy beards, all you need to do is adorn your beard with canes and you are good to do.

4. Beard Jingle Bells: For those who don't mind being heard before they are seen, beard bells provide a fun and frivolous way to jazz up your face. Ideal for Christmas carolling.

5. Beard Knits: Does your mum love to make you an annual Christmas jumper? If so, why not ask her this year to knit you a beard warmer instead? It's festive and perfect for keeping out the winter chill.

6. Beard Lights: Last but definitely not least, it wouldn't be Christmas without some well-placed fairy lights, and what better location for these colourful decorations than on your face? Just make sure you buy a clip-on set to avoid a terrible tangle in your bristles.



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Men's skin toning & tightening after one treatment

Men's stomach after one treatment

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- ✦ Smooths Fine Lines & Wrinkles

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DIY UGLY Christmas Jumper

National Ugly Christmas Jumper Day falls on the third Friday of December each year and offers participants the chance to showcase the worst possible festive jumper they can find. However, why not steer clear of the shops this year and make your own original ugly jumper?

COFFEE SHOP UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER
If you love nothing more than a Starbucks first thing in the morning, why not showcase your devotion by sticking a coffee cup directly onto your jumper? Start by cutting your cup in half lengthways and gluing it to the lid. Then glue two pieces of felt to the inside of the cup, glue Velcro tape to the felt and to your jumper and attach.

COUPLES' UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPERS
What could be more cringe than you and your significant other wearing matching garish glittery Christmas jumpers? Using hot glue, stick on sequins that say "Mr" and "Mrs" and then add as much tinsel, glitter and baubles as you can stomach.

LIGHT-UP UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER
Whatever design or slogan you choose for your DIY ugly Christmas sweater, the addition of Christmas coloured fairy lights will only ever make it more tacky. Simply turn your jumper inside out, decide where your battery holder should go and then sew in your LED lights.

SNOW GLOBE UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER
One of the more inventive options. All you need is a plastic bowl, a selection of cheap Christmas decorations and a glue gun to create your very own 3D snow globe on the front of your jumper.

CUTE KIDS UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER
If your children are taking part in national ugly Christmas jumper day, then this DIY Christmas tree jumper is just the ticket. Plus, they can help you make it. All you need is some felt, mini shatterproof baubles, festive beads and hot glue.

Photo credit: ilovetocreate.com, creativefashionblog.com, thesamanthashow.com, brit.co, countryliving.com



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I have been a client of Michaels' for nearly 10 years and I see the same service as I did then as a new client as I do now as an existing client.

Christopher - London

SherwoodHealthcare

I have been a client of Sherwood Healthcare for over 10 years. They are a very professional, helpful company that provides superb service. I have recommended them to many of my friends and all of them are just as happy as I am.

Tea - London

I contacted Mike through recommendation for my life and critical illness cover. I didn't have any knowledge of the market as this was something I had never looked into before. Mike took me through all of the options, giving me clear advice and was really helpful. It was great to know that Mike worked closely with the market as he was able to explain lots of information that I wouldn't have been able to find myself online. Mike was available by email and telephone whenever I had questions, which made the experience really personal. Mike was able to secure cover for me on both of my requirements, which had great benefits and a competitive price.

I feel reassured that I now have policies in place and am glad that I used Sherwood Healthcare as a recommended broker.

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Christmas

plants that care and cure

There are several plants that are synonymous with Christmas, from the decorative poinsettia, to the “kiss me quick” mistletoe, to the evergreen holly and ivy. However, did you know that each of these plants has its own healing properties?

Holly: Often used to decorate your table for Christmas dinner, in terms of medicinal use, you should only use the leaves of the holly as the berries are poisonous. Holly leaves have been known to treat digestive issues, rheumatism, fever, bronchitis and high blood pressure.

HOW TO TAKE: Dry out your holly leaves, crush and add a few teaspoons to a cup of hot water.

