

THE HOUSE THAT KATE BUILT

When it opened ten years ago, The Lakes by Yoo set a precedent for urban style in a country setting. Now a new project - which sees fashion superstar Kate Moss turn her hand to interiors - will take this luxury-design-meets-country-living concept to a whole new level. Chairman John Hitchcox shows Emma Johnson around.

Words | EMMA JOHNSON



ohn Hitchcox is everything you'd expect from someone who counts Simon le Bon, Kate Moss and Jade Jagger amongst his friends - charismatic, mischievous, very cool - but also down-to-earth and refreshingly pragmatic.

He came up with the concept for The Lakes, he tells me, after finding himself trudging around Regent's Park, two young children in tow, thinking, "There has to be something better than this." "I wrestled with where I wanted to raise my children. I was a total urbanite, but I wanted the kids to be brought up in the country - somewhere they could play outside, explore woodland, go sailing. For years I had a real jostle about where we should live."

The answer it seems, was The Lakes - a place where parents could come with their children at weekends and during school holidays, and pick up as much country living as they could, while enjoying the benefits of a life in London too. "The idea was to create somewhere you could come and get all the luxuries you were used to in a hotel or an urban environment, but in the country." ▶



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Hitchcox found the site in 1999, and in 2008, after numerous years of planning machinations, work began. It was no small venture. What was previously a barren 650-acre gravel pit expanse is now a beautiful secluded setting, complete with a wealth of natural wildlife and stunning scenery, with 90 lake-side homes nestled amongst over 500,000 indigenous trees.

A little bit reminiscent of parts of north America, or even the Scandinavian forests, The Lakes feels very unique. Plots are available to purchase – both on the lakes and now in the woodland areas – and houses can be designed from a range of layouts and styles, making each house bespoke. “Our only restrictions are to make sure each house all blends in with the scenery, so it feels harmonious,” Hitchcox explains. “And we insist on using entirely local materials – larch from local farms, Cotswold stone, for instance.”

Even though the development feels like it has naturally evolved into its landscape, it is clear that the level of planning and precision is second-to-none. And, what is perhaps most unique about The Lakes is the way that a community has sprung up amongst residents here, despite there being over 90 houses spread across 650 acres. Saturday evenings during the summer sees a communal barbeque in the woods, where everyone pitches in, while the well-attended spa provides a space for parents and children to relax or keep fit, and woodland activities educate and entertain children during the holidays. There are plans to introduce a restaurant or bar offering in the next couple of years. “Everyone feels like they’re part of things here. We wanted to build a community and have residents be part of those things they care about. And that’s what we’ve got here – a group of likeminded people, most are from London, but with an international flair. Now our residents all know each other, and they appreciate that – they know what it’s like to be in a new country and start again with the social life.”

And it’s not only their social life that is taken care of. Because of the nature of the development, maintenance issues are dealt with centrally and the Lakes’ concierge ►

Picture above: Chairman John Hitchcox and Kate Moss outside the front door of The Barnhouse at The Lakes by yoo **Main image:** Living Room, **Right:** Staircase, Guest bedroom, Children’s room



Pictured (above): Living room view, Dining area, **(below):** Master bedroom **Opposite page:** Pool area and exterior of The Barnhouse



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service means you can organise a wealth of activities and services from your own home, including having your fridge pre-stocked before you arrive and your fire lit. “I suppose it’s almost the opposite of the country pile,” says Hitchcox. “You don’t have maintenance and management issues, your house is looked after when you’re away and when you arrive the place is ready for you.” With the new woodland houses, this concept of a country

mansion without the maintenance headache is more pertinent than ever. The Cotswold stone Barnhouse – the first of its kind on the site and a departure from the other lakeside homes – will eventually be part of a wooded enclave totalling 25 acres, in the centre of The Lakes development. With water on all sides, and hundreds of trees surrounding each acre plot, these new woodland houses will offer a real sense of secluded luxury and

boast an enviable amount of space to boot. “With the lake houses, we built them on the water, so your garden is the lake. Here we’ve got an acre of land to play with in each plot. I’m even thinking about building treehouses...” smiles Hitchcox.

As we talk, sitting in the impressive double-height sitting room, looking out to the garden and the lake beyond, the autumn rain is lashing against the floor-to-ceiling

windows. How has Hitchcox and his team rationalised this indoor/outdoor living that their designs seem to encapsulate, with the inevitable British drizzle? “There’s little details in the house throughout that lend themselves to that,” he says, jumping up and taking me into a smaller second sitting room with glass walls on two sides. “These open completely, so the whole room changes and you’ve got that real sense of being outside, even if the weather means you’re inside. Suddenly the entire house becomes completely open – and you start to live outside more.” It is clear that every detail has been considered here. Even if it is Kate Moss’s first foray into interior design, it’s a confident one, with real splashes of inspiration: a painted pea-

cock darts across a skirting board, a vintage record player encourages you to stop and sit, and a striking image of Moss herself, dressed in a figure-squeezing gold lamé suit dominates the main landing. It could feel affected, out-of-place in this quiet Cotswolds enclave, and yet, it fits somehow, despite its starry aspirations.

“Well, Kate lives down here,” says Hitchcox. “And she seems to know what works. When we first started talking about this, I walked around her house and said, ‘This place is really cool, you should design something for me’. We talked about several different projects, and then she came down here one day, and saw The Barnhouse and loved it – she said it reminded her of Johnny

Cash’s woodland house. It just seemed like a great place to start. It wasn’t too big, a nice intro into what Kate could do.”

And, by all accounts, this new direction into interiors has been a successful one for the model, and the team at The Lakes. As a local girl, it’s clear Kate Moss has an eye for the Cotswold style. “She’s a perfect fit really – local influence with an international outlook. And she’s done a brilliant job. We’ve had a great reaction. It was quite a brave leap for us, something completely different from the lake houses. But I’m thrilled with it... I want to move in,” finishes Hitchcox. ■

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