



Girls Gone Mud!

It's the reverse fairytale - an increasing number of the fashion set are upping sticks to the countryside in search of the good life. **PENNY McCORMICK** ponders whether to join them

Always pack a party dress is both motto and memoir of former fashion director of Barneys' Amanda Brooks. In 2012, however, the one-time Gagosian gallerina decided to go on a "creative sabbatical" renting out her New York apartment and retreating to the Cotswolds with her husband, the artist Christopher "Looks" Brooks. Her destination was the Brooks' family farm complete with ticking striped sofa, toile de Jouy soft furnishings and an idyllic garden designed by Miranda Brooks - Christopher's first wife and landscape architect for André Balazs, Ron Perelman and Anna Wintour. The initial idea was to stay a year but Brooks has never left, documenting her bucolic bliss on Instagram, writing a further book *Farm From Home* and declaring enthusiastically, "I am happier on a much deeper and more mature level than I was in New York. My life here is inevitably and intrinsically dictated by what is going on outside: Is it too muddy to ride? Is it so cold that I have to start my workday by making a fire in my office's wood-burning stove? Is the unexpected sunshine summoning me to do some weeding in the garden? Do I need to defrost food for dinner, or is there something fresh I can use from the garden?"

Brooks is not alone in these new deliberations. Catching up with Jasmine Guinness, in Dublin for the launch of TK Maxx's initiative with Enable Ireland, the former model explained with evident delight: "I've moved lock, stock and barrel to North Wales. I grew up on a farm outside Dublin and it was the memory of the freedom and fresh air which inspired the move. I wanted my children to experience the same sense of freedom - to be able to engage

their imagination and decrease the amount of screen time. I hope to get some chickens and a polytunnel soon. I want to be as self-sufficient as possible."

Indeed it is this quest for self-sufficiency which has seen the demand for smallholdings increase in estate agents around the country. However, Guinness is transparent, as is Brooks, about the need to be creative with flexible incomes to fund pastoral pleasures, disproving the adage where there's mud there's brass.

"I shut down my toy shop Honey Jam [in London] and now run pop-ups from time to time off Portobello Road to encourage new brands to develop. It's a way for them to rent a space and to interact with customers." She is also in the process of renovating a property with a large garden for rental purposes in which she says she can "unleash my inner interior decorator. I want to create a place where people will come back to. The really luxurious investment was installing an Aga, and lots of big comfy sofas. The house can sleep eleven people so it's ideal for two families to share." Clearly she has modelled the staycation abode on family memories. "I remember my best holidays as a child were in a cottage in Caherdaniel on the beach in Kerry - it was so wild and free." That is not to say that Guinness has given up trips to London. "My 13-year-old-son asked me to describe London Fashion Week recently and I told him it was like a school reunion. For me it is a chance to catch up with friends and see some beautifully made clothes. Simone Rocha's SS19 was amazing as was Vivienne Westwood - like theatre - wildly inspiring."

Meanwhile in deepest Norfolk, Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge is acknowledged as queen bee of the so-called "Turnip Toff" set. The clique includes her new stylist and

This Glossy Life



Has opened a lifestyle store in chi-chi Stow-on-the-Wold called Cutter Brooks, which friends such as Marie Chantal of Greece have visited. It's her latest venture since returning from New York to Fairgreen Farm in the Cotswolds.



former *Vogue* Virginia Chadwyck-Healey, Viscountess Glenapp, co-founder of the retail website Lux Fix, and Kitty Galsworthy whose husband founded Sipsmith Gin. All these women show that a rural move doesn't mean giving up on fashion. Amanda Brooks has not yet forsaken her party dresses either.

Alessandro Michele - the master of mad juxtapositions - swapped the catwalk for the cowshed when it came to photographing his current Cruise campaign for Gucci. It's not the first time he has used the backdrop of a pastoral idyll (Chatsworth House no less) to sell his collections. Who wouldn't wear a Gucci Flora scarf when collecting the eggs?

As for farmlit, as a genre it's thriving, reflecting perhaps concerns about the planet and the desire to minimise our carbon footprint. New titles just published chronicling the joys of farm life include Sara Cox's *Till the Cows Come Home*. The former DJ and TV presenter's tales of wagon rides, haymaking and agricultural shows make it clear the sense of freedom and adventure she enjoyed were training ground for her later ladette lifestyle. Then there's *A Farmer's Diary: A Year At High House Farm* by Sally Urwin - a contrast to Urwin's former job as marketing manager for a bankruptcy practitioner. Having met her husband, farmer Steve on a dating website, Urwin's book documents life at High House Farm in Northumberland which she shares with sheepdog Mavis and a very fat pony. Urwin describes stock sales and existing on "a diet of sausage rolls, chocolate hobnobs and plenty of coffee" during lambing season.

Heida: A Shepherd at the End of the World by Heida Ásgeirsdóttir completes this trifecta of new farmlit. The former Icelandic model gave up a career in modelling to return to her family farm after her father's death and since the age of 23 has managed it alone, scanning and

shearing all sheep herself. Designer samples have been replaced with Icelandic wool vests and shirts knitted by her mother. Speaking to Heida, now aged 40, just before the lambing season began (she has 430 ewes), I found her a mix of brutal honesty and pragmatic optimism; "I suffered from depression in my 20s [Heida's sister died] but I am lucky I got over it. Yes, I do get lonely and miss having a glass of wine with friends but sometimes it's my own fault - I could go but I have to force myself. Now I'm trying to remember to take breaks - I realise how important it is to get away from the farm. I'm just back from New York and last year I took a trip to Peru." She writes poems which often percolate while she is out working and is formulating plans to welcome guests for overnight experiences on her farm - a tourism trend which is on the rise.