Mistletoe: Either a blessing, or a curse depending on who you are standing in close proximity to, mistletoe has been used for centuries to treat medical conditions such as epilepsy, hypertension, headaches and the symptoms of menopause.

HOW TO TAKE: Only use the leaves and stems as the grains are poisonous. Steep in cold water for 12 hours, strain and drink up to three times a day.

Poinsettia: The perfect plant to decorate your home over Christmas, the poinsettia is known for its ability to clean air, and in particular, to remove formaldehyde from insulation, plastic bags and other household items.

HOW TO TAKE: Simply place a poinsettia in your home and let it work its magic.

Ivy: The leaves of ivy are both anti-inflammatory and anti-rheumatic, plus they contain antioxidant properties. Ivy is also said to help settle your stomach, boost your immune system and increase oxygenation of the body.

HOW TO TAKE: The leaves of ivy can either be consumed or applied topically. To make ivy tea, simply soak 4 fresh ivy leaves or 2 tbsps of crushed dried ivy in 1 litre of cold water, bring to the boil and then filter immediately.



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Bob's story – Knee replacement surgery



Bob McLintock had knee replacement surgery at the Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital after 10 years of pain in his left knee.

Bob McLintock has been involved in sport as a participant, teacher, coach, facility manager and event organiser for over 50 years.



Bob McLintock

Active Essex

Bob, former chief executive of Brentwood Borough Council, is currently chairman of the Active Brentwood sports partnership.

10 years ago, Bob's left knee was beginning to limit his opportunities to participate in physical activity. By the end of 2019 he was restricted to a

15-minute walk only. In January 2020 he came to the Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital and met with consultant orthopaedic surgeon and knee specialist, Mr Sunil Kumar. Bob was immediately seen for x-rays which identified the problem as severe bone on bone arthritis.



Mr Sunil Kumar

He was told that a total knee replacement would be the best course of action to get him back to his old self.

Bob was offered physiotherapy during his time at the hospital and was given a tailored exercise programme to support him back to fitness after surgery.

Bob saw his surgeon, Mr Sunil Kumar, daily during his three day stay in hospital, and saw him for two follow up appointments to check his progress after. He undertook a month-long programme of physiotherapy and an on-going recovery exercise programme.

Post operation, Bob experienced some pain but exercised regularly, as instructed by the Nuffield Health physiotherapy team, to restore the maximum movement. Eight months later, Bob is delighted to say "I have the same range of movement in my new left knee as I have in my

right. I am exercising and walking without pain and can play football with my grandsons".

Mr Sunil Kumar is a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital. He specialises in all aspects of knee surgery including minimally invasive partial and total knee replacements, cruciate ligament surgery reconstruction, cartilage surgery and sports injuries.

Mr Kumar is just one of a number of specialist consultants at the hospital who between them have countless years of experience in orthopaedics, general surgery, men's and women's health, children's services and cosmetic surgery.

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For further information or to book an appointment with Mr Sunil Kumar, contact Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital on **01277 554 181** www.nuffieldhealth.com
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FOUR COMMON

WINTER AILMENTS

AND HOW TO TREAT THEM

As well as the common cold and seasonal flu, not to mention COVID-19, there are several ailments that many people suffer with during the cold winter months.

Let's take a closer look at them and their most effective treatments.

1. PAINFUL JOINTS

If you suffer with arthritis, you may find that your joints become even more painful and achy in the colder months. Although there is no way to avoid the effects of the cold completely, ensuring you partake in regular exercise, manage your weight and continue to take any prescribed medication can lessen any pain or discomfort you are experiencing.



2. COLD SORES

If you are prone to cold sores, you may find that you are particularly susceptible in the winter when your immune system is compromised. Try to ensure you get as much rest as possible, keep your lips moisturised and use a topical treatment when needed.



3. ASTHMA

The dry and cold air in winter can make the symptoms of asthma worse by irritating your airways and causing your muscles to spasm, resulting in loss of breath. You can counteract this by limiting your time outside, wearing a scarf when you do go out and always having an asthma action plan in place.



