



Lower Mill Estate.



Jeremy Paxton's eco-friendly home.



Eco-friendly and fully recycled house.

# How green is my valley

*Jeremy Paxton, owner of the eco-friendly Lower Mill Estate, wants people to switch off when it comes to green issues...*

**T**O SWITCH off lights, televisions, monitors and other household devices left ticking away on standby, that is. These idling appliances gobble up an incredible eight percent of the country's electricity.

And if you need a bit of help remembering, he's got that for you too. He's invented the 'Planet Switch' – a piece of electronic circuitry that does the work for you. Fitted into new homes, it switches appliances off at the press of a button. As a retro-fit, it's a conscience-prick – an earth-shaped reminder that the planet is in your hands.

And if you need that in black and white, just read the statistics.

According to the Energy Saving Trust, the estimated CO2 emissions from devices left on stand-by in the UK are a whopping:

- 1,600,000 tonnes from stereos.
- 960,000 tonnes from videos.
- 390,000 tonnes from consoles.
- 100,000 tonnes from DVD players.
- 60,000 tonnes from set-top boxes

"I know!" Jeremy Paxton says, startled himself. "When I first saw the statistics, I was bowled over. Do you realise how massive that is? If you got everyone to

switch off, you could close eight percent of the country's power stations."

In truth, the circuitry in the Planet Switch isn't rocket science. The clever bit is in the must-have design. It looks cool enough to double as a piece of modernist sculpture. You can buy the simple version for £13 – or go all the way up to glitz at well over £100.

"My theory is make energy conservation a little bit cooler; make it fun. It's no good banging on about the multi-billion pound investments needed to save the planet," he says. "That's not where the rank and file are going to make the difference. I want people to turn things off. That's my basic premise. The irony is – what's clever in that? Nothing!"

Actually, it is clever. For the Planet Switch is designed to make people 'green' with envy; for them to see one in their neighbour's house and want one too.

It's typical of the way this unconventional eco-warrior does things. A multi-millionaire, he doesn't hide the fact that he travels most places by piloting his own helicopter; he does take some holidays overseas (carbon offset to a factor of 150 percent); home is an energy-efficient impressive modern interpretation of a classic boathouse overlooking the Thames, and

