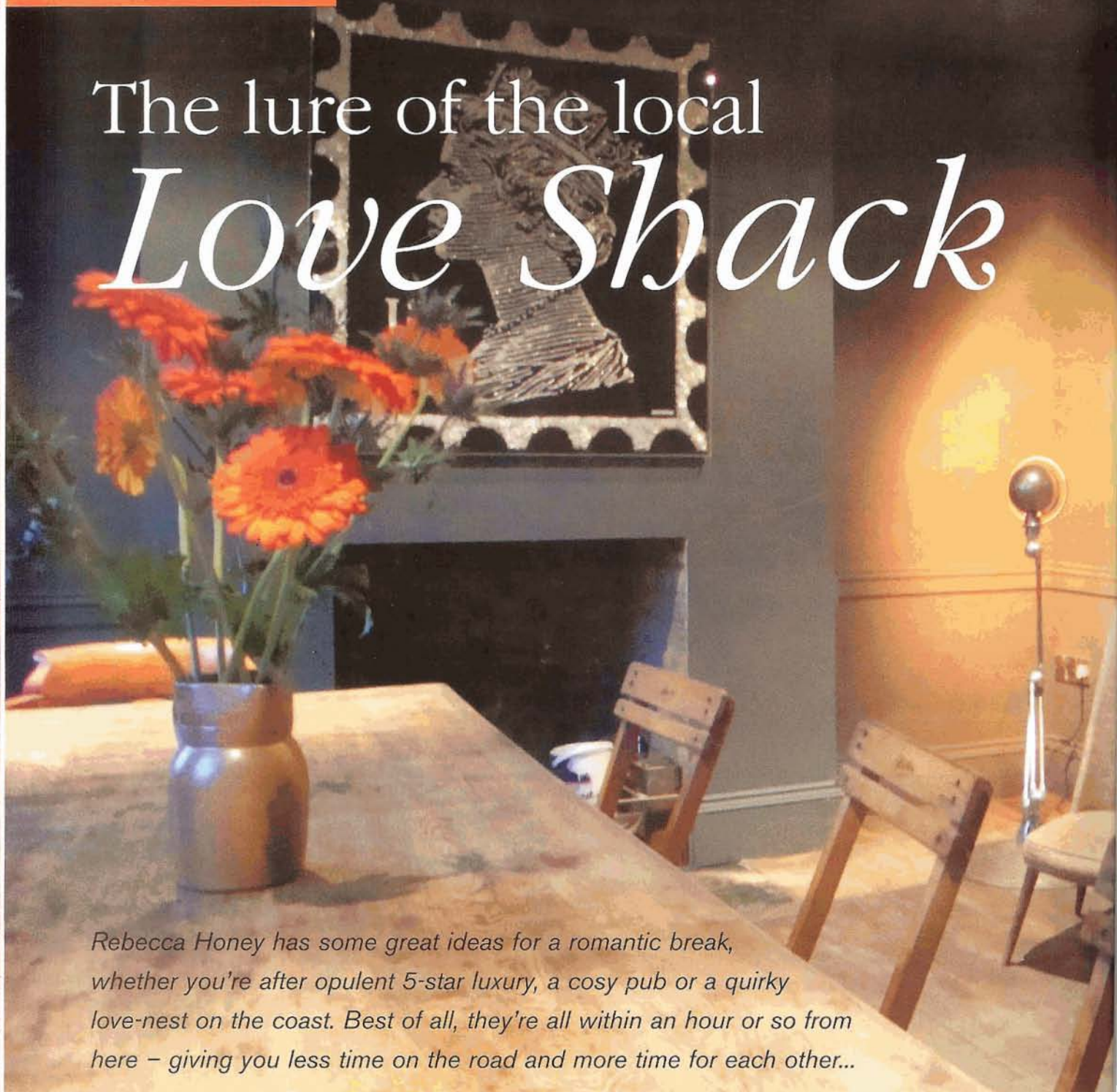


The lure of the local *Love Shack*



Rebecca Honey has some great ideas for a romantic break, whether you're after opulent 5-star luxury, a cosy pub or a quirky love-nest on the coast. Best of all, they're all within an hour or so from here – giving you less time on the road and more time for each other...

