

SATURDAY

The story behind your Christmas tree

What began as an ancient German ritual is now an annual obsession for millions of Brits – and it’s big business, says Richard Godwin



Every year, as winter tightens its grip, some eight million British householders venture into the cold, procure a tree, drag it home, dress it in silver and gold., adorn it with baubles, bells, angels, glass Brussel sprouts in tiny Santa hats and plug it into the mains. We say: “Welcome to the family” and give our tree a plum view of the TV, establishing a bond that

bridges not just the species divide but the realms of the living and the dead – for the thing that brings us such cheer is already in the process of decay. In fact it was killed for our pleasure, literally cut off at the roots. The Christmas tree ritual is perhaps the closest we come in 21st-century Britain to ritualised pagan sacrifice. It also happens to be my favourite part of Christ-

▲ Choosing the perfect tree is an essential pre-Christmas ritual for millions of families

mas – the only part that modern capitalism can’t quite poison, though Lord knows it tries. Even in an age of Pre-Lit Ultra Mountain Pine artificial trees and “Novelty Jingle Balls Adult Baubles” (£8.99 on Etsy), Tree Day retains its innocence. I love it all. The elemental tussle of wrestling a six-foot thing that clearly wants to be outside, inside; the resurrection of the Christmas

playlist; the making of punch; the larking of children; the disinterring of the ornaments. (“Those guys from the Christmas decorations box – they’re fun, right?” as Woody reminds his fellow toys in *Toy Story 3*.) It’s the moment when Christmas really begins to *happen*.

Continued overleaf



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You can imagine how my heart leapt as I drove into Marlton Christmas tree farm near Torquay in Devon on a blue winter morning last week to be greeted by thousands of trees, in their own element, or close to it. The trees here are underplanted in a forest-like arrangement, most of them human-sized – three to six foot or so – but with the occasional 15-foot giant in their midst, destined for a hotel lobby or department store or town square. Some of the trees are pre-decorated by families who have picked them out in advance; a crowd management technique because this place becomes extremely popular at weekends. Marlton’s clients have included the National Trust, the Crown Estates, the Royal Horticultural Society and 10 Downing Street, and the trees here are not the cheapest: £50 plus for a Nordmann fir. But what is on sale is rather grander than a mere tree – it is enchantment itself, complete with Alpine ski lodge, huskies, reindeer, a snow machine, and, it is rumoured, the big man himself, FC.

“Christmas basically starts with a tree purchase, doesn’t it?” says Sadie Lynes, the founder of Christmas tree wholesalers Jadecliff, which grows around 200,000 trees across these sites in Devon, in addition to importing trees from Scotland, Ireland, Germany and Denmark for wholesale. “We see so many families come into

Tinsel was invented in 17th-century Nuremberg – the word derives from the French verb *étinceller*, to sparkle

sites like Marlton and for them it’s when Christmas begins. We all need a bit of feel-good with the climate as it is in the world. That’s what the Christmas tree symbolises. It’s the catalyst. Here we go. It’s Christmas.”

The roots of a custom

The practice of dragging evergreens into the home in midwinter actually predates Christmas. Some have interpreted this as pagan worship. It seems equally feasible that our ancestors found that a bit of holly, ivy and/or mistletoe cheered them up a bit during the darkest months of winter.

The modern Christmas tree ritual is, like so many Christmas rituals, a German innovation, imported to Britain by way of Prince Albert in the 1840s. As is tat. Baubles were invented in the 16th century by a German glassblower from Lauscha. Tinsel comes from 17th-century Nuremberg where it was originally made from shredded silver, though the word comes from the French *étinceller*, to sparkle. Apparently it was common practice in 16th-century Germany to hang Christmas trees upside down and, according to certain lifestyle influencers, this might make a quirky centre-piece to a 21st-century home – but this seems like a terrible hassle. Witch trials were also common in Germany in the 1500s too and there’s no reason to resurrect those.

In any case, Albert’s trees were the right way up. So is the Trafalgar Square

Christmas trees in numbers

8million
The number of Christmas trees sold in Britain every year

80%
of the those are Nordmann firs

10yrs
The length of time it takes for a Nordmann fir to grow to 6ft

60%
Proportion of Brits (according to YouGov) who planned to reuse an existing fake tree at Christmas 2022

15%
According to the same survey, the proportion of Brits who intended to buy a real tree

tree that the citizens of Oslo donate to the citizens of London to say thanks for the war. Trees are of course a staple of Hollywood imagery too, *White Christmas*, *It’s a Wonderful Life*... though my favourite Christmas tree scene in a movie is the bit in Joe Dante’s *Gremlins* where one of the eponymous critters stages a surprise attack from between the branches of a tree. For all their cosy domestication, trees should remain a little bit menacing – a little bit other.

As for the British Christmas tree industry, that only took root comparatively recently. Sadie Lynes entered the business thanks to her father, Keith Fletcher, who began importing trees from the Ardennes forest to sell in his greengrocers in the early 1980s. “There wasn’t a supply in the UK back in the early 1980s,” she says. “A lot of them came from Belgium and Denmark. The farmers in the UK would perhaps plant a few in a corner of a field that they couldn’t use for anything else and would then wander back ten years later to see how it was getting on.”

The industry has seen rapid development in the 40 or years since then, many of which Lynes has spent as the head of the British Christmas Tree Growers Association, which has over 300 members. “It has gone from a product that is field-grown but without much care to a product that has been standardised. We prune, we net, we label, we palletise.”

Christmas trees tend to thrive on marginal land, which makes them a tempt-

▲ The Duff tree farm at Wester Auchentroig, in Scotland’s Central Belt

ing crop for farmers looking to maximise their land use. But they are not to be taken lightly. According to Marlton’s chief operating officer, Steve Gibbon, it costs around £1.50 to plant one Nordmann sapling and ten years for it to grow to a profitable size. “A lot of people say: ‘What do you do after Christmas?’ If only you knew!” A Nordmann requires at least two prunings a year to retain the desired rocket-like shape, both the top and bottom whirls (a “whirl” is the term for a layer of branches; the tip is called the “leader”; the soft green growth that arrives in Spring is the “flush”).

Let’s say you plant 2,000 trees in a field over ten years. You’ll have 20,000 trees to prune before the time you’ve seen a return. The costs of fertiliser and fuel have vastly increased in recent years too. “You really need to be set up well. A lot of farmers start growing trees and only later do they realise how much work is going to be involved.”

Compared to many other appalling rituals of Christmas – the mechanised slaughter of turkeys, for example, or the panic-buying of plastic nonsense on Amazon – the cultivation of millions of trees may seem comparatively benign. And yet it seems to attract undue angst. Witness the recent fracas in Italy, where various environmental associations from Trentino wrote a furious letter to the Pope urging him not to accept a 29-metre fir tree from their region for a “purely consumerist” Christmas display at the Vatican. “It is inconsistent to talk about fighting climate change and

FROM DEVON TO DOWNING STREET



Marlton tree farm supplies blue-chip clients including the National Trust, the Royal Horticultural Society and, in 2021, 10 Downing Street. (This year’s prime-ministerial tree was sourced in Powys.)





➤ Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their family share an Anglo-German Christmas in 1848



the school, a margin it is hard to reproduce in, say, bake sales. “It’s an all-round win-win and a joyous occasion to boot!” says Zoe, the head of the PTA. If anyone raises a query regarding waste, I will tell them that the trees are all grown just a couple of miles away, at Frenchay Forestry just off the M32 and the Bristol Waste Company will collect them for free after Christmas whereupon they will be shredded, blended, mixed and seasoned into organic compost; there is also a local hospice that will collect trees for modest donations.

Tough times for growers

Christmas tree fashions have changed. A couple of generations ago, the Norway spruce predominated. “Considered purely as a tree, a piece of living greenery, the Norway spruce hasn’t much to commend it,” notes Richard Mabey in *Flora Britannica*, who quotes a vintage poem produced by a cleaning company lamenting the tendency for its needles to get everywhere: “It’s mid-July, you cry out, ‘Waiter / What’s this in my soup?’ / He replies ‘Norwegian Tarragon / According to the cook!’”

Today, over 80 per cent of all Christmas trees sold in the UK are Nordmanns. This is a hardier variety that was apparently “discovered” by the Finnish botanist Alexander von Nordmann on a trip to the Caucasus in the 1830s (presumably the locals had been wondering what those green pointy things were.) The Nordmann has much to recommend it: its shapely whorls, its pert leader, its excellent needle retention. But much like a supermarket apple, its hardiness comes at the cost of character. It has almost no aroma, unlike the Norway spruce, which in turn has nothing to the “incredible scent” of the Noble fir, Lynes assures me. She imports these from Ireland. “If we can’t produce a tree ourselves, we try to buy them from where they thrive.” The chic thing these days would be to source a rare breed: a Fraser fir, a koreana, a lasiocarpa fir, a lodgepole pine.

There are of course commercial pressures on the Christmas tree. One is that everyone wants their trees up much sooner: “In my father’s day, we never

sold a tree wholesale until the sixth of December. Now our wholesale season is already finished,” says Lynes. The thing is, the earlier you put up your tree, the sooner it will die. Lynes’s advice is to put it in water and replenish regularly; keep it away from any heat sources – underfloor heating is deadly – and ideally slice a layer off the bottom of the tree midway through the season to allow it to take in more water. “We try to say to our customers, ‘come on, you’ve got to look after your tree.’”

The primacy of the Nordmann has been challenged in recent years by the rise of artificial trees, which like artificial lawns and AI friends are increasingly hard to distinguish from the real thing. My parents were delighted that it took my sisters and me three years to notice that their tree spent most of the year disassembled in the attic. According to a YouGov survey, 60 per cent of British people planned to use an existing fake tree over Christmas 2022 and 7 per cent intended to buy a new one, compared to 15 per cent who intended to buy a real tree. Interestingly, 54 per cent considered the artificial tree to be more environmentally friendly. In fact, it is estimated that it would need to be reused at least seven times for it to have a smaller carbon footprint – and this doesn’t take in such benefits as local employment, composting, charity fundraisings, nor the forever plastics in fake trees.

Still, Lynes is less concerned about fake trees than she is about supermarkets devaluing real trees and exploiting farmers. Lidl is currently advertising £11.99 pot grown trees. Tesco is offering half-price trees to Clubcard customers. “They’re kind of ruining the industry,” Lynes says. “At a farm or a garden centre, you can see the trees and you’ll know they’re fresh. You’ve got some degree of expertise too. Whereas the supermarkets are not really engaged with the products. It’s just there to help footfall. You don’t know how long it’s been sitting there. The margins are small and if they don’t sell them they’ll push it back to the farmers and farmers can’t live like that.” Many Christmas tree farmers have been left exposed by the collapse of Homebase, which has gone into administration.

But this is another reason why farms like Marlton are leaning so heavily on the experience of buying the tree. “Christmas basically starts with a tree purchase. I had a friend who bought her house based on where the tree would go at Christmas. For her that was really

special.” Gribbon says that many local families come for the day and don’t actually buy a tree at all and he’s fine with that. “You can see, for them, it’s just an amazing day out. It might be their Christmas. You can see it’s a tradition for them and it’s harking back to the traditions of their childhood.”

It’s the ritual enchantment that’s the thing. T.S. Eliot wrote a late masterpiece called *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees*, in which he recalled the “the glittering rapture, the amazement / Of the first-remembered Christmas Tree.” For the 66-year-old Eliot those memories, unboxed each year, were “not be forgotten in later experience, / In the bored habituation, the fatigue, the tedium / The awareness of death, [or] the consciousness of failure.”

The trees are themselves enormous metaphors. They sit there flashing in our homes, half-rave, half-shrine – reminders that none of us has long before our needles drop.

T(H)REE OF A KIND



NORWAY SPRUCE
The tree of choice for much of the last century, the Norway Spruce is less hardy than the more popular Nordmann, but does have more of that evocative pinewood scent



NOBLE FIR
Good-looking, elegantly proportioned, deliciously scented and with plenty of greenery, the Noble Fir is often the tree of choice in Scandinavian households – but hard to come by in the UK



NORDMANN FIR
The near-ubiquitous Nordmann takes a decade to grow to marketable size, and requires pruning twice a year to attain the desirable rocket-ship shape. Cheap and durable

then perpetuate traditions like this, which require the elimination of such an ancient and symbolic tree.” The local mayor, Renato Girardi, pronounced himself bewildered at the fury, noting that the tree would otherwise be destined for the sawmill – as is fairly standard practise when it comes to forestry management.

The inherent absurdity of the business is not lost on Lynes. “It’s one of the most stupid business models out there, if you think about it,” she says. “You grow this thing for ten years. It has a four-week life span. And then it’s worth nothing.” Still, she’s being a little disingenuous about that. If cultivated with care, Christmas trees can be an exemplary circular business. For the ten years or so that it takes for a Nordmann fir to grow to six feet, it turns CO₂ into oxygen and provides a rich habitat for wildlife. Indeed it is precisely the sustainability of the business that attracted Gribbon to the industry. He spent most of his career working in advertising before taking a “substantial” pay cut to come and grow Christmas trees. But as we stroll among the trees he seems almost unreasonably content. “It’s a lovely industry. When you get to the retail part, it’s nothing but smiles. And everything we do is about sustainable forestry. A lot of companies like to talk around the subject of sustainability. It’s very easy to greenwash things. But we’ve tried to look at the whole cycle.”

The trees grown here are processed in the neighbouring farm just visible over the hill, whereupon they end up as 3,000 tons of compost, used to help grow other crops: corn, wheat, more Christmas trees. Where underplanting is not possible, fields are rotated in such a way as to not strip whole areas bare in one go.

“We try and do it in such a way as to not disrupt the animals,” says Gribbon. “If it wasn’t like that, I probably wouldn’t be here.”

There is another element that is not usually factored in when the benefits of real trees are compared with artificial trees – which is how useful they are for fundraising. I should confess that I have some skin in this game. In fact, I am a seasoned Christmas tree salesman. For the last six years, I have somehow landed myself in a WhatsApp group of dads who sell trees on the first weekend of December. As someone who mostly pushes words around a computer for a living, this is a thrilling insight into what it might be like to do a proper job. We rise at 5.30am or so, head out nobly into the dark with our Stanley knives and torches to manhandle 150 or so Christmas trees from their pallets on the back of a lorry and line them up around the dark playground. Then, as the sun rises, the Christmas tunes come on, bacon sandwiches are prepared and everyone parades in to buy their tree. The camaraderie is unmatched. No one is sad to be buying a Christmas tree. The last event raised over £2,000 for



➤ Branching out: Sadie Lynes can also sort you out with some mistletoe

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THE VALUE OF INVESTMENTS CAN GO UP AND DOWN, AND BUYASSOCIATION ALWAYS RECOMMENDS THAT YOU SHOULD SEEK INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL ADVICE.

Xanthe Clay's taste test

This week... ready-made gravy

If you've got enough to worry about this Christmas without deglazing the pan juices, read on...



Get on the gravy train: more than a sauce, a good gravy can save the day (or the dinner at least) by glossing over the dryness of a “well done” roast, rescuing under-seasoned side dishes from blandness and providing crowd-pleasing savouriness.

Making it is another matter, of course. All that fiddling around with deglazing roasting tins and finessing the flavour – more wine? herbs? Or, à la Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, a pinch of coffee granules? It’s a job that I could do without when the sprouts need split-second timing and the roast potatoes haven’t reached optimum crispness. Could ready-made be the answer?

The supermarkets are keen to get on board but it’s a tricky one to get right. One gravy cannot be all things to all people – or plates of Christmas dinner. For some, gravy is more akin to what chefs call a jus, the roast’s caramelised juices dissolved in stock or potato cooking water and whisked into a thin, savoury broth. For others, it should be cooked to a deep brown then thickened with flour, giving the gravy a toasty flavour and heartwarming opacity.

My friend Meg Houghton-Gilmour, who writes wickedly honest reviews of local restaurants at [The Bristol Sauce](#), is a proud Mancunian. She strongly supports a thick gravy – a flour-stiffened loop that clings proudly to meat and

Read all Xanthe's tasting notes online

11 gravies were tasted; see the full results at [telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink](#)

potatoes alike. I prefer a thinner, intensely flavoured iteration – although unlike Gordon Ramsay, who passionately defends a flour-free version, I do like a little thickening.










Meg is dismissive of my soft southern ways, saying, “I’m a northern lass. You should be able to run a finger through the gravy on the plate and see a parting of the waves. Christmas dinner is not something you eat in 10 minutes, so if the gravy is too thin your potatoes are going to go soggy.”

We tasted our way through 11 ready-made gravies while debating important points like, “does gravy really get thicker the further north you go?” and “could we develop a formula that added a gram of flour per degree latitude north one travelled?”

We tested a range of chicken and turkey gravies, as not all supermarkets have a turkey version available yet. That said, unless you are very fond of the gamey taste of turkey, you may want to temper it with a chicken gravy anyway.

I made a note of the protein content of each gravy (they ranged from 1.2 per cent to 5.9 per cent) as an indication of how meaty the base stock is, too. A really meaty bone-based stock will need less thickening, as the natural collagen provides body, so maybe Gordon Ramsay has a point after all. But what matters most is a good, deep flavour.

FLOAT YOUR BOAT/STOCK BOTTOM

 <p>M&S Collection Turkey Gravy £4.50 for 500g (90p/100g), M&S and Ocado</p> <p>A good choice for hardcore turkey fans, with a gamey flavour. Nicely thickened with big bits that make it look authentically homemade. High protein level, too: 5.2 %.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	 <p>Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Roast Chicken Gravy £2.75 for 450g (61p/100g), Sainsbury's</p> <p>Very even colour and OK viscosity, says Meg, “but I’d go 10 per cent thicker”. Tastes bland, with a sourness despite a whopping 5.9 % protein.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	 <p>Waitrose Chicken Gravy £2.95 for 300g (98p/100g), Waitrose</p> <p>Meg approves of the thickness, though the little flecks of herb look like they’ve come from a stock cube. Oddly bland and sweet, with a strong hit of white pepper. Contains 4.6% protein.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>
 <p>Waitrose No.1 Turkey Gravy £4.95 for 400g (£1.24/100g), Waitrose (available from 6 December)</p> <p>Nice texture, like it’s made with real stock. Savoury and chicken-like, with some caramelisation – and a splash of wine. 3.1% protein.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	 <p>Morrisons Chicken Gravy £1.70 for 300g (57p/100g), Morrisons</p> <p>Cardboardy, and almost too sweet – I think it must contain carrots. Looks as though it’s thickened with cornflour; tastes too bland to be paired with chicken.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	 <p>Cook Traditional Gravy (Frozen) £4.25 for 400g (£1.06/100g), cookfood.net</p> <p>“I’m all for viscosity but you could almost cut through that,” says Meg. Thick, beige and featuring orange tones from added tomato, this is institutional stuff.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>
 <p>Aldi Specially Selected Turkey Gravy £2.49 for 500g (50p/100g), Aldi (in store from 19 December)</p> <p>Looks like the Waitrose turkey gravy above – a deep tawny colour – but there’s no added booze. Won’t overpower other flavours. 2.7% protein.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	 <p>Tesco Finest Roast Chicken Gravy £3.20 for 500g (64p per 100g), Tesco</p> <p>Very thick – almost syrupy – with a transparent reddish hue. Smells of old socks and cardboard, with a stale Oxo cube flavour. Not what you want Christmas dinner to taste of.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	 <p>Cook with M&S Turkey Gravy £3.40 for 500g (68p/100g), M&S and Ocado</p> <p>The only gravy we tried that came in a long-life pouch, rather than from the chiller cabinet or freezer – but still. Looks like the meatball sauce at Ikea; tastes of yeast extract and stock cubes.</p> <p>★★★★★</p>

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MARRIAGE DIARIES

My husband wants me to write 200 Christmas cards

Every year at about this time, I settle down to the arduous task of writing Christmas cards by hand. This is made even more difficult by the fact that my husband expects me to write an individual message for each recipient. This needs to consist of a five-paragraph update on our own family activities and goings on, followed on by a polite enquiry on the recipients' welfare as well as their children/dogs where relevant.

A standard, one-for-all printed out round robin is “not acceptable”.

After that, I have to find the right address for the right name which has become more complex over the years with our wide social group re-marrying, divorcing, moving house and sadly sometimes being widowed.

Then one of my friends announced at our Pilates class that she was going to send e-cards instead. She’s actually quite a traditional sort and I was quite surprised – as well as inspired.

So I checked out the website she recommended and was enchanted by the pretty cards you can send with flying snowmen and singing choristers.

What a great idea. It’s also much quicker for me to type a personal message than write by hand because I have a dodgy wrist.

But when I suggested this to my husband, he became almost apoplectic, demanding to know what our friends might think.

I pointed out that the Pilates friend was going to do it which silenced him for a brief second since he plays golf with the husband. However, he then declared that our family wasn’t “stooping down to the same level” and that handwritten Christmas cards in pen

He declared that hand-written cards were ‘vital to the fabric of our society’

and ink were “vital to the fabric of our society”.

I replied that he was going completely over the top and that if he felt like that, he could jolly well write 200 odd cards himself.

Then he played the guilt card by saying I would be depriving the charity we usually buy from. I said we could simply send them a donation instead. He also pointed out that you can’t put an e-card on the mantelpiece which I concede is a good point. But in my book, the benefits outweigh this.

He has been sulking ever since. This morning, after he left for work, he actually left me a note on the kitchen table pointing out that the Christmas posting date for second-class stamps was December 18. And that’s another thing. The postage cost last year was nearly £200 compared with a very reasonable annual membership to the e-card site.

Our argument has, to be honest, made me question our marriage. I feel hurt that he doesn’t appreciate my point of view. It’s not the first time I’ve felt this but it really feels like the last straw.

So I’ve signed up for that lovely gift card website my friend has told me about. It’s just an option. But maybe next year, our social circle will be sending us Christmas cards at two different addresses...



ILLUSTRATION: MISTERNED

When I was a child, I wanted to be a police officer because my father was in the police force. When I came to apply, he encouraged me to get a degree first, as that would help when it came to promotions. So I did a law degree, as that goes quite nicely with being a police officer, and I fell in love with family law. On my first day, I was thrown into a court hearing and shown the real, human side of the job which sealed the deal for me. I am now a partner at a law firm and my day-to-day role is helping people through divorce – mainly with separation of finances – as well as children issues, cohabitation disputes and pre-nups.

In family law, you are on a journey with your client. Obviously nobody ever actually wants to come and see a family lawyer. But being able to build a relationship with a client and see them go from one of the most difficult times in their life, when they are super vulnerable, to progressing the case through to the finish and getting a good and fair outcome in terms of their matrimonial finances or child arrangements – for me, that's golden.

When a client comes to me, they are within the grief cycle – maybe they are really sad or angry. I am always very clear that I am not a therapist. I'm not trained to deal with that side. But I build a team around them, putting them in touch with divorce and separation coaches, financial advisers, mortgage advisers, whatever they need. I have to remain objective to be able to do the best I can for them.

I've learnt how to deal with someone crying violently down the phone or getting aggressive because they feel they haven't got the outcome that morally they deserve. It's about staying calm and collected and making sure they have the appropriate outlet.

My favourite case so far was when my client hadn't seen or spoken to their child for four years because of serious allegations that had been raised by the other parent. I think these allegations were raised not because they were true, but because the other parent wanted to relocate.

When the judgement came through in our favour and my client was reunited with their child, it brought tears to my eyes and I felt intense relief.

It was the culmination of two-and-a-half years of hard work and dealing with someone who was being torn away from their child. They emailed me the photographs of their first meeting with their child after four years and the child had a massive grin. That is the reason I do this job.

My hourly rate is in excess of £300 an hour plus VAT. I am aware that I'm a distress purchase. Nobody wants to spend over £300 an hour on some-



◀ Stuck in the middle: the family lawyer has to deal with clients at their most vulnerable

The secret life of a... Family lawyer

I'm paid £300 an hour to fight people's battles – but I'm not their friend'

thing they don't want – for instance, if they are the party that wants the marriage to continue.

Some clients tell me they don't want to spend that much on a lawyer and we pass them on to a more junior member of the team who has a lower hourly rate.

My salary is about £80,000 a year plus bonuses. The highest bonus I've had is £10,000. I think I'm fairly well-paid, though obviously nobody would say no to a pay rise. I don't think you go into family law if you want to become uber wealthy: it is not particularly lucrative compared to other areas of law. My salary is dwarfed by what I could have earned if I was a mergers and acquisition lawyer at an American firm: I'd have started on £125,000 and I'd probably be on between £300,000 to £400,000 as an equity partner by now.

But I have no regrets. I don't want to work 20 hours a day, doing a lot of due diligence, combing through documents. I chose family law for the day-to-day building relationships with people and the actual work which I find enjoyable. I like picking up the phone and speaking to my clients. My firm also offers other benefits such as flexible working, so if I need to finish early I can; and I can work from anywhere.

My husband and I are renovating a campervan, and next month I'll be

I'd make more money in mergers and acquisitions, but I chose family because I like talking to my clients'

working abroad from the van. I also work with great colleagues so that all forms part of my compensation package that I'm content with.

I start my day with a very strong cup of coffee, a dog walk and a to-do list. I am at my desk at about 8am, catching up on emails and seeing if there's anything that needs urgent attention – like a civil injunction, any domestic abuse allegations or Children's Act proceedings where a child may have been abducted.

Then I may have a court hearing and calls with clients. I work through my tasks depending on my caseload. I probably have 45 or 50 cases in my name, but I am working on those cases with my colleagues so I am not the sole lawyer working on them.

The hours are long and very variable. Sometimes I'll finish at 4pm, sometimes at 8pm, sometimes I will work into the night. It's not unusual for me to log on during the weekend too.

The job can be emotionally draining, especially cases that involve domestic

violence allegations or neglected children. You have to shoulder a lot. I try to remind myself that my clients don't want a friend: they need someone who is objective and who can guide them through the process and explain the different avenues they could go down. But you have to be empathetic and offer a listening ear.

With cases involving allegations of domestic violence, it's really important that individuals feel heard. What may seem like a small allegation for us, could underpin a lot of trauma for them. I have clients who have PTSD and mental health issues, and I have to keep an eye on how I deal with those clients. For example, there are some clients I will never send communications to until I have space in my diary to have a safe conversation with them. With other clients, I'll get pages and pages of abuse that a former partner will want me to pass on but I will only pass on the pertinent bits that we need to answer to – I won't pass on a load of waffle or aggressive communications.

I have learnt how important it is to take time for yourself in this job. When I was more junior, I didn't understand that. Now I know it's essential and it's not a sign of weakness, it keeps you strong enough to help your clients. Time out for me is jumping on my Peloton and thrashing out a 30-minute workout, taking my dogs for a walk in the fields nearby or sitting quietly with a cup of coffee.

My top tip for anyone going through a divorce is to remember that you have had good times in the past together. If there are children involved, I always use the example of my husband's family. His parents are divorced and there was a time when it was extremely acrimonious. But it meant so much to us that he was able to seat them together at our wedding because they now have a good relationship.

I say: "You are no longer husband and wife but you are still mum and dad, you still want to be there to give your daughter away, you still want to go to university graduations. Your relationship has changed but it doesn't mean you have to dislike each other."

I believe that divorce law is in a good state, but that cohabitation law needs to be updated. We need some protection for people who live together for 25 years with one party paying towards the mortgage and home improvements and then coming out with nothing. To me, that is extremely unfair.

I estimate that 97 per cent of the time I'm happy in my job, and three per cent of the time I find myself thinking: "It would be so much easier to be a florist." That's not a bad ratio.

