



WHERE POWER MEETS PROGRESS
Rebecca Irby shares a woman's view from inside the United Nations

WOMEN IN THE KITCHEN
River Cottage head chef Emese Patko on her journey through food in a male-dominated sector



REDEFINING CONSERVATION

Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka's conservation philosophy sits at the intersection of public health and wildlife protection

PORTUGAL CALLING

We meet some of the women who have been drawn to a life of community in Central Portugal

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



The UK's no. 1 sustainability and climate awards



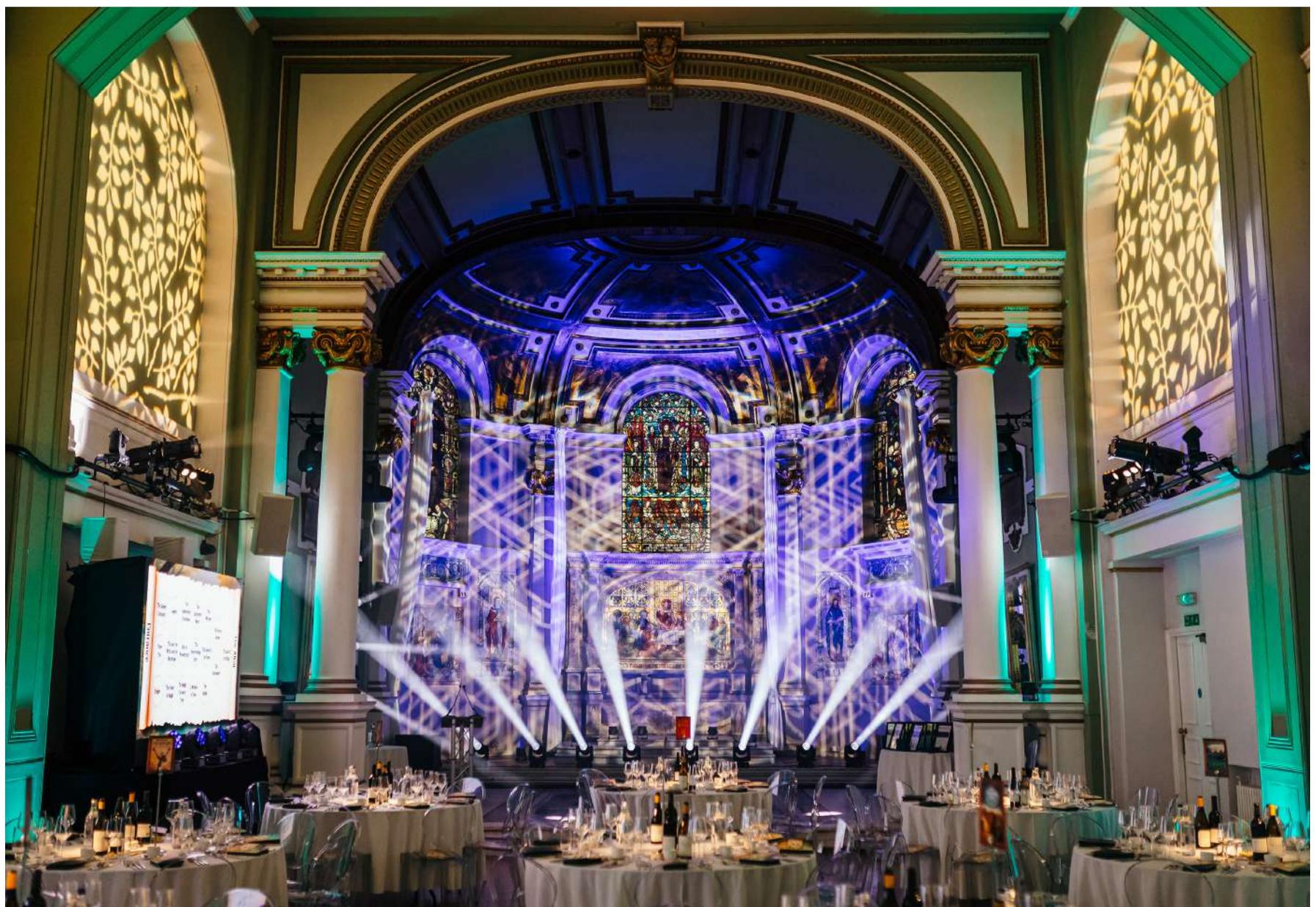
Closing date for entries: 31 March 2026

AWARD CATEGORIES:

- Best of the Year
- Climate Power
- Community
- Culture
- Energy
- Evolution of Sustainability
- Health & Wellbeing
- Indigenous Communities
- Innovator
- Lifetime Achievement
- Nature
- Shopping
- Technology
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Welcome to My Green Pod Magazine!



Katie Hill, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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International Women’s Day (08 March) has been around for over 100 years – just like many of the issues it seeks to address. At the current pace of change, a girl born today will be nearly 40 before women hold as many seats as men in parliament.

This fact really hit me last summer, as I stood in the House of Commons – surrounded by a group of incredible women dressed in bright and beautiful clothes – for the relaunch of What Women Want. At the event, Sarah Dyke MP revealed that she is one of only 694 women ever to have been elected to the House of Commons. That number went up at the end of February when Hannah Spencer, who admitted she ‘didn’t grow up wanting to be a politician’, won the Gorton and Denton by-election for the Green Party.

Women and girls should have equal chances and opportunities to fulfil any ambitions to enter politics, but Lynne Franks, the powerhouse behind What Women Want and the SEED (Sustainable Enterprise and Empowerment Dynamics) Hub, recently reminded me that power comes in many guises, and that effective leadership can be more about holding space than controlling it.

By building alternative structures and leading by example in a changing world, we can all become powerful agents of change – in our homes, communities and countries.

This issue features a number of women who are doing just that: leading with love to build a more just and equitable world for everyone – regardless of gender and background. I hope you find some inspiration from the stories they have to tell, and that they help you to embrace this year’s International Women’s Day theme: ‘Give To Gain’. This mindset of generosity and collaboration emphasises the power of reciprocity and support, which we all need now more than ever.



ABOUT US

My Green Pod is an independent, family-run UK business, founded by Katie Hill and Jarvis Smith. We want to share the real stories behind the brands and people working tirelessly to offer ethical alternatives to mainstream products and services. You might not see these options on the high street and they may not be the first to appear in on-line searches. But they are on mygreenpod.com.

Use the search bar to find conscious lifestyle inspiration – and you could save some cash along the way!

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1/4 of UK women are exposed to around 168 different chemicals through their daily personal care routine

Strong climate action could add up to \$26 trillion to the global economy by 2030



At current progress rates, gender parity won’t arrive until 2158

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EMPOWERING YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS



Becks Wheatley, programme manager for NextGenLeaders, shares how the next generation is changing people and society for the better

At NextGenLeaders we believe in a better, more sustainable world where everyone can thrive – but crucially, we believe this world should be led by young people with the passion, confidence and skills to make it happen.

Since 2017, NextGenLeaders has worked in schools across Yorkshire, the East Midlands and, more recently, in the South of England to enable young people to cultivate projects that address the problems they see in the world around them. These are often the issues that adults might miss; we are not walking in the shoes of younger generations, and the world we grew up in was very different.

STUDENT-LED ACTION

Our mission is to empower socially responsible, purpose-driven young people to tackle the biggest issues of today. The scale of this work is significant. In the 2024–25 academic year alone, 14 schools and 226 changemakers delivered 30 community projects that reached over 32,000 people.

One project – ‘Street Flow’, in Halifax – began as a group of students determined to address period poverty. Over three years, they built a campaign rooted in empathy and sustainability.

The students distributed Period Packs made using materials rescued from landfill and recycled into wash bags. These were filled with reusable sanitary items, and came with pictorial instruction leaflets to ensure anyone, regardless of language or literacy level, could understand how to use them.

The wash bags were distributed to people on the edges of homelessness, including those sofa surfing, using food banks or engaged with the charity Street Angels, helping to relieve the financial pressure of purchasing sanitary products.

The environmental potential was clear. By promoting a switch to reusable products, the changemakers estimated that they would save 86,900kg of CO₂ per person over an individual’s lifetime, reducing the global waste associated with disposable sanitary items.

In Sheffield, ‘Project H’ is tackling food insecurity. Partnering with the MCKS Charitable Foundation and working with school staff to ensure family anonymity, the NextGenLeaders team has delivered over 300 hampers to date. This ensures no student goes hungry or without essential toiletries in their home.

The ‘Sports For All’ team in Bridlington developed a project to focus on inclusion. It worked to organise a sponsored run where the entry fee was a donation of old sportswear. Anything

‘only 9% of participants believed they could create sustainable change. By the end, 94% felt capable.’

in good condition would be gifted to those who felt that a lack of equipment presented a barrier to participation. Items not in good condition were planned for recycling into punchbags.

As one changemaker noted: 'My project has helped me realise that there is always something I can do as an individual to help my community.'

BUILDING SKILLS FOR LIFE

While NextGenLeaders projects often focus on sustainability or social justice, the programme is fundamentally about creating well-rounded future leaders. Staff leads within schools report that their students develop a broad range of essential skills that go far beyond the curriculum, including conflict resolution, strategic thinking, organisation, presentation skills and learning to cooperate with others.

The growth is measurable. In our latest impact report, 90% of staff leads observed an improvement in public speaking among students, while others noted significant gains in leadership and teamwork.

By navigating real-world challenges, such as securing grant funding, pitching to experts and coordinating logistics, students are building a toolkit for life. As Peter Goulding, assistant principal at Abbey Grange Academy, notes: 'The NextGenLeaders programme has developed Sustainable Development Goal awareness[...] and inspired them to take action[...] It has created a real appetite for long-term change and collaboration across year groups.'

INCLUSION & BELONGING

We ensure that privilege never dictates participation; in 2024–25, 69% of our participants met vulnerability criteria.

The programme offers a unique space for students who may struggle in a traditional classroom environment. We work across a range of settings, from traditional schools to alternative provision where students do not attend mainstream lessons, schools for young people with an autism diagnosis and colleges for students who have opted out of school at the age of 14 to attend a more vocational environment.

As one staff lead observed, the school has a 'great opportunity to engage pupils in the programme that may come from disadvantaged backgrounds or have SEN or behavioural issues and create a group they can be themselves in.'

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Through a partnership with York St John University, NextGenLeaders research reveals that before joining, only 9% of participants believed they could create sustainable change. By the end, 94% felt capable.

Teachers report that the programme contributes significantly to schools' 'outstanding personal development frameworks'. This contribution has been formally recognised, with the programme receiving positive mentions in three separate Ofsted reports in the last year.

