

# GoShopping

This week, we stop off at shoe store Schuh, in Swansea's Quadrant shopping centre.



## Cool, smart and pricey footwear

**First impressions** SMART, clean and contemporary. Prominently located between Boots and Dorothy Perkins, Schuh's windows were plastered with big "70 per cent off" and "No VAT price rises" signs when I dropped by on a Monday afternoon. The shop is quite large and open plan, with floor to ceiling length windows featuring men's and women's shoes on either side of the entrance. This is useful because you can see from the off that the footwear on offer is generally aimed at the younger market.

**Was I being served?** Yes. Within a minute a friendly sales assistant asked me whether I needed any help. I declined and chose to browse, but I started to get a little irked when the third member of staff asked me the same thing, with one evidently forgetting he'd already asked me and pestering me a second time. Of course, I'd be just as annoyed if there was no-one around to help, it's all about getting the balance right.

**Did we buy?** The displays were neatly divided into winter-friendly boots, dressy heels and trendy trainers. Schuh stocks a wide range of ladies brands including Red or Dead, Doctor Martens, Hush Puppies, Irregular Choice, Converse and Ugg, as well as their own brand shoes. The sale rack was placed near the entrance but there wasn't a huge choice on offer: understandable given the time of year. I was drawn to the selection of Schuh killer heels, specifically a pair of gorgeous black patent platform court shoes which cost £49.99 but ended up buying a pair of decidedly less exciting, but

vastly more practical black leather flats reduced from £49.99 to £20. Well, at least I've less chance of getting bunions! Silver lining and all that.

**Shopping experience?** The shop is spacious and welcoming, unlike a few of the budget shoes stores I've visited, where you find yourself squeezing past people in the aisles. The staff were friendly, if slightly overbearing in their approach, but at least I knew help was on hand if I needed it. I wasn't too sure about the corny sayings emblazoned on the walls, such as "Just keep driving, keep breathing and don't look back" but the store was generally smart, with plenty of mirrors, and easy to navigate. It is the kind of shop I would have loved as a teenager but suspect most people above the age of 25 have grown out of the Converse and D&G trainers popular with surfers and skateboarders. A range called Irregular Choice offered a refreshingly creative take, with some outrageously quirky designs featuring all sorts of embellishments from fur and dots to metal spurs and teddy bears. The average price of a pair of shoes was around the £60 mark, so I've no idea how youngsters can afford to shop here. The men's shoes seemed more grown-up, however, with classic designs from Doctor Marten, Adidas and Timberland. I'm considering going back to Schuh for those killer heels but will probably hang on until the next sale. Schuh isn't going to be everyone's cup of tea. But it's worth a visit if you're after something fresh, on-trend and vibrant.

# Pie lady fulfilling her dream with own cooking

**YOU would have to be mad to set up a business in the middle of the deepest recession for more than 50 years. Either that, or you're exceptionally talented, driven and ambitious.**

Claire Phillips probably has a little bit of all three about her! She gave up a 22-year career in nursing in Neath Port Talbot to launch her own catering business last year. But already she is steaming ahead.

Now mum-of-two Claire will be one of the exhibitors at this year's Get Welsh! event in Swansea's Castle Square on February 27.

It is the fourth year the show has been held, helping boost the number of people in the city by as much as 50 per cent on the day.

Claire, of Clos Gors Fawr in Grovesend, runs Little Welsh Deli from her home and supplies various outlets throughout the Swansea area including The Junction at Blackpill, the Gower Wildflower Centre in Blackhills and Swansea Market.

She says: "I am a cook rather than a chef but I do know what people enjoy eating. I have been at the stove for years preparing dinner parties and food for the family. People have always seemed to enjoy it so eventually I took that step of giving up my job and going it alone."

Entrepreneur Claire makes pasties and pies, novelty cakes and traditional ready meals such as chicken and coriander curry, chicken stroganoff and faggots.

She adds: "You do not have to invest a lot of money, but if you have an idea and product then it is an ideal opportunity to do some market research and see if your idea works."

She says the Get Welsh event will be the perfect opportunity not only to strengthen her client base but, more importantly, give her the chance to meet customers and get their views. "Farmers' markets are great for that — allowing people to actually speak to the cooks who are preparing food for their plates. It is very much a two-way thing which is great."

"The Castle Square event will showcase the best of what is available on our own doorsteps. I am really looking forward to it."

"I do miss the banter of working in a busy hospital with lots of people around me. But with the help of my family things are now going really well and I am looking forward to what lies ahead."

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GET ready for some foodie heaven! Swansea's gastronomic delights are about to go under the spotlight as PETER SLEE and EMMA JONES have been finding out.



**TASTY TREAT** Claire Phillips has a cake and pie stall at Get Welsh.

## Tea company's created a stir

**THE British response to a stressful situation is to reach for the kettle and get the tea bags out.**

And a nice cup of tea is proving more popular than ever now that we can't afford vintage champagne, or those £3 lattes at Starbucks.

The brains behind city-based Welsh Brew Tea, Alan Wenden, is looking forward to serving up some comforting hot brews at the Get Welsh! event next month.

Tucked away in the lanes of Llandlog, the company was launched in Llandoverly 13 years ago and produces a mix of Kenyan and Indian Assam designed to complement the soft water of Wales.

It supplies quality tea to retail and hospitality sectors, including major supermarket chains across the UK, and has expanded into the US out of a distribution centre in Ammanford.

And despite the recession, or perhaps because of it, the business has seen a whopping 28 per cent growth over the past year, which Alan puts down to increased distribution and media activity.

