



CHILD'S PLAY: Christian, Carolyn and Angel.

Picture: Gary Longbottom

# BOUTIQUE HOTEL IN A BELL TENT

**'GLAMPING'** HOW DO YOU TRANSFORM A TENT INTO A GLAMOROUS HOLIDAY HOME? SHARON DALE REPORTS.

**C**arolyn van Outersterp has a magic touch when it comes to interiors. She's a trained fashion designer, who transformed the humble gas fire into something cool and contemporary in her previous role heading up trend-setting CVO Fires.

Her home in Buttercrambe, East Yorkshire, is a masterpiece that she painted all white and decorated on a tight budget using vintage furniture, thrifty buys and home-made soft furnishings.

But when she and her husband Christian decided to bring glamping (meaning glamorous camping) to the North, it tested all her creative skills.

Converting conventional camping with its gloomy nylon tents, soggy sleeping bags, plastic plates and bedraggled, kagoule-clad followers into something cool and trendy was a task and a half. "I was always more of a five-star luxury girl and I wasn't keen on camping at all, but I heard about glamping and it really appealed," she says. "But we could only find sites in the South and they were really expensive. That's when we saw a gap in the market to bring it north and make it affordable." She and Christian

tested it out at a local music festival by buying a bell tent – a vintage British design created in 1858 by Henry Hopkins Sibley after years spent studying the tipi.

"I had great fun customising it – making miniature bunting and a mountain of cushions from my store of vintage fabrics. We strapped a couple of futons to the car roof, stocked up on provisions and took our family off for five days," says Carolyn.

"I loved the tent and the way we could stand upright enveloped in cotton that could breathe, had more soul, and was warmer than nylon. It also had that yummy, warm canvas smell, evocative of the endless summer holidays of old. I also loved the early mornings, when butterflies and swallows dancing around outside were silhouetted on the inside of the tent."

On their return, the Van Outersterps leased part of Buttercrambe woods on the edge of the Wolds and close to the main road from York to Bridlington. They bought more bell tents and also designed their own large "lodge" tents and pitched them on wooden decks.

The lodge tents have a large living/dining area and there are two beach chalet-style huts either side of the central area. One is a bathroom complete with slipper bath and the other is a kitchen. At the back of the tent there are



ROOMY: Inside one of the bell tents.



curtained-off bedroom areas with one featuring a king-size four-poster.

Furnishings were a challenge as they had to be fashionable and practical. So Carolyn and Christian, who have four children Galatea, 12, Midory, 10, Alto, eight and Angel, four, used her own home as a template. She used vintage furniture – dressers, dining tables and chairs, chests and drawers all painted white and decorated with wallpaper inside.

"I spent ages looking for old brown wood furniture and painting it up," says Carolyn, whose favourite hunting ground is York Community Furniture Store on James Street in the city.

She upholstered the futon sofas in pretty wipe-clean oil cloth (plastic coated cotton) and softened the look further with bunting and with curtains and cushions fashioned from old, embroidered table cloths she found at car boot sales, on eBay and in charity shops.

After her own experiences of camping, she ensured there was lots of storage.

"There's nothing worse when you're camping and tripping over everything,

you can't find anything and if it rains and you're confined in a crowded space, you end up wanting to kill each other," she says.

"So there's loads of storage in the lodge tents and with the bell tents we give people two: one for sleeping and one for storage, cooking and eating in.

"We also provide everything so you're not cramming the car with bedding and everything else. You just turn up with your clothes and your wellies."

With limited electricity from a generator, the tents are lit with paraffin lamps and candles.

There's also a cake tent with cabinets full of home-made goodies and every night there is a camp fire. But there's no TV or DVD player and no sockets for charging Nintendos. "The idea is to get away from it all and no-one misses the electronic games or the TV. Children love it, especially if they're from the city. They can build dens, swing on rope swings and do things they've never done before," says Carolyn.

It is Enid Blyton meets

**HAPPY DAYS:** Children enjoy the freedom and space of "glamping".

Below, left: the bell tent sleeping area with futons covered in practical oilcloth.

Picture: Gary Longbottom





**BACK TO NATURE:** Above, Every large tent boasts a wood burning stove. Top right, Family-sized tent has its own luxury bathroom housed in a beach-style hut. Right, The dining area and kitchen. Below, Muddy kids are no problem with Carolyn's practical sofas covered with oil cloth. Pictures: Gary Longbottom.

➔ Swallows and Amazons and once there starring in your own story book, while drinking from china cups and sleeping under canvas in a proper bed, you probably won't want to leave.

You will want to stock up on ginger beer, sing Ging Gang Goolie and leave the cares and worries of the outside world behind.

"When the first guests arrived, they came with a full itinerary of what they were going to do and where they were going to visit but they didn't go out at all. They stayed here," says Carolyn.

It's not gold taps and hotel-style luxury.

There's mud and a rugged environment but there's a nice bed and fresh laundered sheets at the end of it.

"The real luxury is being able to spend time with your family in beautiful, natural surroundings.

"In these crazy, stressful times waking in such a nurturing space, to the sounds of birdsong and a gentle breeze, seems to me to be the ultimate in luxurious living."

■ Jolly Days Luxury Camping costs from £350-£850 per tent for a week. Tel: 01759 371776.

[www.jollydaysluxurycamping.co.uk](http://www.jollydaysluxurycamping.co.uk)



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