The benefits of the programme extend far beyond the school gates; in 2024–25, the total audience across media and digital channels topped 1.7 million. As Paul Blakey MBE, founder of Street Angels, summarises: 'The concept of NextGenLeaders and, more importantly, the young people who are part of the programme is simply amazing. The ideas from the young people[...] become realities that are truly changing people and society for the better'.

Find out more

■ NextGenLeaders is a programme from Enactus UK&I; discover more at enactusuki.org



'My project has helped me realise that there is always something I can do as an individual to help my community.'



CLOCKWISE
Becks Wheatley at the Enactus Expo April 2025; NextGenLeaders at the Welcome Event October 2025; Safe Together speaking at the Enactus Expo, April 2025; growing food at Airedale Academy; NextGenLeaders presenting at the NextGenLeaders competition event, May 2025



Between **POWER** and **PROGRESS**

When people hear that I work with the United Nations, they often imagine grand rooms, formal statements and decisive action. Sometimes that's how it is – but more often, the reality is quieter and far more complicated than you might think.

As a woman working in global policy spaces, I live in a constant paradox: what I call the liminal space between power and progress. I am close to decision-making power, and yet I can see and feel how painfully slow progress actually is. I sit in rooms where the future of our world is discussed, yet I know that the voices most impacted are often missing from those decisions.

International Women's Day is, for me, not so much a celebration as a moment of accountability. A reminder to always ask: who is being heard? Who is being protected? Who has been left out? Who is being harmed? Who have we not yet considered?

HOLDING SPACE

My role at the United Nations has been to create and hold space, and to witness and report what I see happening on the ground. I see both the promise and the limits of international cooperation and multilateralism; I see what becomes possible when we choose dialogue over dominance.

I also see how easily fear, and especially ego, stops progress and takes precedence over universal values. When profit is placed above people, we always lose. Yet too often, that equation remains weighted towards profit.

As a woman in these spaces, much of the work I do is invisible. It is the holding of space, relationship-building, diplomacy, deep listening and the translation of complexity across cultures. These skills are rarely celebrated, yet they are often the only ones that move negotiations forward. Women at the UN are doing this work every day, not just in March, and they deserve recognition all year round.

A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

I also want to address a common misunderstanding about how the United Nations functions. It is a membership organisation that has been systematically defunded over the past two decades. People are not entirely wrong when they say the UN is not functioning, but it's not for the reasons they think.

By withholding dues, some countries have placed intentional strain on the organisation – a strain then used to argue that the institution itself is unnecessary. What we are witnessing is not a failure but a conscious dismantling.

Rebecca Irby shares a woman's view from inside the United Nations



Rebecca with the official UN delegation to the 2019 Pyeongchang Global Peace Forum

Alongside my work at the United Nations, I lead the PEAC Institute, an organisation rooted in peace, education, art and culture. PEAC exists because policy alone cannot transform the world; change requires imagination, dignity and connection.

Our work centres young people who, historically, have been excluded from global decision-making. We create pathways for them to engage as contributors rather than as spectators, bridging policy rooms and lived experience.

I believe art is our most universal language. I have seen it cut through even the most difficult conversations by inviting people to lead from their hearts rather than their heads. PEAC is about ensuring power is accountable, relational and grounded in everyday realities.

A NEW LEADERSHIP

This work can be exhausting, and I am often asked why I stay. Why remain in systems that can feel incremental at best, mired in bureaucracy and, at times, deeply compromised? When confronted with these questions, I understand my presence as a responsibility, not an ambition.

I stay because I believe care is a form of leadership. I believe imagination is a political act. I believe building trust across difference is one of the most radical things we can do in a fractured world. Persistence does not always look like force; sometimes it looks like staying present.

Sometimes it looks like refusing to harden.

Sometimes it looks like choosing collaboration when competition would be easier. I choose to centre joy and love when the world would have us choose fear and hate.

As a woman, I have learned this not in theory but in practice. Leadership is not about control, it is about stewardship. It is about tending relationships, holding complexity and staying accountable to the people most impacted by our decisions. This is not a softer form of leadership, it is a more durable one – and it is exactly what our global systems require right now.

WORKING FOR EVERYONE

In this chapter of my work, my hope is not abstract. It is practised daily, in rooms where power is negotiated and in communities where its consequences are felt.

I want young people to see themselves reflected in international spaces. I want dignity to be foundational, not optional. I want us to remember that systems are made by people, and that means that these very systems can also be remade by people. This matters because no one is coming to save us; we are the ones we have been waiting for – not through the power of domination, but through the power of 'we' – through collective courage, shared imagination and the refusal to accept a world that only works for some.

International Women's Day is a moment to remember that transformation has always come from those who are willing to stay, to imagine and to act together. I am committed to ensuring the world works for 100% of us, because anything less is not enough.

Find out more

■ Rebecca Irby is a transformational change expert who is helping people and institutions to move from talk to practice. Discover more at rebeccairby.org

P.E.A. AWARDS 2026

Setting the stage for a night of hope, action & laughter at this year's leading sustainability awards

Climate comedian Stuart Goldsmith has been confirmed as the host of this year's P.E.A. (People. Environment. Achievement.) Awards, in association with OMMM.

Stuart has performed stand-up comedy all over the world, including on *Live at the Apollo* and Russell Howard's *Stand Up Central*. His comedy is about the climate crisis that is unfolding around us, and it takes audiences on an energising journey from inertia and dread to action.



Comedian Stuart Goldsmith will host 2026's P.E.A. Awards; the venue, One Marylebone

Stuart's recent climate show, *Spoilers*, won Best Show 2023 at Leicester Comedy Festival and was one of the best-reviewed shows at the Edinburgh Fringe. 'We're delighted Stuart will be hosting this year's P.E.A.s', said P.E.A. Awards founder Jarvis Smith. 'If we're going to go, let's at least go smiling.'

CLIMATE ACTION IN LONDON

The P.E.A. Awards, from the UK's leading sustainability and ethical awards body, will take place at London's prestigious One Marylebone on 22 June as part of London Climate Action Week (LCAW), the largest city-wide climate festival in Europe.

The P.E.A. Awards, now in their 16th year, play a key part in inspiring global and local action for the planet. They recognise and celebrate individuals championing sustainability across 15 categories, from Youth and Indigenous Communities to Technology, Travel and Nature. A Lifetime Achievement Award will be presented to an individual whose passion for change has led to exemplary long-term success in the field of sustainability, and a Best of the Year Award will go to the judges' top-scoring entrant or nomination. The winners will be announced over an evening of award-winning plant-based food and drinks.

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2026

At a time of intersecting crises and a media narrative driven by doom, the P.E.A.s will lighten the tone with an evening of comedy and celebration. The ceremony has been curated in association with OMMM, an organisation that exists solely to raise consciousness and awareness through events.

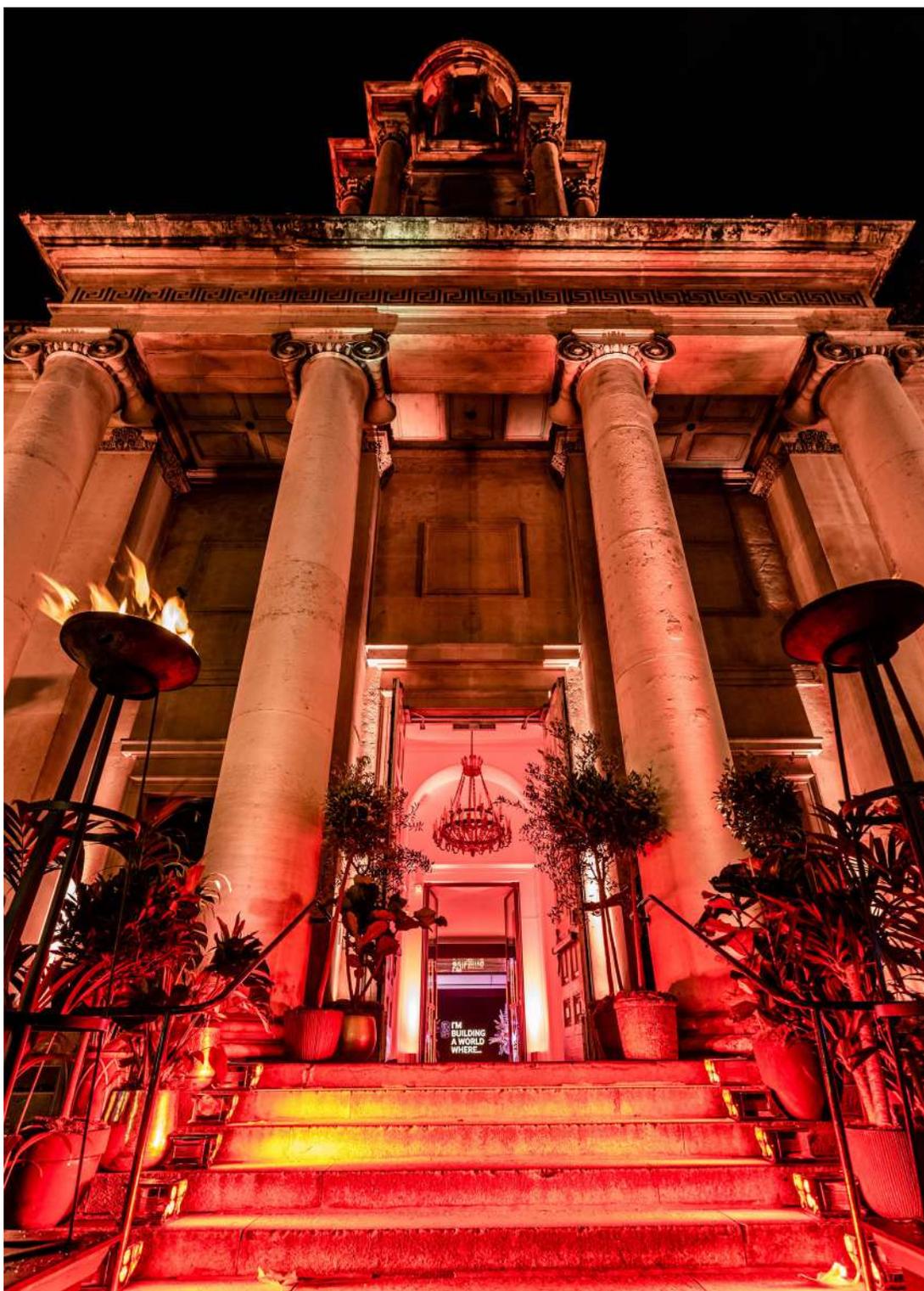
Leading up to the evening celebrations, the P.E.A.s will host a daytime event to share masterclasses on the relationship between sustainability and the themes of Communication, Consciousness, Community, Ayurvedic Food, Energy, Indigenous Wisdom and Investment, and the part these subjects play in the context of sustainability and climate. Speakers include Mark Millar, CEO of Duracell Energy; Master Sha from the Love Peace Harmony Foundation; Nick Ash, CEO of Sustain Britain; Jamie Anley, director at Strategic; Divya Alter, Divya's Kitchen and Leonel Cerruto, director at Kawsay Mother Earth School.

