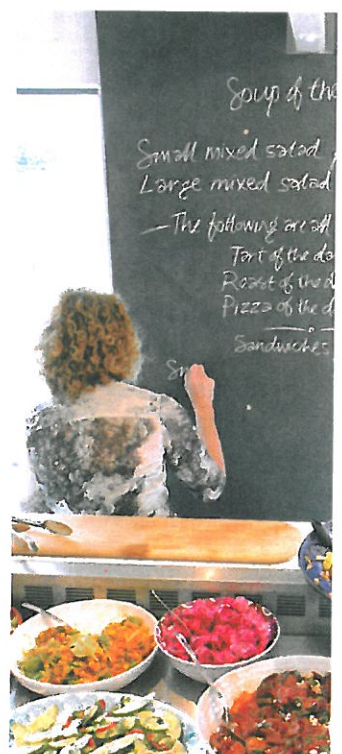
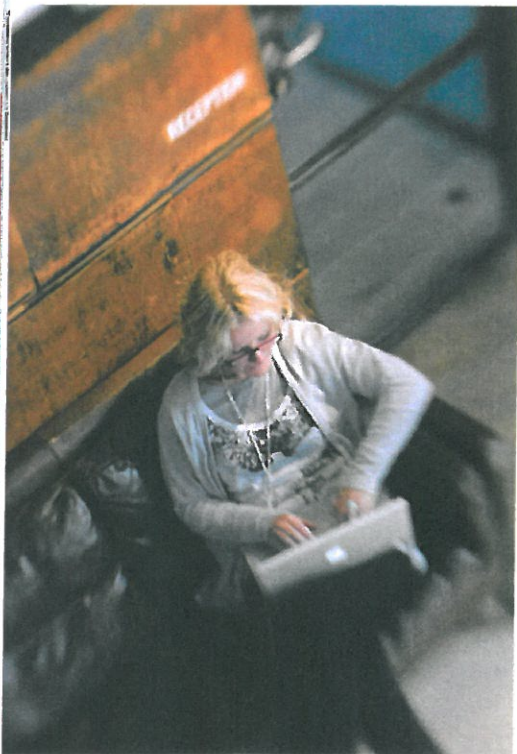


Calling all workers



Hands in Glove

Boasting a swish new café, this stylish work and leisure space could define Holt's cultural landscape for years to come
VELIMIR ILIC smells the coffee



Calling all workers

Located just a few miles from Bath, in the middle of Holt, a quiet revolution is taking place.

Opened last year, The Glove Factory is an inspiring, design-led rural workspace and cultural hub that's far removed from the drab office environments many of us are accustomed to. No corporate stiffness here; instead, where leather gloves were once made, a grand new vision is unfurling. Contemporary studios, workshops and a project/event space are all available for hire – made all the more alluring by a modern National Trust outlet and a brightly refurbished café.

The vibe envelops you the moment you walk in. This is a funky incubation space full of charm and character, encouraging harmonious and dynamic co-working between its mostly creative business residents. But TGF is visitor-friendly too: the spruce new café, with its bold décor and beautifully presented food, has a buzzy feel. It's all still evolving, but if a proposed sculpture trail and events such as last year's successful pop-up supper clubs (with Aussie chef Bill Granger and acclaimed food writer Joanna Weinberg) are anything to go by, one senses exciting times ahead.

"Our interest is in the provision of workspace," says TGF founder and creative director Nick Kirkham, "but also becoming a 2.5-acre complex similar to a mini-Dean Clough or Salts Mill (established arts/business complexes in Halifax and Saltaire) for the south west. That might be a museum of leather or an artisan school of food, lots of elements that re-invigorate the economy in rural Wiltshire."

Kirkham claims the site is not quite finished – art and furniture displays from South West artists and designer-makers are planned in the café and project space, new signage is imminent – but you'd never know it. Attention to detail is paramount: distinguished oak floors and Bath stone walls are constructed around reclaimed metals and timbers. "You need urban-quality spaces, with possible lifestyle benefits such as a game of tennis at lunchtime or a walk around the fields," says Kirkham. "That's the starting point of what we wanted to do here, and I guess that's why it was important to re-invigorate the café."

