

DURHAM, TEES VALLEY AND NORTH YORKSHIRE

# Living

NOVEMBER 2009

COMPLIMENTARY

## ART

In residence  
at Raby  
Castle

## FOOD

The best  
pork pies  
in Britain

## WAX FACTOR

Win a  
Barbour  
Utility jacket

## PLUS

## HOMES & INTERIORS

How to create  
a stylish haven





# Furnishing a new future

Kerry Fowler meets a former policewoman, who has turned her hobby into a career



**BEAUTIFUL PRINTS:** All of Kerrie's products are made from 100% recycled materials. Main picture: When Kerrie's working, her girls like to help

**W**HILE YOU might not see it, Kerrie Kerrie's Victorian house in Eaglescliffe, County Durham, shows you just what she's surrounded by. It's a jumble of fabric samples while her daughters are around, adding their own creative twists to their mother's furnishing home-making business.

It's a pretty picture, and it takes a long or imaginative grasp that Kerrie was once recommended for interview in her previous life as police sergeant. One of the things that came out of her head during a little bit of time in the present in a small military-style setting. But knowing what Kerrie has achieved in the past couple of years confirms that she's not one to shy away from new challenges or difficult situations.

"A couple of years ago I was a police sergeant, writing to be promoted to inspector. I went into the police force straight from school – it was what I always wanted to do," says the 34-year-old. "I had the girls, Grace, who's now nine, and five, five, when I was in the force, and slowly became more of a struggle in my role. My husband, David, does shift work, too, so juggling that with middle-of-the-night childcare was hard."

At the same time, Kerrie was busy restoring her home and making a go of it with her furnishing. "I always make curtains and cushions. It was a hobby that gave me a lot of pleasure," she says. "Then a friend of mine advised me to make pinboards for me. Her friends started pinning in requests, too, and that's when the idea for the business began."

By this point Kerrie was missing the operational side of the job and starting to think about new premises, but it was being two separate situations in a situation that

really made her consider what to do next with her life.

"In 2008, I had a really serious car crash and had serious brain and injuries to my hands, arms and back. After I'd just dropped Grace off and played on my mind that was what I would have been in the car. Psychologically it took about 18 months to come to terms with what happened, but it gave me the time to reflect on life. Had that been the end of my career, where would I want to take my life from there on? Then a year ago, my husband was diagnosed with a brain tumour, and that really made me realize you just don't know what's around the corner. You can't think about how life will be in 20 years – it's about being happy now."

Kerrie had registered the name 'Kerrie's Victorian' in her 2007 business making in 2006, but it wasn't until last year that she decided to take the plunge and make it a full-time business.

It was during her having a successful career and a good income, but to have been in police after mum was diagnosed would have been a nightmare because we were at the hospital all the time. I wanted a job that would allow me to be in charge of my own time and be there for my family, too. My husband was very supportive about Pins and Ribbons – he saw that I was unhappy and told me to go for it."

Starting with only two products – pinboards and doorknobs – Kerrie began the business sewing at the kitchen table and seeing some potential on eBay. Now she's built the range to an impressive array of home furnishings, from bedding, curtains and headboards to evening accessories and dog beds. Everything she makes not only has her own unique look and pretty hand-drawn style, but is also created solely from U.S. sourced

**RIGHT:** Kerrie Lowe being in charge of her own destiny, says: "I'll usually working into the night sometimes"

**MAIN PICTURE:**  
Kerrie with Grace, left, and Eve



materials. She now sells via her website, is stocked by an impressive 110 shops nationwide, and has a small but dedicated team of three sewists upon whom to rely in a local industrial estate.

"They wanted friends of mine, I met Jane who was living in the local park - she's a trained musician and was out of work at the time. Lisa's children are in care with mine, she started patching, and is now looking to go full-time. And my mother's best friend does the admin for us. Following treatment and surgery, mum's doing well and when cancer is behind me I want."

Kerrie appreciates the difficulties of managing home and work and has made the hours as flexible as possible. "Lisa and I drop our children off together and then start work at the unit. We pick the children up after school and then work all night when we have to - recently we had a last minute order for 60 pieces of wedding hunting! And Jane wakes her dog, Oscar, before she comes in - sometimes she brings him to work, too."

The business is burgeoning but Kerrie's ethos is to keep it small and standards high. "I don't ever see it

being a huge production," says Kerrie, who still brings her machine home and works at the kitchen table to get orders done. "We'll probably stop locally, but I don't want to make a vast factory. The company wasn't launched for that - it was launched because I want to be happy doing what I'm doing and in control of my own destiny."

Kerrie's new life is a million miles away from her career in the police force, but despite part a huge change in direction it's obvious her new job brings her just as much reward. "Apart from my sewing and recovery there's nothing I'd wish for now. The children are very happy and I'd love it if they ran the business when they grow up. Eve wouldn't last five minutes because she gets bored, but Grace is very creative. We were in a fabric shop recently and she was getting very excited choosing the material. She declared: 'We're going to be the youngest designers in the world!'"

■ To see more of Kerrie's creations, visit [www.kerrieandgrace.co.uk](http://www.kerrieandgrace.co.uk)

## House Beautiful



■ This article first appeared in House Beautiful magazine

Picture: KIM JOHNSON

HAIR: Kacie Harrington MAKE-UP: Sarah Higgins at Affinity STYLING: Nicola Farrow

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