RECOGNISING HEROES

If you know a sustainability champion who deserves to be recognised, we want to know. Entries and nominations close midnight on 31 March 2026. Tickets are available for anyone who wants to network with sustainability leaders and green glitterati in an atmosphere of hope and celebration.

Find out more

■ Buy tickets, enter or nominate your green heroes at peaawards.com





A time for a deeper solution

Introducing Love Peace Harmony: a global foundation restoring balance for humanity and the Earth

Humanity is at a turning point. Environmental challenges, social division and rising mental health struggles all trace back to one root issue: a loss of balance. A loss of love, peace and harmony in daily life.

The Love Peace Harmony Foundation (LPHF), sponsor of the 2026 P.E.A. Award for Health & Wellbeing, was created to restore that balance. By nurturing love, peace and harmony within people, households and communities, the Foundation fosters sustainable change for people and planet.

RESTORING BALANCE

Inspired by Dr and Master Zhi Gang Sha – world-renowned Soulfulness® healer, Tao Grandmaster, transformative artist and bestselling author – the Foundation bridges ancient wisdom and modern life. Trained in both western medicine and ancient teachings, Master Sha observed that every personal, social or environmental challenge reflects an imbalance in love, peace and harmony. From this insight, LPHF emerged as a practical, inclusive, heart-centred path to restore balance.

LPHF has already touched millions of lives across more than 40 countries. Children in schools learn emotional regulation, kindness and respect for one another and nature. Families in shelters find comfort and hope. Patients in hospitals experience peace and dignity. Scholarship programmes nurture future leaders who carry these values forward.

This global impact is supported by more than 350 LPHF volunteers and representatives worldwide, who lead programmes, workshops and community initiatives. Together, they have facilitated over 30,000 meditation sessions, reaching more than 600,000 participants and creating lasting change in households, schools and communities.

A SONG FOR HUMANITY

A cornerstone of this work is the Love Peace Harmony Song, which has now been translated into over 90 languages. Its origin dates back to 10 September 2005, when Master Sha walked in the redwood forests and asked the universe for a song



CLOCKWISE LPHF has partnered with One Tree Planted and Eden Reforestation; the powerful calligraphy has the power to transform spaces; Master Sha is the inspiration behind LPHF

to heal humanity. The song, available in Soul Language, Mandarin, English and as an instrumental version, radiates a powerful frequency, bringing calm, love and peace. Today, it is helping to transform energy wherever it is heard – from homes and offices to community spaces.

UPLIFTING FREQUENCY

Through the song, calligraphy, music, books and guided meditations, families, teachers and community leaders report moments of quiet clarity, eased conflict, deeper connection and renewed compassion.

At the heart of the Foundation's work is the understanding that frequency matters. Thoughts, emotions and actions carry energy. Low frequency fosters conflict; high frequency nurtures clarity, compassion and conscious choice. Families often share that even brief daily engagement with the song, calligraphy or guided meditations brings clarity and deeper connection, transforming relationships and environments.

LPH Calligraphy is more than art; it carries vibration and energy. When displayed in homes, schools, hospitals and workplaces, it serves as a daily reminder of balance and connection, softening conflicts and promoting patience.

Through LPHF's programmes, children learn emotional regulation and empathy, vulnerable populations find comfort and dignity and scholarship programmes cultivate future leaders who carry these values forward. Participants often share heartwarming stories of families reunited, communities finding peace after conflict and children discovering confidence and empathy.

HARMONY WITH NATURE

The Foundation emphasises that humanity and nature are inseparable. Inner harmony inspires conscious, sustainable choices, from how we grow food and protect land and water to how we care for future generations. Participants often note that the same tools that bring harmony to their homes foster deeper respect and connection to the Earth, creating lasting effects.

LPHF is a movement of practice, service and lived values. By restoring love, peace and harmony at the household level, it is paving the way for a more compassionate, resilient and sustainable world. One heart at a time, one household at a time. When love leads, peace follows. When peace is nurtured, harmony arises – and when harmony returns, humanity and the Earth will flourish together.

Find out more

- Discover LPHF's programmes and work at lovepeaceharmony.org
- Nominate your green heroes at peaawards.com



From waste to food



Sustain Britain's Nick Ash on the pioneering tech harnessing landfill waste to grow year-round food

This is shaping up to be an exciting year for Sustain Britain and Sustain Wiltshire. Over the coming months we will see the world's first landfill-gas powered growing dome produce year-round fruit and vegetables for 10 families in Wiltshire, and in the autumn we will see the return of the vibrant Sustain Britain Conference.

Back in 2025, the Conference launched the *Greenprint for a Sustainable Independent Britain* and the concept of the Sustain Circle. Delegates and their communities were challenged to produce as much as possible within their local community circle. In theory, everything a circle needs should be produced locally; where that isn't possible, the circle extends regionally, then nationally to access increasingly specialist products and services.

At the most basic level, the aim of the Sustain Circle is for a community to produce as much of its own food as possible, which would help to end our reliance on unnecessary and environmentally damaging out-of-season imports.

To make this proposition realistic, Sustain Wiltshire has been pioneering the development of cutting-edge, positively pressured growing domes that are located on landfill sites.

PERFECT GROWING CONDITIONS

Using heat, power and CO₂ generated from the conversion of landfill methane, perfect growing conditions can be achieved within the domes to produce fruit and vegetables all year round.

CO₂ is pumped into the growing dome to aid photosynthesis while UV light stimulates growth. Heat creates temperatures perfect for growing and harvesting everything from lettuce to avocado – even in the depths of winter. Photosynthesis transforms CO₂ into clean oxygen, meaning that when operated at scale, landfill sites using this tech could become carbon negative. The first of these 40mx20m domes will be trialled over the coming year to perfect techniques ranging from raised growing beds to hydroponics. The first crops are expected from spring.

Combined with Sustain Wiltshire's wider ambition to turn landfills into Super-Middens, where plastics that are currently unrecyclable can be mined for future use as polymers, British technology is on the cusp of transforming landfill into one of the most climate-friendly methods of waste treatment.

A CONFERENCE FOR THE FUTURE

With such exciting developments to showcase, this year's Sustain Britain Conference is set to be bigger and better than ever – which is why we are planning to extend the event to two days.

The first day will be dedicated to sixth-form and university students; letters have already been sent to schools in the local Wiltshire area, but we hope that other sixth-formers and university students will join us, too. We view this as an opportunity to introduce tomorrow's guardians of the planet to the

theory of Sustain Circles, to help students learn what it's like to be a delegate and to experience talks from high-profile sustainability speakers. Last year, we welcomed Sir Jonathon Porritt alongside the CEO of Forum for the Future, Hannah Pathak. 2026 promises another stellar lineup.

Combined with opportunities to get involved in discussions and practical sessions, the Conference is a great way to learn more about how to realise a sustainable future for Britain. It also creates the perfect platform to showcase the many innovative and sustainable solutions being pioneered by Sustain Wiltshire, such as the Super-Midden project and the fast-gassing Solid Waste Anaerobic Treatment Cells (SWATC). These will produce gas from solid waste to power electricity-generating engines, providing low-cost energy.

With the promise of lively debate and discussion, Q&A panel sessions and interactive challenges, the Conference will again question and probe what we need to do to create a truly sustainable Britain – one where money and jobs are kept in local economies through a commitment to producing and purchasing locally and in a sustainable way. Our hope is that this will inspire and encourage students and delegates to think differently about the role of sustainability in the modern world, and in their own community. We look forward to seeing you there.

Find out more

- Tickets for the Sustain Britain Conference will be released in early summer, but can be reserved in advance by emailing info@sustainwiltshire.co.uk
- Nominate your green heroes at peaawards.com

Just like its Bunny mascot, Duracell has an indefatigable knack for evolving with the times. It was the first company to send alkaline batteries to the Moon, and today its legacy of innovation continues through trusted brand licensee Puredrive Energy.

In 2022, Duracell awarded Puredrive Energy the licence to manufacture and distribute Duracell-branded energy storage products. These are the solutions we'll need if we are to reach net zero and take control of our power; they will help homeowners and businesses become energy independent, lower costs, reduce reliance on the grid and cut carbon emissions.

The result of the relationship is Duracell Energy, this year's sponsor for the Energy P.E.A. (People. Environment. Achievement.) Award. It supplies market-leading, high-performing and longer lasting solar and battery solutions that put control of how energy is used, generated and stored back into the bill payer's hands.

FROM WINNER TO SPONSOR

Previously, Puredrive supplied home storage products under its own brand, a company headed by the pioneering Mark Millar. In 2015 Mark designed, engineered and installed the UK's first-ever home battery system in his own house. This was a moment that defined Mark's mission to deliver high-quality, reliable home energy storage solutions.

In 2021 Mark's commitment was recognised with the P.E.A. Award for Energy. His relentless approach proved a perfect match with the Duracell Bunny's non-stop energy and, following a rigorous approval process, Puredrive was named an official Duracell licensee. Duracell Energy's suite of home battery storage systems was launched at the Everything Electric Show in April 2024.

'We've come a long way since winning the P.E.A. Award for Energy in 2021', said Mark, 'and we're really excited to be a category sponsor for this year's awards. We love seeing all the latest innovations and meeting all the other people who are championing sustainability in their own fields – in the energy sector and more broadly. We couldn't be prouder to recognise and celebrate their work. Good luck to all the entrants.'

THE ULTIMATE BATTERY

Duracell Energy's flagship Dura5 Solar Battery has been dubbed the ultimate home battery storage; it uses off-peak electricity times and energy generated by solar panels to save you money. In fact, homeowners who fully integrate solar, battery, dynamic tariffs and the Duracell Energy app see savings of up to 90%.

The Duracell Energy App uses a smart algorithm that considers weather forecasts and predicts when solar capability is low, to ensure your energy storage system is fully charged when you need it.

The Dura5 system works with solar panels or as a stand-alone battery storage system. If used alone, the battery draws low-cost electricity from the grid during off-peak hours and stores it for later, when prices are higher.