4. SINUS INFECTIONS

If you have a weakened immune system, are a smoker or suffer with seasonal allergies, you are more likely to suffer with sinus infections. Symptoms include a runny nose, headaches, pain or pressure in your face and a sore throat. Try placing a warm compress on your face, using a decongestant and breathing in steam from a hot shower.



TOP TIPS FOR KEEPING HEALTHY THIS WINTER

- > Eat more fruit and veg
- > Embrace natural daylight
- > Wash your hands regularly
- > Stay hydrated

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Cooking UP A treat



FOOD FINESSE WITH POPULAR CHEF JAMES MARTIN

When James Martin bade an extremely tearful farewell to his *Saturday Kitchen* colleagues in March 2016, it was imagined the chef would be turning his hand to new projects after 10 years fronting the popular BBC weekend cookery show.

Of course, as these things often materialise, the popular Yorkshireman reappeared less than six months later fronting a copycat culinary conflag over on ITV.

Regardless, the 48-year-old's switch to commercial TV has also spawned a run of cookery series, reaffirming his place as one of the most popular chefs on television.

Of course, life on the small screen is already a secondary career for Martin, who excelled with wooden spoon in hand from a young age. Indeed, he was almost asked to leave a cookery class at the age of 12 for serving flambéed chicken and mangetout while his prepubescent classmates struggled to create fairy cakes. He went on to study catering at Scarborough College, coming

top of his class for three consecutive years, and was then offered a job working in London with Antony Worrall Thompson, one of the judges for his final exam.

His accomplishments, however, weren't served up to him on a plate – as a Yorkshireman, Martin was taught from birth that “you don't get owt for nowt”. The hard graft paid off, it seems, as he was made head chef of the first Hotel du Vin in Winchester when he was just 22.

Two years later, he began to appear on our screens in shows such as *James Martin: Yorkshire's Finest* and *Ready, Steady, Cook* – his affable nature and dry, self-deprecating humour making him an instant hit with viewers.

From weekend shows to cooking adventures at home and overseas, the chef's fascination with food is unrelenting, as evidenced in his recent return to our screens for *Saturday Morning with James Martin*.

“It's been a great ride so far,” he says, “and the stove is still warm.”



Photo credit: Ken McKay/ITV/Shutterstock



Let's get Saucy

Even if you pride yourself on making your own roast potatoes and stuffing your own turkey, not many people take the time to make their own sauces for their Christmas dinner. So, let's change that. Check out these three popular Christmas sauce recipes that are both simple and delicious.

Easy Peasy Bread Sauce

YOU WILL NEED: 600ml milk | 50g butter | 1 onion | 6 cloves | 6 peppercorns | 2 garlic cloves | 1 bay leaf | 3 sprigs of thyme | 100g white breadcrumbs | 4 tbsp single cream | Pinch of nutmeg (optional)

HOW TO MAKE: Simmer the milk, butter, onion, cloves, peppercorns, garlic and herbs in a pan for 15-20 minutes | Strain and return liquid to heat | Add breadcrumbs and simmer for a further 4 minutes | Stir in cream | Season with nutmeg if desired, and serve



Super Simple Cranberry Sauce

YOU WILL NEED: 200g white sugar | 4 cups of fresh or frozen cranberries | 250ml water | Zest of an orange | Optional spices - cinnamon, nutmeg and allspice

HOW TO MAKE: Rinse cranberries | Boil water and dissolve sugar | Add cranberries and simmer on a low heat until most of the berries have burst | Grate in some orange zest and add a small pinch of your preferred spice | Leave to cool

NB: Cranberry sauce will continue to thicken as it cools.