As told to Isolde Walters



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Step into Christmas: Simon Attridge tucks in at Claridge's



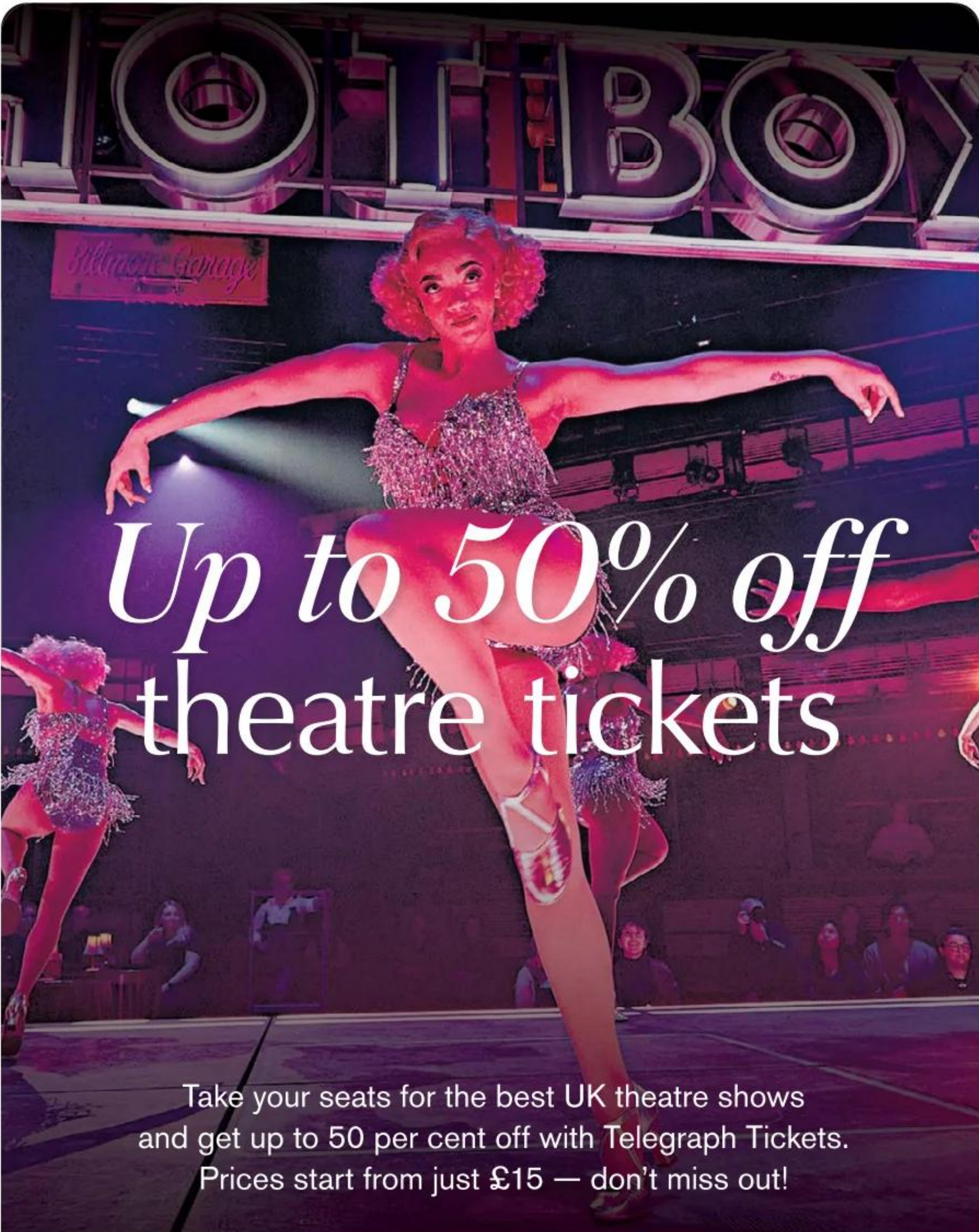
CHRISTOPHER LEDGER

How to cook the Christmas turkey – according to the chef at Claridge’s

Plus your guide to getting ahead so the big day is stress-free. By Ed Cumming

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At Claridge's, turkeys are not just for Christmas. The season begins in the run-up to Thanksgiving, when North Americans in London flock to the old lady of Brook Street for celebratory meals, and runs until the end of December. Simon Attridge, the hotel's Culinary Director, is not sure exactly how many they get through, but it is a hefty total, including more than 300 servings on Christmas Day. His supply lines must be failsafe. "I do not want to be the guy that's remembered for running out of turkey at Claridge's," he says. "That would be a disaster."

He knows what he is doing when it comes to preparing them, too. "It starts with the bird," he says. "Obviously there are a lot of different quality turkeys out there. You can't turn a badly sourced product into a great dish. So it's really important to invest in getting the bird right."

"You get what you pay for. I would recommend looking at the bronze turkey. Then size-wise, you probably want around five kilos for a family turkey. We

work on the principle of about two portions per kilo of turkey, so five would be about 10 portions. Obviously, with Christmas dinner it's important you have a bit left over for sandwiches, too."

"Then you have to be prepared," he adds. "Not everyone cooks every day, and there's pressure on Christmas Day lunch when you have the family round. So get as organised as possible." (see box)

More radically, Attridge agrees with a conclusion many a home cook has reached at the end of Christmas lunch. "It's very hard to cook a whole turkey," he says. "Even for us at Claridge's, it's almost impossible to cook the legs and the breasts properly. I recommend you ask your butcher to get them boned and rolled, so they'll take the legs and breasts and roll them. You get two legs and two breasts and cook them separately. Then you can cook them to perfection."

"I know there will be some traditionalists who say you have to cook the whole turkey, and have dry breast and

undercooked legs: it's a lot harder," he says. "What everyone should have is a temperature probe. On sight you can tell if it's overcooked but you can't tell what the middle is like. You get the middle to 75 degrees [celsius] and then take it out to let it rest."

Are most people overcooking their turkeys? "I don't want to speak for everyone, but it's unusual *not* to have an overcooked turkey," he says. "I think if you cook a whole bird with the legs on, you can't cook it evenly. A turkey is just not designed to be cooked normally."

He doesn't advocate brining. "I give them a little coating in vegetable or rapeseed oil, then sear them off on the stove, with salt and pepper. Then when they go in the oven, a good coating in room-temperature butter. You can add some chopped rosemary, thyme or garlic to the butter if you want. But don't be shy with it. Then tinfoil over the top."

"I would cook them at 170 [celsius] for an hour, maybe a little longer," he says. "Then just towards the end, when you're getting to 62/63 degrees on the probe, you should turn it up, take the foil off and give it a blast at 200C to crisp the skin up a bit. Once it hits 75 [celsius] internally, take it out and let it rest. With foil it will stay warm for well over an hour, so you can crack on with the other things you need to do."

Another advantage of the boned and rolled bird is that it is easier to carve. "You are losing some of the theatre, because you're not seeing the whole turkey sitting there," he concedes, "But it is a lot easier to carve. On the whole bird you are slicing down, hitting bone. This way gives you a much better end product and a much more relaxed Christmas day lunch."

HOW TO GET AHEAD

The day before
Peel the potatoes for roasties and leave them in cold water overnight.

Braise the red cabbage, with onion, port, red wine vinegar and brown sugar (or try Diana Henry's recipe online). You just need to warm it up when you're ready to serve.

Cut the sprouts in half and blanch then refresh them. On the day, you can roast them with baby onions, lardons and vac-packed chestnuts.

Blanch and roast some Chantenay carrots, and put them in the dish ready to warm through.

Blanch and refresh some Tenderstem broccoli.

Make the stuffing. Attridge favours a mix of sausage meat, pork mince, chestnuts and semi-dried apricots that he makes into a ballotine, wrapped in cling film and foil. Cook it in boiling water, using a tea towel to keep it submerged. It's ready when it reaches 75C on a meat thermometer. On the day, he



▲ A surprising amount of prep can be done the day before, from blanching veg to braising cabbage to (below) fluffing your roasties



cuts it into slices and pan fries it to warm it up and give it some colour.

Attridge recommends buying in the gravy. (See Xanthe Clay's taste test on page 4.) Don't be afraid to take advantage of a few easy wins.

On the day
Prepare the pigs in blankets. And if even that seems like a stretch, see Xanthe Clay's taste test online for the best shop-bought version.

Drizzle some honey on peeled and halved parsnips then give them a blast in the oven while the turkey is resting.

To make the roast potatoes, cut them into two or three pieces, being sure to keep them big. Bring them to the boil in a large pan of salted water, turn down to a simmer and cook until they're just starting to fall apart. Drain and chuff them very gently in a colander. Roast them in hot vegetable oil and take them out of the oven as they're ready – they cook at different speeds as they're different sizes.

HOW TO COOK THE PERFECT TURKEY *Step-by-step*



1

I recommend a bronze turkey. You get around two portions per kilo of turkey, so aim for five kilos for a family of six with enough for leftovers.



2

It's almost impossible to cook a whole turkey well: you'll have dry breast and undercooked legs. Ask your butcher to bone and roll the legs and breasts so you can cook them separately.



3

Chop some thyme and rosemary leaves, and coarsely chop some garlic.



4

Mix the herbs in a bowl with some softened butter.



5

Coat the rolled breasts and legs in vegetable or rapeseed oil and season.



6

Sear the turkey pieces skin-side down in a hot frying pan.



7

When the skin is brown, turn frequently until it's nicely seared all over.



8

Place the turkey on a piece of kitchen foil; smear it with the herb butter.



9

Gather up the sides to create a loose parcel that will allow steam to circulate.



10

Roast at 190C/170C fan/gas mark 5 for an hour, or until it reaches 62-63C on a meat thermometer.



11

Open up the foil, turn the oven up to 220C/200C fan/gas mark 7 and cook until it reaches 75C internally.



12

Remove the turkey from the oven and loosely seal the foil parcel again to keep it warm while it rests.



13

Carve breast and leg meat in roughly equal quantities (there may be some left over).



14

Serve on a hot plate.



15

Enjoy the finished Christmas feast!

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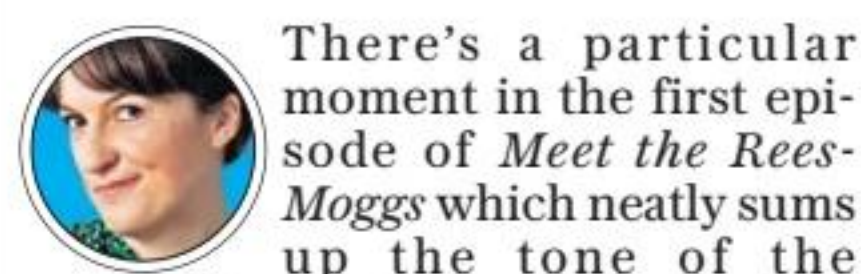


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Sophia Money-Coutts

When you meet the Rees-Moggs, you just might be pleasantly surprised

Sir Jacob's foray into reality TV shows a more self-aware family than some would like to think



There's a particular moment in the first episode of *Meet the Rees-Moggs* which neatly sums up the tone of the new reality television series about the political family. Sir Jacob's wife Helena is sitting on the sofa ahead of this year's general election, explaining to their 12-year-old son, Anselm, that the numbers aren't looking good for the Tories. "Almost all the polls show a Labour gain from the Conservatives," she says, in specific reference to her husband's seat of North East Somerset. Helena explains this to her young son as solemnly as if she's explaining the birds and the bees, and Anselm looks about as dumbfounded. "Other careers are available," she quips.

"I've never even heard of anyone losing their job," Anselm replies, puzzlement across his face, "let alone someone in our family doing it."

"Well, at least we don't lose our house," Helena says briskly, "so we're lucky on that front."

The five-part series isn't going to win over those who cannot bear the now-former MP for North East Somerset. But if only some of his detractors would bother to watch, they might find a forbearance and self-awareness which others could learn from.

The cameras followed the whole family for several months – Jacob, Helena and their six children – plus Nanny Veronica, with cameos from Shaun, a smiling, patient man who drives the whole family to Boris Johnson's 60th birthday party in one episode, and Sara, the assistant housekeeper. "He's nicer than what I thought he would be," she admits of Jacob in the first episode, while making up a four-poster bed at their house in Somerset. The Rees-Moggs are sheets-and-blankets people, you may not be surprised to learn. No duvets here; and poor Sara has nine beds to do on laundry day.

The fact that this programme has even been made has sparked grumbles that certain politicians – Matt Hancock on *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*,



It's a Mogg, Mogg, Mogg, Mogg world: Jacob (centre) in his paterfamilial pomp

for instance, and now Rees-Mogg – shouldn't be allowed to do reality television on the basis that it gives them a platform to whitewash over their supposed transgressions.

But something about this sticks in the craw a bit; you can't vilify people and then scream that they shouldn't be allowed to try to explain themselves. Reality television is the medium via which plenty of people now offer themselves up as sacrificial lambs – whether a Tory MP or a former porn star – and if

a Labour MP did something remotely entertaining, then perhaps they'd be offered a show, too.

I don't agree with Jacob on many issues. His stance towards abortion (he's a staunch Catholic and vehemently against it); his attitude towards Europe (arch Brexiteer); and his opposition to homosexual marriage, to cite just a few. But I respect his right to hold them, and I respect the manner in which he forges on regardless of the brickbats flung his way. And not just his way, either, but his wife and children's way.

There's a poignant moment in the first episode when Mary, Jacob's then-

15-year-old daughter, talks of being given a rough time at school on the basis of her father's views. In August, Jacob revealed that his then-16-year-old son, Peter, had been sent hate mail. Many (most?) teenagers are embarrassed by their parents; but this is a whole other level – and only time will tell whether the mini-Moggs have actually coped with it – but on the basis of this show, they're doing just fine.

"As Churchill said, KBO," Helena says herself, perhaps a touch wearily, when talking yet again about the general election. "You have to keep going." Resilience, that's the thing. She's right, too.

Helena and Sixtus, the youngest of the family, are the two stars, I reckon. Sixtus, seven, is what we would call a card. He doesn't like general elections because they mean "boring parties"; he asks for a drum kit for his birthday (much to his siblings' dismay); he isn't terribly keen on learning about Catholicism.

"What is the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist?" Jacob intones one lunchtime across the dining room table, attempting to teach his youngest about their religion.

"Poo poo," Sixtus replies. Which is obviously a seven-year-old's idea of a

good joke but, in the withering face of his father, I have to admit it made me laugh.

Helena is drily funny throughout. "When you first met Jacob, what attracted you to him?" comes a voice from behind the camera.

"Nothing, because I was one," she shoots back, deadpan, before explaining that their parents were old friends. Would she be up for a seventh child? Her eyes boggle slightly. "The world's got quite enough Rees-Moggs in it."

If you want to find further evidence to dislike the family, of course you're going to find it, whether it be lingering shots of their whopping Somerset house, black-tie dinners on Saturday evenings or Sara explaining from behind the ironing board that Jacob likes his boxers crisp. But

Making jokes about oneself as a posh person is basically the only line of defence available these days

parents and children constantly maintain this droll, self-deprecating sense of humour, adopted like a suit of armour to guard against the vitriol sent their way.

Being self-deprecating, of course, annoys those who argue that you need the smug confidence of a public-school education to crack such jokes in the first place. Perhaps, but various members of the family use the words "lucky" and "privileged" multiple times in the first episode alone. The Rees-Moggs are accused of many things, but being unaware of how they come across isn't one of them.

"We live in a mansion," boasts the family comedian, Sixtus, at one stage. "It's not a mansion," his older brother quickly corrects him. "It's an old country house."

OK, so perhaps some are more aware than others. But making jokes about themselves in response is hardly a crime. Take it from me, making jokes about oneself, as a posh person, is basically the only line of defence available these days. What else are we poor, abused, misunderstood sorts supposed to do? Getting down and grovelling would absolutely trash the knees of Jacob's double-breasted suits.

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‘I don’t want to be compared to Jeremy Clarkson’

For two decades, *Emmerdale* actor Kelvin Fletcher played a fictional farmer in the Yorkshire Dales; then he decided to swap acting for the real thing. Boudicca Fox-Leonard asked him and his wife Liz what they’ve learnt

After twenty years playing a farmer in *Emmerdale*, Kelvin Fletcher was ready for pastures new. Having lifted the *Strictly* glitterball in 2019, he and his wife Liz, also an actor, set their sights on California.

But between lockdown, visas and a second baby, it never happened. Instead, they found their new adventure on home soil.

On the train down to London one day, Kelvin saw a dream Peak District property on Rightmove. That it came with 120 acres, farm buildings and sheds was all part of the attraction. In them, he saw the potential for anything.

Three years on when we meet in the farmyard of his Cheshire home, Kelvin shakes his hand wearing wellies and sporting a winter rug of a black beard. If he looks every inch the farmer, this time it is no costume.

Kelvin, Liz, both 40, and their four children – Marni, eight, Milo, five, and twins Maximus and Mateusz, two – have become a small part of the 90 per cent of farms owned by families in the UK.

Neither of them were animal people before they moved here from Oldham. Now they run a native breed system rearing sheep, pigs and cows. Around the family dinner table each night, there’s only one topic of conversation; the farm.

With subscriptions to Farmer’s Weekly and the Farmers Guardian, the couples’ Whatsapps are most likely to be links to farming articles about soil health, hedgerow schemes and late cuts. “We’re in it. We’re absolutely immersing ourselves,” says Kelvin.

They’ve joined the farming firmament at a challenging time, when family farms like theirs, that have been passed down for generations, are facing uncertainty. We met the day before the Westminster protests that saw an estimated 20,000 farmers and their families take part in a rally against Labour’s so-called “tractor tax”.

Unlike Jeremy Clarkson, Kelvin is hesitant about becoming a verbose spokesperson for the whole of the farming industry. While he calls the budget “a hugely contentious issue” he won’t be drawn directly on his views about the inheritance tax threshold of £1 million, although presumably it will affect his own farm.

“I’ve got my own opinions and I guess I keep them to myself,” he says, measuring his words. However, the clear passion he feels for his adopted community is hard to suppress.

He’s watched proudly as his own children become the sort that live in rough dungarees and play in hay bales. Already Marni is a budding shepherdess, with her own flock and demanding more fields of her own. As such he says: “I do feel very passionate about the fact that we are a small family farm and any measure that could potentially be detrimental for our children to carry that on is a real detriment to the industry, so I’d obviously be really against that.”

After the protest, he contacted me to clarify his standpoint: “This proposed inheritance tax policy is part of a continued attack on British family farms – which are vital to our sustainable farming future and food security. As newcomers to farming, we’ve quickly learned the crucial role of these family-run operations to our country’s rural heritage and environmental stewardship.”

While his focus is primarily on his farm and family, he adds: “Inherently you’re part of a community and you’ve got instinctive empathy for how you will be affected and as an industry.”

Showing what real life is like for farmers

Jumping the fence from consumer to producer has opened his and Liz’s eyes to how little the general public knows and appreciates about farming. “The thought of New Zealand lamb in your supermarket being cheaper to feed your family is crazy. All we can do is keep pushing ‘Buy British’ and that’s what we’re doing.”

While he wasn’t at the recent protest, he says: “You can show your support in many other ways. Not necessarily just being there on foot.”

“We stand in solidarity with every farmer there. We all depend on farming more than we realise, and these tax changes threaten the very foundation of our agricultural sector. We support the farmers’ call for the government to reconsider this policy and work with these farmers to ensure a thriving, sustainable future for Britain.”

Fletcher’s Family Farm,



▲ Kelvin with Elizabeth Estensen in *Emmerdale* and, below, with partner Oli Mabuse at their moment of *Strictly* triumph



the TV documentary that has followed their metamorphosis from townie actors to strident spokespeople for UK farming, first on the BBC and latterly on ITV, is how he sees himself speaking up for farmers. Unlike Clarkson’s Farm, it’s a softer show, which puts their kids in the picture, learning alongside them. “I don’t want to be compared exclusively to Clarkson,” he says. “There are so many more of those types of shows, they’re all unique in their own ways.”

They’ve long been fans of Kate Humble and Our Yorkshire Farm’s Yorkshire Shepherdess. I wonder whether he has had any tips from Matt Baker? “No, I think we’re doing alright. I’d back myself against any TV farmer.” That sounds like a reality show format right there.

Where their show is unique, they feel, is the whole family can sit down and enjoy it, from kids to grandparents. A showbiz couple inviting the cameras along for their farm adventure always had the potential for great telly, but now they hope it communicates what life is like for farmers. “Hopefully we’re bridging that gap between the public and the producer,” says Kelvin.

The way they have chosen to farm “is a real homage to how farming was done 50 to 100 years ago; all native breeds, a mixed farm. We’re trying to reignite that old traditional farm in the 21st century,” he says.

Right down to the children being involved. “Marni is a real help. Milo

can become somewhat of a hindrance at times and the twins are a bit of a liability,” says Liz. “It’s a case of keeping them alive and safe. They just want to be in the action the whole time with the animals.”

Farming is a 24/7 job

Looking at the Le Chameaux wellies, a cynic might wonder if the Fletchers are farming for real. “There was no format of a TV programme that would prompt me to go and do something in real life,” says Kelvin squarely. “Six months of the year cameras aren’t here and life carries on. It’s our life. Regardless of whether there’s a TV show, this will continue.”

Farming ultimately is a 24/7 job. “People always ask us, ‘so who is running the farm?’ And I say ‘what do you mean?’” says Liz. “We are of course. It wouldn’t make financial sense for us to be getting other people in to look after it.”

They’re still 100 per cent actors though. “And 100 per cent farmer,” says Kelvin. “It depends where I am. Is that possible?” he laughs.

“Did you ever touch a sheep in *Emmerdale*?” jokes Liz. He did. Most of the time, though, he was doing storylines about murder or marriage rather than mucking out.

“That’s the irony. 20 years playing a farmer and in real life doing it now we are learning on the job.”

The two worlds aren’t as poles apart as you might think. Acting has given them resilience and adaptability which has been an asset on the farm.

“We’re not of that nature to do anything half-hearted,” says Kelvin. “Whatever we do we commit ourselves and give it our best shot. And with this we just absolutely love it. And if you love something and you’re passionate about it then it always feels worth it.”

They have had nothing but support from the local farming community. “People are so generous with their knowledge,” says Liz. “Coming in from no background of farming, none of our family are farmers and people have just welcomed us with open arms. When we go to shows, the biggest honour is a farmer saying to us, ‘We absolutely love what you’re doing’. For someone to say that when we’re newbies, that’s so special.”

Liz recalls the time when she and Kelvin were struggling to get three hundred hay bales into the shed before it started raining. “We were just looking at each other and next thing some of the farmers turned up, knowing full well we were not going to do it,” she says. “They’re all like that. That’s what all

▲ Kelvin and Liz Fletcher with some of their Lincoln Red cattle

farmers are like. They’re people with their own farms to run but they’re prepared to come and help you. And they all come together. It’s really special to have people like that and their kids are growing up like that and that’s what the world needs.”

They believe there needs to be a mindset change in the British public, which sees us all trying to buy local and eating with the seasons.

Kelvin’s family ran an independent bakery for a couple of generations: “And unfortunately when the supermarket opened next door it scuppered them thereafter really. So whenever we have the opportunity we buy locally.”

Kelvin believes that small family farms are fundamental to agriculture. As a farming family with a larger platform than others, they are urging more families to go out and explore their local farm shop.

“Once you’ve tasted it you will realise what you’ve been missing out on,” says Liz. “Cook a joint that will last you a couple of days. If you think about it and plan then it makes sense.”

And if we don’t? “These small farms will disappear,” she says. Their produce so far has mostly gone directly to restaurants, as well as a few farm pop-up shops.

“Going direct to the consumer as a small farm is the best way to realise a bit of margin,” says Kelvin. This year will be the first year you can order Fletcher meat from the comfort of your own home and have it delivered. “That’s exciting,” he says.

Not that the farmyard is teeming with animals. Besides some very free-range hens that have elected to roost in the trees, the yard hosts more machinery; tractors, a quad, and even a road sweeper that was a 40th birthday present from Kelvin’s parents to help him clean the yard.

It is because they are a low-input farm with hardy breeds that their sheds are virtually empty – save one deconditioned ewe under observation and a couple of late lambs.

“We’ll even try to outwinter our cows. Pigs will farrow in here and then run in the woodland. And come March the sheep will come in here only for a day or so and then they’re out.”

The whole family will go out to the fields to check on the animals. Their flock of Lleyln and Jacobs is smaller this year, just 70. It was twice that last year, but finishing off their pigs and bringing in cows – adorable Lincoln Reds – has taken most of their effort this year.

There is no solid plan. “The land will always dictate what animals you run. Because we are grass-fed that will limit things. But we’re big enough for 20-30 head of cattle, 200 sheep.”

Sounding like every farmer everywhere, Liz says: “When you get land, you realise you need more.”

Ultimately though it is the simplicity of life that has won over Kelvin. “Of all the industries I’ve worked in, this one allows you to be present. That’s the biggest thing: your outlook on life has a big tweak. Being out there on the top of a field you notice the stillness, the smells, the seasons. Everything just feels so much more, and it just resonates.”

And what of California? “We probably wouldn’t have lasted five minutes,” laughs Liz. “This is the life for us.”

Fletcher’s Family Farm airs on ITV1; @fletchersonthefarm

Most of the time his storylines in *Emmerdale* were about murder or marriage rather than mucking out

‘Knowing you won’t see your dad again is a big concept to grasp when you’re eight’

Army Benevolent Fund helped one little girl cope with the sudden death of her father. Jack Rear met her, 15 years on

Christmas Charity Appeal 2024

Captain Mark Hale was – in modern parlance – a “girl dad”. “He embraced being the father of two daughters; I have fond memories of him joining in with me doing ballet pliés in the kitchen when I was little,” recalls his daughter, Alix. “He was 6’4” and fiercely uncoordinated, so ballet was a car crash – but I love remembering dancing in the kitchen with my dad.”

During his 26 years in the Armed Forces, Captain Hale travelled all over the world, serving in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Iraq and eventually Afghanistan. Yet despite the time he spent overseas, Alix, now 24, remembers how “family orientated” her father was.

“Everything we did, we did together,” she says. “When my sister decided she wanted to start rowing, he started rowing with her, and me and Mum would cycle down the canal tow-path following them. I have a lot of memories of being outdoors with him, being active.”

Though her father was away a lot, Alix admits she was mostly in the dark about his career. “We lived in Northern Ireland so there was probably a risk in telling a young child what Daddy did for work,” she explains.

“Before he went away we’d pull out the atlas and talk about the country he was going to,” she adds. “He’d put a green star on the map in my bedroom so I knew where he was. I had no idea of what was going on out there, Mum wouldn’t have the news on while he was away.”

“I remember the excitement of when he came back – we’d go and meet him at the airport,” enthuses Alix. “Maybe it’s a hindsight thing, because this is the lens I look at it through now, but I have more memories of him going than I do of him returning. It was always hard.”

On August 13 2009, Captain Hale was caught in the blast of an improvised explosive device while on patrol in Afghanistan. He died in hospital at Camp Bastion hours later.

“I was at summer school,” says Alix, who was eight at the time. “We’d made bracelets and I’d done one for my dad in his regimental colours. I was so excited to show Mum.”

When Alix’s mother didn’t arrive at pick-up time, alarm bells rang for the teachers. “Eventually my aunt and uncle collected me,” she remembers. “I was just excited to see them. I spent the car journey telling them about my new school shoes for next term. Looking back, I remember my aunt was silent the entire journey, which I didn’t pick up on then.”

As they approached the house, Alix

Telegraph Appeal charities

Army Benevolent Fund is one of four charities supported by this year’s Telegraph Christmas Charity Appeal. The others are Humanity & Inclusion, Teenage Cancer Trust and Alzheimer’s Research UK. To make a donation, please visit telegraph.co.uk/2024appeal or call 0151 317 5247

could see something unusual was going on. “There were cars everywhere; on the road, blocking pavements, on driveways, on the grass. I asked my uncle whether someone was having a party,” she says.

Alix’s mum met them at the door. “I remember saying ‘Mummy, I want to show them [her aunt and uncle] my new school shoes’. Mum said: ‘we need to go upstairs and have a conversation’”

“She took me up to my bedroom and sat down with me on my bed,” recalls Alix. “She took me by the hand. I’ll always remember her words. She said: ‘Alix, I’m really, really sorry but when Daddy went to work today, he got taken to heaven and he can’t come home. He’s really sorry that he can’t come to say goodbye, but he’s with Jesus now’.”