POWERING A GREEN TRANSITION

P.E.A. Awards sponsor Duracell Energy is helping bill payers shift to battery-powered homes



When paired with solar panels, the battery stores excess energy generated during the day for use at night or during cloudy periods. Other renewable sources, like wind and hydro power, can be integrated to further enhance energy independence at home or in the workplace.

The Dura5 operates effectively in temperatures as low as -10°C without the need for internal heaters, and is able to charge and discharge in just one hour. This market-leading speed allows rapid access to stored energy during periods of high demand, making it a crucial part of any energy management system.

A GREENER FUTURE

We all know renewables are key to a greener future; the wind and sun are incredible resources that are just waiting for us to use. The issue has been with the gap between supply and demand.

This is where battery energy storage systems come in; they allow us to save power when it is generated and save it until it is needed, creating a reliable source of on-tap power and a practical replacement for fossil fuels. Battery energy storage removes the obstacles to a whole-hearted embrace of renewable energy sources and will accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels – which is why it has a key role to play in our transition to net zero.

BATTERIES & NET ZERO

The government has a legally binding target to reach net zero emissions – reducing the UK's greenhouse gas emissions by 100% – by 2050 compared with 1990 levels. To meet this target, the goal is to achieve 'clean power by 2030', which means being on track to achieving at least 95% of low-carbon generation by 2030. The government's Clean Power Action Plan stated an expectation that 23-27GW of battery storage will be needed by 2030, a 'very significant level of increase' from the 4.5GW installed in December 2024.

With pioneers like Mark and Duracell Energy driving the shift to home batteries, we're more confident than ever in the shift to a decarbonised power system that boosts energy independence and brings costs down for bill payers.

Find out more

- Get a personalised quote for home battery storage at duracellenergy.com
- Nominate your green heroes at peaawards.com

Don't invest unless you're prepared to lose all the money you invest. This is a high-risk investment and you are unlikely to be protected if something goes wrong. Take 2 mins to learn more. www.crowdcube.com/explore/risk-warning



Are you ready

Investment Launch | March 2026

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PREMIUM CIRCULARITY

A cocktail of regulation, innovation & consumer demand has paved the way for sustainable, high-end hospitality



In the early days of the war on plastics, bars, pubs and restaurants raced to switch single-use plastic straws for paper alternatives. The move was laudable but the reality – paper that went limp after 30 minutes in liquid – was grim.

Still today, kids discard sticky, unfurled straws and ask for replacements, reminding parents up and down the UK that the hospitality sector's waste crisis is far from over. 'The hospitality industry was being offered so-called sustainable

alternatives that simply did not perform at a professional level', says Mathias L. Nyström, founder and CEO of The Ocean Straw Group. 'Paper straws that failed mid-service, products that compromised the guest experience or materials that still released microplastics.'

Mathias channelled this frustration and founded The Ocean Straw Group; the goal was to create products that meet the highest premium standards while being genuinely sustainable. 'Our ambition

is to raise the bar for what sustainable hospitality products should be', he tells us, 'and to demonstrate that environmental responsibility and premium service are not opposites – they are inseparable.'

TWO WORLDS COLLIDE

Years of experience in the hospitality sector – as an event organiser, nightclub manager and, at the age of 23, a restaurant property owner – have given Mathias a practical understanding of how

'Operating in one of the world's most competitive industries teaches you very quickly that premium is not optional – it is essential'

MATHIAS L. NYSTRÖM

FOUNDER AND CEO OF THE OCEAN STRAW GROUP

hospitality truly works; not in theory, but in real service environments under pressure.

‘Operating in one of the world’s most competitive industries teaches you very quickly that premium is not optional – it is essential’, Mathias shares. ‘Premium guest experience, premium materials, premium execution at every level. Only when every step meets the same high standard can a hospitality business survive and succeed in a highly competitive market.’

Moved to act, Mathias founded The Ocean Straw Company as a way to bridge two worlds: it would service the uncompromising demands of premium hospitality while also addressing the devastating impact of waste on the ocean. ‘Before my experience in hospitality, I worked professionally as a diving instructor’, Mathias shares, ‘which deeply shaped my environmental awareness.’

FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

As a diving instructor, Mathias spent hundreds of hours beneath the surface of the ocean; ‘The ocean was both my workplace and my classroom’, he tells us. ‘It was there that I truly began to understand how fragile marine ecosystems are. Seeing plastic pollution even in remote, seemingly untouched locations leaves a lasting impression and creates a lifelong sense of responsibility; once you have seen plastic embedded in coral reefs or drifting through open water, it becomes impossible to ignore. That experience fundamentally shaped my sense of environmental stewardship.’

While sustainability has always been important to Mathias, he recognises that his thinking on the subject has evolved. ‘Early on it was all about awareness, he tells us. ‘Over time, it became responsibility. Today, it is action. I do not believe sustainability should ever mean compromise. True sustainability is about better design, better materials and better systems.’

PREMIUM SUSTAINABILITY

Historically, the hospitality sector has relied heavily on single-use products, for myriad reasons around convenience, hygiene and cost efficiency. Given the scale of global hospitality, this dependence has contributed significantly to global waste streams.

‘The most obvious issue with these single-use plastic products is longevity’, Mathias explains. ‘These products are used for minutes, yet remain in the environment for centuries. Many plastics break down into microplastics that enter ecosystems, food chains and, ultimately, the human body. This is a largely invisible but extremely serious problem.’

For a long time the sector has been crying out for viable alternatives that match professional requirements. Today, The Ocean Straw Group provides premium, circular alternatives to traditional single-use hospitality products, primarily within beverage service. The demand is there; its products are used in high-end restaurants, cocktail bars, hotels, airlines, luxury events and premium hospitality venues around the world.

The Ocean Straw Group provides wood- and plant-based products, made from residual by-products of the Norwegian forestry industry. ‘We upcycle wood waste from Nordic forestry that would otherwise have no high-value use’, Mathias explains. ‘In this way, we transform an industrial by-product into premium hospitality products rooted in Scandinavian sourcing and design values.’

The materials and processes are carefully engineered to ensure that no microplastics are released, either in use or at the end of the product’s lifecycle. This is not a marketing gimmick, it’s a core value embedded in every design decision and a fundamental pillar of The Ocean Straw Group’s circular economy model.

‘Sustainability is built into the product from the beginning, not added afterwards’, Mathias says – yet the products are developed from a hospitality-first perspective. The solutions are premium in look, feel and performance, designed by professionals who understand real service conditions.

‘We upcycle wood waste from Nordic forestry that would otherwise have no high-value use. In this way, we transform an industrial byproduct into premium hospitality products rooted in Scandinavian sourcing and design values.’

For Mathias, this approach is part of a broader movement that’s redefining quality standards in hospitality. ‘Sustainability is no longer an alternative to premium’, he says; ‘it is premium.’

THE NEW STANDARD

Mathias has noticed demand for premium, authentically sustainable products has increased significantly and continues to gather steam. ‘The shift is being driven by regulation, consumer pressure and the availability and innovation in materials and design’, he says. ‘When circular products also make commercial sense, adoption accelerates rapidly.’

There’s also a growing understanding that low-quality alternatives damage brand perception. ‘Hospitality professionals increasingly recognise that premium solutions are required even for traditionally disposable items. At the same time guests have come to expect responsible choices without compromising experience’, Mathias shares. ‘Sustainability has become a core brand value rather than a niche concern.’

A key milestone has been The Ocean Straw Group’s endorsement and collaboration with the International Bartenders Association (IBA).

‘Having our products recognised by the world’s leading bartending organisation as a new industry benchmark confirms that sustainable products are becoming the new standard’, Mathias says.

INNOVATION & INTEGRITY

Mathias acknowledges there is still ‘work to be done’; many initiatives and targets are in place globally, but implementation remains uneven. Progress now depends on collaboration, scalable solutions and products that work operationally.

It’s unlikely that single-use products will ever be completely eliminated from the hospitality sector, but they can certainly be reduced and redesigned. Achieving this requires system change, education and the willingness to rethink established practices.

Growth for The Ocean Straw Group has been particularly strong in the Nordic countries, where sustainability and design excellence are already deeply ingrained, and more recently in the UAE. In both regions, premium hospitality and sustainability

are increasingly viewed as inseparable. The Nordics have a strong culture of environmental responsibility and design integrity, while the UAE combines innovation, premium hospitality and ambitious sustainability goals. Mathias notes that both regions value excellence, and that this aligns naturally with The Ocean Straw Group’s philosophy.

‘Our focus now is on global expansion’, Mathias shares; ‘we are developing new premium circular products and building strategic partnerships across international hospitality markets. Profitable business and environmental protection can and must go hand in hand; sustainability that does not work commercially will never scale. Premium, profitable and sustainable are not contradictions; they are complementary.’

‘For me, this journey is about respect – for the guest, for the industry and for the ocean’, Mathias continues. ‘When premium thinking guides every decision, sustainability becomes a natural outcome rather than a compromise.’

Find out more

■ Information about how The Ocean Straw Group’s products have been designed to fit into a circular economy is at theoceanstraw.com

Recipes to support menopause

Support women's health with these plant-based recipes from **Henry Firth, Ian Theasby** and the **BOSH!** team

Menopause is a significant life stage that deserves more visibility, understanding and support. This International Women's Day (08 March), we wanted to use food as a way to show up for anyone who is navigating perimenopause or menopause, and celebrate nourishment, balance and wellbeing through thoughtful, plant-based cooking.

While everyone's experience of perimenopause and menopause is different, food can play an important role in supporting energy levels, digestion and overall health during this time.

FLAVOUR MEETS FUNCTION

The two recipes we've provided for this article focus on whole, nourishing ingredients such as legumes, mushrooms, tofu and fresh herbs – chosen for both their flavour and their function. To ensure they're as supportive as they are delicious,

both dishes have been selected and nutritionally analysed by our in-house nutritionist, Catrina Gell (ANutr).

Our spring-inspired Primavera Beans (right) are light and fresh, combining fibre-rich legumes, leafy greens and nutritional yeast to help support energy, metabolism and brain function.

The Miso Mushroom & Silken Tofu Orzotto (opposite page) delivers comforting, creamy goodness, with plant-based protein, fibre and naturally occurring isoflavones from silken tofu – ingredients often included in menopause-supportive diets.

These recipes are about cooking with care, listening, learning and using food as one small but meaningful way to support the women in our lives.

Find out more

■ For more plant-based recipe inspiration, head over to **bosh.tv**



PRIMAVERA BEANS

This fresh, spring-inspired bean dish includes ingredients such as nutritional yeast and legumes, which provide B vitamins to support energy, metabolism and brain function. A mix of greens and herbs adds fibre and antioxidants to support overall wellbeing during menopause.