Perfect Turkey Gravy

YOU WILL NEED: 2 chopped onions | 1 large chopped carrot | 1.3 litres stock - preferably turkey, but chicken will do | 3 tbsp plain flour | 5 tbsp white wine | Turkey neck (optional)

HOW TO MAKE: Add the onion, carrot and turkey neck to a pan | Pour in stock and simmer for one hour | Strain to remove the vegetables and meat, then return liquid to pan | Combine flour with white wine and then add to stock | Heat gently until thickened | Season to taste | Leave to cool and chill



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Ageless Aims

KIDS

ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL ENTERTAINMENT IDEAS FOR FAMILIES WITH KIDS OF VERY DIFFERENT AGES



Having children across a broad age spectrum can often be taxing when it comes to keeping them all amused and happy, but here are a few ideas that work right across the board, from tiny toddlers to troublesome teenagers.

Cooking up a treat

Whether baking a cake, preparing a stew for dinner or simply working together to get a few sandwiches on plates, the kitchen has always been a staple for family life (and the odd party).

Cooking creates a true bond among children, not least because they can enjoy the fruits of their labour afterwards.



Scooters, bikes and trikes

From balance bikes to mountain bikes and any sort of wheeled machinery in between, venturing out on a ride is a great way of connecting our kids with the outdoors. Follow an established route, explore a new area, set up a treasure hunt or simply go off-piste into wooded areas – getting outdoors is great fun.



An English country garden

What better way to embrace the best playground of them all than by getting the kids involved in tending to the garden? From mowing the lawn to planting, clearing out the shed or even trimming back the bushes, the view from your window will be all the better for a family afternoon in the yard.



Paint it black

Whether it's throwaway pieces of art on paper or a more serious dollop of paint on canvas to be hung on the wall, being creative makes a fantastic family bond. And because art is subjective, you can tell your competitive brood with absolute sincerity that those Pollock-like splashes of colour that come from your two-year-old are in no way inferior to the Picasso-esque portrait painted by your eldest, the art student.

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Why the Help to Buy: Shared Ownership continues to create homes out of houses

For all its speculation, criticism and conjecture, the housing market represents one of the most stable industries in the UK. Only amid the perils of negative equity in the 1990s did the bricks and mortar of people's fortunes really begin to crumble; yet for large periods outside that time, investment in property has largely been deemed a safe one.

Of course, as a result of this, the market has become much more competitive, and the growing difficulty with which first-time buyers, in particular, are able to get on board means the government's introduction of Help to Buy schemes has gone a long way to guiding people along the footpath to realising those dreams.

The concept is simple – if you cannot afford the mortgage on what would be 100 per cent of a home, Help to Buy: Shared Ownership will allow you to buy a share of the property, which could be anywhere between 25 and 75 per cent of its value.

You would effectively pay rent on the remaining share. This means the initial deposit is smaller and mortgage finance more accessible. On the plus side, owners still enjoy a decent proportion of true investment and, along with that, benefit from rises in market price over time.

The criteria to get involved is sensible. Those applying need to earn less than £80,000/year (£90,000/year in London). Furthermore, you would need to be a first-time buyer, or have owned before while being unable to buy now; or perhaps are in an existing shared ownership arrangement and are looking to move.

Variations to the rules exist for the over-55s and disabled applicants, but for the most part the success of the scheme, which is being repackaged and relaunched for 2021, is evident in the millions of people who have stepped onto the property ladder since its launch four decades ago.

SMALL ISLAND LIVING – REDISCOVERING WHAT WE ALREADY HAVE

In recent weeks, there has been an 800 per cent rise in Brits searching for 'Staycation UK', as the uncertainty surrounding international travel during the pandemic continues to prevail¹.

APPRECIATING WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE...

Destinations such as Plymouth, the Isle of Wight and Exeter are expected to recover quickly due to the staycation tourism boost, according to new research². It would seem that the pandemic is allowing Brits to rediscover and appreciate the thousands of beautiful destinations that we already have on our doorstep.

