

INSIDE! MAKE IT EASY MAGAZINE

# Essentials

## STAY SUMMER GORGEOUS!

- ✓ The secret to glowing skin
- ✓ Treats & tips for hair
- ✓ Get salon beautiful at home

## 15 NEW WAYS TO BEAT THE BLOAT

How to be happier in one week

**TURNING POINT**  
The moment that made me lose 12 stone

# What to wear now

The one look that flatters EVERY woman  
**PLUS** 10 key buys from £14.50

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MAKE IT  
*Easy!*

### 28 FAMILY RECIPES



Ready in 35 minutes



It's time to get baking

### BEAUTIFUL CRAFTS



Gift idea!  
Create a teacup candle



So simple  
Embroider a laundry bag

SEPTEMBER 2013

MEET OUR COVER STAR

# 'I turned my passion into my business'



When **Nikki Channon**, 44, tired of her old career, she and her husband combined their favourite hobbies and found the opportunity to live their dream life...

**A**s a professional singer, I'd been performing in a duo with my husband, Jason, for ten years.

But as I hopped around on the wet floor of yet another pub toilet trying to change into my posh frock, I couldn't help thinking there had to be more to life. We didn't have any kids (just two naughty beagles!) and I'd always wanted to move to the country. Jason felt the same, but we needed to fund it – and that's when we decided to take the things we were most passionate about and turn them into a business.

I've always enjoyed entertaining – I get such a buzz from seeing everyone enjoying themselves and knowing I made it happen. Our home in Weston-super-Mare was always full of people, laughter and music. Jason, on the other hand, gets his fun from mountain-biking. As an ex-army man, he's super fit and started biking around ten years ago.

An idea came to us when we went skiing in France. We stayed in the most fantastic chalet and after skiing all day, we'd return to lovely meals cooked by the staff. The



more we thought about it, the more we realised that no one was doing anything comparable in the UK – and if we combined that style of hospitality with mountain biking, we'd have our business. All we had to do was find the right place to kick off MudTrek Mountain Bike Breaks.

Our target area was Wales, as it has great mountain-bike tracks. In spring 2009 we found a 250-year-old farmhouse on the edge of Brechfa Forest in Carmarthenshire. It had stunning views, was beautifully isolated and the mountain-bike trails nearby were world-renowned. We knew we'd found the perfect spot and moved there in May, but it took us two years to complete the renovations. We had to graft night and day to turn the '70s-style interiors into the welcoming space we're now so proud of.

At the same time Jason and I were still driving all over the country to gigs, so we could pay the bills. Jason built a website for the business and we set up a Facebook page – we were off the ground!

We welcomed our first guests to the barns in August 2011. We were very nervous and excited – I had visualised it for so long that it all felt a bit surreal. Of course, we didn't tell our visitors they were the first, but they know now and, thank goodness, they've come back since.

Entertaining large groups of mountain bikers quickly became second nature. We found lots come to get away from high-pressure jobs and to enjoy the amazing scenery, so we do everything we can to create a welcoming, relaxed vibe.

I think this would be a tough job if you weren't a people person, but we both love to socialise. I'm no Nigella, but I'm in my element in the kitchen and our visitors rave about the menu. I've always stuck to really

tasty, hearty recipes. Some of the most popular – like beef casserole with mustard croutons and banana bread and butter pudding – have come from the pages of *Essentials!* But the real firm favourite is Nikki's Legendary Lasagne and the secret is using locally sourced, top-quality ingredients and a few spices to give it a little kick.

Mountain biking isn't seasonal, which means we're always busy, but our dreams for the business haven't stopped. We're looking to double the capacity and we're building a new skills course on some neighbouring farmland. But the bigger dream is to have a franchise, where other holiday lets are transformed into MudTreks.

There's such potential and the future looks bright – we have loads of repeat business, we're earning twice as much as when we were touring clubs, and we've won four awards.

I think about the times I'd be singing my heart out as kids ran around the dance floor playing football, or the time when we were set up under a pub dartboard, and I can't believe how far away from our performing days we've come. Yes, clearing up after guests can be gruelling and there were tough times at the start, like when 12 muddy mountain bikers all wanted showers and the water tank couldn't cope, or the time when I had 14 burly men eating their lasagne with their head torches on, because the power had cut out. However, Jason and I sorted out those early teething problems together, and we could never go back to our old life.

Our new adventure in the country is everything we wanted and so much more.

**For more info about Mudtrek holidays, visit [mudtrek.com](http://mudtrek.com).**

**'Some of my guests' favourite recipes are from *Essentials!***

## Nikki's tips on starting a business

### Make the most of your skills

Think about what you're like as a person. There's no point going into hospitality if you don't love having people around.

### Research, research, research

Do masses of market research about your product and the growth potential. Who else is doing this? Are they doing it well?

### Exploit social media

If it wasn't for Facebook and Twitter, I don't think MudTrek would have been a success. It's the best way to spread the word.

### Use contacts

Friends with an accountant? Got a friendly neighbour with marketing experience? If you're setting up a business you need all the help you can get – ask for as much advice as you can.

### Explore funding

Check out possible loan schemes or new business grants in your area. I called our local council to enquire about grants and the resulting funds meant we could finish the renovations to our guest barns.



**Nikki and Jason now have a successful, award-winning business.**

## Be an *Essentials* cover star!

If you want to appear on our cover, like Nikki, then we'd love to hear from you. Just tell us a bit about yourself, attach a recent colour photo and send your email to: [amazing\\_essentials@ipcmedia.com](mailto:amazing_essentials@ipcmedia.com).

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