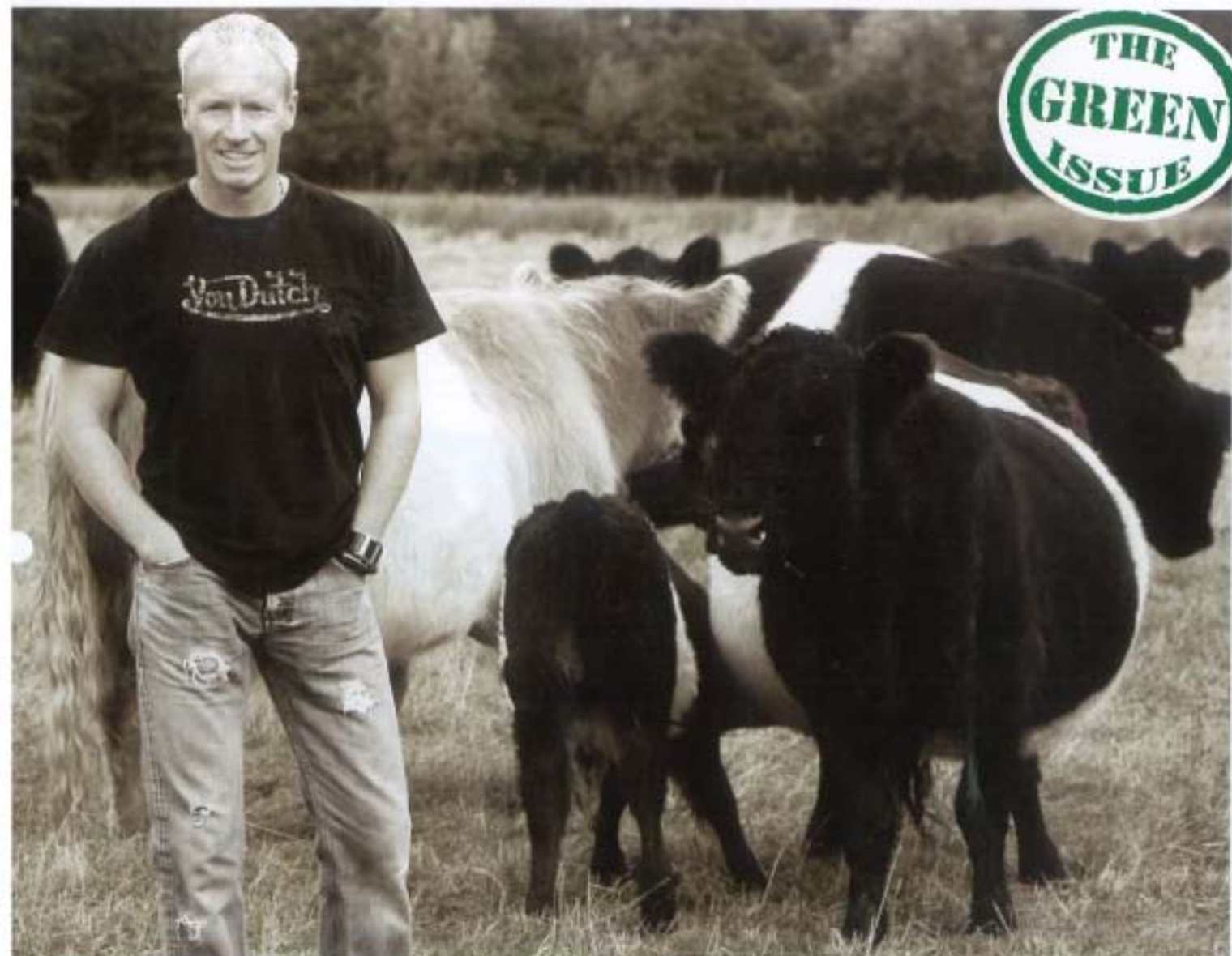
another is a fully recycled property on his eco-friendly luxury estate (especially for second-home owners) in



the Cotswold Nature Reserves near Cirencester.

But you can knock neither his sincerity nor his achievements. "You do not have to be a muesli-jumper-wearing bearded tree-hugger to make a difference," he says. "People should carry on with their lives more or less as is, but stop being so wasteful and slow up the throw-away society".

While the Lower Mill Estate is undoubtedly a bolt-hole for Londoners



Jeremy Paxton.

who long for the country life (weekends only), it can also be argued as a first-class example of how to create a sustainable community – a community of the future. The houses going up there are not only modern architecture at its best (and, in some cases, at its most expensive: you can buy in the £millions); they're also solid reminders of how to do things sustainably, using recycled materials. The estate itself is full of recycling points, and even an eco 'natural swimming' pool – a 21st century village-hall-type meeting point.

But Jeremy Paxton doesn't lecture to his residents; he doesn't harass them with eco-babble. Instead, he relays the antics of the beaver colony he's introduced, via closed circuit TV. He provides 'designer' allotments where home-owners can grow their own veg, and ensures there are bike racks outside the houses. He schedules Second Nature clubs to teach kids about the 3,000 species of wildlife that he encourages on every centimetre of his 550 acres. Indeed, the estate is one of the most

significant sites in the country for otters; there are water vole, purple heron and great crested grebe, as well as rare orchids.

"I'm reconnecting people with nature. It's through that that they start going: Actually we don't recycle, do we? People won't do it because you tell them they must. They do it because they get it themselves – the penny drops.

"The allotments are a good case in point of making it easy for people to do something responsible. What they allow people to say is: I've always wanted to grow my own vegetables but I've hidden from it as I know it's time consuming. But suddenly it's possible, and the children then get very interested – children love growing things. It harks back to the sort of upbringing I had: very *Savallous and Amazons*."

In fact, the childhood enjoyed by kids at Lower Mill is a million miles from his own. Born in Hackney to a teenage single mother, he was adopted by a couple from the New Forest who provided him with a

stable happy childhood, blighted only by the death of his father when Jeremy was 10. They instilled in him a deep love of the countryside.

