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**HELEN
HEADS HOME**
HELEN McCRORY
IS BACK ON STAGE
IN LONDON

INTERIORS

ON TRIAL



NEED TO KNOW THE HOTEL

Retro 1960s in design externally, Bedruthan Steps Hotel and Spa has been refurbished and completely modified inside, with the emphasis on sustainability and green living. The family friendly destination was voted Cornwall's Hotel of the Year 2010/11, and boasts two exciting new restaurants and a full-service spa.

GETTING THERE

First Great Western fares from London Paddington to Newquay start from £19.50 each way. For further details, see firstgreatwestern.co.uk or call 08457 000 125.

Machine Embroidered Art with Lou Gardiner

AT BEDRUTHAN STEPS HOTEL AND SPA

LOU GARDINER IS on a one-woman mission to sex up the image of machine embroidery. Since graduating from Goldsmith's College with a Textiles BA she has helped push the boundaries of this niche art form, creating one off pieces using a combination of rhythmic drawing, intense free machine stitches, paints, appliqué and inks.

I've been intrigued by Lou's work since hearing Kirstie Allsop describe the highly addictive art form as, 'the crack cocaine of craft', after spending time with Lou during the making of her *Homemade Home* television series. So it was with great excitement (and a little apprehension – would I make the grade creatively?) that I packed my bags and headed to one of her embroidery weekends at the beautiful Bedruthan Steps Hotel in Mawgan Porth, Cornwall.

After a delicious seafood dinner in the hotel's new Herring restaurant with some of the other students, a good sleep in my sea-view room, a swim in the luxurious spa and a bracing walk down to the beach, I arrived in the studio feeling inspired, if still a little worried about my drawing capabilities, or lack thereof. Lou soon dispelled these fears with a glass of sherry (because "it's never too early for Granny's favourite"), some motivational music and a session of extravagant mark making – think scribbling on paper and you won't go far wrong. Next we donned fancy dress and began drawing one

another blind (read: without looking at what we were doing, or taking the pen off the paper) – cue zero performance anxiety and some decidedly 'unique' interpretations. These drawings were to form the basis of our creations.

Lou walked us through the secrets of her art, insisting that when it comes to machine embroidery, there are no rules. Before long even those who had never touched a sewing machine were stitching away manically. The weekend passed in a flash: the days were punctuated by cookie breaks, delicious lunch spreads and a big group dinner on the Saturday evening (the chefs at Bedruthan Steps definitely know how to keep the creative juices flowing), but we were all reluctant to stay away from our craft for long. In no time at all I found myself heading for my train back to London, proudly clutching my piece, and dreaming up ways to perfect it when I got home. I fear I may have found myself a new hobby... **LN**

The next Lou Gardiner course will run at Bedruthan Steps from 6-8 July. Priced from £324 per person for a two-night break including lunch on both days and a three-course meal on both evenings. Mawgan Porth, Cornwall, TR8 4BU (01637 860 860; www.bedruthan.com)

Lou works mainly to commission, creating bespoke and embroidered pieces ranging from £1,000 to £5,000 in price. A selection of limited edition prints is also available. For information, see www.lougardiner.co.uk