“I didn’t know what it meant. I just started screaming,” says Alix. “I felt this fear and panic. Not seeing someone

ever again is quite a big concept for an eight-year-old to grasp. I was confused. It was a whirlwind. The house was flooded with people; family members, friends. You sort of go through the motions after that.”

Captain Hale’s death was a major news story. He was the longest serving British soldier to have died in Afghanistan and among the first that lived in Northern Ireland.

Alix went with her sister and mum to

Wootton Bassett to see her father’s body being repatriated. “It was traumatic, seeing the coffins coming through, all these people in military uniforms; I soon realised this war in Afghanistan was a big part of the news,” she says.

Despite their young ages, Alix, 8, and her elder sister, 16, found themselves at the centre of significant media interest. “It was the first time a British soldier that lived in Northern Ireland died, so

the local press wanted their moment,” she recalls. “After the funeral, we couldn’t go home because the tabloids parked themselves in our front garden.”

The issues didn’t stop there. Captain Hale’s pay was frozen: it couldn’t go into his bank account because that had been closed due to his death. The Ministry of Defence lost his will so Alix’s mother couldn’t access the widow’s pension, so the grieving family found themselves in a desperate situation. “We fell through



‘I want to make the world a better place to make him proud’ – Alix Hale today and, above, with her father

every hole in the net,” explains Alix.

The most pressing issue was Alix’s schooling. Like many Army children, due to the requirement to move each time her father was posted, the MoD contributed towards Alix’s school fees to ensure continuity in her education. With her father’s death it looked as if they would have to find a new school with just 15 days before the start of term.

“Dad’s commanding officer advised us to speak to the Army Benevolent Fund who stepped in and covered my school fees for the next three years,” explains Alix. “No questions, no fuss, they just did it.”

School was a safe place for Alix. “Everything was changing suddenly. Everyone knew about Dad’s death, it was all over the news. School offered me shelter,” she says. “I was given a chance to deal with it in my own time.”

Because the school knew Alix and what she was going through, they could personalise her schooling. “They did lots of things for me,” she explains. “They cancelled Father’s Day activities. They did fundraisers for the Army Benevolent Fund. They gave me extra help to ensure I passed my 11+ and could get into grammar school. When I was having a tough time, they were able to recognise it early and react accordingly.”

Being able to continue at her school meant Alix “had one-on-one support with teachers I knew and trusted, which made all the difference.”

In 2019, Alix went to Oxford Brookes to study politics and international relations, and went on to move to Brussels where, in her spare time, she assists at a foundation which helps army veterans move into political roles. She credits her success to the Army Benevolent Fund’s help all those years before.

“If I hadn’t been looked after in primary school, I wouldn’t have made it to university,” she says. “A lot of personal development happens at that age. I was lucky to be able to stay, to have that one bit of normality after my world was torn apart.”

Now Alix volunteers her time to fundraise and speak for the Army Benevolent Fund. “They came in and supported our family during our hardest chapter,” she says. “That’s what they do. If veterans have issues, the Army Benevolent Fund is there for them. They’ve become like a big extended family to me.”

Even 15 years after his death, Alix still feels her father’s influence. “Every rite of passage is bittersweet,” she admits. “I wish I could look at significant moments and think ‘that day was pure joy’, but there’s always a part of me that thinks ‘I wish he’d been here for it’. But I know he’d be proud of me, which has given my life a lot of direction. I want to make the world a better place to make him proud.”

‘Every rite of passage is bittersweet – I can think a day was pure joy, but part of me is wishing he’d been there to see it’

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AA Always Ahead

Telegraph recommends...

Nine crackers to make your Christmas go with a bang

From luxe to trad, games to gastro-treats, sparkles to charity consciousness-raising quizzes, Jessica Salter has got you covered – and not a plastic moustache in sight

The best Christmas cracker for your family is the one that brings your Christmas table to life. Formal, silly, vintage, luxury or traditional, there are styles to suit all tastes and budgets and this year manufacturers have really upped their game. But which is the right one for you?

This year, Marks & Spencer's range includes crackers with charades and other family games inside. Crackers containing foodie treats – such as those from Melt – are easy crowd pleasers, while it pays to give children crackers with a treat worth keeping. Meri Meri's cracker treats this year make lovely bedroom decorations in their own right.

The best crackers I've found tend to be glitter-free (or to use eco glitter) and recyclable – except for the bows, which can be reused. Cracker gifts are no longer plastic rubbish, but things you can use.

AVOID EXPENSIVE MISTAKES

Go online and read our trusted product reviews from *umbrellas to mattresses*

visit [telegraph.co.uk/recommended](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/recommended)

BEST OVERALL CRACKERS



Marks & Spencer Star-shaped Christmas Crackers
£20 for six, Marks & Spencer

We like: the unusual shape that looks good on the table
For ages 14+
Each cracker contains: wine charm, hat, joke and charade

This year M&S have crackers in the shape of Christmas trees as well as the traditional sort, but these star-shaped crackers double as table decorations and are completely plastic-free.

Inside you get a little metal wine charm to go round the stem of your glass and identify it as yours – very important after a certain point in festivities – as well as a paper hat, joke and charade. Good value and grown-up.

BEST VALUE CRACKERS



Dunelm Luxury Winter Starlight Crackers
£8 for six, Dunelm

We like: lovely-looking for the price
For ages 8+
Each cracker contains: hat, motto, metal gift

Even better value are these simple, but charming, cream and black crackers with gold stars and gold bows. They may be cheap, but they're very cheerful. Although fairly flimsy, they look appealing on the table and each contains a metal – not plastic – little mini gift. Perfect for an affordable table decoration.

BEST SPARKLY CRACKERS



Clear Crystal Luxury Christmas Crackers
£25.99 for six, Clear Crystal

We like: the premium feel
For ages 12+
Each cracker contains: hat, joke, pouch containing a piece of jewellery or an accessory

This one's not just for the ladies: these Swarovski crackers feature jewellery for both men and women including necklaces, earrings, perfume, a bottle opener and a wine bottle stop. Everything has at least one Swarovski crystal embedded to give your table a sparkle, and the price isn't as high as you'd expect for such high-quality crackers.

BEST LUXURY CRACKERS



Harvey Nichols Luxurious Christmas Crackers
£65 for six, Harvey Nichols

We like: the gifts are all so stylish
For ages 12+
Each cracker contains: a joke, hat and Harvey Nichols Foodmarket gift

Yes, again this is over my self-imposed limit, but I feel that at just over £10 each these Harvey Nichols crackers are actually good value thanks to the excellent foodie gifts from the Harvey Nichols Foodmarket, such as a Champagne stopper or a jar of its Raspberry Jam, or a hand-turned wooden honey stirrer for your Boxing Day porridge.

BEST BEAUTY CRACKERS



L'Occitane Festive Crackers collection
£24.50 for four, L'Occitane

We like: proper gifts for grown-ups
For ages 12+
Each contains one shower gel and one hand cream

L'Occitane know that, past a certain age, we don't really want anything that's inside the typical cracker and they've addressed that head on. These classy-looking crackers have no hats and no jokes, just two products that you'll definitely use, in four different fragrances: cherry blossom, almond, verbena or shea butter. The box and crackers are all recyclable cardboard from sustainable forestry.

BEST CHARITY CRACKERS



Shelter Fill Your Own Christmas Crackers
£7.99 for six, Shelter

We like: the 'fill your own' concept
For ages 5+
Each cracker contains: hat, joke, quiz question, conversation starter and a gift you add yourself

What can get lost in the manic build up to Christmas is that it should be really about giving – and this set of crackers for the charity Shelter is a beautiful way to do so. They are decorated with a pretty festive scene, and come with a fun sheet with a joke, quiz question, conversation starter and hat, plus plenty of space to fill yourself.

The packaging is all recyclable, and matching wrapping paper and cards are also available. But best of all, your money is going to help those less fortunate.

BEST CRACKERS FOR CHILDREN



Nutcracker Character Medium Crackers
£30 for six, Meri Meri

We like: charming gifts that they won't want to throw away
For ages 8+
Each cracker contains: gold foil hat, joke, etched wooden Nutcracker character brooch

There's more nostalgic charm with these Nutcracker crackers – which come from the children's party supply shop Meri Meri, but I think are beautiful enough for adults, too. My daughters love the Nutcracker and so were delighted to each choose a ballerina (which comes in a range of skin tones, decorated with golden crowns or fringed skirts) for them to snap open. Along with a joke and gold foil hat, gifts include charmingly retro (and plastic-free) gifts, such as a wooden Nutcracker character brooch.

BEST CHOCOLATE CRACKERS



Melt Chocolate crackers
£44.99 for six, Melt

We like: far tastier than any other cracker you'll come across
For ages 5+
Each cracker contains: hat, motto, three chocolate bonbons

If you want to serve up a bit of art with your table setting, these crackers, with a limited edition design inspired by Roy Lichtenstein (this year would have been his 100th birthday) will do just that. The crackers are big and luxurious, but the packaging is eco-friendly and plastic-free. They pop with a reassuring bang and inside are a really delicious range of chocolates including a dark soft-centred gianduja, decorated with gold leaf (my favourite), a gold-dusted Christmas spiced milk chocolate and a white chocolate and cranberry.

BEST SCENTED CANDLE CRACKERS



Chase and Wonder luxury candle Christmas crackers
£65 for six, Chase and Wonder

We like: an unexpected twist on the party favour theme
For ages 12+
Each cracker contains: scented candle (six different scents), paper crown, joke

You might want to pull these before Christmas dinner, rather than after, because the treat inside is a hand-poured scented candle. It would make a very decent addition to the festive tablescape – although, in practice, most guests will probably want to take them home. Scents include 'Alpine Lodge', 'Enchanted Forest' and 'Home For Christmas'. The crackers come in seven different designs, some of which can be personalised with your guests' names.



WELCOME TO THE START OF ANOTHER GREAT PUZZLING WEEKEND

The Daily Telegraph

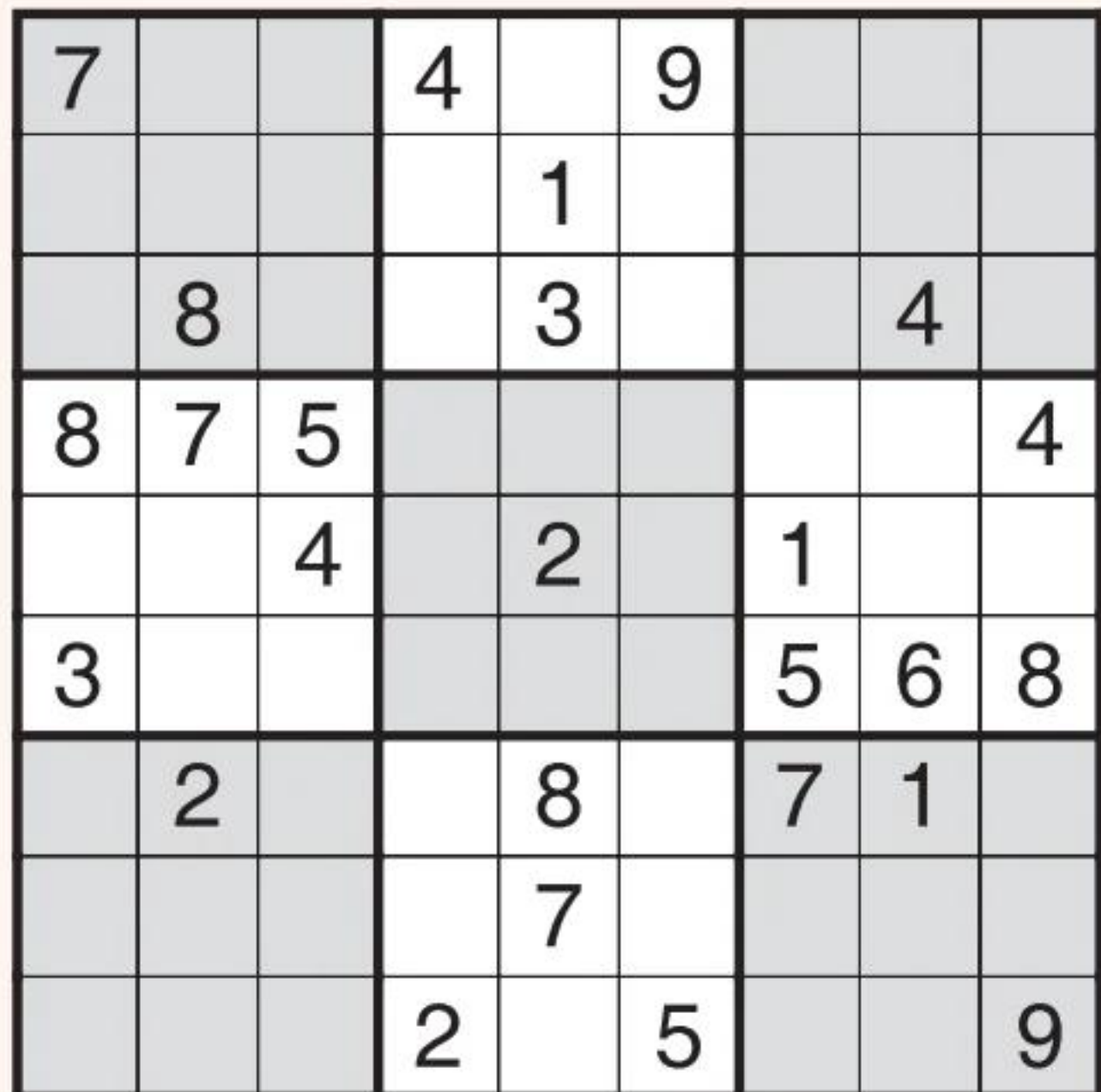
PUZZLES

SUDOKU

In this puzzle, each 3x3 box, each column and each row must contain all the numbers 1 to 9. The solution to the tough sudoku will be published on Monday. Today's regular solution can be found on the last page of puzzles.

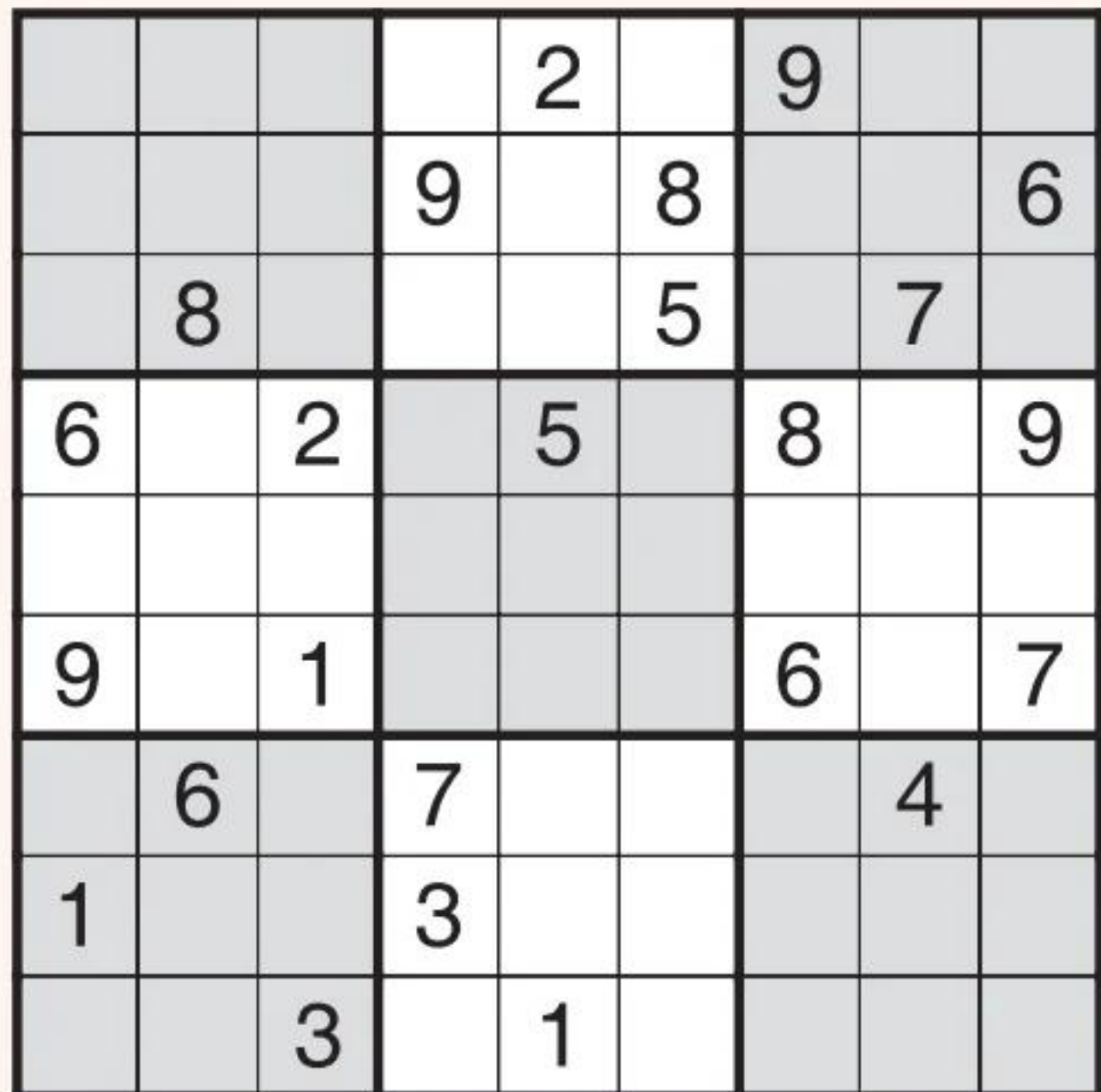
REGULAR

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TOUGH

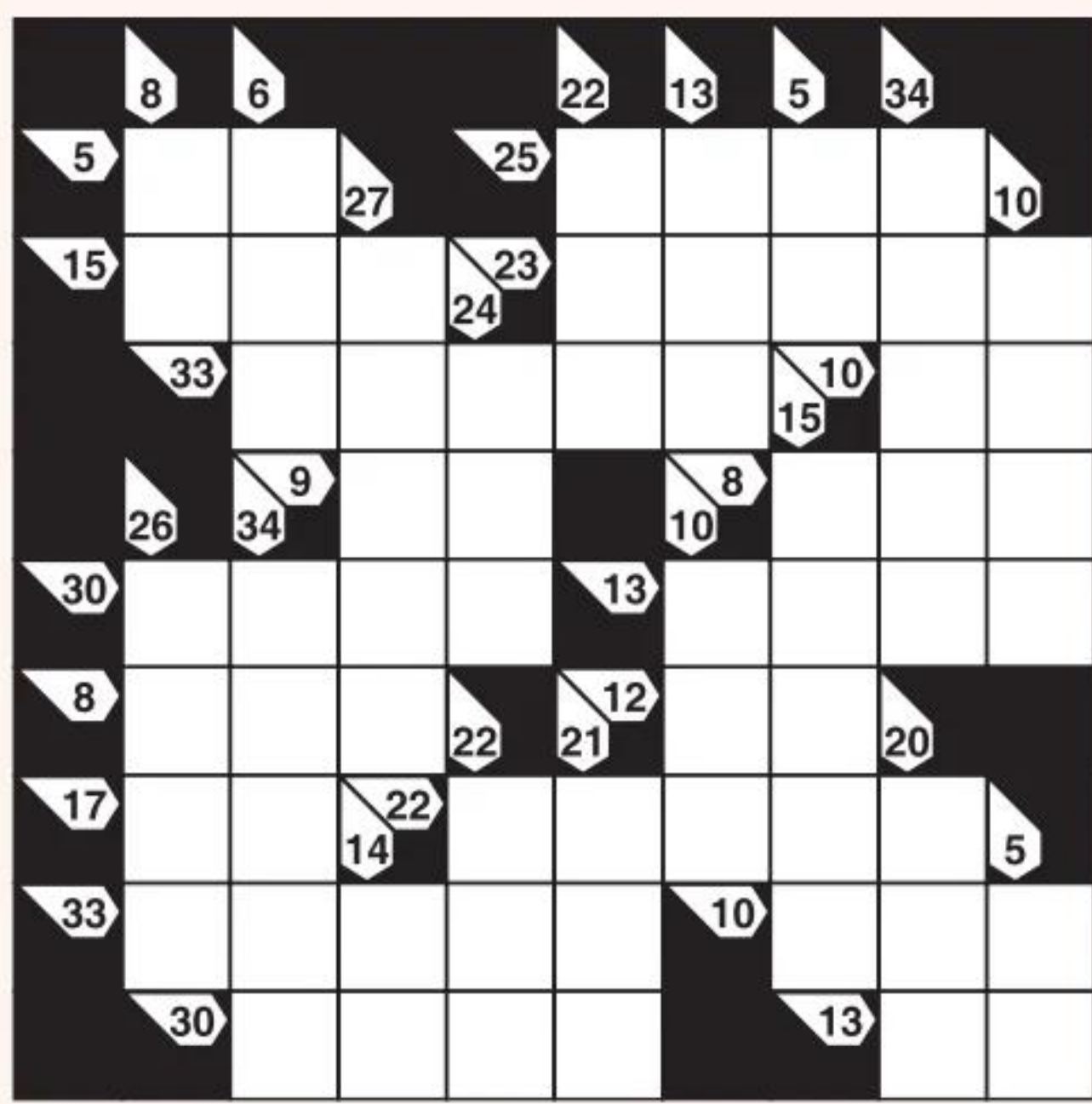
6797



For today's tough sudoku solution, please call 0905 757 0136. Calls cost £1 per minute, plus network access charge. You must be 18 or over and have the bill payer's permission. SP: Spoke Ltd - Helpline 0333 202 3390.

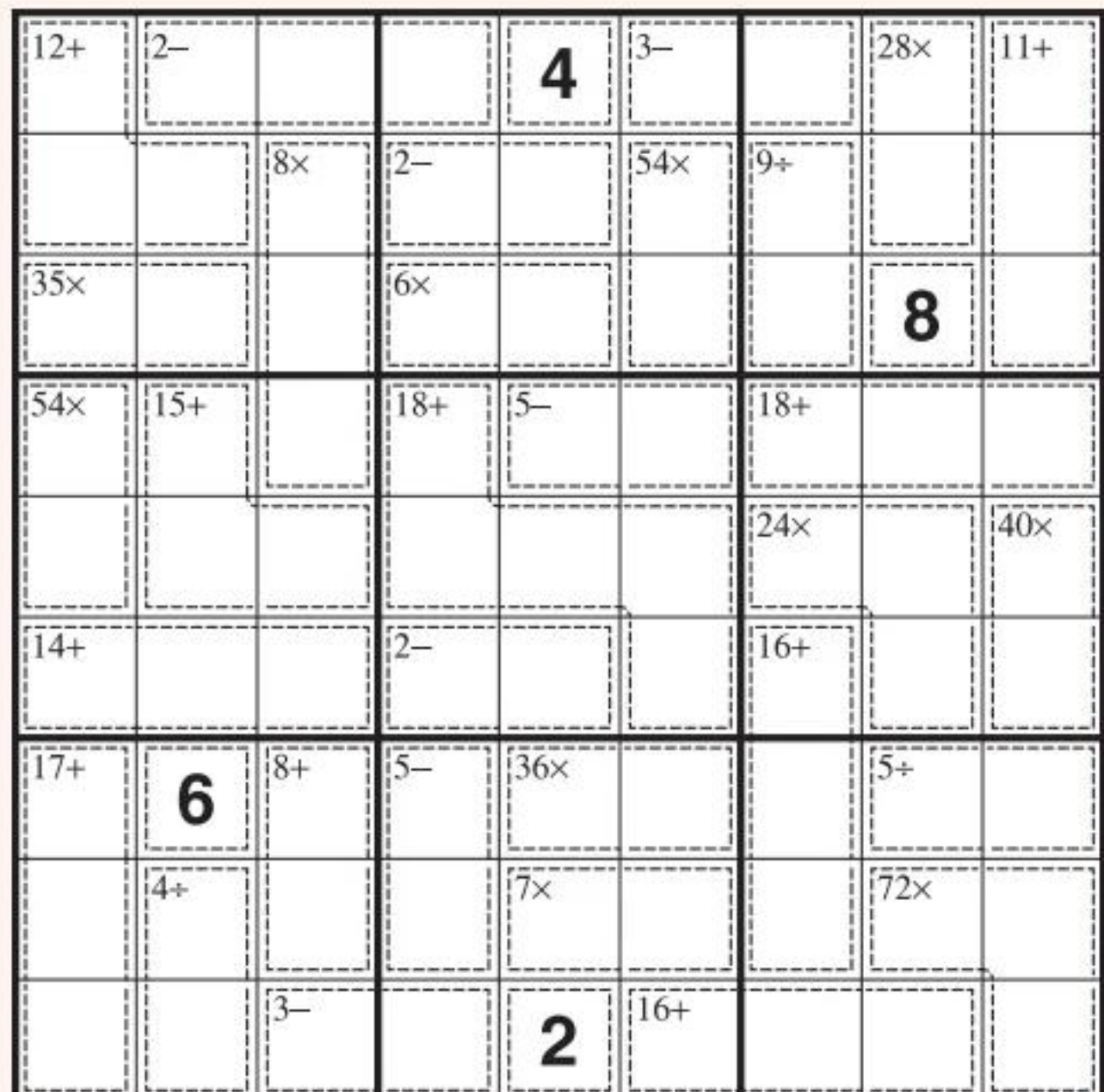
KAKURO

To solve Kakuro you must enter a number between 1 and 9 in the empty squares without repeating a digit. The clues are the numbers on the black squares and are the sum of the solution numbers. Solution next week.



KILLER SUDOKU PRO

All the numbers 1 to 9 must appear in every row, column and 3x3 section. The target number in the top left-hand corner is calculated from all the cells in the block. For example, 6x indicates that all the cell values multiplied together come to 6. 3- indicates that the first cell minus the following cells equals 3. 4+ would indicate that the first cell divided by the following cell(s) equals 4. Solution on the last page of puzzles.



PANAGRAM

Create words of four letters or more, always using the centre letter. Proper nouns and plurals are not allowed, and you can only use each letter once per word. Can you find the nine-letter Panagram? Solution next week.