(Serves 2)

INGREDIENTS

For the beans

- 1 bunch spring onions
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 lemon
- 1 large bunch asparagus
- Handful dill
- Handful mint leaves
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large jar butter beans
- 3 tbsp plant-based cream cheese or crème fraîche
- Handful broad beans (optional)
- Handful frozen peas (optional)
- 15g nooch
- Handful sugar snap peas
- Salt and pepper

Serve with

- Toasted sourdough
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Cracked black pepper

Before you start

- Large frying pan

METHOD

Prep ingredients

Finely slice the spring onions. Peel and finely slice the garlic. Half the lemon, juice one half and cut the remaining half into wedges. Trim the asparagus then cut into 1cm slices on the angle. Finely chop the dill and mint.

Cook beans

Heat the olive oil in the large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the spring onions and cook for 3-4 minutes until soft. Add the garlic and cook for a further minute or two before adding the butter beans, including their liquid and 100ml water.

Bring to a simmer and stir in the plant-based cream cheese until emulsified.

Finish beans

Stir in the asparagus (and frozen peas and broad beans if using) and simmer for 2-3 minutes until tender but still with bite. Remove from the heat, stir in the nooch and lemon juice. Taste and season with salt, pepper and more lemon juice if needed.

Serve

Top the beans with the snap peas, a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and a sprinkle of cracked black pepper. Serve with crusty buttered sourdough.

MISO MUSHROOM & SILKEN TOFU ORZOTTO

A creamy, comforting orzotto made with mushrooms, chickpeas and silken tofu. Silken tofu contains plant-based isoflavones, which are often included in menopause-supportive diets, alongside protein and fibre to help support sustained energy. (Serves 4; 24g protein/serve)

INGREDIENTS

- Drizzle of oil or plant-based butter
- 500g oyster mushrooms
- 1 leek
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tbsp white miso paste
- 200g orzo
- 150g silken tofu, blitzed until smooth
- 570g jar of chickpeas
- 550ml vegetable stock
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 40g nooch
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Chives to garnish

Before you start

- Large frying pan or wide saucepan, blender, ladle, wooden spoon

METHOD

Prep the ingredients

Finely slice the leek, tear the mushrooms, finely chop the garlic, rinse and drain the chickpeas and finely slice the chives

Cook the base

Heat a drizzle of oil or plant-based butter in a wide pan over medium heat. Add the mushrooms and fry until golden. Remove from the pan. Add another drizzle of oil, then add the leeks. Fry for 5-6 minutes until soft and slightly caramelised.

Add the garlic and miso, then fry for another minute. Pour in the orzo and toast for 2 minutes.

Build the sauce

Add the tofu, chickpeas, stock, soy sauce and nooch to the pan. Stir well to combine and simmer for 10 minutes until the orzo is done, stirring constantly to avoid sticking. Add a splash more water to loosen if needed. Stir in half the mushrooms.

Finish and serve

Add the lemon juice. Taste and adjust seasoning. Spoon into bowls. Top with the reserved mushrooms, chives and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.



From corporate success to climate action



Olio co-founder **Tessa Clarke's** journey from the boardroom to the front line of food waste

When Tessa Clarke decided to launch a food-sharing app, it meant walking away from a successful corporate career. The reaction was far from supportive.

Friends and colleagues questioned Tessa's judgement – some even put the decision down to 'baby brain' – but she was responding to a deep sense that something fundamental was missing.

Tessa had grown tired of admiring the bravery of others while feeling uninspired by her own work. Her CV looked impressive, but it didn't reflect the person she wanted to be or the legacy she hoped to leave behind.

It was time for a change, and when Tessa truly confronted the scale of one particular issue – food waste – she found it impossible to look away. Food waste, Tessa discovered, is not just inefficient; it is morally wrong and environmentally devastating. Perfectly good food is thrown away every day while people struggle to afford meals and the climate cost of producing that wasted food continues to accelerate the ecological crisis. For Tessa, this realisation was a turning point.

COURAGE TO BEGIN

Leaving her corporate life was a risky move, but Tessa drew courage from three things: the first was the sheer magnitude of the problem she had uncovered and the second was meeting her co-founder, Saasha Celestial-One, whose energy, belief and shared values made the challenge feel not just possible but exciting. The third major influence was motherhood.

At the time, Tessa had a newborn baby and a toddler. On paper it looked like the worst possible moment to start a business, but in reality Tessa



CLOCKWISE Tessa Clarke, co-founder and CEO at Olio, at her TED talk, 'The Surprising Climate Benefits of Sharing Your Stuff'; Tessa with Olio co-founder Saasha Celestial-One

found that with motherhood came clarity. Becoming a parent sharpened Tessa's sense of what truly mattered and strengthened her resolve to build something she could be proud of, both for herself and for her children.

FROM SMALL STEPS...

What followed next was not a single leap of bravery but thousands of small, determined steps. Olio did not begin with slick branding or major investment; it started with a simple survey, which was shared on Facebook as a market research tool to get to the bottom of how people really felt about food waste.

Next came a WhatsApp group, which was set up as a way to test whether neighbours would actually share surplus food with each other. A very basic app followed, which launched in just five north-London postcodes.

Tessa and Saasha spent days pounding the pavements, handing out flyers and explaining the idea face to face. Behind the scenes, the personal risk was real: it involved remortgaging the family home every couple of years to keep finances afloat while navigating years of long, hard slog.

THE IMPACT OF SHARING

The global pandemic tested individuals and businesses all over the world; Olio was no different, but in 2020 – after three and a half years of conversations – Tesco signed up to trial Olio's Food Waste Heroes programme. This breakthrough moment helped Olio to scale, and Tessa saw it as proof that persistence pays off.

Today, the Olio app has 9 million users across 63 countries, and its impact is striking. Through the simple act of sharing, people using the app have helped save the equivalent of 137 million meals from going to waste and rehomed 16 million household items.

Alongside Tesco, retail giants including Iceland, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and ASDA are now using the app to share their surplus food. The environmental impact of sharing (rather than wasting) the food and other items rehomed on Olio equates to one billion car miles taken off the road, and 40 billion litres of water prevented from being wasted.

For Tessa, these milestones are both a source of pride and a reminder of how much work still lies ahead; the scale of the global waste crisis means progress can simultaneously feel huge and heartbreakingly small.

TURNING VALUES INTO ACTION

For Tessa, one thing is clear: working with purpose has been transformative. Building Olio has changed her career and also her relationship with success itself; the measure is no longer awards or accolades but tangible impact, in human and environmental terms.

Tessa's journey is a great reminder that doing something that matters is rarely easy or comfortable and is never finished. There will always be uncertainty, setbacks and moments of doubt, but taking the leap – even when the timing feels wrong and the path unclear – can be deeply rewarding. Sometimes the most important thing is simply to try.

For those inspired by Tessa's journey, Olio offers a simple way to turn values into action. By making it easier to share surplus food and household items with neighbours and local communities, the app shows how small, everyday choices can add up to meaningful change.

Find out more

■ Olio is available to download on the **App Store** and **Google Play**



WOMEN IN THE KITCHEN

Emese Patko, the new head chef at River Cottage, on her journey through food

In a sector where women are still underrepresented at the very top, Emese Patko's appointment as head chef marks an exciting new chapter at River Cottage.

With over two decades' experience across Europe and the UK, plus a deep-rooted passion for seasonal, ethical, produce-led cooking, Emese now leads the kitchen at River Cottage HQ. Emese talked to us about what drew her to the role, her vision for the future of River Cottage and her journey to becoming a head chef.

What first sparked your love of cooking, and when did you realise you wanted to pursue it as a career rather than just a passion?

When I was 12, I watched Gordon Ramsay's *Hell's Kitchen* and saw Angela Hartnett cooking as his sous chef. I was completely inspired. I had always known that I wanted to be a chef, but in that moment something just clicked. Seeing a woman in such a senior role showed me what was possible and gave me the confidence to imagine myself in that position one day. I started building my knowledge and experience by working in kitchens around Europe.

You've worked across central Europe and the UK – how have those different food cultures shaped the way you cook today?

Every country and place I've cooked in has influenced me. In Germany and Austria, for example, there's a strong tradition of roasting large joints of meat, and I've taken a lot from that. Hungarian food culture, though, is very similar to the way we cook at River Cottage – with seasonal

fruit and vegetables, cooking from scratch every day and with a close connection to where food comes from. Having livestock and preparing food from your own garden is completely normal in Hungary, so self-sufficiency and seasonality have stayed with me.

What excites you most about this new chapter leading the kitchen at River Cottage?

It feels like coming back to my roots! I've worked in many different environments, so returning to a true plot-to-plate ethos feels like coming home. River Cottage is leading the way in butchery, sustainable produce and working with its own kitchen garden, all on a small scale. Everything that happens here is a dream for a chef: making things from scratch, curing, smoking, preserving. Not many kitchens approach food this way any more, and that makes it really special. There's a sense of craft here that I really enjoy.

River Cottage is built on seasonal, local, organic and wild principles – why are those values personally important to you as a chef?

The world is speeding up, and so many people are looking for quick, easy solutions when it comes to food. Here, we focus on slowing down and really understanding fresh produce – how to use it, preserve it and batch cook. We know it's not always possible for people to cook from scratch every single day, but learning how to make the most of seasonal ingredients helps people move away from ultra-processed foods and enjoy real cooking. It's about giving people practical skills they can use at home.

What advice would you give to young women who aspire to leadership roles in professional kitchens?

Don't give up on your dreams! Work hard, learn as much as you can and really look after your body and your mental health – it's so important in this profession. Be consistent, keep your standards high, stay humble and be true to yourself. There is always something new to learn, and always a way to develop your skills further.

What do you hope people take away from time spent learning at River Cottage?

Coming to River Cottage is a special experience, and we try to reflect Hugh's deep respect for animals, sustainability and the source of ingredients. When I'm teaching, I want to pass that on – to show proper knife skills, how to get the best from each ingredient and how food moves from the ground to the plate. I also want people to understand zero-waste cooking: how to use offcuts, how to value every part of the ingredient and how thoughtful cooking can make a real difference.

Find out more

■ Brush up on your skills – River Cottage courses and dates are listed at rivercottage.net

Seasonality, ethics and provenance top the menu at River Cottage, supported by its 100-acre organic farm on the Devon/Dorset border



HERO PRODUCTS

Introducing our March Heroes!

We've picked these products because we believe they are all best in their class for people and the planet.

They represent simple, sustainable switches that will help to keep you, your home and the planet healthy – without compromising on experience or performance!

View all our Heroes at mygreenpod.com/heroes

HEALTH & BEAUTY



LIFELONG DEO STARTER KIT

This plastic-free, refillable liquid deodorant tackles ocean plastic and has been designed to last a lifetime.

