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Recession Culture Reloaded: from Chicken Chic to the New Survivalists

There is something about going back to basics that the British middle class seem to enjoy and be good at – championing wood-burning stoves, hen coops, frugal recipes with root vegetables, and cutting back on labels and luxuries. It is like a collective home-coming, providing a real proper economical reason to be ecological, ethical and Spartan without all the intellectualising and endless debating about global warming.

In fact the speed and enthusiasm with which the British have embraced and are adapting to the new economic circumstances suggests they are well practiced in the art of recession culture.

One of the heroes of the recession is the humble turnip – with one major supermarket recently reporting a sales increase of 75% in 12 months. Recipes for using this hitherto shunned and unpopular vegetable are appearing in abundance in quality national newspapers. As supermarket supplier farmer Richard Parry says: "People are turning away from prepared meals and are instead buying raw produce to save money. One root vegetable can provide quite a lot of food on a plate compared to buying a pre-prepared meal. Turnips are great at bulking out recipes such as stew and casserole. They can also be sliced up raw and mixed into salads, or fried in oil." Meanwhile some greengrocers are reporting that they are struggling to meet the demand for this vegetable.

Another recession-led come-back are the so-called Survivalists who have taken something of a backseat since the 1970s, but are now popping out of the woodwork, happily prepared for the worst. As one woman told the Guardian, "with the help of self-sufficiency manuals my husband has evolved (or regressed) into a creature from the past: he's got an allotment, has turned our garden into an orchard grown from pips (farewell ornamental rose) and recently started knitting. He even has plans for a composting loo..."

It is perhaps not surprising either that the hearth or the fireplace is back in demand for both symbolic and financial reasons. Sales of wood-burning and multi-fuel stoves – the classic "heart of the home" are up 40% on last year as people come to terms with the rising costs of electricity, oil and gas. As one expert said, "if you have wood stacked in your

backyard it's like your piggy bank". Or as another put it, "the hearth is now the focus of my house, and the television comes a poor second."

This drive to go back to basics has led to an unprecedented increase in demand for hen coops, particularly The Eglu (www.omlet.co.uk). This "designer" coop is made out of coloured plastic and comes ready with a pair of hybrid hens, a supply of organic feed, and egg boxes. Rather cynically called "chicken chic", over 25,000 have been sold since 2004 and it is estimated that around 500,000 households now keep chickens in the UK.

If the thought of all this is too earthy and depressing, you can always reach for so-called "credit crunch chic" such as a timeless and classic LBD (little black dress) offered at the high-street chain ASDA for a recession-friendly 18€. As Faith Popcorn recently said, "we're shifting from bling and flash to no-logo apparel and accessories... People will have to prioritize their spending, choosing the heating oil bill over the "it" bag, filling the gas tank over filling their closets." So join the growing queue for designer cupcakes at the Hummingbird bakery for what Popcorn calls the "Small Indulgences" to smooth over those recession blues. (www.hummingbirdbakery.com).

Links:

www.omlet.co.uk

www.hummingbirdbakery.com