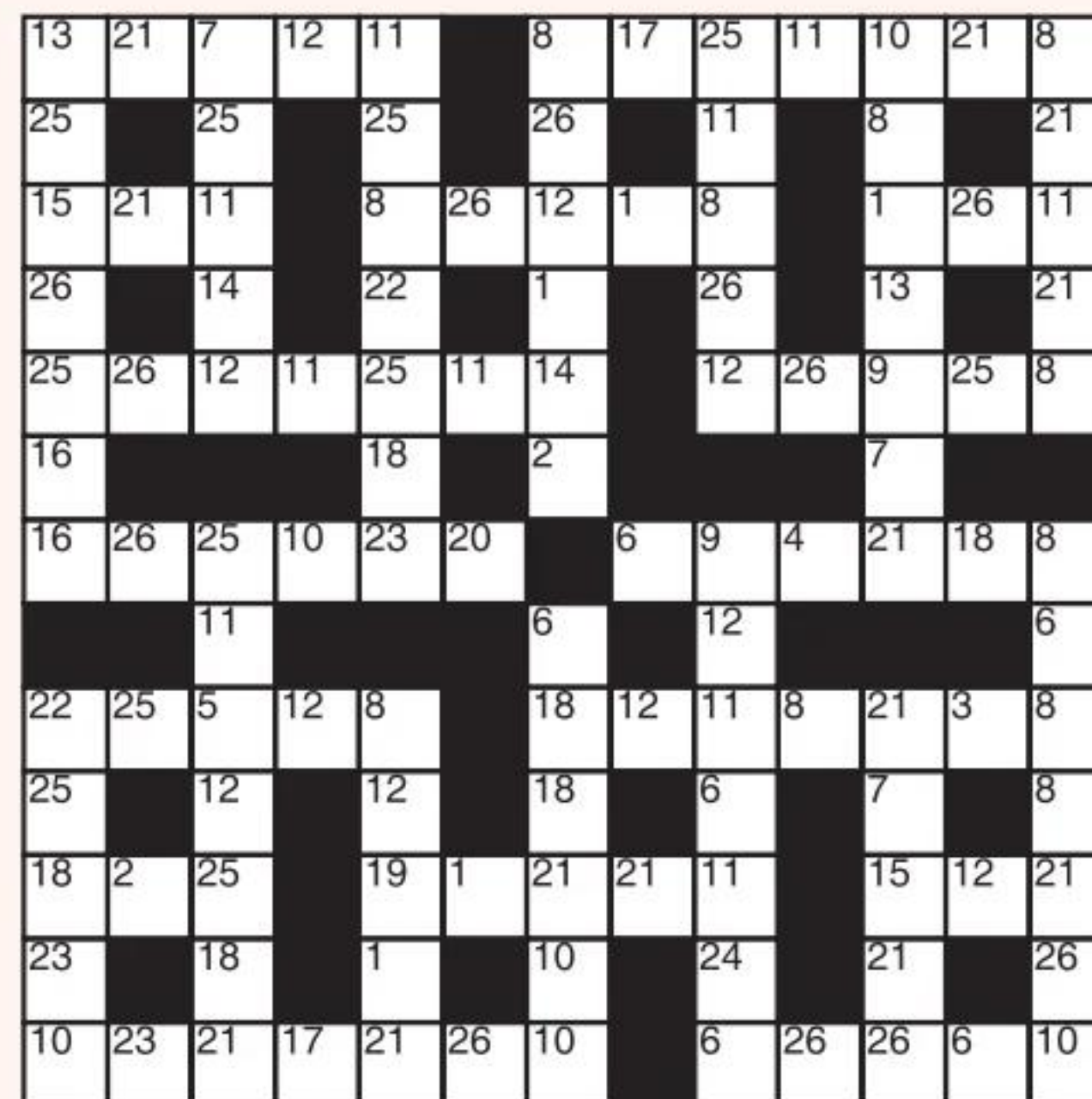
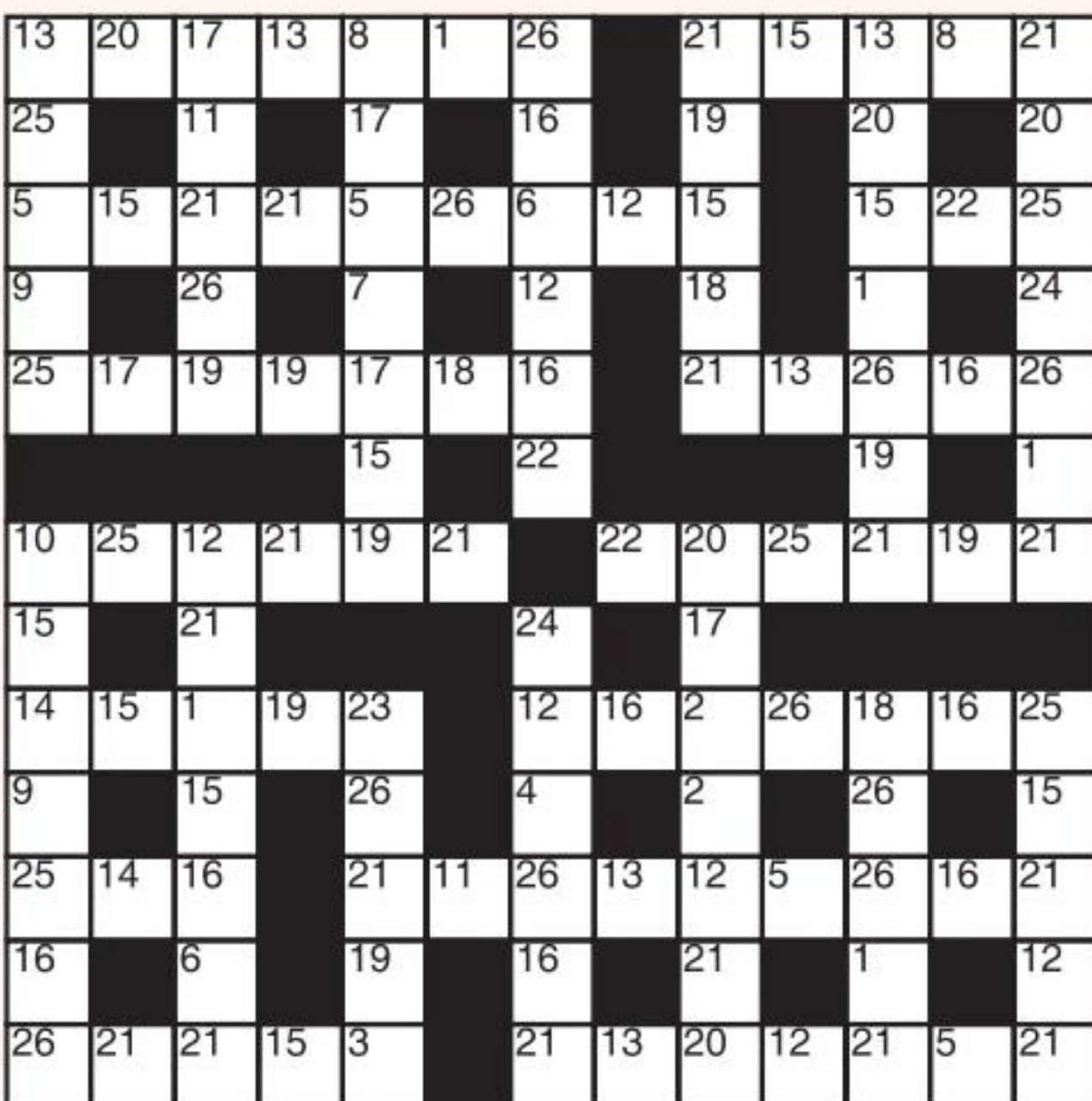


Up to 6 words - Word Finder, 7 - Wordsmith, 14 - Word Wizard, 22 - Word Master, 29 - Word Genius, 37 - Word Perfect



CODEWORDS

Numbers are substituted for letters in these grids. To the right of the grid is the key where you will see that some letters are solved. As you work out each word, enter the letters in the key. The first codewords solution can be found on the last page of puzzles. The solution to the right-hand codewords will be published in Monday's Daily Telegraph.



For the solution to the right-hand Codewords, please call 0905 757 0131. For five extra letter clues for the right-hand Codewords, please call 0905 757 0130 or text DTCODE to 64343. Calls cost £1 per minute, plus network access charge; texts cost £1, plus network access charge. You must be 18 or over and have the bill payer's permission. SP: Spoke Ltd - Helpline 0333 202 3390.

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE CROSSWORD

13,073

KATE MEPHAM

ACROSS

11 Author of a set of children's books following the high jinks, trials and tribulations of Darrell Rivers and her midnight-feasting chums at a fictional castellated cliff-top Cornish boarding school called Malory Towers (6)
12 Prickly plant whose flowers, immortalised on coats of arms, coins, Scottish emblems and shortbread rounds, provide downy parachute-like seeds for goldfinches and nectar for bumblebees and painted ladies (7)
13 A hoax, sham or trick; an imposter; a lump of toffee; a black-and-white peppermint drop to which a stripy wild boarlet is likened; or, nonsense, such as Christmas, according to Dickens's curmudgeon called Scrooge (6)

14 A colliery, pit, quarry, shaft, tunnel or other excavation from which coal, diamonds, gold, tin or other precious metal or ore is dug; or, by extension, any rich source or abundant supply (4)
15 Calfskin, kid, morocco, nappa or other tanned hide to which weathered skin or the coriaceous underside of a dog's earflap is likened; a strap for a stirrup iron; a ball for cricket or football; or, a cloth of chamois for washing a window (7)
16 From Old French for "bowl, dish" and Latin for "salver, tray, wooden platter", word first for the department of a household concerned with cookery utensils, later a small kitchen for the washing of said kitchenalia (8)
17 Strong traditionally striped cases or covers of mattresses or pillows; sounds of clocks; moments; or, from "pats, touches", word for check marks indicating correct, done or yes (5)

18 A slang word, thought to derive from criminals' cant for cloaks or loose coats, for one's capes, cardis, clothes, cords, cossetry, cossies, costumes or other clothly clobber collectively (4)
19 An argyle, saucière or other such cymbiform or ship-shaped vessel for serving gravy, velouté and the like (4)
20 Word meaning "discard", as in the water of a drainage basin; or, an outhouse or hut for bikes, cattle, garden tools or potting-up plants (4)
22 Word, synonymous with bright, cheery or optimistic, for an unaccented musical pulse or oompah, at which the conductor raises their baton (6)

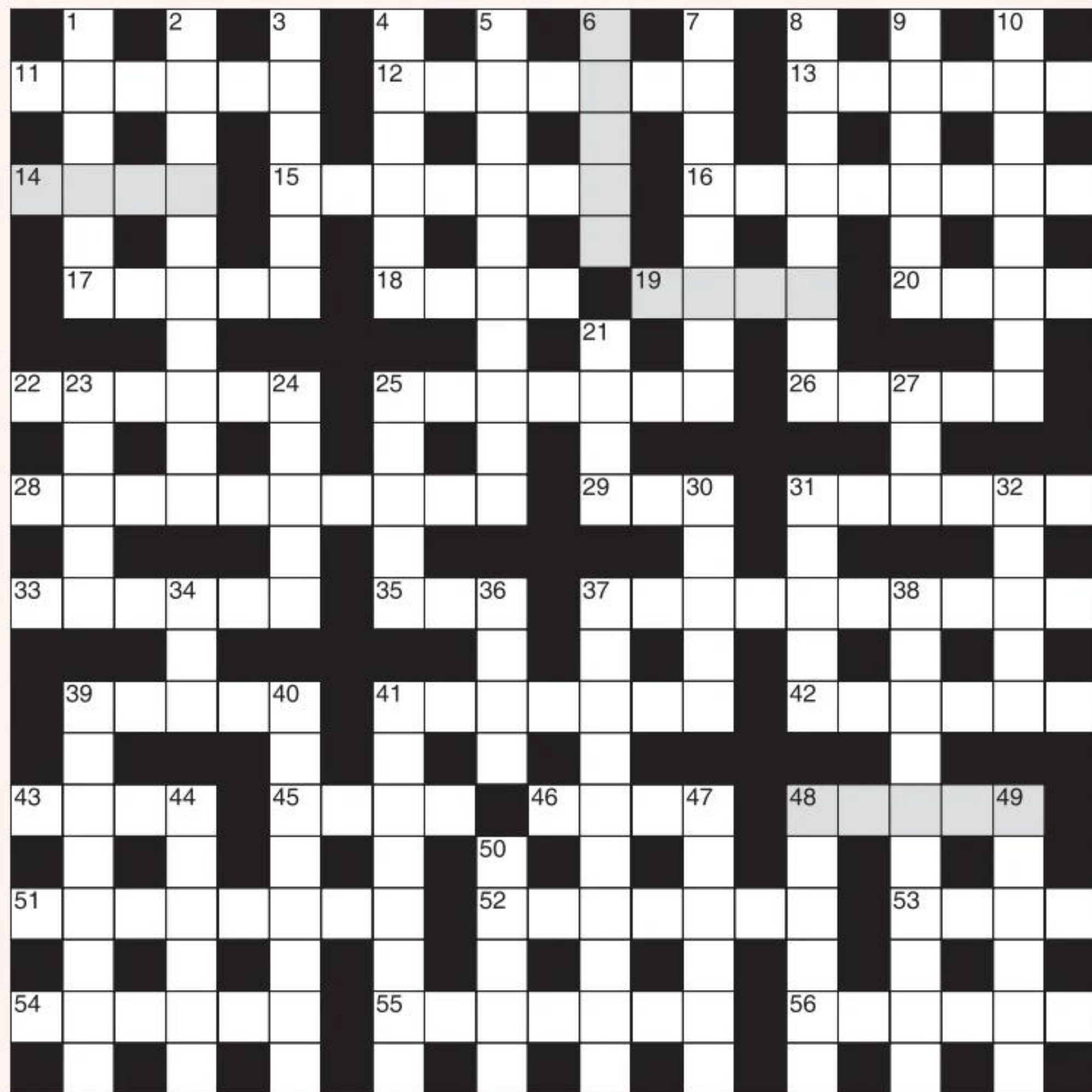
25 Noble gas whose name derives from the Greek for "hidden" or "to hide", for it is colourless, odourless and tasteless, not to mention very rare (7)
26 Word for the cords, guys, lines, stays or tethers that dab hands are said to "know", in an expression that harks back to the days of sailing ships and sailors' skills in tying knots (5)
28 Term for a mode of knitting alternate plain and purl loops so as to create a texture like a carpet or blanket of woodland bryophyte (4,6)
29 Informal plural noun for one's jammies, jimjams or other night suit of loose-fitting "leg-clothing" and nightshirt in which to sleep/lounge (3)
31 An old provincial word for a hollow stalk or stem of an umbelliferous plant, such as cow-parsley or hemlock (6)

33 Flocks, gaggles, Vs or wedges of geese in flight; or, hanks of yarn (6)
35 Homophone of "ewe" that is the name of a mainly toxic evergreen; or, a toxophilic bow made of its wood (3)
37 Type of theatrical galanty show or ombromanie using the umbrae cast by puppets, miniature figures or hands onto a lighted opaque screen (6,4)
39 Name, from a French word for a coniferous cone, for a variety of blanc, grigio, gris or noir wine grapes forming a cluster likened to said strobilus; or, the vin made from said raisins (5)
41 From "devour, greedy, swallow, throat", word for a belly-god, gannet, gobbler, gormandiser or guts; or, an apparently voracious animal, such as the wolverine (7)
42 Word that derives from the Persian for palaces and Turkish for garden pavilions or summerhouses, yet is used to describe public telephone boxes or newspaper stands (6)
43 Landmass whose toponym derivation, thought to come from the Greek for "sunrise" and Assyrian for "east", is uncertain, despite belonging to the world's largest continent (4)
45 Mr and Mrs Herbert Beerbohm Tree's bob-haired bohemian daughter, who shared her name with a purple flower or yellow flag known in its stylised form as a fleur-de-lis (4)
46 A verbal rendering of the sign +, meaning "with the addition of", hence found in the name of baggy knickerbockers made with an extra four inches of fabric added to create an overhang at the knee (4)

48 A brick or other mass of stone or wood one is said to be a figurative "chip off" when resembling one's mater or pater in character or appearance (5)
51 Classic French nutmeg-infused roux-based white "mother sauce", named for Louis XIV's chief steward (8)
52 Term meaning to clear a sinking ship of water by means of a bucket or ladle; escape an aircraft via an emergency parachute jump; rescue financially; save from a predicament; or, abandon an engagement (4,3)
53 Antithesis of wild/adventurous (4)
54 An address, discourse, harangue, Demosthenic oration against Philip of Macedon or other such talk (6)
55 Word meaning merciful or mild, in regard to a person or the weather (7)
56 Gaelic word for a broad river valley, hence a common element in toponyms of the Scottish Highlands (6)

DOWN
1 Word, from "pound the breast", for a lamentation, mournful song or querimony; or, a statement of grievance, made to a court of law (6)
2 Devices, lies, racks etc that extend things or truths; or, gurneys (10)
3 Dialect, from "fire, light, live ember", for domestic fireplaces or hearths (6)
4 Narrow channel in which one is figuratively stranded when in a dire position or desperately tight spot (6)
5 Greek-derived word for a carving, engraving, incision or sculpture on a stone such as a precious gem (10)

6 Word, from "history", for a legend, saga, tale or yarn about a fairy, ghost, shaggy dog or anything else (5)
7 Item of cutlery or silver with which to stir one's theaceous tisane; or, the amount of around 5ml held in said miniature ladle, as a cook's measure (8)
8 A booster, jabber, jet, lunging fencer, propeller, pusher, vernier rocket or other propulsive person or thing (8)
9 Expressions with face-lightening radiant examples likened to sunbeams; favours or blessings; or, an old word for treats or drinks of whisky (6)
10 Word for squabbles or wrangles that also refers to square things, including panes of glass, tiles or arrowheads for the bolts of arbalests/crossbows (8)
21 Any one of an organ's knobs one figuratively pulls when bending over backwards or doing one's utmost (4)
23 Word, thought to be in imitation of the "blanc" in French vin blanc, for a cheap variety of said white wine or any other inferior vinous beverage (5)
24 Word, from "buttocks", for ballerinas' skirts of netting or tulle (5)
25 Old word for a jail, which transferred to a pool of money staked in gambling; or, a child's pet name for a moggy (5)
27 Short word, from "to paint", for a painting, photograph, portrait or other pigmented or pixellated portrayal, worth a thousand proverbial words (3)
30 Word for a lad, servant or knight's attendant first, later a country youth, peasant, rustic, male lover or suitor (5)
31 A rap or tap, such as that on wood, in a superstitious custom thought to ward off bad luck; or, an innings (5)



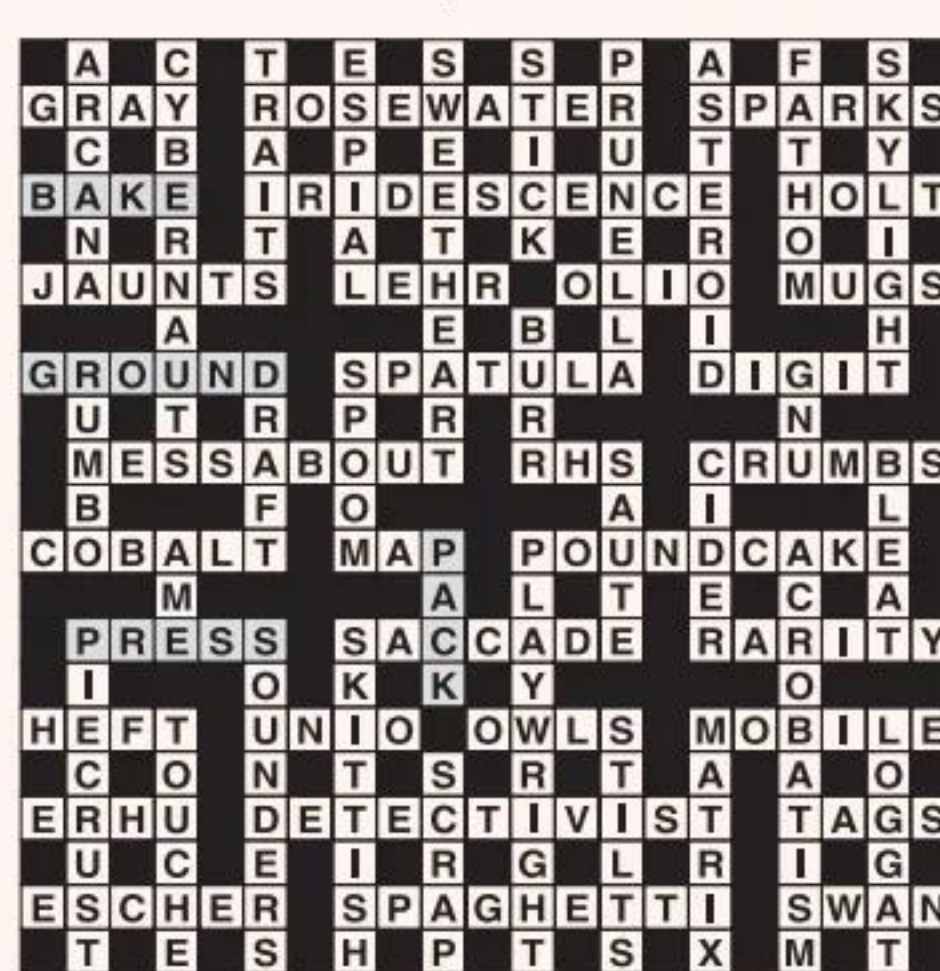
To enter by post: Mark your envelope GK 13,073, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT. To enter by email: Scan your grid and coupon and send to: prize.puzzles@telegraph.co.uk with GK 13,073 in the subject field. Entries must reach us by 9am on Monday, December 16. Solution and winners' names on Saturday, December 21. For more information about how we use your data, please visit: telegraph.co.uk/privacypolicy. Entry terms and conditions: telegraph.co.uk/prize-terms.

Name _____
Address _____
Email _____

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31 A rap or tap, such as that on wood, in a superstitious custom thought to ward off bad luck; or, an innings (5)

32 Word for desolate, harsh, naked or severe that is used as the name of the House of the Lords of Winterfell in A Song of Ice and Fire books (5)
34 Any one of the electrically charged atoms whose existence in emeralds, garnets, rubies, sapphires etc is central to said gems' colouration (3)
36 Word imitative of a loud plaintive bawl, howl, squall or yowl of a cat or a newborn baby (4)
37 Word, from "attendants, followers, guards", for heavenly bodies, such as moons, revolving around planets (10)
38 Word stellar objects in the form of infant "estolles", still gathering mass from parent molecular clouds, aka stellar nurseries (10)
39 Term for camera-ready copies, collages, mechanicals, montages or other glued compositions (5-3)
40 Word for victories; or, pageants (8)
41 A traffic jam, thus a stalemate (8)
44 Any one of a fascicle of fraxinum samaras growing in clusters, imagined to resemble bunches of (3-3)
47 Stertorous sounds made when "sawing logs", snickering, sniffing, sniggering or snoozing; slang for submarine snorkels; or, sniffers (6)
48 Word, from French for "beast, brute, fool", for a blunder, folly, gaffe, ill-timed remark or other stupidity (6)
49 Word, translating as "grappling hands" or "sparring", for the Japanese art of freestyle fighting in karate (6)
50 A type of monastery or convent, such as Shaftesbury's Benedictine nunnery, founded by Alfred the Great but destroyed by Henry VIII (5)

GK SOLUTION 13,071 (NOVEMBER 23)



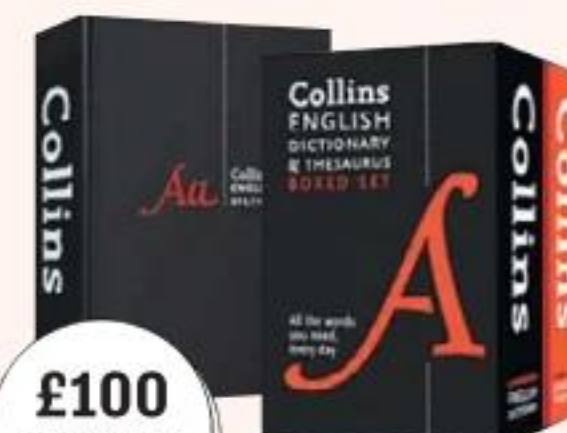
PRIZE-WINNERS

GK 13,071 (November 23)
First prize:
Jim Furze, Earls Colne, Essex.

Runners-up:
Shirley Hosking, Okehampton, Devon; Peter Treagust, Salisbury, Wiltshire; Stuart Robbins, Nuneaton, Warwickshire; Glenys Dickinson, Bow Street, Ceredigion; Joe Carroll, Westbury, Wiltshire.

Scrabble 1553:
Joanna Richardson, Evesham, Gloucestershire.

Win a £100 book token and Collins Dictionaries



There is a £100 book token for the winner of today's crossword, plus a copy of the brilliant Collins English Dictionary.

Collins English Dictionary is the home of living English, and the largest single-volume English dictionary in print, with more than 725,000 words, meanings and phrases. The latest edition is an unparalleled resource for word lovers and word gamers. Plus five runner-up prizes: Five runners-up will each receive an Essential Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus.



IN MONDAY'S
Daily Telegraph
WIN A £25 BOOK TOKEN WITH THE HERCULIS GENERAL KNOWLEDGE CROSSWORD

Each shaded solution with a highlighted clue in this week's crossword (14a, 19a, 48a and 6d) forms half of a well-known word or phrase. Work out which of the four shaded solutions they should link with in Monday's Herculis General Knowledge crossword and you could win a £25 book token.

BRAIN
TRAINING

Each week, we focus on five areas that will help train your brain and improve your sharpness.

With practice, you should find the puzzles easier over time. *Solutions on the last page of puzzles.*

MEMORY

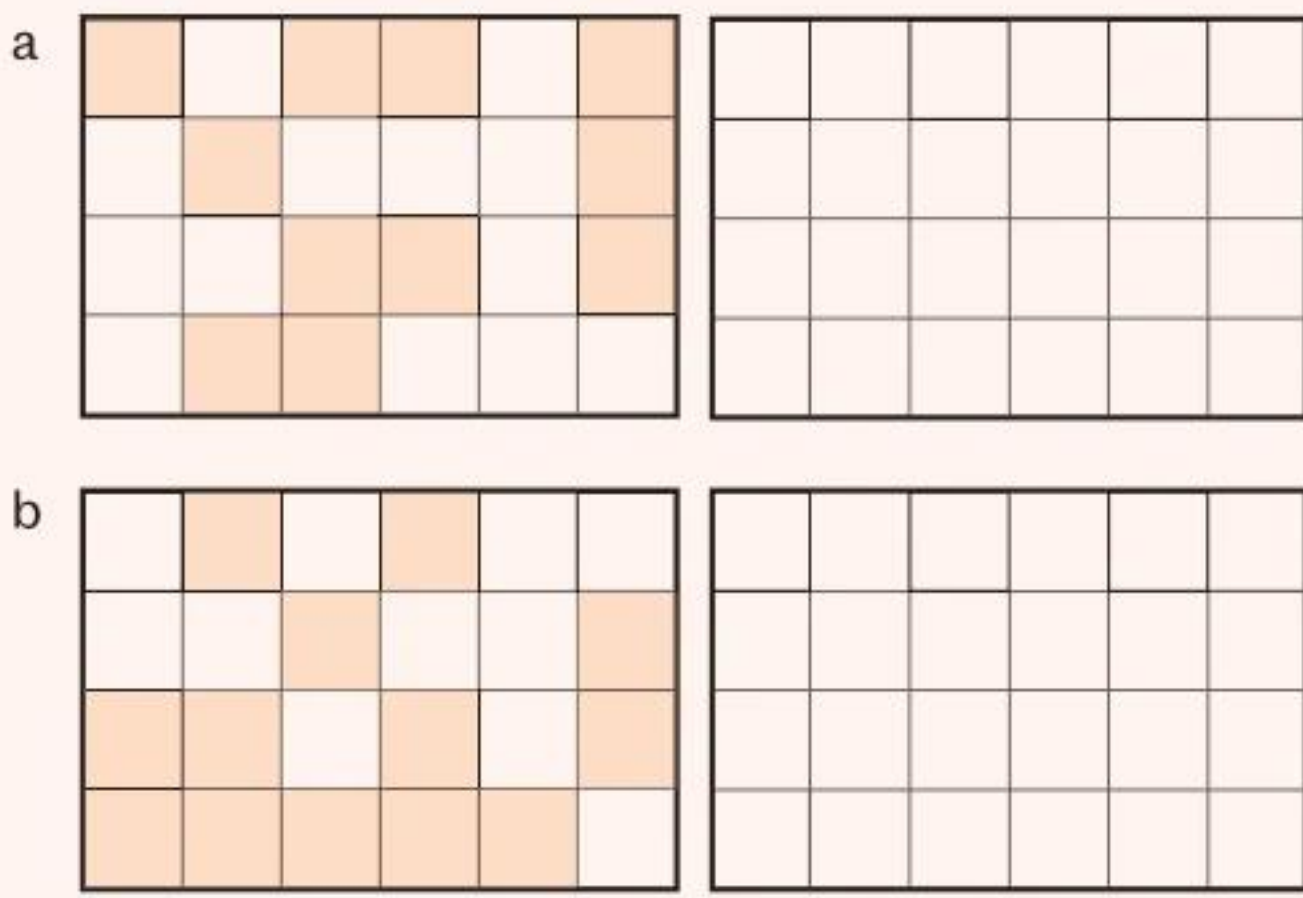
WHAT'S NEW

Cover the bottom row of objects, then study the top row for two minutes. Then cover the top row and show the bottom row. How many are new, and which ones?