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Organic pads, liners and tampons for reliable protection without plastics, chlorine, fragrances or synthetic irritants.

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HAOMA ORGANIC LAVENDER EAU DE PARFUM

This pure and sophisticated perfume boasts eight organic essential oils with uplifting aromatherapeutic benefits.

mygreenpod.com/heroes/haoma-organic-eau-de-parfum-no-1

HOME & GARDEN



CLEAN LIVING COMPLETE CLEANING CADDY

Hit the spring clean running with this comprehensive set.

mygreenpod.com/heroes/clean-living-complete-cleaning-caddy

TOP 5 MARCH SWITCHES

1

Thinking about your next holiday? Lonely Planet's *Flight-Free Europe* is the ultimate guide to slow travel, ethical adventure and mindful exploration.

✕ @lonelyplanet

mygreenpod.com/heroes/lonely-planet-flight-free-europe

2

Get maximum protection against water pollutants – and ditch plastic water bottles – with the Coldstream Undercounter Water Purification System.

✕ @Coldstream

mygreenpod.com/heroes/coldstream-undercounter-water-purification-system

3

The mornings may be getting lighter, but we all need a lie-in sometimes. The Biosnooze is the first and only UK-made 100% biodegradable polyester pillow.

#Biosnooze

mygreenpod.com/heroes/biosnooze-pillow

4

Looking for an easy way to boost your health? Every pinch of organic Aura Celtic Sea Salt is infused with your daily dose of vitamin D.

#AuraSeaSalt

mygreenpod.com/heroes/aura-sea-salt

5

Zero Waste Bulk Foods is the UK's only Soil Association Organic certified zero-waste store, featuring 700+ products from artisan suppliers you won't find in supermarkets.

✕ @zwbfood

mygreenpod.com/heroes/zero-waste-bulk-foods

Take personal care

Soil Association's Paige Tracey delves into the murky world of chemicals in cosmetics

Despite vast improvements in women's health, many cosmetics and personal care products still contain chemicals that have been linked to serious health issues.

A 2025 study commissioned by Breast Cancer UK found that a quarter of UK women use at least six different personal care products each day, which exposes them to an average of 168 different chemicals. While some of these chemicals will be innocuous – everything including water is, after all, a chemical – others are not.

Some are classified as endocrine disruptors, meaning they can interact with and disrupt the body's hormonal systems. Many specifically interact with or mimic the female hormone estrogen in a process linked to the development of hormone-related cancers like breast, ovarian and thyroid.

PESTICIDES FROM COTTON

Concern isn't limited to intentionally added ingredients; a 2025 study by the Women's Environmental Network found glyphosate residues in UK tampons that were 40 times over the limit for drinking water. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classed this powerful weedkiller as 'possibly carcinogenic' to humans; it has also been linked to Parkinson's disease and reproductive issues.

Glyphosate residue on tampons is explained by the weedkiller's use on cotton crops; it's estimated that non-organic cotton – dubbed the 'world's dirtiest crop' – uses nearly 5% of the world's pesticides and 10% of insecticides.

Glyphosate absorbed through the vagina will directly enter the bloodstream, bypassing the body's detoxification systems. If this level of glyphosate is deemed to be unsafe in our drinking water, how is it permitted in our menstrual products?

Thankfully there are products on the market, with clear organic certification labels, that can help women to make informed choices and reduce their exposure to these controversial chemicals.

AVOIDING CHEMICAL EXPOSURE

Glyphosate and artificial pesticides are not permitted in organic farming, but in textiles the term 'organic' is not legally regulated the way it is in food and drink. Look for tampons certified to the Global Organic Textiles standard (GOTS) to ensure they have only been made with organic cotton. Some GOTS-certified tampon brands include Mooncup, Natracare, We Are Riley and Yoni.

In cosmetics, none of the chemicals listed on Breast Cancer UK's 'A to Z Chemicals of Concern' are permitted in products certified to international COSMOS Organic or Natural standards.



CHEMICALS TO AVOID

There are too many chemicals of concern to list in this article, but there are some commonly used ingredients that women should try to avoid.

Parabens are used in cosmetics as a preservative. On ingredients lists they will appear as methylparaben, butylparaben, ethylparaben and propylparaben. The UN has stated that parabens are endocrine disrupting, even at low levels. Triclosan is another preservative used to prevent bacterial growth; there is evidence it can have a negative effect on thyroid function and UK regulators are currently reviewing the evidence that triclosan and a similar ingredient, triclocarban, are endocrine disruptors.

Phthalates are used to make plastics more flexible, meaning they can sometimes be found in plastic-based period products. They are also often used as stabilisers or fixatives for artificial fragrances. It's very tricky to know whether or not a product contains phthalates; the ingredients list may just use a catch-all term like 'fragrance' or 'parfum'.

Widespread use means nearly everyone will have been exposed to phthalates, though their use in many cosmetics increases the risk for women. Chronic exposure to phthalates can lead to endocrine disruption and can have negative effects on multiple organs. Avoiding products that just list 'fragrance' or 'parfum' on the ingredients can help

to reduce your exposure; COSMOS only allows phthalate-free natural fragrances in products.

CHOOSING A SUNSCREEN

Some artificial UV filters used in sunscreens have been linked to endocrine disruption. There's evidence oxybenzone, also called benzophenone-3, is endocrine disrupting, even at the levels normally used in sunscreen. The European Food Standards Agency has classed oxybenzone as 'persistent, bio-accumulative, toxic, and a possible human carcinogen and endocrine disruptor.'

Oxybenzone has already been banned from sunscreens sold in tropical regions like Hawaii, Palau and Thailand due to the negative impact it has on coral reefs and marine life. However, oxybenzone is still allowed in sunscreens sold in the UK and the EU. Looking for sunscreen with natural mineral filters like zinc oxide and titanium dioxide will ensure you still get effective sun protection without hidden nasties.

Most of these chemicals are difficult to avoid, but altering the products you use every day is a good first step to reducing your chemical load. Look for the COSMOS or Soil Association logo on the products you buy for a quick way to ensure you're getting a clean product that won't cost the earth.

Find out more

- Information about organic beauty, health and wellbeing is at soilassociation.org/take-action/organic-living/beauty-wellbeing
- Download Breast Cancer UK's 'A to Z Chemicals of Concern' at bit.ly/3LJinu2

TWO DECADES OF BEAUTY

Janey Lee Grace reflects on her 20-year career in natural beauty

When my first book, *Imperfectly Natural Woman*, hit number one on Amazon 20 years ago, the industry looked remarkably different. Mineral makeup was revolutionary. Organic certification was niche.

The idea that what you put on your skin mattered still met resistance from mainstream beauty. Fast-forward to 2026 and the landscape has changed in ways I couldn't have imagined.

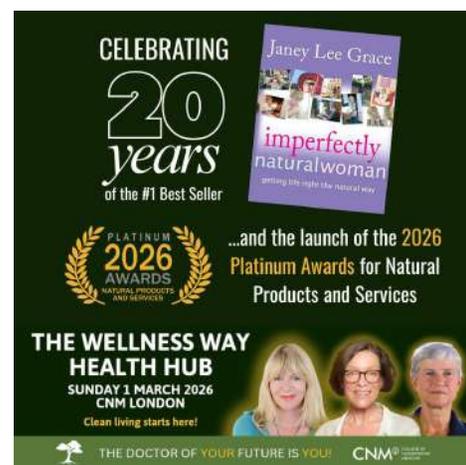
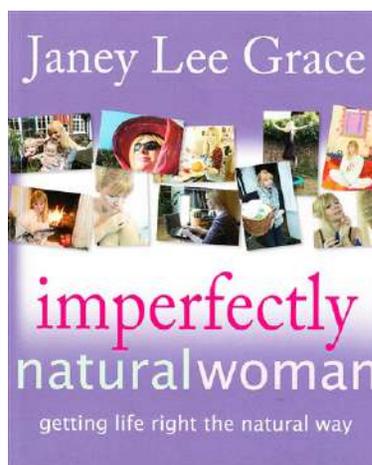
THE SECRET'S OUT

Perhaps the biggest change has been the shift from 'natural' as a marketing term to genuinely transparent, certified-organic formulations. 20 years ago a brand could slap 'botanical' on a label while the formula remained 95% synthetic.

Today's consumers demand proof – that means Soil Association or COSMOS certification, ingredient transparency and ethical sourcing credentials.

The rise of 'beauty from within' has been equally transformative. Collagen supplements such as the wonderful Rejuvenated – once the preserve of Hollywood insiders – are now mainstream. Sleep elixirs and skin-supporting supplements acknowledge what holistic practitioners have always known: true radiance starts internally.

Back then facial oils seemed revolutionary but now there are so many wonderful potions, including the range from Penny Price Aromatherapy.



BRANDS THAT ENDURED

Some brands weren't just ahead of the curve – they drew it. Weleda, with roots stretching back to 1921, proved that natural skincare could be both effective and luxurious long before 'clean beauty' became fashionable.

Weleda Skin Food, which has remained virtually unchanged since 1926, remains a cult favourite because brilliant formulation doesn't need reinvention.

Green People, a British pioneer of organic skincare, has been championing certified ingredients and environmental responsibility for over two decades.

LOOKING AHEAD

I'm very excited to be speaking at The Wellness Way Health Hub at the College of Naturopathic medicine, on Sunday 01 March. I'll be sharing a stage with Dr Sarah Myhill and Philly J Lay, talking about clean living and celebrating all the successes of the last 20 years.

I'll also be launching the Platinum Awards 2026! Along with our Platinum Awards judges – Carrie Grant, Glynis Barber and Jo Wood – I'm looking forward to discovering the best innovative skincare, beauty and holistic products available today, as well as the best therapists, coaches and wellbeing authors.

If the first two decades taught us anything, it's that authentic brands that understand beauty as wellness, that formulate with integrity and transparency, aren't just surviving the evolution of this industry – they're creating it.

Find out more

- Book your ticket to join Janey at The Health Hub at tickettailor.com/events/thewellnessway/1975697
- Enter the Platinum Awards 2026 at platinumawards.co.uk



Pioneers of wellness

Natural beauty expert **Janey Lee Grace** celebrates three women transforming health



This International Women's Day (08 March), let's celebrate the amazing women whose innovative work in health, beauty and wellbeing is changing lives through a potent combination of science, nature and genuine care. Below are three such women, united by something I feel is essential in wellness: the understanding that true healing requires both innovation and heart.

Let's celebrate the pioneering women who show us that the most powerful medicine often comes wrapped in kindness, scientific curiosity and an unwavering commitment to making wellness accessible, sustainable and truly transformative.