An obvious jewel in the crown, rebooting the café was an aesthetic masterstroke. Daz-white and lurid pink



TGF is visitor-friendly, too...



Fabulously tempting food in the cafe

"Rebooting the cafe was an aesthetic masterstroke"

walls house refectory-style tables and pristine old Scandinavian sofas you can sink into: it's a brassy statement of intent, but no less convivial for it. Word of the café's modish overhaul has evidently spread, and queuing diners hungrily eye the immaculate food, described by chef Mark Vickery as "Ottolenghi meets Delia Smith".

Watching Vickery put out the food, I'm



TGF attracts all sorts...

Calling all workers



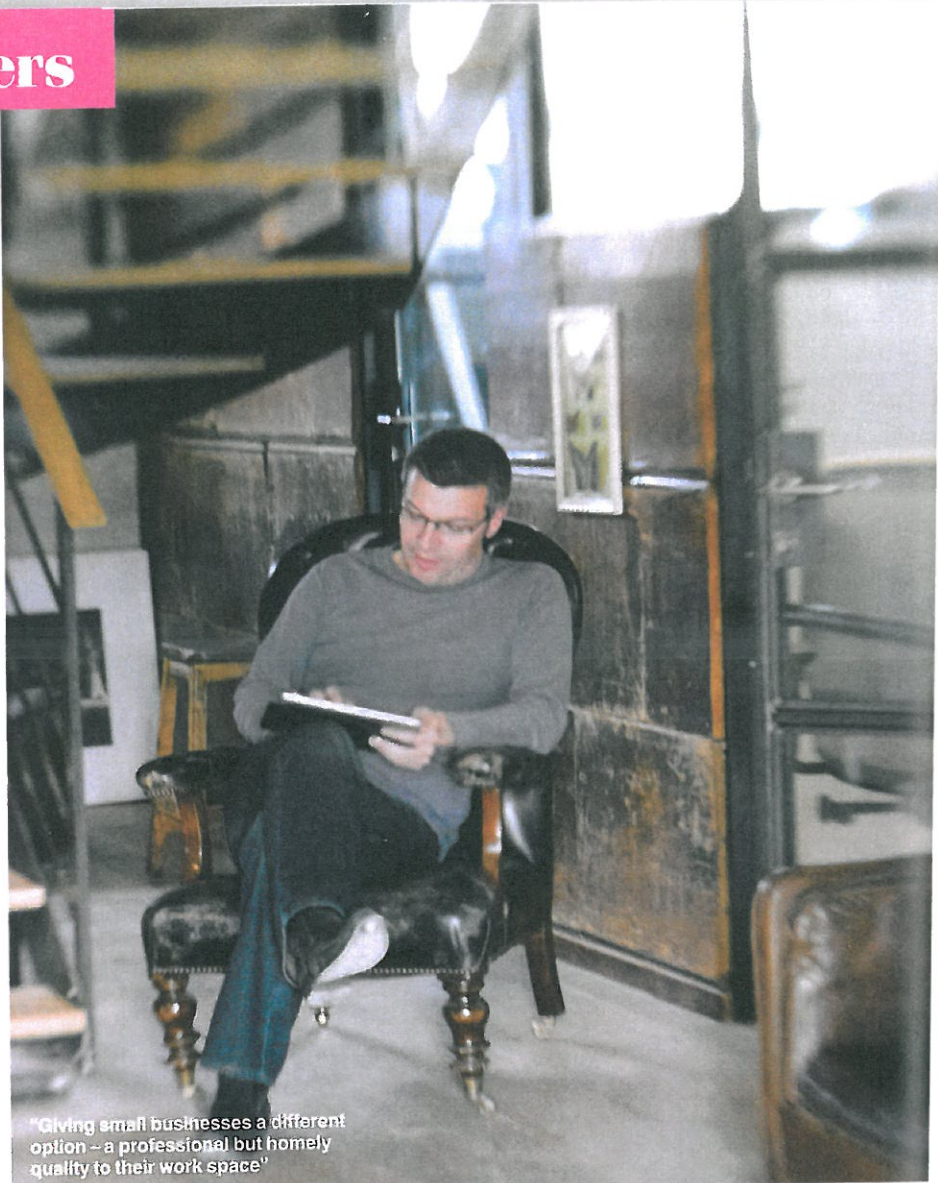
drooling too; golden spinach and feta filo pastry pie, home-made chicken liver paté and a panoply of vibrant exotic salads just ask to be devoured. There are earthy aubergines and mushrooms with harissa and chickpeas; ripe nectarines with mozzarella and mint; juicy watermelon and feta; and chunks of beetroot smeared with horseradish yoghurt; not to mention oodles of cake and hunks of fabulously moist chocolate brownie, all reassuringly artery-hardening. Resistance is futile.