1 Best for old-fashioned glamour

Bailiffscourt Hotel & Spa, Climping

Gloriously gothic in feel, Bailiffscourt Hotel instantly transports you back in time as you wander through the winding flagstone corridors to find several cosy lounges stuffed with antiques, crackling fires and fresh flowers. The pretty

mullioned windows frame the rolling gardens and acres of private parkland to perfection which, in turn, lead you down to unspoilt Climping Beach.

Top Tip: ask for the Wymcroft Room with its open fire – it looks over the less-than-inspirational service area, so is available at a cheaper rate: great for those who'll be keeping the curtains closed anyway!

1 hour and 20 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £210 per room per night – but special offers frequently available, so do

check the website. Call 01903 723511 or see www.hshotels.co.uk

Stone House Hotel, Heathfield

Built in 1495, the Stone House Hotel today represents a stunning mix of Georgian and Tudor elements. It was originally created for the Dunn family (in whose hands it has remained ever since) and is now owned by Peter and Jane Dunn, who have worked tirelessly to create a country house hotel that combines period charm,

delicious food (Jane also runs excellent one-day cookery courses, open to non-resident and complete comfort. Take your pick from beamed rooms in the Tudor wing or four-post beds in the Georgian. Hey, if it's good enough for guests such as Sir Paul McCartney, surely it's good enough for you.

Top Tip: how about a special 'Spring Awakening' break? From Monday 21 March to Thursday 12 May (excluding Saturdays) you can stay for three nights' bed and breakfast and two

Boho elegance at Belvidere Place



Stone House Hotel: good enough for Sir Paul...

Chapel Down vineyards in Tenterden. The Farmhouse was recently refurbished by the National Trust, who have preserved the Victorian quirkiness of the house, but simultaneously modernised it to provide luxurious accommodation – all within the historic grounds of Sissinghurst Castle. The Farmhouse has seven double bedrooms, all with en-suite bathrooms and spectacular views across the Sissinghurst Estate.

Top Tip: though this B&B is closed until March, fret not, as spring is one of the best times to see Sissinghurst when it's less crowded and the gardens start to stir into life.

25 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £130 per room per night. Call 01580 720992 or see www.sissinghurstcastlefarmhouse.com

Lamberden House, Sandhurst

This beautiful Kentish oasthouse B&B is set overlooking rolling Wealden countryside, nestled amongst its own spectacular gardens surrounding a pool. While it'll be too chilly at this time of year for a dip, the warm welcome from owners Margie and Julian Croysdill (and their friendly chocolate Labradors Dilly and Holly) will more than make up for any lousy weather.

Explore the grounds at Lamberden, or ask Margie for her personal recommendations for visits to other local gardens.

Top Tip: ask for the ensuite room in the main house, which has a cosy seating area and spectacular views.

30 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £75 until April 2011. Call 01580 850968 or see www.lamberdenhouse.co.uk

3 Best for Pub-lovers

The Griffin Inn, Fletching

Fancy snuggling up with your loved one in a beautifully beamed and candlelit inn? The Griffin Inn is right up your street if so, and you'll find a choice of 15 gorgeously cosy rooms at this picturesque pub – some with four-posters – with a deserved reputation for outstandingly good food.

Top Tip: ask about the 'Internet Deal', which means you'll get dinner, bed and breakfast from Sunday to Thursdays for just £160 per couple.

30 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £85. Call 01825 722890 or see www.thegriffininn.co.uk

The George, Rye

Located in the centre of this pretty Cinque Port, the George

is the oldest coaching inn in the area, and was recently renovated to create one of the most stunning hideaways on the south coast, using a blend of antique and modern furniture, materials and local art. The George today is relaxed and informal, and a perfect spot for exploring all that Rye and the nearby white sandy beaches at Camber have to offer. Crisp bed linens, REN bath products and chrome power showers emphasise the luxury feel.

