



the urban ruralist

By Caroline Phillips

I'm not the type who finds it pleasurable to relieve myself behind trees or have calamitous journeys just to get lost in country lanes littered with reeking mounds of bovine excrement. (Personally, I'd poop-scoop cow pats.) Others may enjoy the experience of losing their mobile signal and collecting blackberries with not a BlackBerry in sight. Not me.

I regard the country as long-haul travel and, therefore, best enjoyed retrospectively. Or, better still, only savoured in anticipation, by poring over rural porn. (Think websites showing thatched gastro establishments.)

The problem with the country for me is that there are no pavements, only worn Barbour and lousy cappuccinos. No pavements is bad for the Jimmy Choos. The rest is bad for my stylish, bohemian, intellectual, urbanite soul. Just thinking of the country – all that ferreting, badger-baiting, surveying outdoor composting loos, wearing Driza-Bones and doing pond management courses – makes me feel faint.

But I'm married to BJ, a bee-keeping, sloe-loving but urban-dwelling chap who reluctantly lives with me in Notting Hill – he just doesn't get the pure, edgy joy of city life, with its hip restaurants, carbon emissions, designer boutiques and energising road rage, racial tensions and noise pollution. His prejudice against our postcode is as entrenched as the mud on

his Hunter wellies. Which may be why, even in town, he likes wearing those shooting jackets with plastic pockets for secreting dead things. (To me, 'country fashion' is an oxymoron.)

We also have two daughters, both at that age when they think the country a Good Thing – and who are nagging us to keep a Thelwell pony in our roof garden. Despite (or perhaps because of) my endless bribes to them of (teenage nirvana) Juicy Couture velour tracksuits, they

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remain steadfastly passionate about all matters equestrian. It must be in the genes.

BJ is selling the country to me, saying that there are now rural heavens where property costs as much as Kensington, 'weekender' isn't a dirty word and they have organic grocery deliveries, underfloor heating and swimming pools with underwater speakers and plasma screens. (I'm sure it never rains there either.)

With all this in mind, I've agreed, over the months, to cast a beady urbanite eye over cottages that look like dilapidated tug boats but

have the potential to become minimalist, eco-friendly dreams; and to brave those horsey laughs to travel intrepidly to investigate on your behalf that upmarket pony club, Somerset health spa or quaint Cornish pub selling Tom Archer-style award-winning sausages. And I'll stop by an agricultural show to see what people do with animals when they don't turn them into carpaccio or coats.

I'll attend a church fête to see who has grown the biggest (ahem) carrot; hang out with the WI to make damson jam and strip off my Marni shirt to become a calendar girl; visit a working farm where kids learn that milk doesn't come from cartons; drop by to scour an antiques fair in a field, or stay in an off-the-beaten track B&B.

Yes, I'll dip my pedicured nails into the ever-faster-moving stream that is now country life. I may borrow scissors from Nicky Clarke to shear a sheep, forage New Forest porcini for risotto, make a groovy willow hurdle to pen cattle or brew some elderflower wine. I might even enjoy learning to lay a hedge, although frankly, *entre nous*, there are more enticing saplings to lay in London.

I may not linger long out of London. You can take the girl out of town. But can you take the town out of the girl?

If you have country invitations for our *Urban Ruralist*, please send them to urbanruralist@hotmail.co.uk

The Weekenders

by Digby
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