

# Our new take on traditional

From a sleek-and-stylish chippy to putting a different spin on a tea shop. Karla Napoleon meets three women who are revamping traditional British establishments

**LUCINDA COOPER, 42**, lives in Muswell Hill with her husband Nick, 42, and their two children, Otilie, ten, and Willem, eight.

**OLD JOB** Stay-at-home mum.  
**NEW JOB** Runs the Emporium Tea Rooms & Fancy Goods in Muswell Hill, north London.

"It began on a girls' weekend away. There were 16 of us from a mums' group. We'd known each other for years and I was talking about how much I'd love to have a shop, maybe with a bit of tea and cake. In the end, one of the mums, Helen, decided to come in with me.

We started looking for premises, and two adjoining shops became available, about five minutes away from where we lived. They were on a little green, with room for parking.

Once we had the keys, we gave ourselves seven weeks to do a massive refurbishment. We didn't have a lot of money to invest – around £35,000 from savings – so we wanted to keep the costs as low as possible. Aside from fantastic builders, we wouldn't have been able to do it without help from family and friends. Everyone pitched in – an illustrator friend painted the signage, and another friend gave us a dishwasher and fridge-freezer.

We hadn't done any advertising, but word had spread and we were busy right

from our opening day. Initially, I was on a high, but the nerves soon set in. It was overwhelming to suddenly have so much to worry about – staff, food and new technology. For the first two months, I didn't really sleep or eat properly. Thankfully, we feel more settled now.

I came up with the name 'Emporium' to reflect that we sell all sorts of things. Plus, it has an old-fashioned British ring to it. We wanted a real homely look, and bought our furniture from junk and second-hand shops. We also have bone-handled cutlery from car-boot sales, and proper china teapots. We play 40s music and serve loose-leaf tea. I like that we're unique.

Our customers often say that when they're in the Emporium they feel like they're on holiday, not in London.

About 40 per cent of our business comes from the shop. We stock handmade cards, paintings, arts

and crafts from local artists and designers, which I take on a sale-or-return basis to help keep the costs down.

We also run classes. It started as an after-school arts-and-crafts club, but we now offer sewing, knitting and French conversation classes. You pay for a four- or six-week course, which is run by local mums.

We have an army of helper mums. Our manager, who is also one of our waitresses, is one of the original pre-school mums' group. Another mum makes our jam, which we also sell in the shop. And other mums



**'I DREAMT OF RUNNING A TEA SHOP BUT IT'S A REAL PART OF THE COMMUNITY TOO'**

go to the cash-and-carry for us if we're busy, and we then repay them with a lunch.

We wanted to attract everyone from the community, and we've achieved that. We had a 'Big Knit' event, and the older people and our young knitting group sat knitting together on the green, which was just lovely.

Running your own business can be frightening and it helps to have someone to share the experience with you. We're just covering our costs at the moment, but hope to be able to pay ourselves a wage next year. I love being back in a working environment. I was a beauty therapist before I had children and really missed the social side of working. I love getting to know

all the people who come in and help to create such a warm community feel."

**HELEN HODGE, 44**, lives in Muswell Hill with her husband Dean, 47, and their children Louis, 14, Theo, 12, and Nat, nine.

"I've always had a yearning to run a tea shop, so when Lucinda talked about it, I seized the moment. My children were getting older and the timing felt right.

As I was going to look after the food side, I took a 12-week course to go over the basics. It cost about £800, and taught me about hygiene standards. We were

inspected by the local authority food hygiene inspector and received a 'five scores on the doors' rating – the top rating.

We are completely different to a high-street coffee chain. We serve toast, teacakes, homemade marmalades and jams – all the food that evokes those wonderful childhood holiday memories. We bake most of our cakes to sell every day, and the first thing I do when I get in is make a batch of scones.

Working with Lucinda has been remarkably easy. We haven't had any arguments and can be open and honest with each other. Meeting so many new and interesting people has been great too."

**FACT FILE**

**START-UP COSTS** £35,000.  
**FIRST YEAR'S TURNOVER** Estimated £200,000 by March 2010.  
**BEST MOVE** Having a business on our doorstep, so we don't have to worry about the children. We're always on hand in an emergency, and they can pop in after school.  
**WORST MOVE** Not buying an industrial dishwasher when we had more money. We have a domestic one and have to do a lot of washing-up by hand, but can't afford an industrial one at the moment.  
**TOP TIP** Have a mailing list to keep your customers informed and drum up business. We take everyone's email addresses and let them know about any changes, events we're holding or any new classes.  
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