

A road to somewhere

Eroica Mildmay meets interior designer and writer Robert Greenfield



Robert Greenfield is a man of many talents. Apart from following through with his interior design company, something he was already doing in London (along with property developing) his latest reincarnation, in parallel motion, so to speak - is as a writer in search of a publisher - for a 90,000 word memoir called 'Sapphire Coast'. As is often the way for first-time writers Robert has chosen the security of the 'handrail' of autobiography for his first foray into writing. He is however, he says, very much looking forward to launching into the 'freedom' of pure fiction with his future work. This memoir is about the long and winding road that brought him to the somewhat impetuous decision made by him and his partner Michael which landed them both in North Norfolk in 2000, a move they turned into a success story.

Robert was born in Islington, London and grew up in Essex. His father was a fashion tailor who later went into wholesale prêt-à-porter men's suits sourced from the Far East before it was commonplace to do so. Sadly Robert's mother died when he was 6 and within four years he was living in Baker Street in central London. His father had remarried by now, to a woman who turned out to be the epitome of an abusive step-mother, who made Robert's life exceedingly unpleasant. This traumatic experience has clearly affected him for the rest of his life, in the form of twin forces; restlessness, and resolve.

Timely salvation presented itself to Robert in the form of a tailoring and design course at The London College of Fashion which delivered him into the dynamic, liberating and anti-establishment environment of 1980's London. Robert decided to set up his own small designer leatherwear collections under the name 'Robbie Maxwell' which was sold in Harrods and garnered him the accolade of 'Britain's answer to Giorgio Armani'. With the emergence of the pop video, pop stars like Duran Duran, Yaz and Spandau Ballet sported his collections, ones with choice names like 'The New Barbarians'. In due course he was head-hunted by Mirage, a huge company who continued

producing his leatherwear designs and then with their backing enabled Robert to set-up the successful 'Maxwear' label: for sportswear, clubwear and casualwear.

To do this he'd had to say goodbye to 'Robbie Maxwell' which he feels with hindsight that he could have pressed on with to even greater success. But nevertheless, path chosen, and with lucrative contract in hand, he was soon living in New York, flying around the world, and living in a very fast lane indeed. But he began to feel he was burning out and returned to London to continue freelance fashion consultancy for clients like Reebok, Adidas, Puma, Converse and other brands. But with advent of the late 80's recession Robert realised he needed to stop completely and deal with some deep-seated emotional issues largely to do with his upbringing.

Once this was done, and it took a while, Robert realised, with an interest in, knowledge of, and a passion for, architecture and interiors, that acquiring a small hotel might be the way forward. Holly Lodge near Thursford was a rather plain and neglected, but roomy country house on offer at a knock down price. It had caught Robert's eye as a tiny newspaper ad. But Norfolk was an unknown quantity and Holly Lodge failed to inspire on that first visit, yet there was just something about it .

After much hard work and inspiration the drab Holly Lodge was transformed and starting picking up accolades left, right and centre, such as 'AA Guest Accommodation of the Year 2004/2005' and 'Visit Britain's Gold Award Bed & Breakfast of the Year 2005'. Their press cuttings book was also brimming over with newspaper features. This brought success, but it also brought obligation and impacted on their privacy more than they had quite foreseen. So Robert and Michael decided to sell up and head for the North Norfolk coast where they now live in stylish riverside fashion in Stiffkey ready for the next big adventure and you know there will be one . . .

• For more info on Roomscape, check out www.roomscapeuk.com Tel: 01328 830038

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