

FINANCIAL TIMES

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# now to spend

## Interior monologues

*Design special*





# Kit Kemp

The acclaimed interior designer and co-owner/creative director of Firmdale Hotels loves farm shops, time in her shepherd's hut and her 26-year-old horse Lonnie

I wake up on Saturday morning in the countryside. My husband Tim and I spend the week in London, then drive down to our house in the New Forest on Friday night. I feel my shoulders relax as soon as I hear the rumble of the cattle grid that marks the start of the forest.

Getting breakfast for Lonnie, my horse, is a priority. He's 26 now, so our rides are more stately than they used to be, but are still an essential part of my day. I like to be out by 9am, but if it's sunny I'll take a cup of lemon and ginger tea and a slice of toast out to the garden first. We've owned this 1930s house for almost 20 years and, while architecturally it's not beautiful, it looks out over the Beaulieu River. I love to watch the constantly changing water.

I'm home again by mid-morning and set straight off to Lymington, 15 minutes' drive away. Food shopping comes first – bread from the market, just-caught fish from S&J Shellfish and wine from our wine merchant, The Solent Cellar. The owners, Simon and Heather, handpick all their wines and find vineyards we've never heard of, so visiting is a real adventure.

Coffee at my friend Julia's dress shop, Stanwells, is a regular date, and then I might pop into St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery. This little museum takes an active interest in everything local and is where I discovered the artist Lucy Kemp-Welch. She's best known for her illustrations for the 1915 edition of *Black Beauty*, but she did a lot of work here in the New Forest.

A lunchtime treat is to meet friends at The East End Arms. The food is amazingly good, particularly the scallops and local honeycomb ice cream, but even though the place is famously owned by John Illsley from Dire Straits, it's not at all grand.

One of my daughters, Tiffany, works at Furzey Gardens, a social enterprise that supports people with learning difficulties, so I'll often drive over to see her after lunch. Sitting in the Tea Room with an affogato, while children race around looking for the fairy doors hidden in the trees, is a happy way to pass the afternoon.

We have supper at home, usually just me, Tim and our five Cavalier King Charles spaniels. We like to stay in because we work so much during the week, but I'll lay the table with a cloth and one of the dinner services I designed for Wedgwood and we'll eat the fish we bought in the morning with a bottle of Simon and Heather's wine.



I'm up early on Sunday to ride, then Tim and I walk the dogs from Pig Bush to Beaulieu. It's a lovely walk through the woods and, importantly, the route takes us past the Beaulieu Organic Farm Shop, which sells wonderful flowering salads and Isle of Wight heritage tomatoes. We don't really do breakfast, but when we arrive in Beaulieu town with our bags of salad, we find ourselves heading to Steff's Kitchen for some homemade carrot cake.

Later, we'll borrow a RIB that our friends keep on the river and go over to

Colwell Bay on the Isle of Wight for lunch at The Hut. Sitting at this simple beach restaurant surrounded by people in red sailing trousers flapping in the wind feels like being on holiday – and it only takes 20 minutes to get there.

The afternoon is quite lazy. I like to go down to my shepherd's hut in the garden. I pretend I'm going to write, but I just read the papers. Then we head back to the city in time to watch the BBC's 9 o'clock drama (especially if it's *Poldark*) before bed.

AS TOLD TO CHARLOTTE ABRAHAMS

The East End Arms does amazing food and is famously owned by John Illsley from Dire Straits