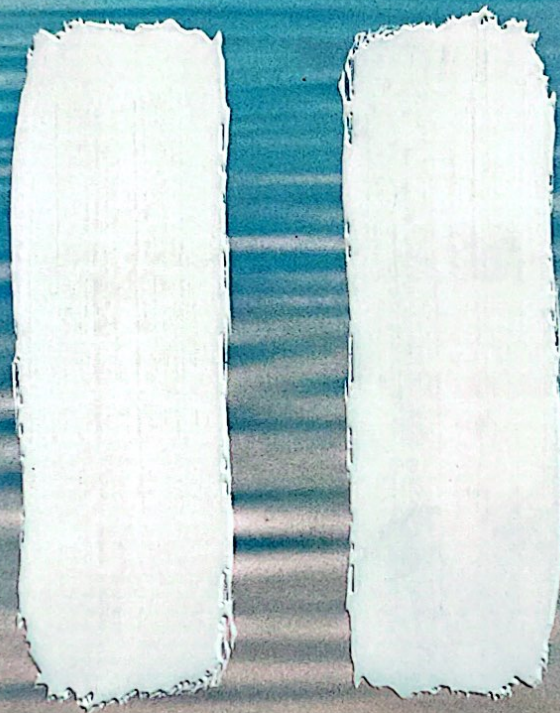


the   
simple  
things

August

Taking time to live well



# PAUSE

Finding magic on your doorstep • The point of poetry  
A life unplugged • Campfire peaches • Appreciating weeds  
Minibreaks for the mind • Why we love a bakery

## STAMFORD

# MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

THE LINCOLNSHIRE MARKET TOWN PROVIDES COMMUNITY - AND  
INSPIRATION - FOR TEXTILE DESIGNER NICOLA CLIFFE

Photography: **CRISTIAN BARNETT** Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**



Nicola takes Ernie, her Parson Russell terrier for his morning walk through the town. Opposite: Ernie at ease in the living room. The cushions are covered with fabric from Nicola's own range, Madder & Cutch



The house is furnished with solid wooden furniture. Here and there are fabric items by Nicola, including her storage buckets, here holding plants (right)



“WILLIAM MORRIS IS A GREAT INFLUENCE ON ME, ESPECIALLY HIS USE OF NATURAL DYES”

This handsome Arts and Crafts house near the centre of an agreeable market town, feels like exactly the right place to find sustainable textile designer Nicola Cliffe. The mullioned windows are framed with curtains and blinds made from her own fabric, and her cushions and lampshades are scattered artfully about on solid wooden furniture. At the end of a garden lined with pleached hornbeams, is a purpose-built studio where she hand-screenprints fabric for her company Madder Cutch & Co. It all feels very William Morris.

“William Morris is a great influence on me,” she confirms. “Especially his use of natural dyes and the way his designs drew their inspiration from nature.” The natural world is all around her in

Stamford; a short walk takes her and Ernie, her lively Parson Russell terrier, to The Meadows, a lush patch of greenery beside the River Welland, which flows through the centre of town. The names of her fabric designs – ‘Achillea’, ‘Clover Seed’, ‘Creeping Ivy’ and ‘Blossom’ – directly reflect what she sees on their morning dog walks and daily in her own garden.

Nicola knows Stamford well: she grew up nearby and, after a sojourn in Derbyshire, moved back with her husband Jonathan and her three sons, George, Ted and Bertie.

When her job as a chemistry teacher in a local school ended in 2012, she finally had a chance to realise a long-cherished dream: to pursue a creative career. “When I was teaching, I kept my dream alive by painting and drawing,” she says. »



"We are spoilt for choice for places to take our very active Parson Russell terrier, Ernie, but The Meadows is a favourite. In the summer, he goes for a swim in the River Welland and meets up with his doggy pals. It's also given me a chance to get to know Stamford's dog-walking community!"





"I drop in to The Fine Food Store for coffee after walking Ernie - it's a good place to warm up if it's cold. The owner's mother makes the most delicious cakes. I've also just made them a curtain from my Achillea fabric as the old one was looking a bit shabby."  
37 St Mary's Street



"There's always someone to help you at Harrison and Dunn, and the ladies make a fuss of Ernie. It's an amazing shop, crammed with all kinds of useful things. I come here all the time to buy rope and hooks for trade stands or jam pots, lightbulbs and cleaning stuff for the home."  
[harrisonanddunn.co.uk](http://harrisonanddunn.co.uk)



"Stamford has a lot of independent shops, and Chez Soi is my favourite. Partly because they support me and stock my fabric and cushions, but also because the owners have such good taste. Everything in the shop is styled beautifully and they sell great painted furniture." [chezsoi.co.uk](http://chezsoi.co.uk) »



"I walk past the door to Askers Bakehouse in King's Mill Lane every day. Askers bakes bread and cakes such as Swiss rolls and jam tarts in the original coal-fuelled oven, which can bake up to 200 loaves at a time. The results are sold in their shop on Red Lion Street and they also supply pubs and cafés in town." 5a Red Lion Street





### Stamford in a snapshot

With its cobbled streets, working brewery, coaching inns, bakehouse and generally prosperous air, Stamford feels like a model town. The streets are lined with medieval buildings and Georgian townhouses built of local honey-coloured Clipsham stone - the result of the town's wool-trade past. With more than its fair share of independent shops, restaurants, and a weekly market, it attracts visitors by the coachload in summer, all keen to enjoy its quiet, civilised charm.



“BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY SMALL BUSINESSES, WE ALL HELP EACH OTHER”

Clockwise, from above: a favourite chair is covered with her Creeping Ivy fabric; swatches of designs are pinned to the walls; Nicola's brother Haydn Day helps her screenprint in the garden studio

“My knowledge of chemistry also helped me understand the dyeing process.”

A year studying Sustainable Textile Design at Chelsea College of Art and Design set her on her new path, which was obviously the right one to follow as her business immediately blossomed. “Because I left it so late, I feel there is little time to waste,” she says. “I’m keen to get on with it!”

Appalled by the environmental and health dangers of synthetic dyes, she chose to use only dyes made from plant extracts. The name of her company reflects this: ‘madder’ and ‘cutch’ are two of the colours she uses (madder is red; cutch is reddish brown). She only prints on linen because it is one of the most sustainable fabrics. Keen to spread the word, she also holds screenprinting and indigo

dyeing workshops in her studio. Fittingly, a woad plant flourishes in a galvanised container outside.

Stamford has proved to be a supportive place to start a creative business. “It’s a really friendly community,” she says, “and because there are so many small businesses, we all help each other when we can.” One example is her favourite café, The Fine Food Store, where she stops for coffee post dog walk, and which is now furnished with curtains made from her Achillea leaf fabric. Nicola has also designed a Stamford cushion - an artistic interpretation of the town’s buildings and leafiness - which is sold in local store, Chez Soi. You get the feeling William Morris would approve. **S**

For more information and for details of Nicola’s workshops, [maddercutchandco.com](http://maddercutchandco.com).