VICKI CARROLL'S BRAVE CRAB

Vicki Carroll's journey has been profoundly purposeful. After working as a psychotherapist, she spent two years researching, learning and listening – particularly to the cancer community.

While volunteering with various charities, Vicki heard the same refrain again and again: the side-effects of cancer treatment were often harder than the treatment itself.

Brave Crab, launching soon, is the result of Vicki's experience: a COSMOS Organic skincare range designed specifically for skin that has been affected by cancer treatment. The 'Bee-loved' collection uses nourishing plant butters, oils and extracts to care for sensitive, depleted skin.

Even the Brave Crab name carries meaning: *carcinoma*, the Greek word for crab, is what Hippocrates called the cancer cell. The crab is also a symbol of the strength and resilience of those who are living with the disease.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Brave Crab Nurture Face Cleanser (price TBA); Penny Price Aromatherapy Sensitive Skin Luxury Facial Massage Oil (£14.50); SugaVida Organic Palmyra Blossom Nectar (£12.99)



LEFT TO RIGHT

Vicki Carroll, Brave Crab; Kristina Locke, SugaVida; Penny Price (right) at 2023's Platinum Awards



What makes Vicki's work so powerful is her deep understanding that true healing extends beyond the physical; her background in psychotherapy informs every product she creates, and recognises that when people feel cared for in their skin, their emotional wellbeing is supported, too.

On International Women's Day Vicki will host her first wellness event: the Brave Crab & Friends Wisdom & Wellness Festival, a celebration of holistic healing and community.

PENNY PRICE AROMATHERAPY

Penny Price has built something remarkable: a company that doesn't just sell exceptional essential oil products but actively educates people on how to use them safely and effectively. Penny Price Aromatherapy has become synonymous with quality, integrity and genuine expertise in the world of natural wellness.

What sets Penny apart is her commitment to proper training and professional standards. Her company offers comprehensive aromatherapy

training courses that equip practitioners with real knowledge. This doesn't just teach surface-level wellness trends, but a deep understanding of how essential oils work, their therapeutic properties and how to apply them safely. This dedication to education ensures that aromatherapy is practised responsibly and effectively.

The Penny Price Aromatherapy product range itself reflects this same commitment to excellence; from pure essential oils to carefully formulated blends, every offering meets rigorous quality standards. Penny understands that when you're using plant medicine, purity and provenance matter enormously. Her approach combines traditional aromatherapy wisdom with modern safety protocols, which helps to make essential oils accessible to everyone – without compromising on quality or care.

KRISTINA LOCKE, SUGAVIDA

Kristina Locke's work with SugaVida represents another kind of healing revolution: transforming how we think about sweetness itself. Her company produces palmyra blossom nectar, an ayurvedic superfood that's changing the game for health-conscious consumers seeking a genuinely healthy alternative to sugar.

Unlike refined sugars that spike blood glucose, palmyra blossom nectar has a low glycemic index and is rich in vitamins, minerals and amino acids. Harvested sustainably from the flowers of the palmyra palm tree, this ancient ingredient – honoured in ayurvedic tradition – offers natural sweetness with genuine nutritional benefits. Kristina's dedication to bringing this ethical, eco-friendly superfood to wellness-conscious consumers demonstrates how traditional wisdom and modern health needs can beautifully align.

Find out more

- Information about Brave Crab is at bravecrab.co.uk
- Explore Penny Price Aromatherapy at penny-price.com
- The SugaVida range is at sugavida.com



Finding PURPOSE

Two new OMMMbassadors are using their wisdom & experience to support an awakened world

The sacred sound of *Om* is said to be the essence of consciousness; it is also the foundation of OMMM, an organisation that exists to elevate global consciousness by deepening our connections and bringing ancient wisdom into modern life.

Founded by minority women Michelle Narciso and Maria Alphonse, OMMM creates meaningful experiences and immersive events that support personal growth and bring ideas to life. It relies on the wisdom of its network of 'OMMMbassadors' to extend impact all over the world.

OMMMbassadors are individuals who are living their purpose – working in different fields, but united by the conviction that everything is connected. Two new OMMMbassadors, Rebecca Irby and Tenzin Seldon, have recently joined the OMMM community to share their wisdom and expertise. We look at how they are helping individuals and communities to live in harmony, guided by purpose and united through co-creation, in line with OMMM's founding goals.



Find out more

- View the full and growing network of OMMMbassadors at ommpresents.com

SEEKING A NORTH STAR

For a very long time, Rebecca Irby thought purpose was something you arrived at, like a destination. Over the years she learned that purpose is more like a North Star; it does not stay still, it guides you – especially when the path is unclear.

Rebecca remembers the moment in her life when she lost interest in chasing titles or approval, and instead wanted her work to feel honest and to matter. That realisation did not give Rebecca all the answers, but it gave her direction.

Rebecca's North Star is creating more peace and balance in the world; whatever brings her closer to that is what she chooses to do. Despite often being introduced by her roles or affiliations, she understands that these titles do not define her. At her core she is someone who believes deeply in human dignity and collective possibility.

In a very real way, we are shaped by the communities into which we are born and the resources to which we have access. Postcodes matter – they influence opportunity, exposure and expectation – yet it's not a given that they should determine our trajectory.

A NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Rebecca has seen what becomes possible when people are invited to imagine beyond the limitations placed on them; when they are trusted with responsibility and when they are met with belief instead of doubt.

One of the most powerful lessons of her life came through collective work to ban nuclear weapons. Many at the time believed it was impossible – too political, ambitious and unrealistic – and questioned Rebecca's right to be speaking about it. A small group of committed individuals thought otherwise; they believed that if they centred human impact, moral clarity and collective action, change could happen. They knew that by shifting the frame from militarism to humanitarian impact, they would be on a much stronger footing.

In 2017, that effort eventually led to a Nobel Peace Prize – not because of any one person, but because of shared conviction. It taught Rebecca



that momentum is built when people align their energy, their values and their imagination towards a common goal. Belief, when held collectively, is not naive – it is catalytic.

LOVE & JOY

Through that process, Rebecca also learned that joy is not a distraction from serious work – it is what sustains it. Love is not a soft concept but a strategy for endurance. When movements lose their capacity for joy, they burn out; when leaders disconnect from love, they lose their humanity.

The work Rebecca does is rooted in the understanding that how we move through the world matters as much as, and in her opinion far more than, what we are trying to change. Joy creates momentum. Love builds trust. Together, they make transformation possible.

Everything Rebecca has learned has brought her back to one truth: we are deeply interconnected. None of us will change the world alone – we each carry a piece of the solution, whether we realise it or not. When we choose to believe in our own agency and in each other, we will feel a shift in what feels possible. Rebecca's work is simply an expression of that belief; an ongoing invitation to imagine differently, act collectively and move forward with courage and care.



‘The companies solving our biggest challenges are the same companies that are positioned for exponential returns’

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS THAT SCALE

Tenzin Seldon was born in a climate-vulnerable region of India, where she was a first-hand witness to melting glaciers, shifting monsoon patterns, displaced communities and other devastating consequences of global warming.

That early exposure taught her something most investors miss: the Earth is an interconnected system, and silos will not decarbonise the planet. This realisation is why Tenzin built a career that moved between building companies, policy, entrepreneurship and now venture capital, always asking how we translate urgency into action that actually works.

REAL-WORLD TECH

Tenzin moved to the United States during her adolescent years. In 2012, she graduated *summa cum laude* from Stanford with highest distinction and Phi Beta Kappa honours. She became the first Tibetan-American Rhodes Scholar, and headed to Oxford to pursue a dual master's degree.

After Oxford, Tenzin joined the UN at its Asia headquarters in Thailand, where she worked on disaster risk reduction and supported countries in building resilience. In 2016, she founded Kinstep, a B2B platform that matches pre-vetted immigrants with fair employment opportunities. The venture earned her a spot on Forbes' 30 Under 30 List and reinforced a lesson she had been learning for years: the most effective solutions are built by people who deeply understand the problem. The human dimension can't be separated from the business model; they are one and the same.

Tenzin carried that philosophy into The Plant, using net-negative infrastructure tech and adaptive reuse of historic buildings to create a global home for climate solutions. It taught her how to scale climate technologies in the real world, but it also surfaced a bigger question: how do we deploy capital to generate outsized financial returns while driving meaningful climate stabilisation?

Strong climate action could add up to \$26 trillion to the global economy by 2030. Traditional venture capital consistently overlooks the most transformative solutions, particularly those led by people from climate-vulnerable communities. That's bad business; Tenzin was quick to realise that lived experience creates competitive advantage.

CLIMATE & VENTURE CAPITAL

In 2023 Tenzin founded Pulse Fund, which invests in scalable climate companies across four interconnected verticals: food and agriculture, energy, infrastructure and mobility. The fund focuses on high-growth, vertically integrated companies that deliver superior margins, outsized

financial returns and supply chain risk mitigation. Since founding Pulse Fund, Tenzin has built a portfolio of the fastest-growing companies positioned at the forefront of climate transformation. She co-led Twelve's \$200 million Series C, part of a \$645 million total raise – one of the largest financing rounds in e-fuels. Tenzin also co-led Mast Reforestation's \$25 million Series B and holds board positions with Mast Reforestation, Endera, Twelve, BlocPower, Floodbase, Unravel Carbon, Nearshore and others.

Tenzin also serves on the board of Marathon Digital Holdings and advises Stanford's Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence initiative, UN NGO Creative Visions Foundation and One Earth. Her work has been recognised with the UN Innovative Disruptor Award, designation as a Harry S. Truman Scholar by Congress, Forbes' 'Most Likely to Impact the Next Century' and the 21st Century Icon Award from the London Stock Exchange.

People sometimes ask how Tenzin balances the urgency of climate action with the discipline of venture capital, but she doesn't see them as separate things. The companies solving our biggest challenges are the same companies that are positioned for exponential returns; you just have to be willing to look in the right places and build with the right people.



WOMEN IN CONSERVATION

Neel Zaver explores how Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka is redefining wildlife protection

Last year I had the extraordinary privilege of speaking with Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka on my radio show, *Our Altered World*, broadcast on UK Health Radio.

What struck me most during that interview – which covered her journey, her conservation philosophy and the intersections of public health and wildlife protection – was her unwavering belief that protecting gorillas and people are not separate missions.

In 1996, when Dr Gladys arrived at Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park as the country's first full-time wildlife veterinarian, the mountain gorilla population had dwindled to around 300. She was 26 years old, armed with a veterinary degree from the Royal Veterinary College in London and confident she could help restore Uganda's vanished wildlife. What she discovered instead would fundamentally reshape how the world approaches conservation, and reveal that protecting animals begins by protecting the people who share their forests.