After grammar school, he became a self-confessed beach bum, pursuing sport full-time for six years, travelling the world on the expenses provided by sponsors. His prowess at waterskiing meant he was in demand as a skier and coach, also striking a three-year commentary deal with ITV, working with a young Steve Rider on water sports events.

When he found himself with a bit of capital, he founded a waterskiing magazine. By the time he sold his publishing business in 1988, it had been swelled by a number of other popular sports periodicals and earned him enough money to make new plans.

Then, 11 years ago, he bought the Lower Mill Estate. Why? He simply fell in love with it. But that passion, as in all good love affairs, deepened. Jeremy spent two years just living there – gaining the feel of the place – before gradually turning it into ▶



the development it is today.

"When I started, people were asking me: What are you doing? I told them I wanted to get back to being closer to nature and to see where that led me. So I lived there for two years: I cut the grass; I did mad things like putting my clothes in the woods so the foxes got used to them and I could feed them dog biscuits. It was brilliant. I connected with my childhood again – a childhood I spent climbing trees, making forts, building tree houses, snaring rabbits. What I was also doing was starting to build a picture of where I wanted to take it, inspired by nature."

The people who inhabit Lower Mill are intelligent movers and shakers – influential big-earners; (they have to be to buy here). What they learn at weekends is grist to the mill. They'll be seminal in spreading the word.

But Jeremy Paxton knows that's not enough. He's busy writing a green homeowner's guide that will be out later this year. He's campaigning for all house builders to be compelled to introduce 10 new measures into every home that, he says, would reduce carbon footprints by 25 percent. And he's costed these measures out at a bargain £500. Could Jeremy Paxton do for the regressive house-building industry what Jamie Oliver did for school dinners?

"There needs to be legislation to force builders to introduce these measures, which aren't expensive but are effective.

"In addition, for every new house that's

sold, I'd like to see £500 spent on landscaping the garden. It's no good just laying turf. Instead, you can easily create a habitat that supports well over 500 species of wildlife.

"£500 on landscaping; £500 on 'green' measures; recycle, switch off the lights and other appliances, cycle and walk a bit more – plus a couple of Planet Switches – and that will be a good start."

The will is there, he says; people just need to be shown the way.

"As far as the environment is concerned, I think we're on the right road. I'm not panicky about it. It's no good worrying about the big complicated measures – they can be left to others. All I'm saying to people is to do their bit at home.

"It's amazing to think back to the war effort (or so I'm told!); everyone did their bit in conserving everything from power to food. Why? Because the enemy was obvious and tangible. Here the enemy is potentially, over time, bigger than Hitler and so it's worth starting to make a difference in conservation generally.

"All we're asking people to do here is to turn monitors and TVs from standby to off; simply to switch off unused and wasted power – that will be a cracking start." ■

**For more information on the Planet Switch, visit [www.planetswitch.com](http://www.planetswitch.com)**

**You can find out about Jeremy's work at the Lower Mill Estate by calling 01285 869489 or visiting [www.lowermillestate.com](http://www.lowermillestate.com)**

#### Building for our future:

"There are 10 simple measures, costing less than £500 in total, that every builder should be made to install in each new home," says Jeremy Paxton, "proving that environmentally-responsible, sustainable housing does not need to cost the earth."

- Try to use Volatile Organic Compound (VOC)-free materials – in other words, compounds that don't easily, under normal conditions, pollute the atmosphere.
- Install reduced water-flow shower heads to cut down on water waste and water heating energy.
- Landscape properties with native plants, as well as plants that can tolerate drier conditions, reducing the need for watering – just £50 per property.
- Use timber from renewable sources to help prevent the destruction of forests.
- Plant five new trees for every house built, creating a new wooded area that soaks up CO2 emissions – £75.
- Install a rainwater storage butt for watering and car washing – £90.
- Fit compact fluorescent bulbs or LEDs to all light fittings and save energy on lighting – £100.
- Fit solar-powered external lights to communal areas – £90.
- Fit under-sink bins to make recycling easier for homeowners – £60.
- Include a green home-owner guide in a handover pack, helping to prevent energy waste by showing people how to run their homes efficiently – £20.