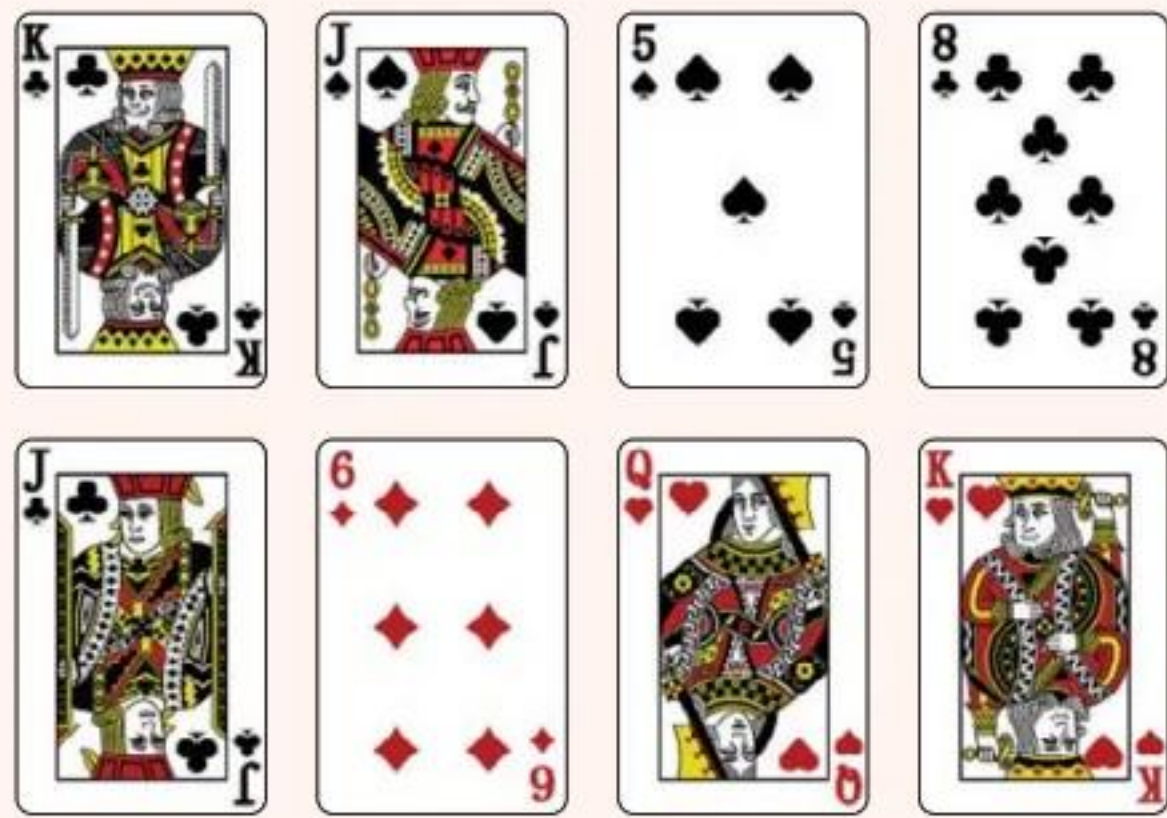
GRIDS

Study grid A for five seconds, then cover it up and try to reproduce the pattern in the blank grid to the right. Repeat for grid B.



CONCENTRATION

Study this set of playing cards for thirty seconds, then cover them up and answer the questions below.



1 Of which suit is there a six? 2 How many kings are there? 3 How many cards have black suits?

MISSING WORDS

Cover the bottom group of words, then study the top group for two minutes. Then cover the top group and show the bottom group. Which words are missing?

ACTION	DEALER	GRAVITY
ADDRESS	DEMOCRACY	OCEAN
ALIEN	ENVELOPE	POINT
BALLOT	EVENT	POLITICS
BEACH	FILTH	RALLY
BUSH	FLUSH	VEGETABLE
CURRENT	GNOME	WEIGHT
FLUSH	GNOME	FILTH
GRAVITY	VEGETABLE	BEACH
ACTION	RALLY	WEIGHT
OCEAN	BALLOT	POLITICS
BUSH	ALIEN	ENVELOPE
DEMOCRACY	ADDRESS	CURRENT

NUMBER ABILITY

SUMTHING

Place the listed numbers into the grid so that all sums are correct, reading left to right and top to bottom.

4	x		=		
+		+		-	
	x		=		
=		=		=	
	+		=		

1
1
2
2
3
4
4
6
7
8
9

MIND GYM

Start on the left with the given number and work your way across following the instructions in each cell. The target time for each row is 30 seconds.

EASY 27	Take the cube root	+48	÷3	-8
ANSWER	+53	÷6	-24	x8
MEDIUM 342	4/9 of this	+84	75% of this	-56
ANSWER	÷9	+80	x14	Take the square root
HARD 254	+318	7/11 of this	-89	Increase by 20%
ANSWER	x8	-13	÷9	-87

PICTURE IT

The average height of 12 gymnasts in a team is 5ft 4in. Over the course of a year, one gymnast leaves and three more join, the newcomers coincidentally all being 5ft tall. The average height of all the gymnasts in the team is now 5ft 3in. How tall was the gymnast who left?



NUMBER JIG

Which one of the listed numbers won't fit in this mini grid?

1626				
2641				
4212				
4642				
6221				
	6			

WORD ABILITY

ANAGRAMS

Unscramble each of the phrases below to reveal five UK bands.

HE LETS BE, TA
SQUATS OUT
DIN IN EAR, MO
SHY POET BOPS
TAMED CLEF - WOO!

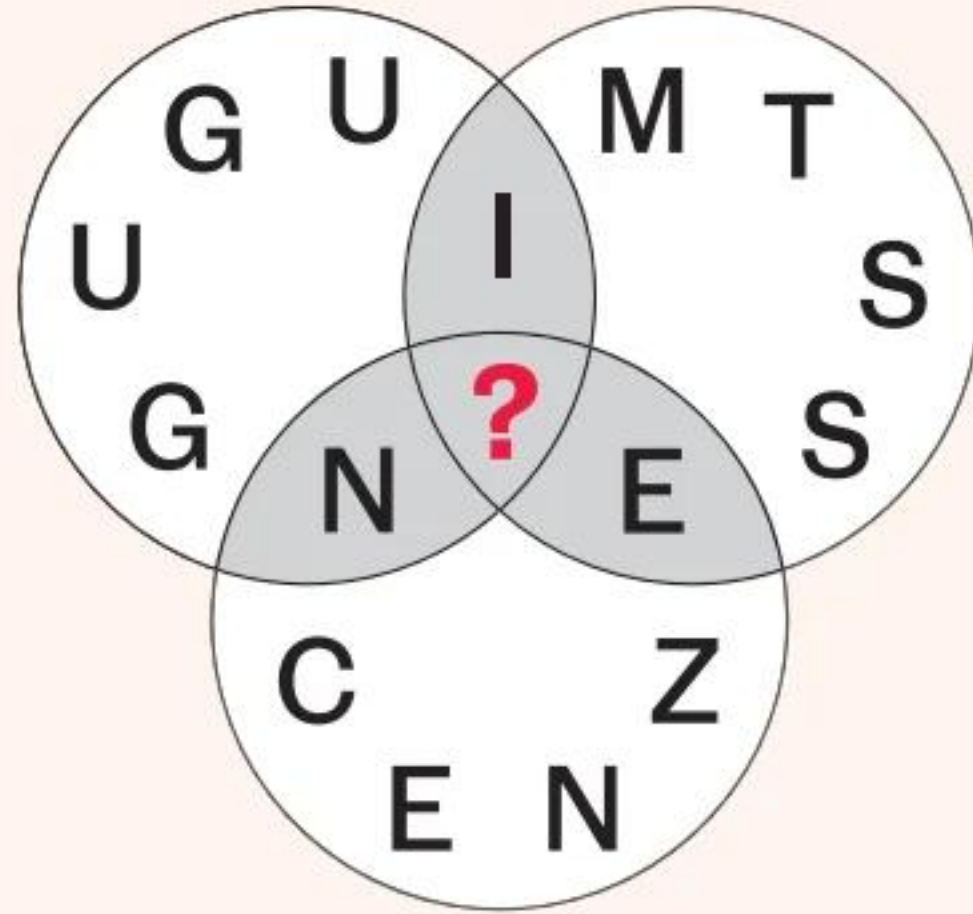
WORD LADDER

Change just one letter to go from the top word to the bottom word in each ladder. Each step must be a valid word and you cannot change the order of the letters. There are clues below for each rung, but they are not in order.

1 MATE	2 BACK
PUNY	POOL
Glove, Unit of capacity, Flat-bottomed boat, Type of paint, Flavouring	Carpet nail, Speak, Implement, Price exacted, Elevated

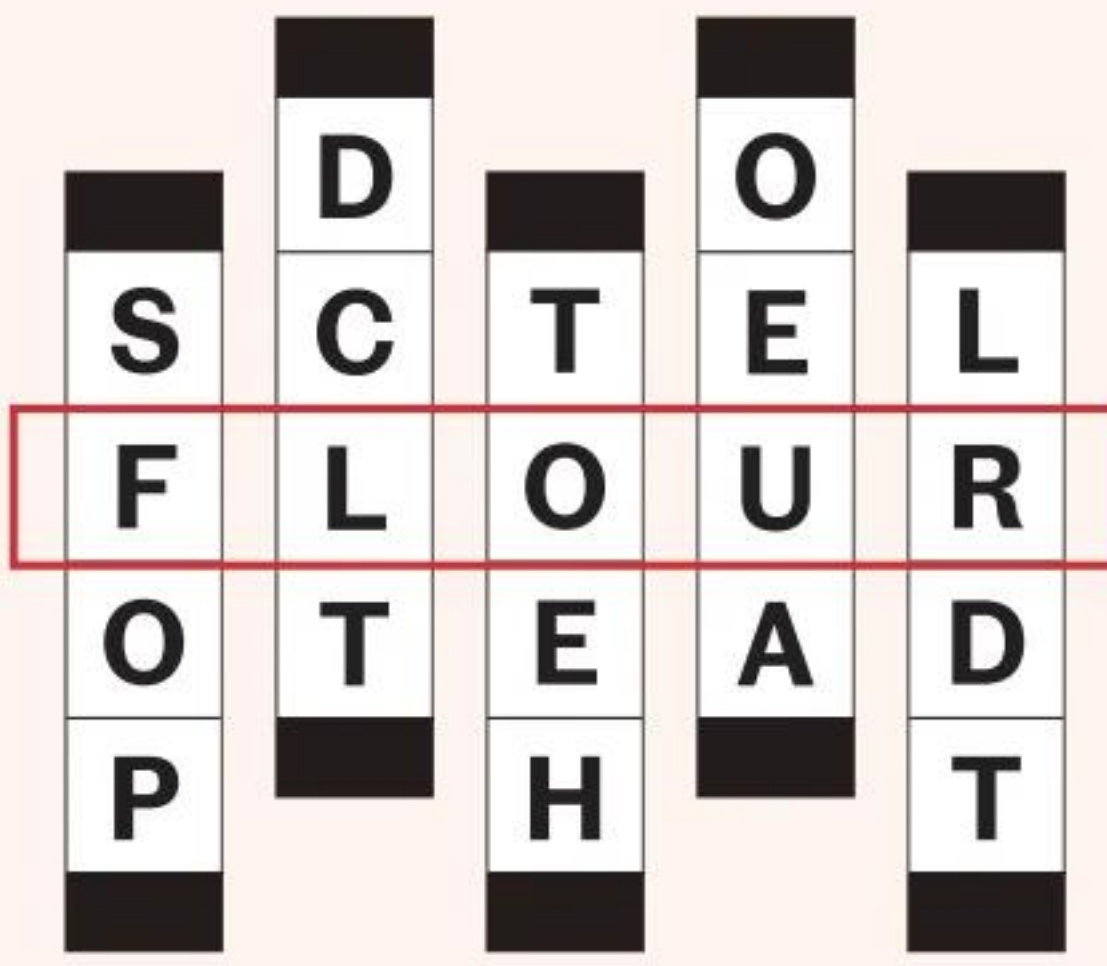
CIRCLEGRAM

Replace the question mark with a letter so that the letters in each circle can be arranged to form words, names or terms on a common theme. What are the three words and the letter represented by the question mark?



WORD SLIDE

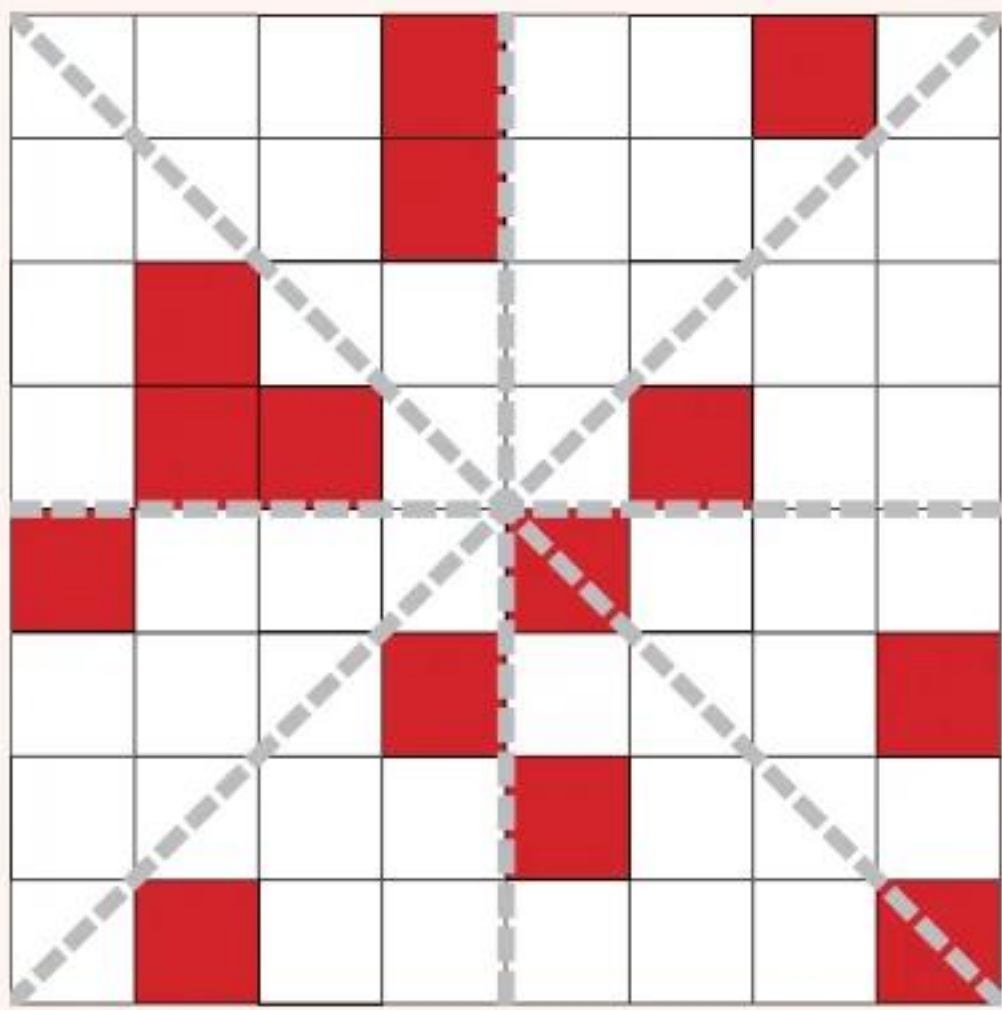
How many regular English words can you spell out using all the sliders? One word is spelled already. Target score: 18



VISUALISATION

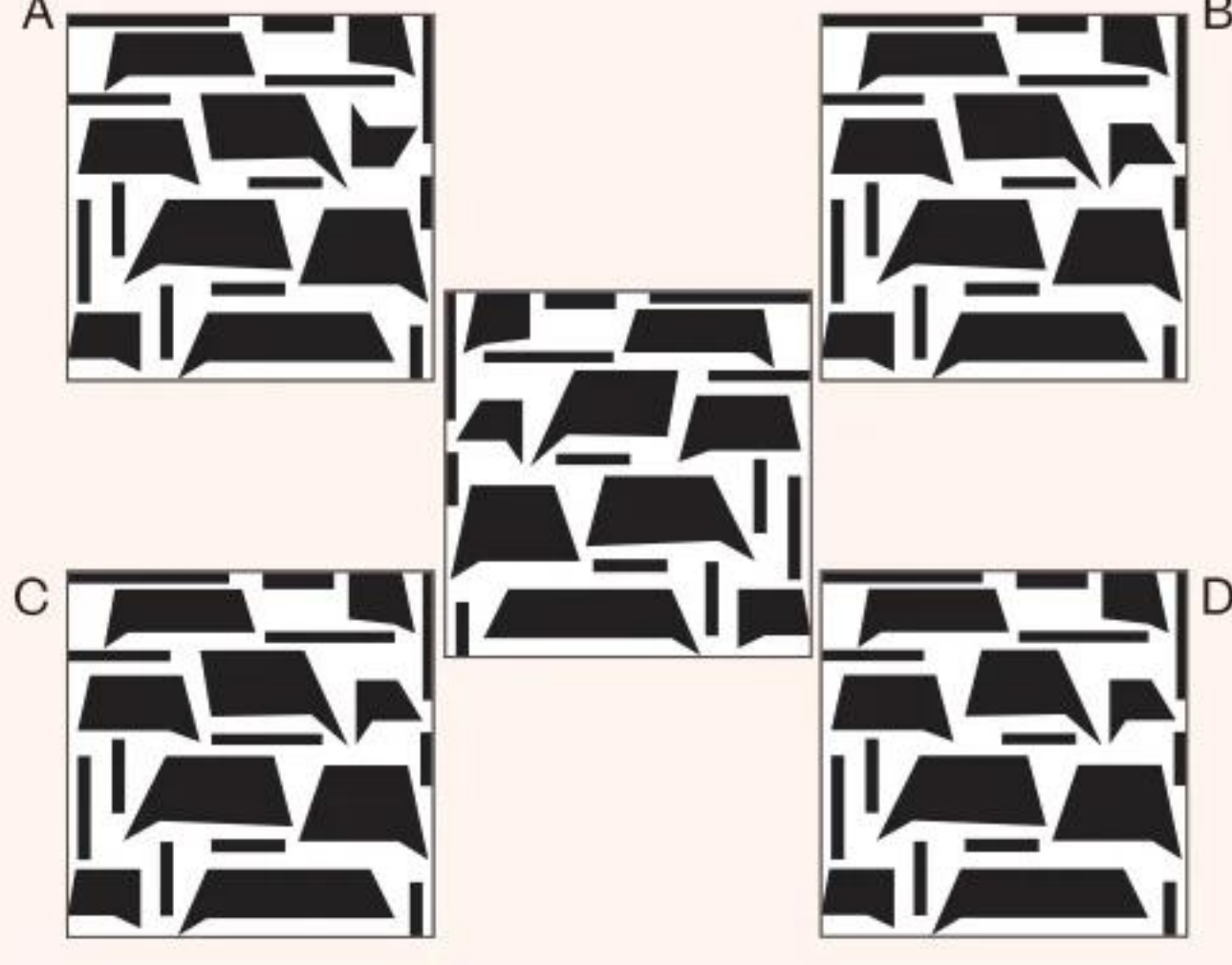
SYMMETRY

Shade in eight of the blank squares so that the pattern shows reflectional symmetry along one of the four axes shown.



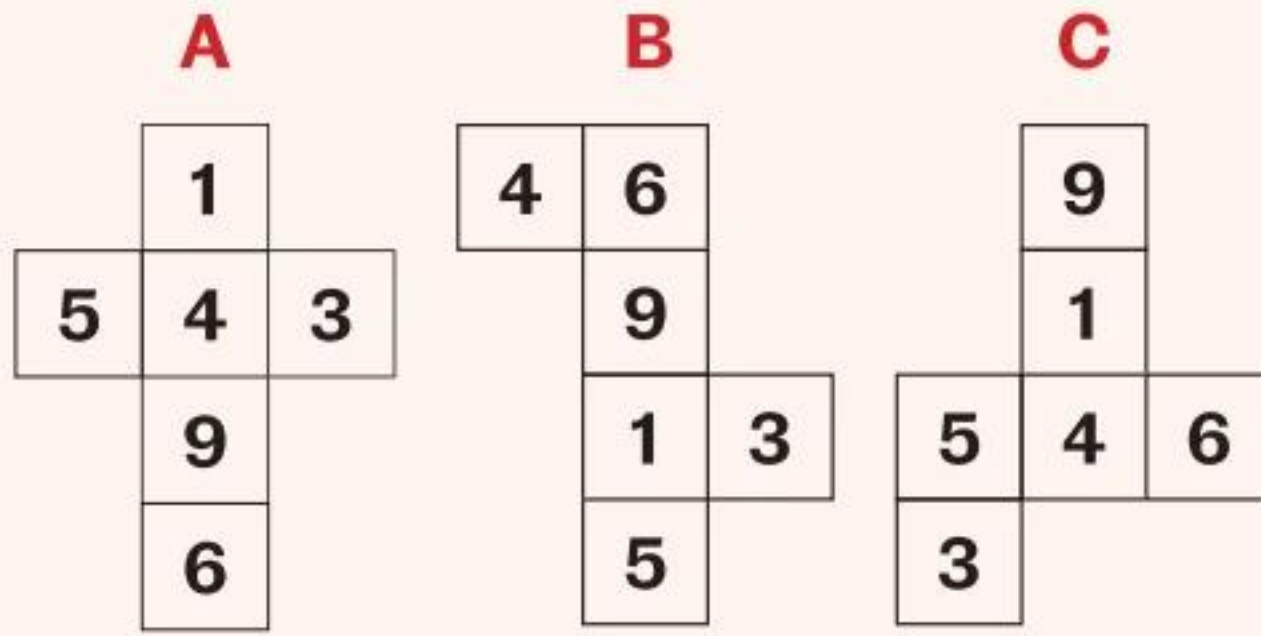
MIRROR IMAGE

Which of the four images below is the mirror image of the one in the middle?



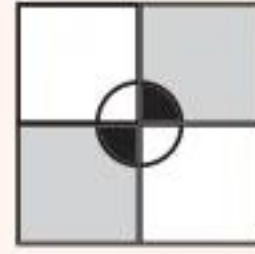
NETS

Which of these nets can be constructed to make a cube in which none of the pairs of opposite faces add up to the same number?

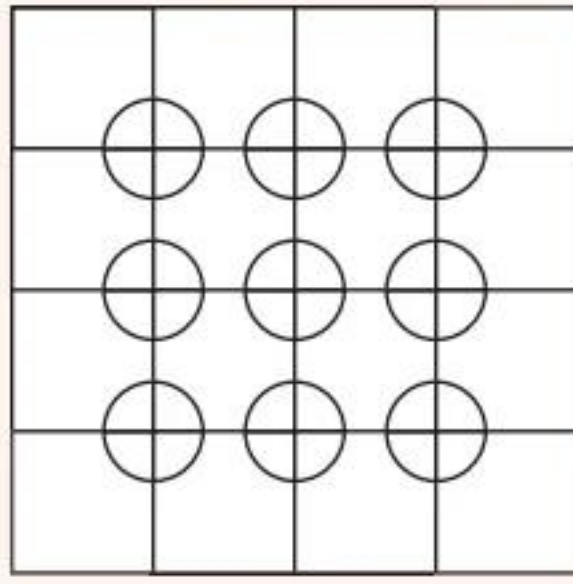


SEKI

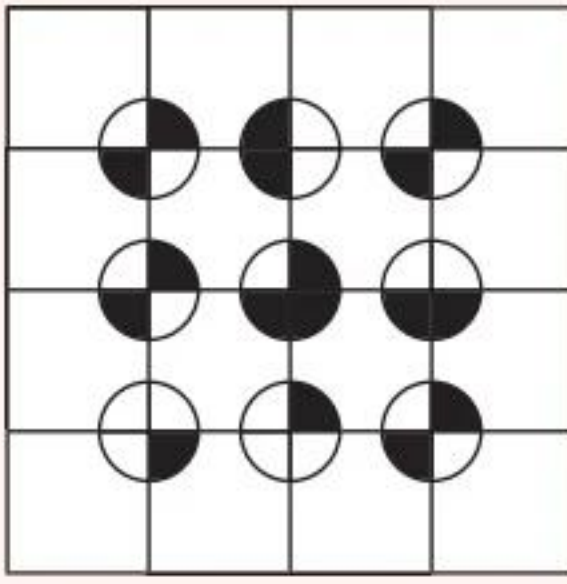
Using the blank grid, rotate some of the circles shown in the start grid and then shade in the corresponding squares (as shown right), so that shaded squares contain only black quarter-circles.



BLANK GRID



START GRID

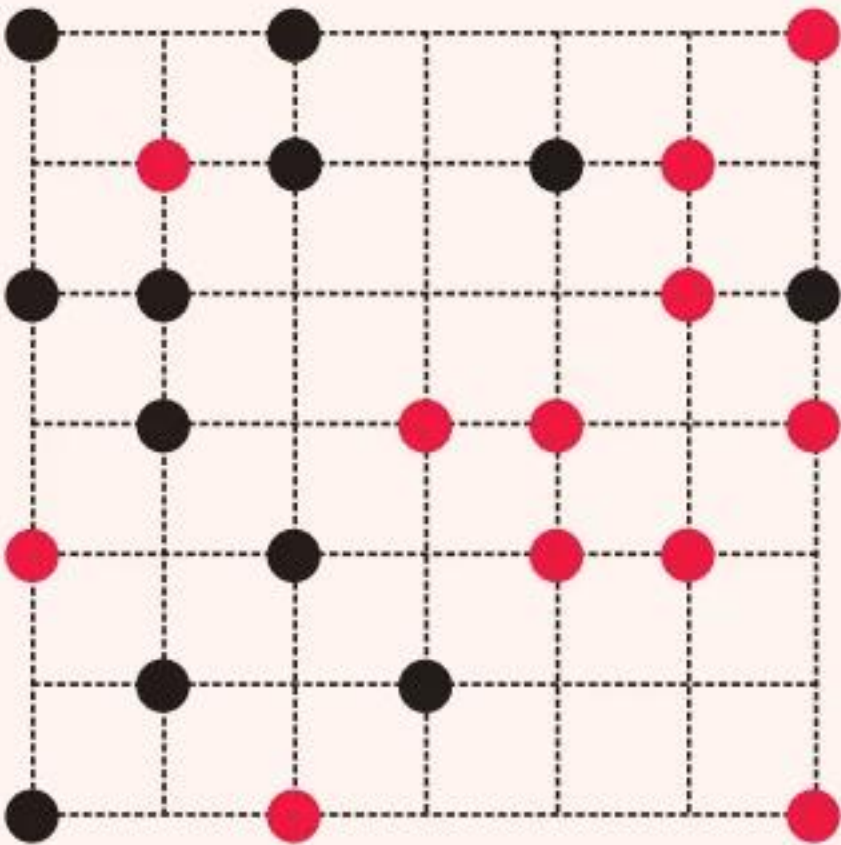


LOGIC

DANGO

Draw lines between the dots to create four shapes in the grid. No shape may touch another and you must use all the dots. When a line reaches a dot, it turns as shown:

● 90° ● 45° or 135°



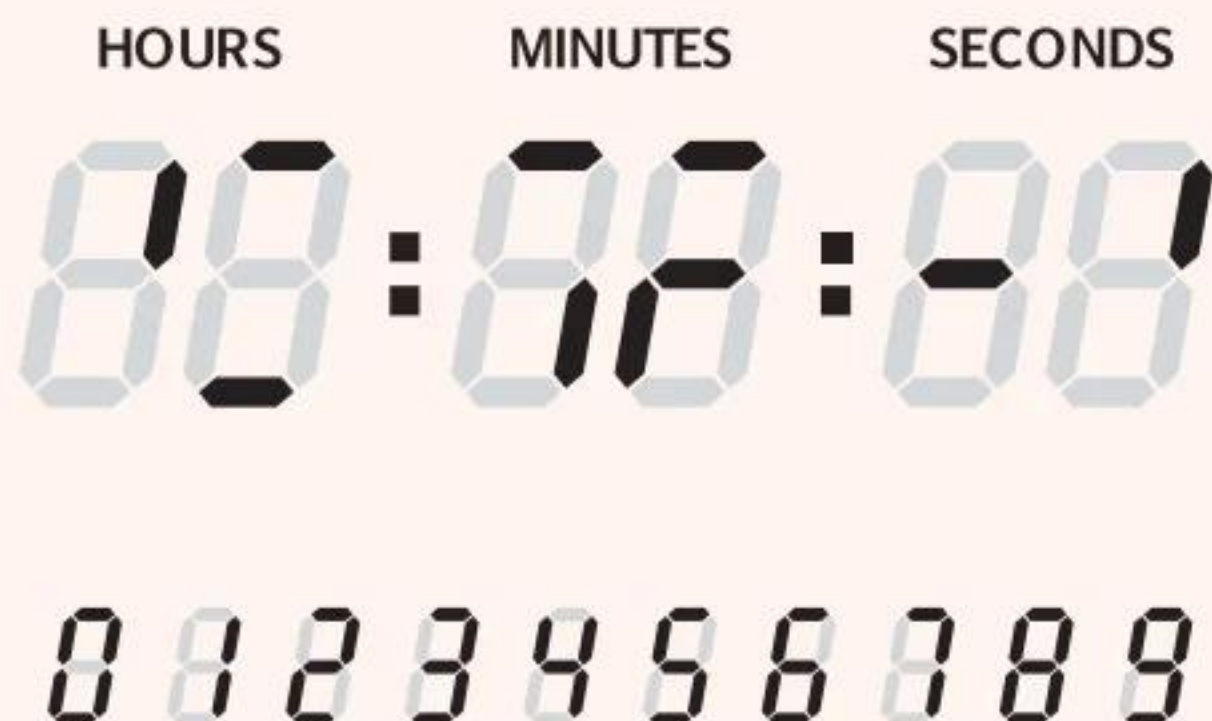
CELLS

Divide the grid into square or rectangular blocks, each containing one digit only. Every block must contain the number of cells indicated by the digit inside it.