Run by Vickery and co-chef Sarah Bickford, the café gradually built its customer base and reputation during its previous incarnation in the Old Shed across the courtyard, and is already thriving in its new spot. "The whole space is so lovely, in the country, with very reasonable prices, and really interesting food," says Bickford. "Now we're doing this new [open display] style of service, it just seems to work."

With the café hitting its stride, it's down to Kirkham to ensure the site's bread and butter elements – its various work and event spaces – fall into line

"The gentrification of industrial heritage sites around the country has started a trend for more service-based use," he explains. "The project space is flexible enough to be business-to-business, cultural, and a community space. It all keeps the life of the building going."

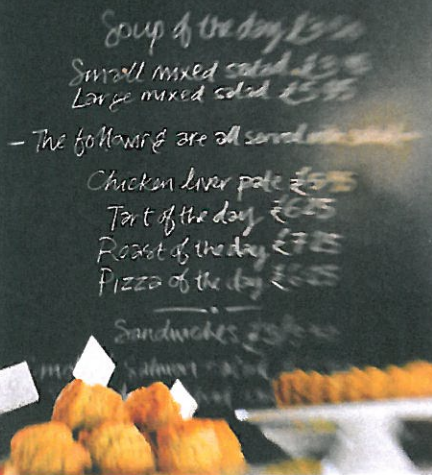
Set up by Kirkham – a large-scale sculptor – and Bath Spa University design graduate Alix Paver (formerly creative



"Giving small businesses a different option – a professional but homely quality to their work space"

"The gentrification of industrial heritage has started a trend for more service-based use"

Mine's the roast of the day...



director of London design agency The Partners), TGF is the latest in Kirkham's co-working/leisure space mini-empire. Erected on former industrial sites in London, the success of his established Westbourne and Great Western Studios ("I built a community of people [at GWS that got me really excited]", clearly informed his vision for TGF.

Describing it as an environment that "allows self-employed people to feel supported, and work amid like-minded others," Kirkham is hugely enthused by his latest project. "You go into a workspace above a shop or an industrial park and they're beige and rather dull, and you're expected to pay through the nose for it. We're giving small businesses a different option - a

Calling all workers

professional but homely quality to their workspace.”

Scratch the surface of this modish complex, and you'll uncover high-aspiration professionals from the creative, communication, IT and technological industries. From Aerial Studios, who create websites for the BBC, to digital design studio Millable, through to sculptural installation artist Anna Glasbrook and Hilltop Language Ltd, who offer Swedish-to-English translations, it's an eclectic mélange of talent.

Being part of Kirkham's Holt operations has crossover benefits too. TGF resident Claire Newman-Williams, a historic wet-plate photographer (“It's how they made photographs in the 1860s, before film existed”), has just finished exhibiting at Kirkham's GWS in London, featuring a series of clowns that were shot using the wet-plate process.

She describes TGF as “perfect on so many levels: the aesthetic, the standard to which it's been done, the peaceful countryside. Alix and Nick themselves are just so inspiring – the whole ethos

of what they're trying to do is fantastic. You're surrounded by incredibly creative and motivated people.”

With the on-site National Trust shop (simply called “Trust”) showcasing quality work from South West artists and craftspeople, the potential sculpture park, and a series of culture-rich events, courses and exhibitions, Kirkham envisages TGF becoming a ‘cultural experience’ in its own right, with a view to enhancing Holt's credentials as a visitor destination.

An ardent admirer of the Brewery Arts Centre's ‘well-considered’ exhibition programme in Cirencester, he wants to host similar aspirational shows at TGF.

“Events like Glyndebourne are held in rural locations and play a great role in the local economy,” Kirkham says. “The Glove Factory has the potential to be a very strong cultural player.” ■

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