Luxe farm experiences are nothing new in Ireland; Ballyvolane House, Longueville and Temple House are some of the most lush. Larchfield Estate, in Co Down, is one of the more recent and has had farming at its centre for centuries - the Georgian farm buildings are now converted to host weddings and events for up to 250 people in what was the tractor shed. Its *châtelaine*, Sarah Mackie, loves the repurposing of the yard; "The dancefloor used to be the pig sties! And overnight accommodation is where the haywagon would have been kept and the stable hands would have lived." Mackie's experience of farming was as a total immersion. "When I moved back to Larchfield from Edinburgh I really was thrown straight into the thick of it. I remember being called to see if I could help an alpaca give birth: as a girl I had the smallest hands on the estate and the cria needed turning inside - much harder work than one would think! I also adopted a miniature donkey foal who was having trouble feeding and the mother was therefore rejecting it, I would mix milk and

All these women show that a **RURAL MOVE** doesn't mean giving up on fashion.

ISABELLA ROSSELLINI
Lives on Bellport Farm, Long Island with 120 heritage-breed chickens who inspired her to write her book *My Chickens and I*.

Is the so-called queen of Turnip Toffs; not quite the same as Queen of Hearts.



CAROLYN MURPHY
The supermodel was brought up on a farm in Virginia, and is regularly photographed enjoying country life. "There's nothing more delicious than foraging for fresh produce at Quail Hill Farm. My go-to weekend uniform is a Canadian tuxedo and Birkenstocks ... normcore gone green."



ELIZABETH HURLEY
Owned Ampney Knowle, a 450-acre farmhouse in the Cotswolds, with her former husband Arun Nayar, which came with a party barn. She made a £3m profit when she sold it and now lives in Georgian Doddington Hall in Hertfordshire.

THIS GLOSSY LIFE



feed it every few hours including throughout the night – great practice for when the children came along. Sadly it transpired the foal had a tongue defect and was never going to be able to feed itself – the mother must have known this – and hence her reaction, but it didn't stop me from trying!" Mackie was undeterred and revels in the rural lifestyle.

Ailbhe Gerrard also enthuses about her change of direction from construction project management to farming as "a bit of a blast. There is quite a lot of mud but lots of fresh air." She took over a farm beside her family home in Co Tipperary in late 2010 and since then has immersed herself in studying and adopting organic and sustainable farming methods – firstly at University College London and then Scottish Agricultural College. Highlights at this time of the year include being out as the buds burst, keeping an eye out for starling murmurations and swallows and noticing the difference in the days since the spring equinox. She quotes the old adage "If the oak is out before the ash, we shall surely have a splash; If the ash is out before the oak, we shall surely have a soak." (Gerrard predicts a dry summer, based on the oak leafing first this year). In addition to planting and managing broadleaf woods and sowing ten acres of wildflower meadows which come into full bloom in August, Gerrard also looks after her hiveshares – a thriving artisan honey business for which she has won several awards. "It's my favourite thing, connecting me as a farmer to people in the city. People love it as an experience and I keep those who have hives in touch with their bees via newsletters and photographs from the farm." In addition she also lectures part-time in Gurteen Agricultural College and envisions how much better agricultural education could become. "There needs to be room for the magic and the wonder. I love to see students realising their potential."

Gerrard has clearly found her niche, though admits a social life needs to be planned, as does shopping. That said, she goes to yoga twice a week and enjoys a sense of satisfaction and happiness. Not least in being self employed, with a sense of purpose and solvent. "Farming creates a lot of outings but I've been lucky to develop other farm diversification incomes." Gerrard runs frequent workshops and festivals in between producing Brookfield Farm honey and exquisite beeswax candles. She leaves plenty of time for the magic however – lambing season, forest bathing and the views she enjoys of Lough Derg ... ■

Get the look



1. *Farm From Home*, Amanda Brooks, Penguin, €38.60.
2. Pink sequined mini dress, €39.95 at Zara.
3. Red Lily herringbone linen and cashmere jacket, €329 at Magee 1866.
4. *Heida: A Shepherd At The Edge Of The World*, Heida Ásgeirsdóttir, John Murray, €15.50.
5. Leather knee boots, €375; www.dubarry.ie.
6. Stripe cotton T-shirt, €69; www.armorlux.com.
7. Red bandana, €69; www.ralphlauren.com.
8. Pink cashmere sweater, €440, Alberta Ferretti; www.farfetch.com.



PLUM SYKES

Author and *Vogue* contributing editor, swapped her Upper East Side New York lifestyle for a picture perfect cottage in Gloucestershire.



Author of *The Farmette Cookbook: Recipes and Adventures from My Life*, is one half of Lens & Larder.



TATA HARPER

Skincare guru Tata Harper pictured at her 1,200 acre organic farm in the Champlain Valley of Vermont.



RALPH LAUREN SS19



TATJANA PATITZ

The supermodel lives on a ranch in Malibu. The self-described nature lover posts mostly animal pictures on her Instagram account and spends five mornings a week riding one of her four horses, which she keeps in a barn north of Santa Barbara.



AILBHE GERRARD

Owner of Brookfield Farm, Co Tipperary.

JOHN GALLIANO SS19



Hand poured beeswax candle, €46; www.brookfield.farm.



Photographed by Glen Luchford, Gucci SS17, at Chatsworth House.