						2
2					2	2
	3	5				
2				8		2
3	4					4
				3	2	
				5		

FILLING TIME ®

Using all six LCD time blocks e.g. 02:58:49, in addition to the 10 panels already shaded black, shade in a further 14 panels in the style of the numbers provided to give you a unique time within a 24-hour day. Not only should the time use 24 panels in total, the numbers used to create the correct time must all add up to the same number of panels e.g. 17:07:16 not only uses 22 panels to display it, but 1 + 7 + 0 + 7 + 1 + 6 = 22.



SUBROKU

If these two grids were overlaid, they would form a completed sudoku grid. However, there would be a single error, since no number can repeat in any row, column or 3x2 box. Which number should be changed, and to what?

2	5	1		4	6			
				5	1			
3	1	4	6					
6	2		1	3	5			
		2	5		3			
	3	6	4					
			3					
4	6	3	2					
					2	5		
		5						
1	4				6			
5					1	2		



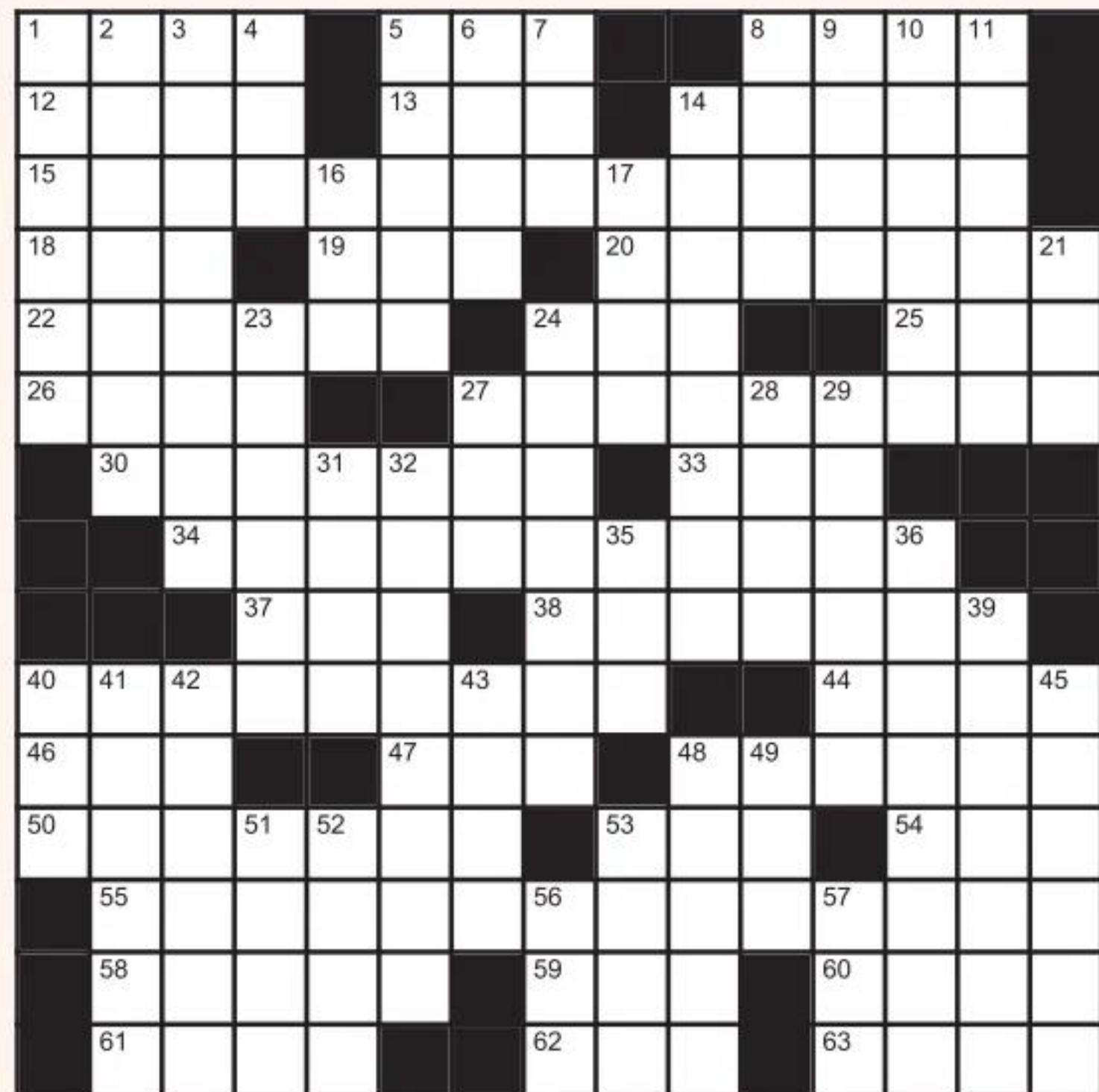
CHILDREN'S
PUZZLES

CROSS ATLANTIC

ALI GASCOIGNE

- Across**
- 1 Domesticated
5 Delivery vehicle
8 "P" in the Nato alphabet
12 Abbr. in a citation
13 Sphere
14 New England witch trial town
15 Advent calendars going on sale in October, e.g.
18 Men and boys
19 "Watch it!"
20 Legendary rock singer?
22 Arrested
24 Place
25 "Uhh..."
26 Spoken
27 Driver's sound system
30 Surname in *Only Fools and Horses*
33 Cheesed off
34 Dynamo performance, say
37 ___ Aviv
38 Incessant
40 In a tricky situation
44 Leave out
46 ___ Solo, Star Wars hero
47 ___ anglais, woodwind instrument
48 Peaceful
50 Find, as an idea
53 Sir Chris ___, eleven-time world cycling champion
54 Wicked spell
55 Responsibility in many senior jobs
58 Middle-Eastern rulers
59 Huge
60 Snare or tom-tom, e.g.

- Down**
- 1 Potential rave music
2 Fundamentally
3 Items that help you work, rest and play?
4 Hebrew name meaning "my God"
5 Did one's civic duty
6 Group of ants
7 Court org.
8 Catherine ___, character in the musical *Six*
9 Away from the wind
10 Kitchen prep tool
11 Current unit
14 The ___, newspaper based in Edinburgh
16 ___/her
17 Sound drunk
21 Qualification, in a text
23 Completely smashed
24 Significant other
27 Can opener?
28 Identifies on social media
29 Publishing house employee
31 Arduous journey
32 Phone and related services
35 Online forum admin
36 Beckoning words
39 Pesto ingredient
40 "Be quiet!"
41 Performed perfectly
42 Punctual
43 Covid-19, slangily



- 45 Modern-day "let's stay in touch"
48 Type of bottom not appreciated on *Bake Off*
49 Part of a needle or hurricane
51 Post-school destinations, for some
52 Corporate gym membership, maybe

- 53 Locks
56 Peacock network, in the US
57 Engineered wood product, for short

Play Cross Atlantic every day at telegraph.co.uk/puzzles. Solution next week.



Notes

BRIDGE

BRIAN SENIOR

At matchpoint scoring, making an extra overtrick can be just as valuable as making the contract. Today's deal saw two declarers take quite different approaches to that pursuit.

Dealer West, N/S vulnerable

♠ 7 2
♥ A J 6 3 2
♦ 3
♣ A K 10 9 7

♠ A Q 10 6 4 3
♥ 7
♦ A Q 5 4
♣ J 2

West North East South

pass 1♥ 2♦ 2♣
pass 3♣ pass 3♣
pass 4♣ pass pass

West led the 10 of hearts. Our first declarer won the ace of hearts, and, mindful of the auction, took the diamond finesse at trick two. Somewhat to his surprise, the Queen lost to the King, and back came the five of spades to East's King. Declarer won the ace and played a low diamond, ruffing in dummy, then ruffed a heart back to hand, East following with the King, to cash the Queen of spades. East showed out, which left West with two spade winners, and declarer still had to find a parking place for his remaining low diamond. Either the Queen of hearts might ruff out, or the Queen of clubs might be onside, so declarer went about giving himself both chances. He led the Jack of clubs to dummy's ace and took a second heart ruff, led a club to the King, and took a diamond pitch on the Jack of hearts, then continued with the fifth

heart, discarding the ♦A. West had his two trump tricks, so the contract was just made.

The E/W hands:

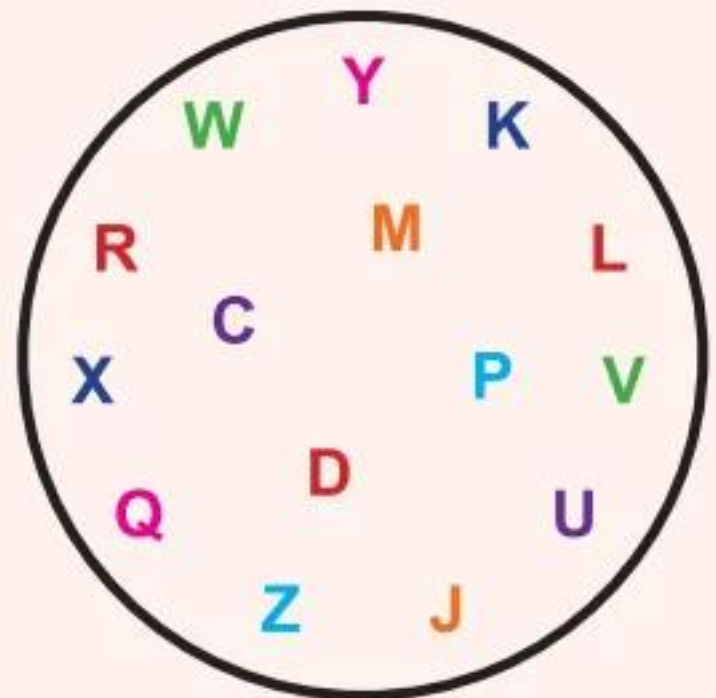
♠ J 9 8 5
♥ 10 9 8 5
♦ K 6
♣ Q 8 4

♠ K
♥ K Q 4
♦ J 10 9 8 7 2
♣ 6 5 3

Declarer number two also received the 10 of hearts lead. This declarer wondered why West had not led a diamond. Declarer won the ace of hearts, and led the two of spades off the dummy, winning East's King with the ace. Taking that at face value, declarer set about shortening his trump holding. He led a club to the ace and ruffed a heart, then played ace and another diamond. Sure enough, the King appeared from West, as dummy ruffed. A second heart ruff established the Jack as a winner, and now declarer crossed to the King of clubs to take a diamond discard on the heart. A club ruff came next, and, at trick 11, declarer played the Queen of diamonds. Down to nothing by trumps, West was obliged to ruff, then lead into declarer's ♠Q10 to give a 12th trick. Had the heart honours not fallen so kindly, declarer's trump-shortening play would still have resulted in his coming to all of his six trumps, but now there would be only one overtrick. To ensure that overtrick, he would need to be careful not to get overruffed when he took his last ruff. If both defenders followed to the third heart, but the Jack was not established, West must be either 4-4-2-3 or 4-3-2-4. In either case, a club ruff would stand up, whereas a fourth heart could be overruffed if West held the latter distribution.

WORD WHEEL

Within the word wheel are most of the letters of the alphabet. However, a few are missing and it's your job to find out which ones. The missing letters rearranged will spell out three words that link with the word 'big'.



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Can you spot the ten differences between the two pictures below?



Illustration by Jayne Schofield

JUNIOR
MIND GYM

Start on the left with the given number and work your way across, following the instructions in each cell.

LEVEL 1					ANSWER
28	÷4	x9	-39	2/3 OF THIS	TRIPLE IT
LEVEL 2					ANSWER
36	8/9 OF THIS	TRIPLE IT	-51	÷5	X BY ITSELF
LEVEL 3					ANSWER
16	x11	3/4 OF THIS	-54	5/6 OF THIS	TRIPLE IT
LEVEL 4					ANSWER
252	÷12	X BY ITSELF	-217	11/16 OF THIS	x5.5

➡ Solutions on the next page ➡

FUTOSHIKI

Insert the numbers 1 to 5 in each row and each column, making sure that no number is repeated. The only symbols to guide you are the "greater than" (>) and "less than" (<) signs. Solution on the next page.

	<	2	4	<	
	>			>	
	<	<		<	

PUZZLES



Enjoy 1 year of puzzles for just £1. Visit telegraph.co.uk/puzzles today.

Thirty-one terms related to railways can be found in this wordsearch: horizontally, vertically, diagonally and in any direction. Solution on the next page.

- AISLE**
BANK
BERTH
BOGIE
BOILER
BRANCH
CABIN
COACH
DEPOT
DIESEL
FARE
FOGGER
FROG
FUNICULAR

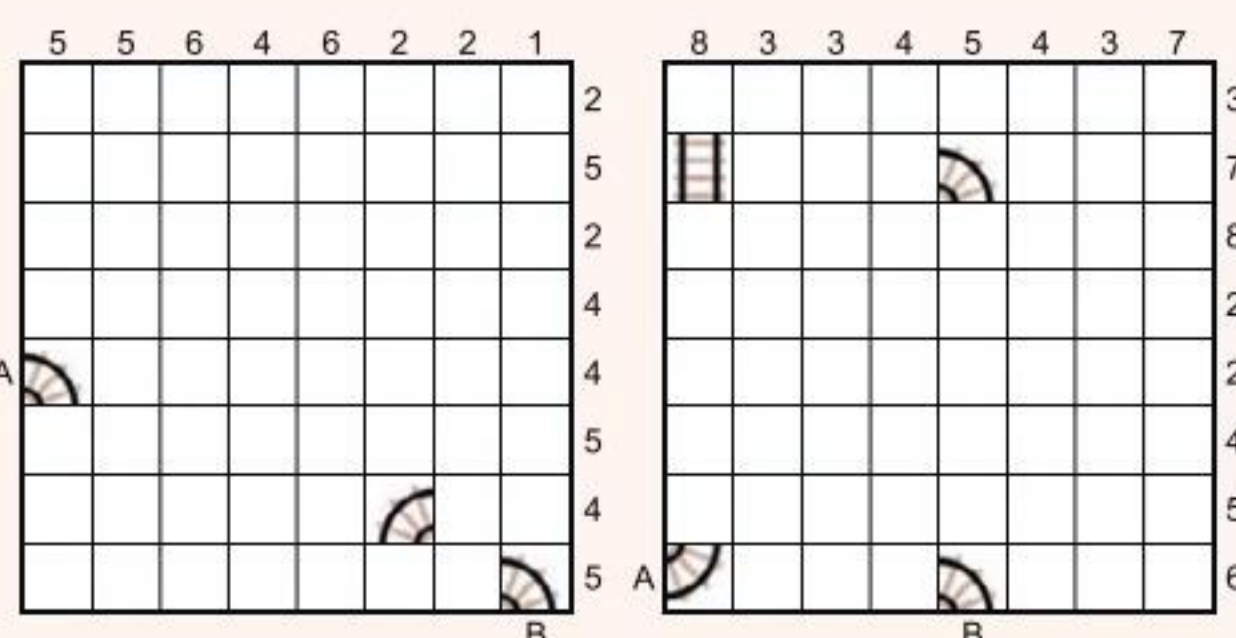
WORDSEARCH

Q T U M S K N D R A U G T
Y D N U N O P N G M W E U
A Q T U I C C O O G Z R B
W O R T H A L D R G V A E
B T A H B S I A F T A F F
U T I I R E T R C R E W U
S O N C S E E I G O B R N
R E Y E K L K A I S L E I
J E L P I E F O G G E R C
D E P O T O T H T R E B U
Y P B P E G U A G S G A L
L I N E O B R A N C H N A
M E T R O H H C A O C K R

- GAUGE
GRATE
GUARD
HOPPER
LINE
LOCAL
METRO
PORTER
SHUNT
STATION
STOKER
SUBWAY
TICKET
TRAIN
TRUNK
TUBE
WAGON

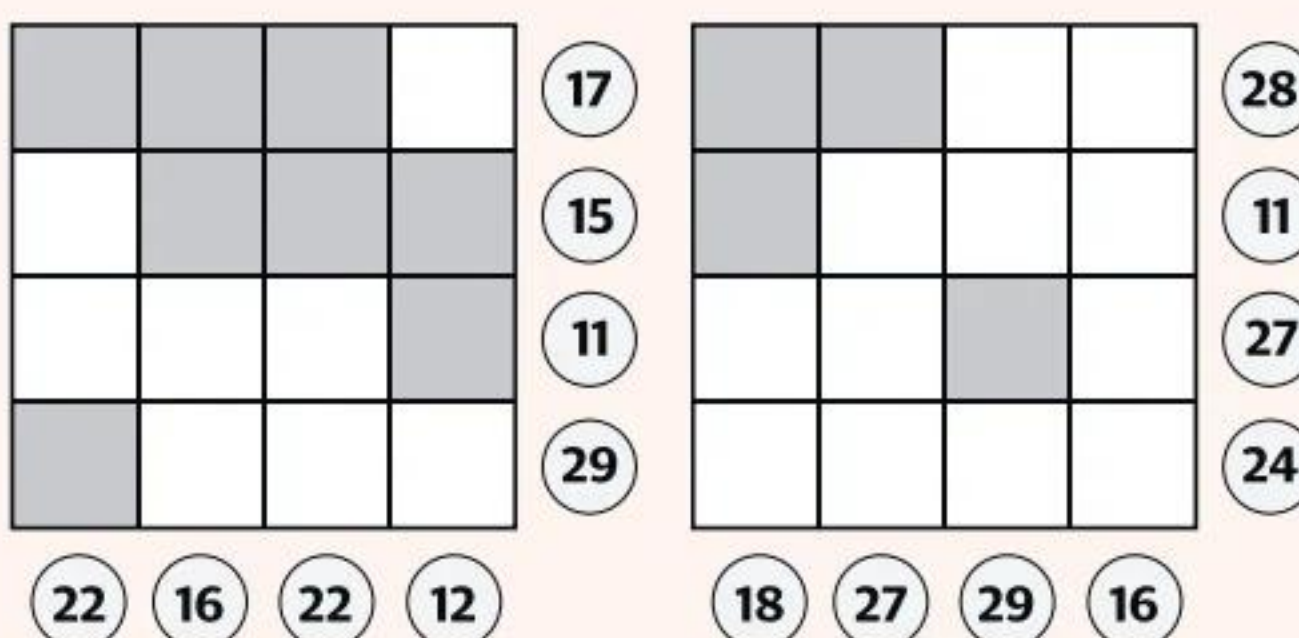
TRAIN TRACKS

Lay down tracks to allow a train to travel from A to B. You may only use straight and curved rails and the track cannot cross itself. The numbers indicate how many sections of rail go in each column and row. Solution on the next page.



EVENS

Insert any digit from 1 to 9 in the squares so that the numbers in each row and column add up to the given totals. No digits may be repeated within a row or column, and only even numbers may be placed in grey squares. Solution on the next page.



PLUSWORD

NO 930				
1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
8				
9				

- Across**
- 1 Rank
6 Cherished
7 In the midst of
8 Elevate
9 Done and dusted
- Down**
- 1 Headlight hazard
2 Like Julius Caesar, e.g.
3 Steer clear of
4 Jammed together
5 Nicked, as a cricket ball

Play PlusWord for free online at telegraph.co.uk/pw or scan the QR code



SCRABBLE®

Use letters from the rack to make a valid move in Scrabble. All words must be listed in *Collins Official Scrabble Words*.

This week's target is 53 pts.

Please send in your word, position and score, plus your name, address and email address, by 9am, Monday, December 16.

To enter by post: Send to **Scrabble 1555**, Telegraph Media Group, London SW1W 0DT.
To enter by email: Send to prize.puzzles@telegraph.co.uk with **Scrabble 1555** in the subject field.

Correct entries that match or exceed the target score will go into a draw for a **£25 book token** plus the *Scrabble Family Dictionary*, courtesy of the publisher, Collins. The solution and winner will be published in two weeks. Puzzle devised by Allan Simmons. Entry terms and conditions: telegraph.co.uk/prize-terms

Scrabble 1553 solution: BEHEMOTH at E3 down 21 points

KEY:

AEIOLNRST=1 / DG=2 / BCMP=3
FHVVY=4 / K=5 / JX=8 / QZ=10



SCRABBLE is a registered trademark of J W Spear & Sons Ltd, a Mattel company

L A G R A T E

THE PUB QUIZ

DANIEL PEAKE

- 1 Left car or right car; in the UK road sign representing "no overtaking", which car is coloured red?
- 2 What question topped the UK singles charts for the Black Eyed Peas in 2003?
- 3 Which Spanish tennis player defeated Novak Djokovic to win the Wimbledon men's singles title in 2023 and 2024?
- 4 What is the metal ring that holds a rubber at the end of a pencil in place called?
- 5 Which netball position is represented by WA?
- 6 Who played the hapless manager Ian Fletcher in the mockumentary series *W1A*?
- 7 At the Malta Summit in 1989, which American president and which Soviet general secretary announced the end of the Cold War?
- 8 A Breton galette is a savoury pancake made using what type of flour?
- 9 The Skeleton Coast can be found in which country?
- 10 Which 1950 film's last line is "All right, Mr DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up"?
- 11 The hymn *Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer* is sung to what tune by John Hughes?
- 12 When pegging in cribbage, a set of cards summing to 15 is worth how many points?
- 13 At the base of the Spanish Steps in Rome is a museum dedicated to Percy Bysshe Shelley and which other poet, known for his 1819 odes?
- 14 What type of animal is a muskellunge?
- 15 *The Heat Is On* by Glenn Frey was recorded for which film?
- 16 How was Edward Teach better known in the early 18th century?
- 17 Aldous Huxley took the title of his book *Brave New World* from which Shakespeare play?
- 18 What type of curved sword with a notched blade appears on the county flag of Essex?
- 19 The Gran Teatre del Liceu is a theatre and opera house in what city?
- 20 Diethyltoluamide is the chemical name of which now-banned insect repellent?

Solutions on the next page. Pit your wits against John Henderson tomorrow in the *Sunday Telegraph Pub Quiz*.



◀ Interior designer Octavia Dickinson says the forgiving expanse of a tray/ countertop combo allows guests to choose their poison (and their glass)

and easier for me as the host, so people can help themselves to their own drinks. It also creates a party atmosphere.”

At his home in Berkshire, Leo Vaughan Williams, a creative adviser, has not one but two grog trays: one in the kitchen and one in the sitting room. “Like a good fire, people naturally congregate around them,” he says. “The one in our kitchen has everything we need to make a good G&T as well as tequila, Campari, martini, Cointreau, vermouth and bitters.” The one in the sitting room holds digestifs “so we can sit next to the fire after dinner with a warming glass of something delicious”. Williams admits that he was inspired by the decorator Nicky Haslam, who once said that informal sitting rooms should have two things: a good drinks tray and comfortable furniture on which guests can put their feet up.

Artist Phoebe Dickinson, who lives in Gloucestershire, has a fabulous grog tray in her front hall at the bottom of the stairs – perfectly positioned out of the sitting room but close enough to carry a martini through without spilling it. “It’s a social hub when guests arrive of an evening,” she explains. “I usually have a scented candle burning, a bowl of lemons and limes, some nuts for swiping and fresh flowers to create that cosy feeling the

Nicky Haslam once said a sitting room should have two things: a drinks tray and comfortable furniture

Park your drinks trolley: a grog tray is a far classier option

Those in the know are going back to basics when it comes to cocktails this Christmas. Nicky Rampley-Clarke reports

A few years ago, our social media feeds were filled with people mixing and muddling drinks as cocktail hour became the only thing that broke up the mundanity of everyday life during the lockdowns. With that came a rising star of this evening ritual: the bar cart. All the big retailers jumped on the trend – Oliver Bonas, in particular, doing a raft of accessible designs that were cropping up in everyone’s homes – but with so many budget styles on offer, the concept soon became a watered-down cliché.

Enter the grog tray: the new/old way to entertain. Taking its name from grog (slang for booze), the grog tray – or, indeed, table – is less obvious, more practical and infinitely classier than a trolley. Certainly, it wouldn’t have looked out of place in the rambling homes of *Rivals* – the recent television adaptation of the Jilly Cooper bonkbuster – where the way in which you serve your drinks says a lot about your creed and can make or break your reputation (indeed, a bar cart would see you firmly wheeled into social Siberia). It’s no wonder Lord Sebastian Flyte couldn’t resist sneaking to the grog tray in *Brideshead Revisited*.



▲ Off your trolley: serried ranks of drinkware will enhance any surface

So, who’s a fan of the grog tray in the real world, and what are they serving up on theirs? Philip Astor, former barrister to the aristocracy and husband of the fashion writer Justine Picardie, has become something of an internet sensation thanks to nightly posts from his table version – a slab of a thing brought down from Scotland when the couple relocated to an old rectory on the Norfolk/Suffolk border. For Astor, it’s the heart of the home and has been since 2020. “The contents of the table have changed somewhat over the past few years,” he admits, “mainly as I discovered vermouth during lockdown. In addition to everything I used to have before, I now have a healthy selection of Italian, French, Spanish and English vermouths alongside more American whiskeys – both bourbon and rye – in order to make cocktails. In addition, I have a blended Scotch whisky in a decanter and there’s always a bottle or two of malt. There are digestifs, too – armagnac, cognac, Benedictine – and all the ingredients for a decent Bloody Mary. Beer features, as well as mixers and soft drinks: tonic, fizzy lemonade and soda. Plus, an ice bucket, water jug and lemons, limes and oranges. Cham-



▲ Keep a few core cocktail ingredients and salient accessories to hand

pagne tends to come out when we have visitors or guests staying.”

While Astor’s grog tray is arguably the most Insta-famous, he’s not alone. A growing number of home-drinks connoisseurs are ditching their bar carts in favour of trays or tables – usually best positioned in the hallway like Astor’s, if space permits, to provide an inviting welcome for visiting friends and family

(not to mention a convenient place to warm up after coming in from a bracing winter walk). Elsewhere on Instagram, influencer Jodie Hazlewood has a grog tray on a sideboard in her home. “I always admired old country houses that had drinks trays with bottles of tonic, an ice bucket, some lemons and a sharp knife to hand,” she says. “I set one up as it’s lovely for guests when they arrive

Lauren Lear, an associate design director at A London Interiors, which creates some of the slickest homes in the capital, has also installed contemporary takes in some of her projects. “These days, a lot of our favourite spir- its are just too beautiful to hide away in a bar cabinet,” she explains. “This styling opportunity allows you to showcase not only a stunning tray, but also beautiful barware and bottles. An impeccably dressed grog tray sets the tone for the evening ahead. Plus, every experienced host knows your social standing is determined by your finest gin or oldest whiskey.”