Top Tip: enjoy the freshest seafood and ice-cold wine at the nearby Fish Café (01797 222226).

45 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £135. Call 01797 222114 or see www.thegeorgeinrye.com

4 Best for Solitude-Seekers

The Grain Store & Gypsy Caravan, Mayfield

Head over to Fair Oak Farm, where you'll find this luxurious grade II listed barn, which sleeps 2-4 people as a self-contained holiday home.

Alongside it is the wonderfully quirky traditional gypsy bow-top caravan, which comes as part of the package and can be used by ▶

nights' dinners at £429.99 for a medium-sized room, or £579.99 for the suite or four-posters.

30 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £113 per room per night. Call 01435 830553 or see www.stonehousesussex.co.uk

2 Best for Garden Lovers

Sissinghurst Castle Farmhouse

This five-star B&B is owned by Frazer and Sue Thompson, who are also the proprietors of the



The exotic Zanzibar Hotel in Hastings



The Grain Store, Mayfield

▶ all guests, as can all of the 12 acres of beautiful grounds. Mountain bikes are available, and the barn provides quick access to lovely Mayfield, perfect for a pub lunch or a spot of shopping.

Top Tip: chat to owner Ian Ledger about the intriguing new eco-lodge treehouses he's installing later this year.

20 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; weekend breaks of 3 nights over February/March priced at £383 to £424, midweek stays start at £245 for 2 nights. Call 01435 884122 or see www.fairoakfarm.co.uk

For perfect pampering, the contemporary bathrooms are stocked with Elemis goodies.

Top Tip: make sure you order breakfast to be delivered to your door – the price includes a glass of champagne each.

1 hour from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £99.00. Call 01424 460109 or see www.zanzibarhotel.co.uk

The Reading Rooms, Margate

This chic boutique hotel reflects once-fashionable Margate's long-overdue renaissance.

Located in an 18th-century town house, The Reading Rooms offers chandeliers, antique armoires and silk headboards. The ultimate in lazy luxury is breakfast in bed: perfect for long, indulgent lie-ins...

Top Tip: ask for Room Three with its gorgeous oak parquet floor, lime-washed beams, an opulent antique chandelier, sumptuous roll top bath and walk-in shower. Oh, and if you book in April, be one of the first to visit the new, David Chipperfield-designed Turner Contemporary art gallery, set to open at the start of that month.

1 hour 30 minutes from Tunbridge

Wells; rooms from £150 Call 01843 225166 or see www.thereadingroomsargate.co.uk

Romney Bay House Hotel, New Romney

Built in the 1920s for the American Actress Hedda Hopper and designed by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, the architect of Portmeirion, the Romney Bay is situated along a private road on a totally unspoiled stretch of coastline with spectacular views, which are even more dramatic on a cold winter day. A first floor look-out room has a library, board games and a telescope for night-time star gazing.

Top Tip: all midweek room rates have a 15% discount up until the end of March, so book fast to get a great deal.

1 hour 10 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; rooms from £95. Call 01797 364747 or see www.romneybayhousehotel.co.uk

Belvidere Place, Broadstairs

A flick through the guest reviews on its website quickly reveals how highly-regarded this recently-opened boutique B&B is. Individually designed rooms, a comfortable, stylish interior and bubbly owner Jilly and her team make this beachside gem a total pleasure. Rooms are priced differently throughout the year.

Top Tip: call Jilly direct as she won't take internet bookings, preferring to personally match rooms to guests' tastes and needs. 1 hour 30 minutes from Tunbridge Wells; room rates variable. Call 01843 579850 or see www.belvidereplace.co.uk

5 Best for Beachcombers

Zanzibar Hotel, Hastings

This small, contemporary boutique hotel is the ideal romantic refuge for those in need of some relaxation and rejuvenation close to the sea. Elegant floor-to-ceiling windows provide unbroken sea views, and the opulent décor and special attention to in-room creature-comforts make this the perfect cosy hideaway for two.