...INCLUDING YOUR FINANCES

This attitude of appreciating what we have extends to our finances. Over the years, life gets busy and it's easy to lose track of our money. A reported one in five savers have lost track of their pension pot – and the situation is likely to get worse. Meanwhile, other research³ suggests that 43 per cent of us have lost track of a bank account,

17 per cent don't know what's happened to their Premium Bonds and 15 per cent have been separated from an ISA – leaving them needlessly out of pocket.

In these troubled financial times, taking stock of your finances and appreciating what you have can give you a sense of financial control during a period of uncertainty.

It's time for a financial review if you feel like you've lost a grip on your finances. Appreciating what you have can help you make the most of what you've already got.

At HCR we take the time to understand our clients' unique planning needs and circumstances, so that we can provide you with the most suitable solutions in the most cost-effective way. For a free review of your current financial situation, please contact Karyn Vogel on 01277 654153.

¹ Staysure 2020; ² Colliers International 2020

³ NS&I 2018

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BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

SHINING LIGHT ON GOOD HEADLAMP ALIGNMENT WHEN DRIVING ABROAD

Having just made the crossing to France and finding ourselves out on the expansive French motorways, many UK drivers would have experienced the strange sensation of a succession of drivers on the opposite carriageway flashing their lights frantically.

No, this isn't a friendly welcome from our continental neighbours, nor is it some kind of automobile backlash resulting from failed Brexit negotiations. Instead, what's happening is that you are blinding other road users with your incorrect headlamp alignment.

In the UK, headlamps are configured to shine to the left, towards the edges of the road and away from the middle. This is to guide motorists away from curbs and ditches, while preventing oncoming drivers from being blinded by our lights.

That means in France, or any country that drives on the right, that same light is actually being shone directly into drivers' faces.

With various advancements in headlamp

technology over the years, new cars are often fitted with a switch control that automatically redirects the headlamps for driving abroad. However, many cars still don't have this function, therefore it pays to know what to do when driving abroad, for both your own safety and that of others.

If manual headlamp realignment cannot be done from the control panel of your car, the most common solution is to buy a set of headlamp unit lenses (or glasses). These deflectors are attached and block out a small amount of your beam, thus keeping light away from other drivers.

These days, it's not a request that headlamps are configured properly, it's the law. 'Do it yourself' beam deflectors – the sort your dad might have made out of black sticky tape in the 1970s – are no longer legal, and deflectors must be operational as soon as you head off the ferry, even in daylight hours.

It's not worth taking the risk when driving abroad... be safe at all times.



MOTORING



FIRST DIVISION – DECEMBER 26, 1963

SPORT

BLACKPOOL	1-5	CHELSEA
BURNLEY	6-1	MANCHESTER UNITED
FULHAM	10-1	IPSWICH TOWN
LEICESTER CITY	2-0	EVERTON
LIVERPOOL	6-1	STOKE CITY
NOTTINGHAM FOREST	3-3	SHEFFIELD UNITED
SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY	3-0	BOLTON WANDERERS
WEST BROM ALBION	4-4	TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR
WEST HAM UNITED	2-8	BLACKBURN ROVERS
WOLVES	3-3	ASTON VILLA

'tis the football SEASON TO BE JOLLY

BOXING DAY 1963 – WHEN FANTASY FOOTBALL BECAME REALITY

If there's one thing that's characterised the opening exchanges of the new Premier League season, then it's goals. It seems defence-minded football has been banished to the substitutes' bench and instead our teams are simply aiming to outscore each other.

Though even the likes of Harry Kane, Raheem Sterling, Mo Salah and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang will have to go some if they are to match the achievements of the rugged footballers of old who trotted out onto veritable mud baths of pitches on December 26, 1963.

They wouldn't have known it at the time, but these old-school soccer stars were about to take part in a day of festive football goal gluts, and an afternoon that's gone down in sporting folklore.

In total, 66 goals were scored across the 10 First Division matches. Six sides shared six goals as Chelsea triumphed 5-1 at Blackpool, while

Nottingham Forest and Sheffield United drew 3-3, as did Wolves and Aston Villa.