Whether tray or table – or a winning combination of both – it’s the smart way to host this season.

STYLE UP YOUR OWN DRINKS TRAY OR TABLE



Medium faux bamboo tray by Emma Sims-Hilditch, £249
Chelsea Textiles



Print Works The Essentials stainless-steel cocktail-making kit, £60
Selfridges



Martini cocktail napkin, £9
Daylesford Organic



Barwell cut-crystal martini shaker, £212
Soho Home



Anna + Nina champagne earthenware jug, £60
Selfridges



Large hammered stainless-steel wine/champagne bucket, £45
John Lewis



Ernest rechargeable table lamp, £124.50
Pooky



Clase Azul Reposado premium tequila, £210
Selfridges



Scalloped rattan tray with stand, £134
Mrs Alice



Madrid lacquer tray, £250
Jonathan Adler



Roebing cocktail party essentials, £480
Soho Home



Tanqueray No TEN and Alessi cocktail-mixing kit, £200
The Bar

What to buy at the great Savoy sale

The legendary hotel is selling off its furniture next week – and there are some bargains to be had, says Pip Rich

If you were hoping to buy someone a rug for £11,000 this Christmas, but also wanting to tighten your belt, then don't worry – your recipient can still get the gift you were planning, as long as they don't mind it being used, though in good condition. The Savoy Hotel in London is auctioning off all the furniture from its guest bedrooms on December 11th and 12th, a mammoth sale taking place in its hallowed ballroom that looks set to be the decor event of the year.

"It's going to be magnificent," says Mark Flynn, auction director at Pro Auction Ltd, who has been overseeing the cataloguing of the 3,237 pieces going under the hammer, and will be leading the sale on the days. "You could fit out a castle with what we've got here. Sofas that originally cost £10,000, rugs that cost £11,000 and handmade silk curtains the original cost of which I dread to think of. And it's all in good nick." What does he think these treasures will fetch? "Well, when we did the auction following The Dorchester's renovation last summer, sofas were going for around £200 or £300, while Rug Company rugs that normally retail for around £12,000 were going for about £220. To put it bluntly, it's mad."

The Savoy has long been a London institution. Tucked back down the only street in the UK where you're expected to drive on the right hand side, just off the Strand and almost hidden by a theatre of the same name, it was once a favourite of legends such as Noel Coward and Elizabeth Taylor, and is now frequented by the likes of Prince William, Rihanna and Taylor Swift. A stay in one of the signature suites can cost up to £2,950 per night.

It was last refurbished in 2010 by the designer Pierre-Yves Rochon, who stayed faithful to the hotel's original art-deco history but updated its Edwardian aesthetic with a glamorous edge. Bedrooms were given Murano-glass chandeliers, maple-framed beds were bought from Streams and Foster (and in top suites, they came from the ultra-luxe Savoir Beds). British designer Bill Amberg fashioned butter-soft leather desk accessories, and the overall effect was one of heightened style that felt exactly right for the moment, a



▲ Everything must go: the spare Edwardian classicism of the Savoy's rooms could be yours



post-recession reactionary take on what comfort meant at the time.

"When I think of The Savoy it's a beautiful reminder of a bygone era," says the British designer Marcia Morgan, founder of Marcia Morgan Interiors. "It was a time of excess, opulence, grandeur and an unobtainable lifestyle. The rooms are beautifully daunting – luxurious and classical." The Savoy is remaining tight-lipped about what this new overhaul will look like. "We have begun a refurbishment of rooms and suites as part of a continued commitment to invest in the property and ensure the best experience for our guests," is all a spokesperson for the hotel will say. "This will be done in stages so as to have little to no impact to the operational running of the hotel."

Lined silk drapes, George III-style walnut tables, art deco-shaped lamps

with gilded silver bases and upholstered benches by the Italian designer Francesco Molon will all be going under the hammer. Even luggage stands are on offer (sadly The Savoy is holding onto those Murano chandeliers). Mark Flynn is most excited about the pieces he'll be selling that come out of the River Suites. These spaces have sofas made by Donghia, a well-loved American brand that ceased trading in 2020. Vintage models are on sale on high-end auction site 1stDibs for around £2,000–£4,000, but Flynn expects them to go for just £300 or so. "And they last 30 years, even despite having been in a hotel for the last ten. All these five-star hotels maintain the quality of their furniture, and while the pieces we're selling are not in showroom condition, because of how much you pay to stay at The Savoy it tends to be visited by people who respect their surroundings."

The sale comes at an interesting time in the cycle of decor trends, where even contemporary-leaning designers are

folding antiques into their work, just as The Savoy has always done. "People are becoming more open to mixing eras at the moment, and understanding of how doing so brings more depth to a property," says the interior designer Charu Ghandi, founder of the West London-based studio Elicyon.

Molly Kidd, founder of Molly Kidd Studio, could only be classed as a modern designer – her work includes very 2024-coded flourishes like dining spaces with dark red walls and ceilings – but even she always uses at least 50 per cent antiques in any room. "Mixing in vintage pieces allows for a patina you only get with age, a liveable yet elevated sense that a newly decorated house is instantly a home," she says. With these sentiments in mind, The Savoy's slightly faded pieces actually feel bang up to date.

"Long gone is the trend for minimalism, and people are fed up with that," Flynn says. "Based on what I see customers buying, they're harking back to a more classical style, and are more con-

'The pieces we're selling are not in showroom condition, but the Savoy tends to be visited by people who respect their surroundings'

scious of the sustainability angle that comes with buying pre-used pieces. Plus, of course, the price tags are a fraction of – and the quality much higher than – anything you or I could find on the high street." Will he be buying anything himself? "Unfortunately staff at the auction house are forbidden from bidding on anything themselves, otherwise I'd be right there down the front."

The Savoy's auction, held at the hotel, is open to anyone to attend, but remote bidding is an option. "There will be a live, online stream with interactive capabilities for people to sit at home and bid through," Flynn says. "Phone bids or proxy bidders are also welcome." All lots start at an opening bid of £5, but there will also be a 22 per cent sales tax added to the final hammer price.

Viewing by appointment at the Savoy, 10am–2pm, on December 10; you can register to bid online at bidspotter.co.uk

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Gardening



How to make your garden an inviting haven over winter

Things can start to look bleak in the garden at this time of year; here's how to make it a welcoming place in which you'll want to spend time. By Clare Coulson

A garden in winter is the absolute test of a true gardener," wrote the plantswoman and designer Rosemary Verey in her 1988 book, *The Garden in Winter*. While many of us will ignore the slumbering borders and wait for warmer weather to get out and tackle jobs or spend some time outside, the hardest among us will embrace it. As Verey goes on, "If our gardens are to be more than graves commemorating summer's beauty, we must start by using our eyes."

Unlocking the pleasure in a winter garden is all about rethinking your perspective – the days may be short and the glorious bursts of sunshine few and far between, but there is also unparalleled beauty and the magical low winter light illuminates every detail. Structure becomes key: the layout and layering of plants, the forms and tracery of trees and skeletal hedges, the beautiful bark, the iridescent tufts of ornamental grasses, and glossy berries – it all plays a role.

While it can feel instinctive to hunker down and ignore the garden until the first shoots of early spring appear, with a little effort the garden

can provide moments of joy in the coldest months of the year, and with just a few tweaks it can provide a more festive welcome to any holiday guests too.

Tidy up

Many of us prefer to leave borders alone over winter and enjoy their decaying structure through the cold months, which provides valuable habitats for wildlife and a seed source for many garden birds, too. But tidying up the paths and terraces around them will radically improve the overall look of the garden, and act as a sharper contrast to the slumbering borders. Collect leaves from anywhere you don't want them and bag them up to rot down over the winter; left bagged up, these old leaves will eventually transform into a crumbly mulch to apply to the borders. Niwaki's fleece-lined winter gloves, £12, and sturdy leaf bag, £32, are your friends for winter work (niwaki.com); if you have a lot of trees, then old builder's bulk bags are useful.

Sweep and weed any paths, too. Gardener and author Arthur Parkinson



▶ Create cosiness even in cold weather with carefully selected warming-up hardware, as in this outdoor seating area by Lights4fun. You may not have a garden room with topiary as at Pettifers, Oxon (above), but your garden will still benefit from a few sharpened edges

takes a rigorous approach here: "I scrubbed all our paving stones by hand a few weeks ago with a washing-up bowl of hot water mixed with a lot of bicarbonate of soda and vinegar and using a good kneeling pad," he says. "Hard work on the hands, but it did make the garden look refreshed."

Sharpen hedges and shrubs

In a similar way to tidying up, sharpening hedges and topiary now will bring a graphic contrast to borders in winter. It's also perfect timing for pruning deciduous hedges now that the leaves are mostly fallen. You can create more graphic shapes by exposing the trunks of shrubs, creating beautiful silhouettes in the winter garden. Time this seasonal pruning with making wreaths and garlands and you will also have piles of material to use – pittosporum, evergreen hebes, yew, birch catkins and beech twiggery with rusty-coloured leaves all make great material for wild festive decorations.

ASK THE HEAD GARDENER



Our gardening expert
Tom Brown answers your
horticultural dilemmas

Q My garden looks particularly bare at this time of year; are there any evergreen climbers that I can plant to add a bit of interest all year round?

A I don't think it's too much of a stretch to describe our gardens as having been well and truly battered over the last few weeks. Cold snaps followed by Storm Bert have left them looking a bit drab, and any stalwart leaves that were holding on to the trees are long gone. People talk about winter being a great time to see the bones of your garden, where the structures really come into their own. It's all very well and good if you have a large garden with established, evergreen topiary that takes centre stage at this time of year, but for many of us the more turbulent

weather can make an interesting garden look denuded and a bit sorry for itself. If you do not have the space for large, evergreen shrubs then there are a variety of evergreen climbers that can cover walls, sheds and archways to give you that structure and interest all year round. There is one out there for you and every aspect of your plot. I've put together five reliable, evergreen climbers that I'd recommend you look at, all of which are widely available and can be planted at this time of year. If your garden is particularly exposed or in a frost pocket, then store them in a cool bright place and plant next spring.

Clematis armandi
Described as winter flowering, but tends to bloom in the early spring.



▶ Star jasmine is a perfect climber for a sheltered garden



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Scandi florists provide endless ideas for imaginative decorations on Instagram



Foraged foliage can be turned into imaginative outdoor decorations, as in these details from Butter Wakefield's London garden – but don't forget to sweep up, below

descends; opt for warm low light rather than anything too bright, which can be garish and also disruptive to wildlife. Single uplighters placed beneath focal plants or trees will provide drama, while lights close to the house help to create a warm and welcoming effect. Simple lengths of festoon lights look effective above windows or strung across a terrace (Lights4fun.co.uk has options that are solar, battery or hard-wired), while panels of LCD net lighting look effective over topiary. If you have the patience, lighting up the branches of one specimen tree can be dazzling. Outdoor candles also add to the atmosphere – Arthur Parkinson prefers them over other light sources, using metal tealight holders with tall glass sides that will protect the flame. Claudia de Young sells elegant outdoor Danish candles in tin vessels (£40, littlegardenshop.co.uk).

Bring the inside outside

Even if you don't spend long outside, you can still create welcoming corners for hot drinks over the festive season, especially if you have a sheltered area. Some sheepskins thrown over seating sets a cosy scene; a heated blanket will make sitting al fresco infinitely more enjoyable (Stoov's Big Hug chair pad, £119, can be used on chairs or across a bench and will heat up at the press of a button), or add a fire pit for some heat.

Go foraging

Creating festive decor outside doesn't require much skill, and costs nothing if you have places to forage for pine, larch, ivy, mistletoe, holly or any other evergreens you can lay your hands on. Lay branches over table tops, or make outdoor garlands which will stay fresh for weeks in damp, cool weather. The Scandi florists provide endless ideas here with their knack for creating beautiful decorations from found and foraged plants; Claus Dalby's month long series of tutorials (on Instagram and YouTube), made in collaboration with florist Hanne Utoft, is a must-watch, with inventive and beautiful ways to create decorations using foraged materials.

Make a winter table

An outdoor table can become a revolving display of small pots of hellebores, winter-flowering violas, cyclamen or bulbs that can easily be moved into the house for forcing, as well as a temporary gathering of festive foliage. Wakefield has two tables in her back garden which she dresses by arranging seasonal foliage including different pines, eucalyptus, pussy willow, cornus stems and seed pods into vintage red metal buckets. "It does bring an enormous amount of interest and joy and I think they are such a quick and easy win," she says. Pots already planted up with spring bulbs can also become part of the scene if they are topped with something green. Parkinson dresses his bare pots with a carpet of velvety moss, raked up from the lawn. "This is much more cheerful than a blank expanse of compost," he says. "And I think this dressing makes pots of bulbs less of a magnet (visually) to squirrels. If they are troublesome then I'll stick in lots of little stems of cut holly as a thorny defence."



Plan for winter

When adding new shrubs, hedging or trees for the garden, consider the winter value too. Garden designer Butter Wakefield has filled her London garden with plants that provide as much value in winter as summer; yew pyramids through her borders add vital structure but there are also winter-flowering shrubs by her back door, including evergreen Osmanthus x burkwoodii and Viburnum bodnantense – their scent adding an additional dimension. In her front garden, guests arrive to the scent of Sarcococca hedging and white camellias, which will flower prolifically until February. "It's absolutely sensational," says Wakefield, who planted the camellias on a whim. "It was a chance thing but they've been a great triumph." In December she runs fairy lights down each of her hedges to make a more festive arrival for guests.

Light it up

Subtle lighting will improve your garden year-round, but it comes into its own in winter when the darkness

Opt for warm low light rather than anything too bright, which can be garish – and disruptive to wildlife



Profuse clusters of creamy white flowers which are scented appear alongside glossy, dark foliage, persisting all year round. Although it's tolerant of partial shade, more intense sunlight will give a much stronger flowering performance.

Hydrangea seemannii

A lesser-known climbing hydrangea. Many of us are familiar with shrubby types and even the deciduous climber *Hydrangea petiolaris*, but although they are great garden plants, all lose their leaves in winter. This evergreen climbing member of the family will tolerate most places in your garden but will flower more reliably in sun. White flowers are produced during the summer amid dark, glossy foliage.

Trachelospermum jasminoides

A perfect climber for a sheltered garden and incredibly effective in urban gardens too. Very few climbers can rival the intense scent of a star jasmine in full flower during the summer. White, star-like flowers appear that turn cream with age alongside glossy, oval shaped foliage. With a twining habit, a few wires or support is needed, but once established it simply needs a light prune in spring.

Pileostegia viburnoides

Also known as *Hydrangea viburnoides*. An evergreen, climbing member of the hydrangea family, producing a fire-work-like display of white flowers during the summer amid dark green, elliptical foliage. The flowers are more

pincushion-like compared to other climbing hydrangeas and will happily grow in most places, with self-clinging roots. As with many evergreens, more sun will produce more flowers.

Hedera helix 'Glacier'

Before you throw your hands up in horror at the thought of planting an ivy in your garden, hear me out. Ivies are versatile and easy to grow, tolerating most conditions, including deep shade. *Hedera helix* is a small leaved ivy with a soft, creamy white edge to the leaf which gives a luminous quality in those dark spaces. I am hard to win over with ivies, but this one is lovely without that brash, bright variegation that puts me off a little. Trim in the spring to avoid an unwieldy shape.

Spring-flowering Cercis

Buy the collection of three (one of each) for £32 – saving £18

Cercis trees – or Judas trees as they are often called – add something truly magical to gardens. Their heart-shaped leaves and early spring blossoms bring charm and colour when it is needed most. Sunny, sheltered spots suit this tree perfectly and chalky or loamy soil works best, but a bit of experimentation never hurts. Once established, the tree takes care of itself for the most part. Years ago, I planted one near my south-facing patio and each spring the pink flowers stopped everyone in their tracks. Bees adored it too, turning the garden into a quiet symphony of activity. For the best blooms, mix compost into the soil and add mulch in autumn. Shaping is not essential but tidying a wayward branch or two can keep things looking lovely. Pair Cercis with lavender or airy grasses and the effect is breathtaking – a garden corner full of grace and life.



Cercis chinensis 'Avondale'

Compact and upright, this Chinese redbud dazzles, with clusters of vivid magenta-pink blooms crowding bare branches in early spring. Perfect for small gardens, this variety thrives in sunny, sheltered spots. The rounded, glossy leaves follow the blossoms, creating a lush canopy. Pair with low-growing alliums for a striking textural contrast. Over 10-20 years it will reach an eventual height of 4m and a spread of 2.5m.



Cercis chinensis 'Shirobana'

With white blooms that emerge like pearls on bare wood, 'Shirobana' offers a rare delight. Soft, green heart-shaped leaves appear after flowering, giving this tree understated elegance. Ideal for courtyard spaces, this variety thrives in well-drained soil and will appreciate a spot where it is protected from harsh winds. Underplant with hellebores for added charm. Over 10-20 years it will reach an eventual height and spread of 3m.



Cercis siliquastrum

Often called the Judas tree, *Cercis siliquastrum* captivates with bold, rosy pink blossoms bursting directly from branches and trunks. Later, heart-shaped leaves arrive, creating a serene summer canopy. Thriving in chalky soils and sunny locations, this Mediterranean beauty brings warmth to any landscape. Complement with silvery foliage for Mediterranean-inspired borders. Over 20-50 years it will reach an eventual height of 10-12m and a spread of 8-10m.

HOW TO BUY

Buy *Avondale* for £18, *Shirobana* for £18 and *siliquastrum* for £14, or buy the collection of three (one of each) for £32 – saving £18. P&P £4.95. Supplied as 9cm pots, with delivery in seven days. Order at [telegraph.co.uk/ls-spring-cercis](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/ls-spring-cercis) or call 0333 772 0325. Contract for supply of goods is with Hayloft Plants Ltd. *Offers subject to availability.



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◀The new Tesla is not only rapid, but also responsive, which makes for a thoroughly satisfying driving experience

New Tesla is a leap forward for high-performance electric cars

Significant updates add driving pleasure and involving handling to the EV equation – in addition to barnstorming pace. By Alex Robbins

Going fast in a straight line is fun, sure, but do it again and again and you become desensitised. What matters most is how a car makes you feel; how well you connect with it. That is why speed is not essential in a performance car. It also explains why many fast electric cars are not necessarily fun. Take almost any rapid Tesla you care to mention; for years, their ballistic performance figures have been held up as proof by many an EVangelist that electric cars can be a hoot.

Yet, there are only so many times you can feel the reality-altering performance of a Model S Plaid, with its ability to get to 60mph in only 1.9 seconds, without getting the sense of a one-trick pony. And feeling queasy. And wondering whether such a trait matches the definition of “fun”.

Tesla has finally realised this. Which is why the latest iteration of the Model 3 Performance – the fast version of its smaller, BMW 3 Series-rivalling saloon that sits beneath the Model S in the range – isn't purely about going fast.

Amped up

You can tell that there has been a mindset shift at Tesla from the minute you clap eyes on the Model 3 Performance. Where previous fast Teslas looked no different to their standard counterparts, this one gains a subtle chin spoiler and another on the boot lid.

Under the skin, too, there are big changes. Firstly, peak power is now 453bhp, up slightly from 444bhp. But it's in the suspension and chassis department that the greatest strides have been taken.

In a first for the Model 3, the Performance now has adaptive dampers. There are stiffer suspension top mounts, too, as well as tauter springs and a beefed-up anti-roll bar.

The 20-inch alloy wheels are now forged, and staggered, with wider tyres at the back; that has enabled Tesla's engineers to set the car's Vehicle Dynamics Controller – the box of tricks that decides how much power is fed to

PROS
Extraordinary performance
Now enjoyable to drive
Surprisingly good value
CONS
Interior usability still an issue
Some road noise at speed
Could do with a simple key

each end of the car – with more of a rearward bias.

In short, where the Model 3 Performance once felt like the standard car with a bit more power, now it stands apart from the rest of the range as a true performance model.

The official range is 328 miles from a battery whose gross capacity is 78.1kWh; Tesla doesn't give a figure for the net capacity, but it's likely to be somewhere around the 75kWh mark.

That should mean somewhere between 230 and 260 miles in the real world, consistent with the stated average energy consumption of 3.3mpkWh; you get a heat pump as standard, too, which means the drop-off in range in winter should be manageable.

Figure skating

So just how fast is it? Well, Tesla quotes a 0-62mph time of 3.1 seconds, an astonishing headline figure. But it's not the whole story. You see, most manufacturers account for a thing called the 'one-foot rollout' in their measurement of acceleration times – that is to say, the distance between the car moving off, and the timing gear starting to register, which is normally about a foot. Tesla doesn't do this, so its 0-62mph times are not directly comparable with those of, say, BMW or Audi.

Is this academic, though? Even if you were to add three tenths of a second to its 0-62mph time to account for the rollout, the Model 3 Performance would still end up pipping the BMW M3 to the same benchmark.

That's mighty impressive in a car that costs the same, or as near as makes no difference, as the BMW M340i – which is to say, around £25,000 less than an M3. You might even go as far as to say that the Model 3 looks like good value, on paper at least.

So can the same be said in the flesh? The first thing you realise is that this is a car that takes some getting used to, and that's putting it mildly. You can set the Model 3 to detect your phone and unlock automatically when it does so, making walking up and opening a the-



oretically seamless experience.

But what if your phone battery's dead? Well, there's a key card you can use as a back-up, though this has some not-insignificant flaws.

You must tap it on a specific (and unmarked) place on the B-pillar to get it to unlock the car, for one thing; for another, it only works on the driver's door, so if you want to let someone into the passenger side, you have to go round the other side of the car and tap their door first.

▲The cabin is roomy, if still obsessively free of buttons and stalks; a subtle spoiler on the boot lid hints at the available power

Feeling touchy

Once you've gained access, everything revolves around the touchscreen; even selecting park, reverse or drive, which is done using a slider in the screen's margin (there's also a touchpad above the rear-view mirror that serves as a back-up if the screen fails).

This 'touchscreen dogma' is mitigated by the fact that the Model 3's is one of the best screens around, with swift responses and a sensible menu layout.

Even so, it can sometimes take more than a few presses to find the function you want, and the lack of an additional binnacle in front of the driver requires you to peer down at the top of the screen, where a corner is permanently hived off to show the speed, warning lights, and driving messages.

Perhaps the most dogmatic move, however, is the deletion of the indicator stalks in favour of buttons on the steering wheel. This makes indicating to leave a roundabout feel like a game of pin the tail on the donkey.

But the cabin is a roomy, airy place to be, with a tonne of space in the back seats. The combination of a low sill, a flat floor and a high roofline make it easy to buckle your kids in; in fact, there's so much room that you can actually stand in front of them, partly within the car, in order to do their belts up, reducing back strain considerably.

There's no start button to speak of. There's no handbrake, either; you just stick it in 'Park' and the parking brake is activated automatically.

You must therefore do this when waiting at traffic lights if you want to abide by the highway code, which causes the car to think you've parked up and are about to get out, bringing the interior lights on. Then you have to stick it back into 'Drive' before you pull away. This soon grows tiresome.

Up and away

Teslas have always had hair-trigger accelerator pedals, and with so much power on tap, you sometimes have to be a bit ginger when pulling away if you

want to avoid jerking your passenger's heads back.

Once on the move, the low-speed ride is firm, but not unduly so, and with the suspension set to 'Comfort' mode, a cruise along a motorway is spoiled only by the slightly intrusive road noise from those big tyres.

But it's off the motorway where the new car's modifications really start to make a difference.

Previously, driving a Model 3 Performance on a back road was somewhat one-dimensional. As a result of those chassis upgrades, the sheer pace of the thing is no longer the alpha and omega of the driving experience. Mind you, it is still a hugely dominant part.

To experience this to its fullest, switch into 'Insane' mode, set the air suspension to 'Low', and then at a standstill, hold the brake pedal and floor the accelerator. Doing so will activate Launch Mode, and when you release the brake pedal, the Model 3 will throw you forward with every sinew of instantaneous acceleration it can muster.

Even when you're used to high-performance cars, the experience is a gut punch. Passengers react in a variety of ways; reaching out in front of them for something to hold onto, stomping on an imaginary brake, or simply making the same 'gngh' sound as the driver.

As with all electric cars, the rate of acceleration slows as the speed rises, though in the case of the Model 3, the change is from 'brain trickling out through ears' to simply 'still holding onto the wheel quite tightly'. What matters is that anywhere below or around the national speed limit, the Model 3 Performance has the pace to get you out of (and indeed, into) trouble.

Need to utilise a small gap in a constant stream of fast-moving traffic? One swift flex of the right ankle and you're already there, almost before you've even had time to think about it.

Out with the old

But it's in the bends where the differences between the old Performance and the new really start to show. The new car is more adjustable on the throttle, not quite to the point of kicking its tail out as you feed the power in, but certainly squeezing the nose in towards the turn, and allowing you to trim your line by backing out of the power a little.

Steering feel is still hard to come by, but the response of the front end to the wheel is more alert now, and there's a greater sense that you're connected to the whole experience rather than simply playing a computer game.

There is still, of course, a huge amount of mechanical grip, which means even with all that power, you rarely trouble the car's limits on the public road unless you're being daft.

The result is that you can deploy all that power comically early in the bend, slingshotting round the apex with the sort of g-force that elicits an involuntary chortle. Yes, where the old Performance was merely impressive, this one really is fun.

As much fun as the equivalent BMW? No, probably not, even if you compare on price rather than on performance. An M340i is still a more exhilarating driving experience, thanks in part to the aural feedback it gives you that the Model 3 lacks. But Tesla has produced a car that comes surprisingly close in terms of the way it feels and handles out on the road.

The Telegraph verdict

There are still problems with this car; most are a result of decisions seemingly taken by enthusiastic designers rather than pragmatic engineers. The near-totalitarian insistence on a button- and stalk-free interior, for example, may be aesthetically pleasing but, as with all current Model 3s, it can cause an awkwardness that doesn't completely disappear with familiarity.

But these flaws are not enough to detract from a combination of pleasing things: considerable performance, involving handling, a welcoming and roomy interior, and a reasonable price.

For the first time, it's possible to say that the Model 3 Performance brings more to the party than just speed. It is now a genuine sports saloon – and a rather good one at that.

THE RIVALS



BMW M340i xDrive
369bhp, 34.9mpg, £60,835 on the road

Arguably one of the sweetest all-round sports saloons of the moment, the M340i matches a honey of a six-cylinder engine to a suspension set-up that can be pliant when it needs to be, but allow you to have immense fun when you fancy it. Enjoy it while you still can.



Hyundai Ioniq 5 N
641bhp, 278 miles, £65,000 on the road

The Ioniq 5 N offers almost 200bhp more than the Model 3, a car not lacking power. This gives expletive-inducing performance, which it can exploit thanks to a sublime chassis – but what really sets the Ioniq 5 N apart is how deliberately it apes a petrol car, even simulating gearshifts and engine noise. Sounds awful, but it works.



Volkswagen ID.7 GTX
335bhp, 365 miles, £61,980 on the road

The most potent of VW's big, smooth ID.7's feels outgunned in this company, though it serves to show precisely what value the Model 3 Performance is. The VW offers 40 miles more range and a more practical fastback tail – but you lose out on more than 120bh and have to pay more for the privilege. Would you? Hmm.

Alex Robbins

Ask the expert

The best consumer advice to save you money and make your driving life easier



ALEX ROBBINS SAYS...

Most of the safety systems on modern cars do their jobs well and unobtrusively. But every now and then they can become faulty or annoying – and turning them off can be deliberately difficult.

WHY DOES MY MERC COME TO A CRUNCHING STOP WHEN REVERSING?