Just like chocolate and sausage rolls, tea



**TEA TIME** Alan Wenden, owner of Welsh Brew Tea.

is one of those comforting indulgences which can comfortably take the place of more expensive pleasures. If you're watching the pennies, tea is probably one of the most economical drinks around.

"The past year has been hard but we're very pleased with our performance and are preparing for a tough year ahead," said Alan. "Restaurants are in the grip of the recession and it's a very difficult climate but supermarket chains such as Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Co-op all strongly support Welsh brands."

The tea is marketed as a cup of Welsh hwy!, or good spirit, and comes in fully bilingual packaging. Alan has taken part in Get Welsh! since the event was launched four years ago and says it's an excellent way to get the company noticed.

"It's very well supported and well organised and we get a lot out of the exposure," he said.

"We get a very positive reaction and I think it's fair to say the people of Swansea like their Welsh brands. There is nothing quite like the welcome afforded by a hot cup of quality tea and such a welcome has long been the tradition of hospitality in Welsh households."

"I don't think we celebrate Welsh culture enough so it's nice to see that Swansea is bucking the trend."



## Tasting Welsh delights

WHO needs fancy food when you can have the delights of cockles, hog roast, fantastic cheeses and great wine?

When it comes to food and drink, there really is a lot more to Wales than you might think.

Tender meat, freshly-caught fish, farmhouse cheeses and award-winning beers and wines are everywhere you look, from roadside shops and farmers' markets to cosy pubs and top restaurants.

Next month's Get Welsh event in Castle Square will showcase some of the best

producers. Already included in an impressive line-up are: Carol Watts, Cockles; C & R James, Welsh cakes; Gower Hog Roast; Greta's Vegetable Burgers; Little Welsh Del; Cwm Deri Vineyard; Celtic Country Wines; Welsh Brew Tea; Gower Butchers; Caws Canarth Welsh Cheese; Swistuns; Tomos Watkin.

There are more still to be added to the list, which co-organiser and sponsor Swansea Business Improvement District says will help significantly up football figures in the city centre, with plenty on offer to suit all tastes. "Shoppers will find some of the finest products in Wales on display," adds a spokesman.

"The event is being supported by the Assembly Government and has been designed as a fantastic platform for showcasing local produce."

Entertainment includes shows by the Morriston Phoenix Choir; demonstrations by chef Colin Preece; Mark Jermin's Dance School; a fashion show; Uncle Sam and singer Robyn Lee.

Shopper Alison Harper, from Grovesend in Swansea, who visited the 2009 event, said: "Not everybody realises what is available. I visited with a couple of friends who were down from London for the weekend and they left impressed!"



**HOT STUFF** Gower Butchers proprietor Howard Penry (left) and manager Alan Hopkins.

## Get teeth into hot sausages

THEY sell around 65 different kinds of sausage, and the most popular is traditional pork.

But Alan Hopkins and Howard Penry, of The Gower Butcher on Swansea's Portland Street are looking to spice things up at the Get Welsh event next month.

Alongside the usual locally sourced beef, pork and lamb, you'll find what could be the hottest sausage in the world. The fiery bangers contain an infamous chilli from the Assam region of northeastern India called the Naga Jolkin, which is commonly recognised as the hottest in the world, rated 260 times hotter than Tabasco sauce.

"They are so spicy we're planning on drawing up a disclaimer for customers who want to buy them," said 41-year-old Howard. "I haven't tried them yet — I hate hot stuff — but the event is great when you've got a specific product to sell."

The company has exhibited at the event for the past three years and find it very useful for connecting with potential customers.

"Get Welsh is fabulous, we get a lot of publicity out of it and a lot of feedback on our products," added Howard. "It's nice to meet a wide range of customers, especially people who might not come into the shop. We tend to meet people who happen to be shopping for clothes who come along and discover there's a lot more in Swansea than clothes shopping."

"They realise it's worth that bit of extra effort to support local businesses because you get a quality product without paying any extra. People often assume we're more expensive than supermarkets but generally, we're not, it's the convenience factor. People are used to going to a supermarkets and filling up their trolley."

The Gower Butcher — which supplies The Welcome to Town restaurant in Llanhidian and Swansea's Dragon Hotel — will have food for visitors to sample on the day.

And Howard, who has been a butcher since he left school at the age of 16, says the event is something we can all take pride in.

"I don't think we celebrate Welsh food and culture enough," he said.

"We are very lucky in this area to have tremendous produce on our doorstep such as salt marsh lamb, vegetables, honey, jam.

"It's a great opportunity for people to come and see what's on offer."

## A few of our favourite things



**ORNAMENTAL** Add a dash of colour: £22 at Next in Parc Trostre and Parc Morfa.



**WELLY TIME** Floral print: £22 at Next in Parc Trostre and Parc Morfa.



**CHANEL-ESQ** This cardigan is £18 at Peacocks in Ammanford and Neath.



**LISTEN IN** Try TK Maxx for these baby video monitors: £29.99 to £99.99.



**HOT KISSES** Lulu Guinness lips toaster, £34.99, Comet, Swansea.



**PULL ON YOUR BOOTS** £25 at Next in Parc Trostre and Parc Morfa.



**BLACK AND WHITE** Get the mono look with this single duvet set, £18, Matalan, Swansea.



**TRY IT** At a bargain £3, this Skinovation eye contour cream has to be worth giving a go. Asda.



**READY FOR SPRING** Find this lacy top for £40 at Dorothy Perkins in Swansea.