West Brom and Tottenham trumped that with a 4-4 draw at The Hawthorns, while both Liverpool and Burnley romped to 6-1 home wins, against Stoke City and Manchester United respectively.

Pity those poor fans at Filbert Street and Hillsborough who saw their Leicester City and Sheffield Wednesday sides win by relatively normal 2-0 and 3-0 scorelines (against champions Everton and Bolton Wanderers respectively).

But on a day on which it appears it wasn't just the supporters unable to shake off the large amount of Christmas Day merriment, Blackburn Rovers hit a magnificent eight away from home at West Ham United; and Fulham arguably snatched the ultimate plaudits from a festive flurry of worthy contenders with a magnificent 10 at home to poor Ipswich Town. Jürgen, Pep, Frank, José... over to you.



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SPORT

OCTOPUSH

Splash of the day

WHY THE UNUSUAL SPORT OCTOPUSH IS MAKING WAVES

At first glance, the sport of Octopush looks a bit like ice hockey gone wrong, namely that the ice has melted and the playing arena resembles a swimming pool. That's actually because the playing area is a swimming pool, and rather than manoeuvring a puck across a surface of cool, slippery, frozen matter, competitors dive to the murky depths of a pool and attempt to score in their opponents' goal.

While it might be peculiar to label any sub-aqua sport as fast paced, in pushing, protecting and working the puck towards enemy territory, in this game of underwater hockey (to give it its formal title), the pursuit actually offers all the drive and drama of a competitive pursuit played on dry land.

There's also significantly more tactical intelligence at play than you might first imagine – it's all very well

shielding a puck from an opponent as you look for a competitor to pass to, but the need for air means that no one in possession can hang about for too long without having to return to the surface to refuel their lungs.

The other great thing about Octopush is a lack of potential injury. Of course, a mass of swirling, swarming bodies below the surface presents something of a hazard, but the cushioning effect of the water ultimately means any contact with opponents is minimal.

Octopush is rapidly growing in popularity, with more than 100 registered clubs across the UK. It combines agility, strength, stamina and teamwork, and our fascination with sport means we'll even take on characteristics of amphibians if we can savour that, sweet, slightly chlorine-laced taste of victory.

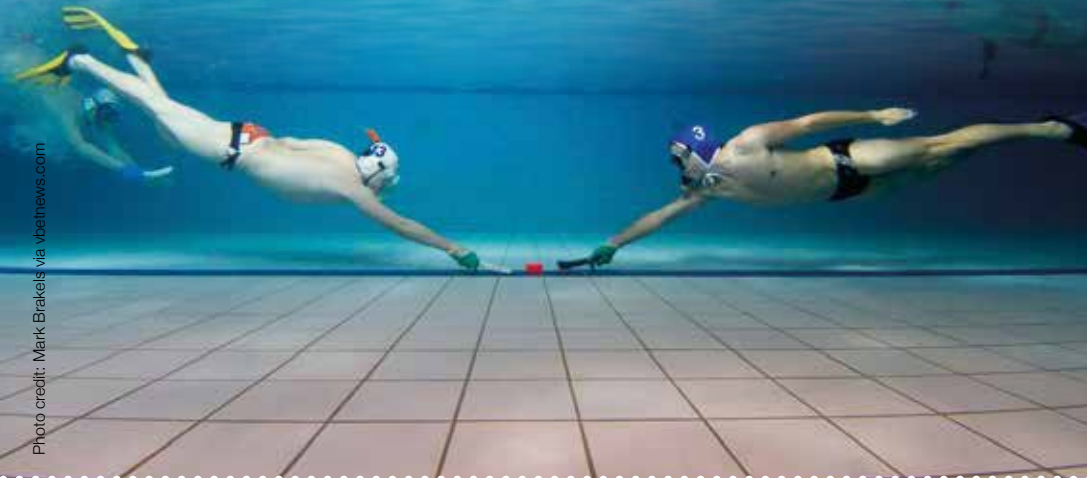


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