Q I bought a new Mercedes Vito in May. Occasionally, when reversing, there is a loud crunching noise and it slams to a halt, but afterwards it continues to reverse as normal. This has happened eight times in the last 4,000 miles. It's embarrassing – people think I have hit something. Mercedes concludes that the problem is caused by the anti-collision system operating. But I find this odd, as the majority of times there has been absolutely nothing behind for the system to have "seen". What do you think?

A I think the dealer is correct. What you're experiencing is the operation of the "close-range braking function", which uses the parking sensors and rear camera to identify pedestrians or objects you might be about to reverse into. If it thinks you're about to hit something, it uses the hydraulic pump to deploy maximum pressure



into the braking circuits as rapidly as possible – which is what makes the crunching noise. Although the vehicle comes to a violent stop by itself, it's never a particularly pleasant experience for those inside. Many Mercedes owners have noted that this function has proven rather sensitive, so you're not alone. Unfortunately there's not much you can do about it because the sensors are calibrated at the factory and there's no way to adjust them.

What you can do, however, is to turn off the close-range braking mechanism. Access the 'Settings' menu in the usual way via the touchscreen, navigate through to 'Assistance' and then 'Parking', then 'Manoeuvring assistance' – within this menu, you should find an option to turn off the close-range braking function. Just be mindful that with the system deactivated you won't have protection if you fail to see an obstacle behind – although the parking sensors should still work as normal.

▲ Our reader's Mercedes Vito may be suffering from an excess of caution in reverse



Write to us

For consumer and used car advice, or car faults, email:

► CarsAdvice@telegraph.co.uk and include your subscriber number

HOW CAN WE REPLACE AN OBSOLETE BRAKE PART ON A MINI?

Q My daughter bought her Mini Cooper 1.6 new in November 2005 and it has now done 90,000 miles. Recently, she noticed inconsistent response from the brake pedal, then last week the car failed its MOT due to the brakes. The garage says that brake fluid has leaked from the master cylinder into the ABS unit, causing its valve block to fail. They said that the valve block is now obsolete, rendering the ABS unit useless and the car unrepairable, unless they can source a used item, which is proving difficult. How can we resolve the problem?

– DM

A It's true that some Mini ABS modules have been made obsolete but, as far as I'm aware, BMW has replaced these with new modules that have different part numbers. My first port of call would be a Mini dealership to obtain the correct part number for the replacement ABS module. They should be able to do this from your car's registration, although they might also need the part number of the original module. Frankly, I'd have hoped the local garage would have done this. Of course, it is possible that I'm being

unfair and that they did so, but the particular part fitted to your daughter's car has indeed been discontinued. But I can't understand why BMW would do this for only one type of ABS unit, especially since there are plenty of these cars still on the road and ABS failures are not uncommon. The downside is that even if a replacement ABS module is available from BMW, it will likely be expensive. As an alternative, you could look at getting a remanufactured part – there are plenty of aftermarket businesses selling these at reasonable prices (£200 or so). ECU Testing, Autronics, Actitronics and Remanx are four that I'm aware of, although I haven't used these firms so can't vouch for them. You will likely need to get the new unit coded to the car, at additional cost – but most good BMW or Mini specialists should have the equipment to do this. In fact, I'd be tempted to entrust the whole repair to one of them – apart from anything else, they will be better equipped to handle it from start to finish than a local garage and will also be able to double check that the diagnosis is accurate.

WITH NO NEW MPVS ON SALE, HOW CAN WE REPLACE OUR TRUSTY VW SHARAN?

Q We want to replace our 2016 Volkswagen Sharan, which has done 110,000 miles. It has proved great for transporting relatively large items, while the sliding doors means easy access in tight parking spots. MPVs or people carriers appear to be out of fashion so we are struggling to find a replacement with the Sharan's space and flexibility. Any suggestions?

– BG

A MPVs have fallen by the wayside in favour of seven-seat SUVs, which is a shame given that none of the latter can provide the practicality and versatility of a people carrier such as the Sharan. However, there are still a few options that can offer the flexibility you require. The first is a car VW is touting as the Sharan's replacement – the Multivan. It is more upright and van-like than the Sharan, but as it's based on one of VW's car platforms it retains the Sharan's

car-like driving experience. What's more, it has sliding doors and seats that move or can be removed. With this done, you're left with a cavernous space – more even than your Sharan. But even the entry-level version is just shy of £50,000 with metallic paint. For one that's a couple of years old, you can shave £10,000 or so off, but they seem to be holding their value well. If you can live with something smaller, the Ford Tourneo Connect is



▲ VW's new multivan looks a bit like a van and drives a bit like a car, a handy combo

worth a look. It's more of a car based on a van, so a little less refined to drive. Having said that, it has the sliding doors you desire and you still get flexible seating. The Grand Tourneo Connect provides extra carrying capacity. My final option would be a second-hand Toyota Proace Verso diesel: this was phased out only recently and you can still pick up a 2023 model with a lowish mileage for about £35,000. This is a van pretending to be nothing

other than a van (albeit with a set of plush armchairs in the back) and it drives as such; the plasticity dashboard belies its commercial roots, too. But you get Toyota's service-activated warranty offer up to 10 years (or 100,000 miles), which means you can keep this second-hand van in warranty for longer than any brand-new offering. If you value peace of mind above all else, that might just make its downsides worth living with.

SAY GOODBYE TO GLARE AND HELLO TO CRYSTAL-CLEAR VISION

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HEXCLAD ISN'T JUST FOR CHRISTMAS

Designed to last a lifetime, HexClad's innovative, hybrid technology should be at the top of every keen cook's Christmas list this year

Boasting the performance of stainless steel, the durability of cast iron and the convenience of non-stick, HexClad has sold over eight million pans in the past five years. If the numbers don't speak for themselves, HexClad is also endorsed by a prestigious family of chefs, including Gordon Ramsay, Paul Ainsworth, Clare Smyth and Nancy Silverton.

Take your Christmas table to new heights with items like the Damascus Steel Carving Set or the HexMill Salt and Pepper Grinder Set. Or, surprise a loved one with a HexClad Hybrid Pan or the Pizza Steel. For the ultimate luxury cookware, it has to be HexClad this Christmas.

Managing the intricate cooking schedule of Christmas dinner is made easy with the ceramic, non-stick HexClad Hybrid pans (£129-£179). These pans are available in sizes ranging from 20cm to 35cm, meaning there's one fit for every task, and they can even go in the oven. The hybrid technology allows for fast and even heat distribution and the hollow handles remain cool, providing added safety and comfort. Additionally, these pans are dishwasher safe, making cleanup quick and carefree. There's no stopping you this Christmas with HexClad Hybrid pans.

You can also carve your Christmas turkey with confidence using HexClad's Damascus Steel Carving Set (£194). Crafted from premium Japanese Damascus steel with a robust 67-layer blade boasting a superior 60 Rockwell hardness rating, these tools ensure effortless slicing and long-lasting sharpness. The set includes a sturdy stainless-steel fork with dual prongs for steady carving and ergonomic pakkawood handles for comfortable serving.

● HexClad can be found nationwide at hexclad.co.uk and Amazon as well as globally in the USA, Canada, Mexico, the EU, Japan and Australia. instagram.com/hexclad_europe



NOBLE ISLE — BRITAIN IN A BOTTLE

Noble Isle is a quintessentially British bath, body and home fragrance brand, inspired by the rich heritage of the British Isles

Crafted with sustainable extracts from incredible locations, like rhubarb from Yorkshire and perry pear from Gloucestershire, each collection is made in the UK and combines natural ingredients with real perfume. Noble Isle believes there's nothing more special than unwrapping a carefully chosen gift. That's why this festive season, it's handpicked a collection of beautiful options, crafted to delight and create memorable moments. Each gift set is beautifully wrapped in boxes topped with a sash of colourful ribbon, making them the perfect indulgent gift.

Sustainability is at Noble Isle's core. Its products are vegan-certified, cruelty-free and are created using sustainable ingredients, with natural extracts from the British Isles, which are paraben-free — because luxury shouldn't compromise on ethics.

● Visit nobleisle.com for special offers, a free gift with every purchase and free gift wrapping. Valid until 31 December 2024.

GIFTS FOR COFFEE CONNOISSEURS

Sort your Christmas gifting and discover a range of products ideal for coffee-lovers with Dualit's range coffee collection — thoughtfully designed and engineered

Get your Christmas gifting sorted and show your loved ones that you really care, with gift ideas from Dualit. We're all searching high and low for the ideal gift ideas for friends and family, whether that means finding the perfect kitchen accessories or affordable luxury that will guarantee smiles this Christmas.

Espresso Pro Coffee Machine

Dualit's Espresso Coffee Machine is a must-have kitchen gadget for any coffee connoisseur. The Espresso Pro feature a dual boiler for simultaneous coffee extraction and milk frothing, at an affordable price point. Available exclusively from John Lewis & Partners, the new Espresso Pro Coffee Machine combines professional grinding performance with timeless elegance and features a built-in grinder that grinds the beans just before extraction, with adjustable grind settings and dose control for fresh, authentic and perfectly tasting coffee. The fresh, authentic taste of a cup of coffee from the Espresso Pro Coffee Machine is created by grinding beans immediately before brewing to unlock the delicate oils and aromas contained inside the beans. Achieving professional barista-grade coffee, the built-in pre-infuser mixes the ground coffee with the optimum amount of water to release the coffee's full aroma just before extraction, ensuring no bitter



SUPPORT FAMILIES FACING CANCER THIS CHRISTMAS

When cancer turns people's worlds upside down, Maggie's provides a different kind of cancer care

At each of Maggie's 24 centres around the UK, you'll find bright and welcoming spaces, free expert care and support for everyone with cancer and all the people who love them. Maggie's helps people take back control when cancer turns life upside down, with professional support for anything from treatment side effects to money worries. Maggie's welcomed more than 311,000 visits from people living with cancer last year and demand for this support is only expected to grow.

Donate today and help Maggie's be there for people with cancer. With more families facing cancer than ever before, your gift will mean they get the support and care they really need to help them find hope, strength and joy this Christmas.

● Visit maggies.org/joy to learn more about the centres, the vital support Maggie's provides and how your donation can help people facing cancer this Christmas.







aftertaste. A really great extraction starts with a low pressure pre-infusion and ends with a high pressure extraction. Purchase an Espresso Pro Coffee Machine by 31 December 2024 and claim a free set of Espresso Cups and Latte Cups via redemption from Dualit.

Hot chocolate maker and milk frother

Spread some Christmas cheer with Dualit's hot chocolate makers and milk frothers. Effortlessly create barista-style drinks at home in minutes. From flat whites and lattes, to mochas, hot chocolates and milkshakes, the creations are endless. Just add a few squares of your favourite chocolate to the frothers for delicious, indulgent hot chocolate, or add chocolate flakes, buttons or powder. This makes it an ideal machine to use for any leftover Christmas chocolate. This handy gadget is the ideal gift for anyone who wants to make cafe-quality drinks at home.

● Find the perfect Dualit Christmas gift and special offers at John Lewis & Partners. Scan the QR code or visit johnlewis.com



HERE FOR FAMILIES FACING GRIEF

The Ruth Strauss Foundation supports parents in preparing their children when a parent's cancer is incurable

Cancer impacts so many of us. One in two of us will receive a cancer diagnosis in our lifetime. The Ruth Strauss Foundation helps parents prepare their children for grief, death and dying when a parent's cancer cannot be cured.

Your support this December can help give hope to a family facing grief. The Ruth Strauss Foundation supports and helps families make the most of the time they have left together, without unspoken worries or fears, while preparing their children for the future.

From 3 to 10 December, donations are being doubled — at no extra cost to you — by the Big Give campaign. All donations raised during this campaign will go towards extending the Ruth Strauss Foundation's Family Support Services, which helps parents have one of the toughest conversations they'll ever have and helps reduce the long-term challenges children can face when they experience parental bereavement.

Scan the QR code to make your donation count twice this Christmas.

● For support on how to navigate a conversation with children about a parent's incurable cancer diagnosis, contact: ruthstraussfoundation.com/support







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DISCOVER YOUR PERFECT EVENING SCENT, SOLEIL LUNAR, THE NEW EAU DE PARFUM FROM LALIQUE

Get ready for the party season with Soleil Lunar Lalique, a fragrance for free souls who are moved by the rhythm of the sun and the moon

Step into the world of Soleil Lunar Lalique, a captivating ode to celestial beauty. Through a harmonious fusion of mineral fragrance notes and a meticulously designed bottle, Soleil Lunar weaves a tale of the timeless romance between the



sun and the moon. Capturing a realm of sophistication and allure, Lalique's new creation embodies the essence of a modern-day sunchild with effortless grace and sensual charm.

A fragrance designed for a fearless heroine who radiates confidence, breaking free from rules with her thrilling boldness. Guided by the rhythm of the sun and moon's symphony, whether dancing in the spotlight or nestled in the shadows, she is a free-soul sunchild, outshining the brightest stars with her luminous spirit, even in the darkest of nights.

In this scented journey, Soleil Lunar reveals the endless bond between the sun and moon and the interplay of light and darkness. Inspired by this duality, Lalique's new eau de parfum plays with electrifying opposites: spirited opulence meets sensual restraint.

A delicate yet powerful floral character shines through as Soleil Lunar opens with an effervescent sparkle of mandarin that mingles with pink pepper. Sweet magnolia preludes the allure of lady of the night. Together in harmony they are enriched by the warmth of vanilla and spice. The woody minerality of deep and resinous base notes creates a bold contrast.

Encased in a meticulously crafted bottle, Soleil Lunar reflects the beauty of the skies with an ombre design that pays homage to the transient beauty of the day's first and last light. Its colours transition from golden amber, evoking the soft light of morning, to an enigmatic purple, reminiscent of the evening's final bow.

Soleil Lunar is more than a fragrance; it's an invitation to embrace the mystery, romance and timeless beauty of the sun and the moon.

● It's your #TimetoShine. Discover Soleil Lunar now at lalique.com and harrods.com from £53 for 30ml eau de parfum.

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Join Trees for Cities' Big Give Christmas Challenge until 10 December and help plant trees where they're needed most, for today, for the future, for all. Every donation will be doubled at no extra cost to you thanks to the charity's partner, Big Give.

● Donate today to grow greener towns and cities. Visit treesforcities.org/rooting-for-equity

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THE BEST GIFT FOR WHISKY ENTHUSIASTS

This holiday season, elevate your gift-giving with Norlan, an international brand dedicated to transforming the whisky-drinking experience

With its innovative approach to glassware design and an appreciation for the ritual of a dram shared, Norlan has captivated whisky connoisseurs worldwide, offering refined drinkware that enhances every sip. Two of Norlan's signature products — the Norlan Whisky Glass and the Rauk Heavy Tumbler — make unforgettable gifts for those who cherish fine spirits.



Launched in 2015 through a record-breaking Kickstarter campaign, the Norlan Whisky Glass is the original double-walled whisky glass, developed with the help of master distiller Jim McEwan on the Isle of Islay. This modern, lightweight design isn't just good looking, it's also crafted to highlight whisky's unique flavours and aromas. The glass's double-walled structure features internal protrusions, which were developed to help aerate whisky, reducing the presence of ethanol and heightening the richness of the spirit.

Norlan's Rauk Heavy Tumbler is a modern take on the classic old-fashioned glass, perfect for those who enjoy their whisky chilled on the rocks or love a crafted cocktail. The non-lead

crystal tumbler features a unique, chevron-patterned interior, which not only looks riveting, but adds friction points for ingredients of the occasional muddled-in-glass cocktail. Turn the tumbler over, and one finds a three-dimensional star-shaped base, proving that glass design need not only be about the silhouette.

In addition to these home bar essentials, Norlan rounds out its range of drinkware with a heavyweight highball glass (for whisky sodas or the Japanese mizuwari) and a double-walled steel tumbler in the same form as its award-winning nosing glass. The Norlan Steel Tumbler as the latter is named, is the ultimate outdoor tasting glass for the whisky-lover/rambler.

And for those seeking something more opulent, Norlan's range also includes a compact assortment of mouth-blown decanters and accessories.

Instead of another bottle, surprise the whisky-lover in your life this Christmas with a gift that's longer lasting, and as sophisticated as it is functional.

● E: contact@norlanglass.com uk: norlanglass.com





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Having a brand-new fitted kitchen can seem like a daunting and expensive prospect, but Kitchen Magic offer a fantastic hassle-free alternative that won't break the bank or leave you living in a building site for weeks on end.

So, if it works well the way it is, why change it? It's the aesthetic elements of the kitchen that tend to bear the brunt of everyday life and suffer the most wear and tear. This means that in most cases, whilst your doors and drawer fronts may be showing their age, your units more than likely have many

A Fresh look kitchen for a lot less than you might think.

Kitchen Magic's vast product range caters to all tastes and budgets. If you're struggling for storage space, take a look



Over 400 style and colour combinations

A kitchen makeover rather than a complete re-fitting is the latest trend in cost saving home improvement, and it's no wonder it's become so popular! By replacing only the cupboard doors and drawer fronts and leaving your existing units in place, you can create a brand new looking kitchen without the cost, mess and upheaval that you might have imagined. Let's be honest, most of us don't really have much scope to completely change the layout of our kitchen; we like our sink in front of the window and in general are bound by existing electrical points, pipe work and doors.

years of life left in them! Whether you're opting for a complete design overhaul or just sticking to what you know and love, with over 400 style and colour combinations, Kitchen Magic have a team of regionally based Designers across the UK who are ready to work with you to create the kitchen you've always dreamed of. But it doesn't stop there; Kitchen Magic can also replace your worktops, sinks, taps and appliances to provide those all-important finishing touches. From cost-effective yet surprisingly durable laminate countertops, to top of the range granite and marble.

at their range of hidden in-cupboard storage solutions to give your kitchen that extra pinch of practicality that you've always wanted. With all items tailor made to your requirements, you needn't worry about the fit of your new cupboard doors and drawer fronts. Kitchen Magic offer a full and completely bespoke service, from the initial design visit and survey to manufacture at their Midlands base and installation by expert craftsmen. If you're looking to transform your kitchen quickly and effectively, this specialist is the one to choose.

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Debbie McGee

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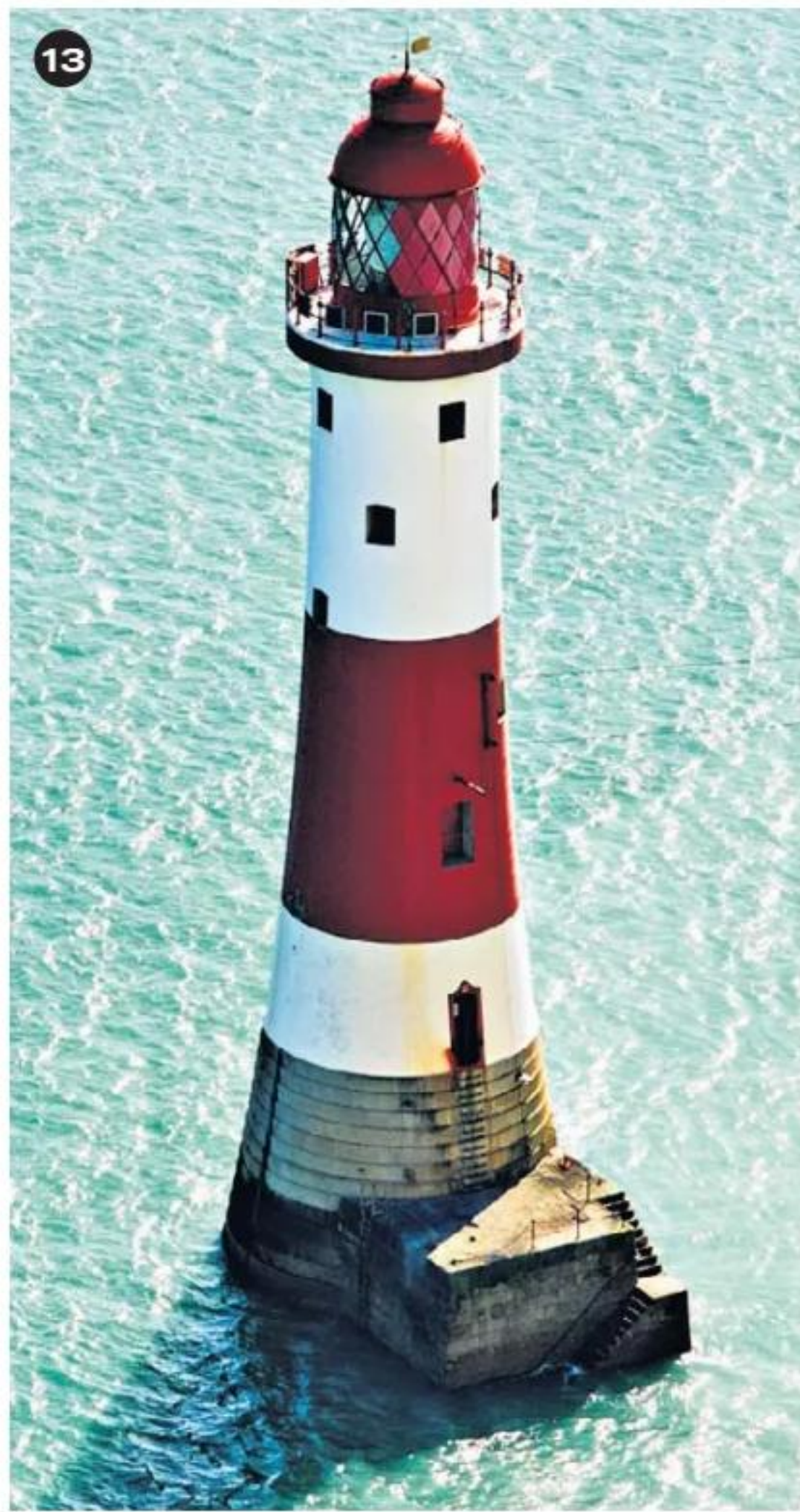
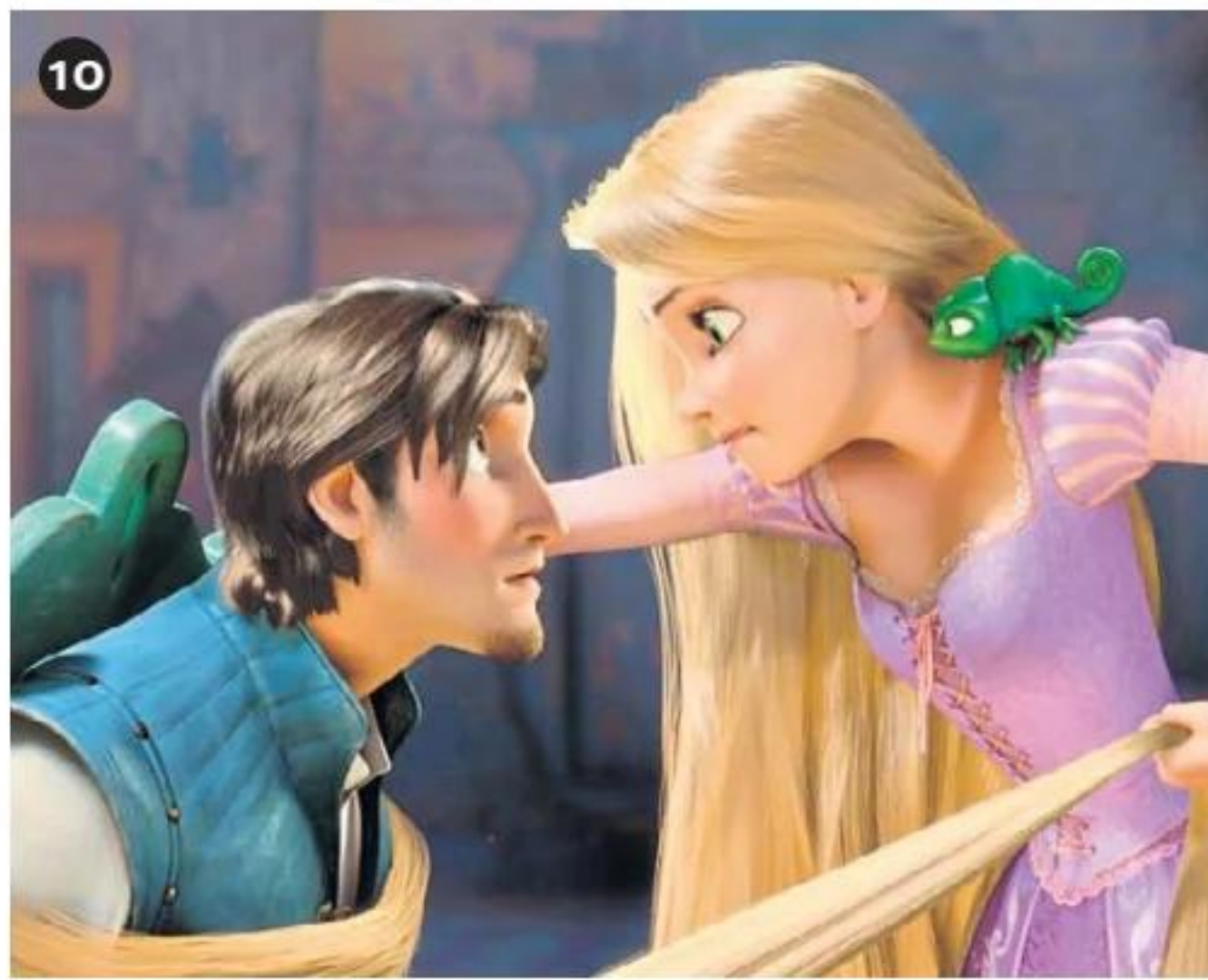


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Andrew Baker
The Saturday quiz



Like a conversation around the table, the Family Quiz follows a thread and everyone can join in. Some questions suit younger quizzers, but really it's a free-for-all. Don't all shout at once!

1 On this date in 1930, the first television advertisement was broadcast, on station WIXAV in Boston, USA. Who was the advertiser?

- (a) Philip Morris cigarettes
- (b) I. J. Fox, Furriers
- (c) Colt firearms

2 Who are the farmers foiled by Roald Dahl's Fantastic Mr Fox?

- (a) Trellis, Trump and Tween
- (b) Smellis, Bunce and Spleen
- (c) Boggis, Bunce and Bean



3 What is the main purpose of the human spleen?

- (a) Filters and regulates blood
- (b) Aids digestion
- (c) Governs body temperature

4 What is the median surface temperature on the planet Mars?

- (a) -65°C
- (b) 65°C
- (c) 0°C

5	Mars was the Roman god of war, who was also considered to have power over what? (a) Love (b) Agriculture (c) The sea
6	Who was the first man to set foot on the Sea of Tranquility? (a) Noah (b) Christopher Columbus (c) Neil Armstrong
7	A <i>colomba</i> is an Italian cake baked in the shape of what? (a) A dove (b) A cross (c) A rabbit
8	What is the name of Peppa's Pig's rabbit friend? (a) Ruth (b) Rebecca (c) Rachel

9	<p>The <i>Rachel Papers</i> was the first novel of which author?</p> <p>(a) Kingsley Amis (b) Stephen King (c) Martin Amis</p>
10	<p>What is the name of the island kingdom in the Disney film <i>Tangled</i>?</p> <p>(a) Corona (b) Arendelle (c) Oz</p>
11	<p>The corona is the outermost part of the atmosphere of which celestial body?</p> <p>(a) The earth (b) The moon (c) The sun</p>
12	<p>How long, according to Guinness World Records, was the longest recorded earthworm, found in South Africa in 1967?</p> <p>(a) 2ft lin (b) 21ft (c) 221ft</p>

13	What does a longshoreman do? (a) Maintains a lighthouse (b) Ensures the safety of a beach or shoreline (c) Loads and unloads ships
14	Beach is the long-serving butler in which fictional household? (a) Blandings Castle (b) Brideshead (c) Downton Abbey
15	Why is the Death's Head Hawkmoth so called? (a) Often seen in cemeteries (b) Skull-like marking on thorax (c) Lethally poisonous

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ANSWERS
1. b; 2. c; 3. a; 4. a; 5. b; 6. c; 7. a; 8. b;
9. c; 10. a; 11. c; 12. b; 13. c; 14. a; 15. b.



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