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- Mortgages
- Homes abroad
- Telegraph mortgage services
- Find a tradesperson
- Property search

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- Arts
- Blogs
- Comment
- Crossword
- Dating
- Digital Life
- Earth
- Education
- Expat
- Family
- Fantasy Games
- Fashion
- Features
- Food & Drink
- Football
- Gardening
- Health
- Horoscopes
- My Telegraph
- Obituaries
- Promotions
- Property
- Science
- Sudoku
- Telegraph offers
- Weather
- Your Money
- Your view

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## Rural living 2008: Hi tech, low stress

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**Once, state-of-the-art meant a city apartment - but now country life can be cutting edge, says Hazel Davis**

Catherine Skelcher and her partner, Sam Brougham, recently left their home in bustling Brixton, south London, and moved more than 200 miles north to the West Yorkshire town of Hebden Bridge. But rather than take advantage of the town's amenities, they opted for a more rural location on the edge of a moor.

Catherine and Sam's newbuild weaver's shed-style house is in the grounds of a Grade II-listed 19th-century textile mill development, Pecket Well Mill.

"I love London and I go back there frequently, but there's a feeling of being on a treadmill," says Catherine, an architect. "When you leave for a break you can almost feel your shoulders go down."

But Catherine and Sam have by no means left behind the life they were accustomed to in the city. Their tailor-built high-spec house features a solar-panel hot-water system and rainwater harvesting, top-of-the-range kitchen and bathroom appliances and solid-oak floors.

"We're not really doing the rural idyll thing and renovating a dilapidated cottage," says Catherine, who moved to launch the northern arm of her London company, Cottrell and Vermeulen Architecture.



Cat's whiskers: Catherine and Sam at Pecket Well Mill

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"We thought, if we're going to make the effort and spend the money, we are going to do it properly. When we saw this development we really liked the design and the location."

The fact that the couple's house is new, says Catherine, means that they don't have to worry about other relocation issues. "We are trying to set up a practice here and it's hard building and living in the same place."

People are moving back to rural areas because they can, says developer Gary Barber of Barber Living, in Northumberland, whose development at Wandylaw Farm - a conversion of five traditional Northumbrian barns - is 30 minutes from Newcastle and 10 from the market town of Alnwick.

"There was a time when you left the comfort of your local town or city and ventured into the nearby countryside and you were unable to connect to the internet and, even if you could, broadband was on a waiting list," he says.

"Now I can sit in my bedroom, look out across the fields to Bamburgh Castle and the Farne Islands, see the wet-suited surfers jog to the North Sea in storm-force winds while the new insulation, double glazing and underfloor heating keep me protected from the hostile winter elements.

"With these mod cons, why would anyone choose suburbia or an inner city over a glorious rural setting?" Each dwelling at Wandylaw has underfloor heating, a ground-source heat pump, solar and photovoltaic electricity and extensive insulation.

All also have a computer network cable, and each room is wired for TV, radio and surround sound. Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are also part of the basic package.

Homes bought early also have the option of remote lighting and curtain rails, disappearing TV projectors, "and even remotes which fill your bath ready for your return home", says Barber, who is about to launch 19 houses in Rock, near Alnwick, and another development nearby.

"Buyers now have more choice," he adds. "Quality is not the preserve of the penthouse apartment." That philosophy can also be seen at The Shires in Astwood Bank, Redditch - 20

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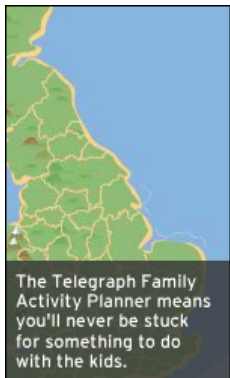
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miles from Birmingham but in the rolling Worcestershire countryside.

This gated community consists of seven individually designed detached houses by Kettering developer Shire Developments.

The houses all feature hi-tech extras which wouldn't be out of place in a city-centre bachelor pad: lounges with "media-panels" and spotlighting, state-of-the-art kitchens and Villeroy & Boch bathrooms. This is country living without a whiff of cow dung.

"Dividing time between work and home is increasingly difficult for modern professionals," says Lucy Gibbons, sales manager for agent Knight Frank. "People are increasingly aware of getting the work/home balance right.

After a hard day, there is nothing more satisfying than returning to your own piece of countryside - without the hassle of maintaining the country-style homes of the past."

- **Contact** Pecket Well Mill 01422 845 615 [www.pecketwellmill.co.uk](http://www.pecketwellmill.co.uk); Wandylaw Farm 01665 606898 [www.georgefwhite.co.uk](http://www.georgefwhite.co.uk); The Shires 0121 200 2220 [www.knightfrank.com](http://www.knightfrank.com)

**Try these...hi-tech rural retreats**

**Pecket Well Mill, Hebden Bridge**



**Prices:** From £267,000 for weaving shed houses.

**Developer:** Mango Homes

**Wandylaw Farm, Northumberland**



**Prices:** From £160,000

**Developer:** Barber Living

**The Shires, Redditch**



**Prices:** From £835,000  
**Developer:** Shire Developments

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