That transformative discovery came in 1996, when a debilitating scabies outbreak swept through a habituated gorilla group. 'The gorillas were losing hair and developing white, scaly skin', Dr Gladys recalled. She consulted a doctor friend and the answer was stark: scabies is rampant in low-income communities with inadequate healthcare. After treating the outbreak an infant gorilla died, with mites still crawling across its skin.

The lesson crystallised instantly: the gorillas' illness wasn't a wildlife crisis, it was a public health crisis. The neighbouring communities, living with limited access to healthcare and sanitation, weren't enemies of conservation but part of the ecosystem. 'I realised then that you really need to improve the public health of the people', Dr Gladys told me; 'otherwise you're not going to be able to help the gorillas.'

HEALTHY VILLAGES

That insight became the genesis of Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH), which Dr Gladys co-founded in 2003 with Stephen Rubanga and Lawrence Zikusoka. Today, it stands as a global model for the 'One Health' approach: recognising human health, animal health and environmental health are inseparable. It sounds obvious, but at the time it proved revolutionary.

CTPH doesn't simply treat sick gorillas; it deploys approximately 430 community health workers, called Village Health and Conservation Teams, into homes around Bwindi to improve health

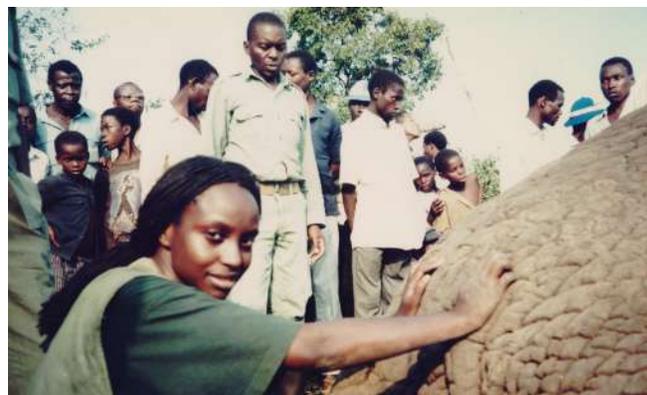


and livelihoods while protecting the forest. At least half of these health workers are women, which has helped to create a cohort of female conservation leaders in a field historically dominated by men.

The teams refer sick people to be screened for HIV, scabies and TB. They teach people how to install hand-washing stations outside toilets and cover rubbish heaps to prevent contamination. They offer advice on family planning, a subject that emerged from conversations around community needs. 'Women were desperate for more control over their bodies', Dr Gladys explained. 'They had too many children they didn't really want. One woman was having 10 children per family.' The programme was so effective that family-planning rates exceeded Uganda's national rural average.

The teams expanded their scope even further by teaching sustainable agriculture and soil conservation on steep hillsides. They helped families access 20% of national park fees and \$10 from each gorilla permit, which is tourism revenue given to communities by the Uganda Wildlife Authority. They worked with traditional birth attendants to encourage safe hospital births without undermining cultural roles.

Most remarkably, the teams integrated traditional healers into the One Health model; CTPH recognised that while healers excel at relationship-based care, the bedside manner that overworked clinics cannot match, certain diseases like TB and HIV require antibiotics. Now, both systems are working in concert.



CLOCKWISE
Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka examining gorilla fecal samples; an adult blackback gorilla; Dr Gladys' memoir, *Walking with Gorillas*; Dr Gladys during the translocation of elephants to Queen Elizabeth National Park; a coffee farmer at her farm, next to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park; VHCT administering family planning in her community

THE GENDER DIMENSION

An unexpected outcome of the programme was the way it drew women into conservation – a traditionally male-dominated sector – while simultaneously bringing men into public health, where nurses and health workers are predominantly female. ‘Both men and women affect conservation and public health outcomes’, Dr Gladys said. ‘Having gender equity on both sides is really important.’

Dr Gladys’s observation reflects a broader truth: women’s leadership consistently produces more holistic environmental outcomes, yet women remain significantly under-represented in conservation leadership. Her career reveals both progress and persistent barriers; growing up in Kampala she was obsessed with animals, and considered unusual by a peer group who found her aspirations unrealistic. By 18 she had founded a wildlife club and organised trips to Queen Elizabeth National Park. During those excursions, she witnessed a landscape scarred by civil war and poaching; elephants had fled to the DRC, lions and leopards had vanished. Rather than despair, she resolved to become ‘a vet who can bring back Uganda’s wildlife to its former glory.’

As Uganda’s first wildlife veterinarian Dr Gladys had no predecessors to learn from, yet this limitation became liberating: without an existing playbook, she was free to invent one.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The impact of Dr Gladys’ integrated approach speaks volumes. The mountain gorilla population has grown from approximately 300 in 1996 to over 1,000 by 2018, with approximately 460 in Uganda’s Bwindi subpopulation and over 600 across the Virunga Massif. In recognition of this rare conservation success story, the IUCN downlisted mountain gorillas from Critically Endangered to Endangered in 2018.

Community transformation runs equally deep. Dr Gladys shared the story of an elderly silverback named Ruhondeza who became very frail and settled on community land. Rather than viewing him as a crop-destroying threat, locals protected him; when he died they came to pay their respects. ‘They had learned to coexist with the gorillas and really care’, she recalls. The economic reality reinforces this shift: with Bwindi gorilla tourism accounting for 60% of Uganda Wildlife Authority revenue, former poachers now work as rangers and trackers, earning sustainable livelihoods protecting wildlife rather than killing it.

During Covid-19, Dr Gladys co-authored a policy brief promoting responsible gorilla tourism, advocating for masks and physical distance. Uganda’s government readily agreed. Now, mask-wearing and respectful distance remain standard practice, a habit CTPH hopes to sustain indefinitely.

SCALING ACROSS AFRICA

CTPH is adapting its model to other Ugandan habitats and expanding into the DRC, where eastern lowland gorilla populations are declining. Nigeria has also expressed interest. Rather than establishing expensive offices everywhere, Dr Gladys builds partnerships with local organisations to adapt the model using a more sustainable, locally rooted approach. With only 10 African countries harbouring gorillas and 21 harbouring great apes, the potential is enormous.

Yet scaling faces genuine barriers; governments must embrace an approach that disrupts the traditional separation between health and conservation sectors, while donors must look beyond funding single sectors exclusively. It requires finding partners willing to think in an interdisciplinary way. ‘The communities are always the easiest to convince’, Dr Gladys



ABOUT NEEL ZAVER

Neel Zaver is a biologist and creative who is using his work to showcase the inspiring work of organisations around the world for the environment, conservation and our planet. His goal is to instil hope by profiling those working to create a positive future for us all.

told me. They live simultaneously with disease, wildlife conflict and climate impacts; they grasp the interconnection instinctively.

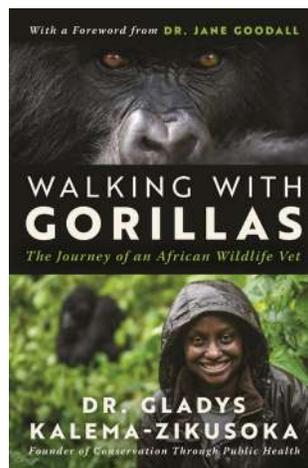
WHEN WOMEN LEAD

This year’s International Women’s Day theme, ‘Accelerate Action’, reflects an urgent truth: at current progress rates, gender parity won’t arrive until 2158. Yet women’s leadership is essential for climate action. Women represent the majority of people displaced by climate change, yet hold minority status in environmental decision-making.

Dr Gladys embodies what accelerated action looks like. She was recognised in the BBC’s ‘100 Women in 2023’, specifically among 28 Climate Pioneers for her One Health approach. She’s a UNEP Champion of the Earth and an Edinburgh Medal recipient. Yet these accolades pale beside the tangible results of her work: a growing gorilla population, rural communities with improved health and economic opportunity, women empowered as conservation leaders and a model demonstrating that climate action, conservation and public health reinforce rather than compete with each other.

Dr Gladys’ goal is to grow gorilla awareness alongside an understanding that conservation doesn’t require choosing between human wellbeing and wildlife protection. She points to 300 landowners willing to sell property for gorilla habitat expansion. Most compellingly, she emphasises young people. CTPH works with schools to build a generation of conservationists – some may eventually become parliament members – which is the kind of systemic change that transcends any single initiative.

This 30-year journey distils to a simple yet radical principle: ‘You can’t address human health alone or animal health or ecosystem health because each affects the others. You have to address them all together.’ In a world fractured by institutional silos, Dr Gladys’ integrated vision demonstrates an alternative style of leadership. This International Women’s Day, she is a perfect example of how one person’s refusal to accept existing boundaries can reshape an entire field. She shows us that saving endangered species isn’t primarily a wildlife problem, it’s a human problem. And when women lead, we find solutions that benefit everyone.



Find out more

- You can listen to the full conversation between Neel and Dr Gladys by streaming this episode of Our Altered World on UK Health Radio’s podcast platform
- Dr Gladys’s memoir, *Walking with Gorillas: The Journey of an African Wildlife Vet*, is available from all major retailers

PORTUGAL CALLING

We meet some of the women who have been drawn to a life of community in Central Portugal



Portugal has a powerful spiritual draw: every year pilgrims walk the Portuguese *Camino de Santiago*, one of the greatest historic walking trails of the world, across Portugal to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Separately, the vision of the Fifth Empire (*Quinto Império*) predicts a time when individuals from all over the world will converge to awaken a higher consciousness and co-create a harmonious world, rooted in Portugal but transcending geographical borders.

The popular Lisbon and Sintra, a picturesque UNESCO World Heritage site steeped in mysticism, draw tourists to the coast, but venture inland and a very different journey awaits.

The Portuguese Inland Way of Santiago has been dubbed a journey of self-discovery across the purest natural landscapes, while the inland city of Fátima, a key centre for the Cult of the Virgin Mary, is known as the place where spiritual journeys begin.

Mountain villages, complete with their trademark schist houses, are being discovered and revived – some with the help of ADXTUR (Agency for the Tourist Development of the Schist Villages) and others thanks to pure love, trust and commitment to the restoration of community and the revival of a special, female-led magic.

One such location is Freedom Ville, a stunning eco resort co-founded by Nadia Duinker. Waterfalls, natural springs and enchanted woods wind their way through fertile land that nourishes life in all its forms; avocados, and pomegranates thrive just as much as the people lucky enough to visit this abundant, magical land. Nadia has form with restoration projects; she has a track record of transforming abandoned and disused space into thriving hubs of creative energy that bring communities together.

The road hasn't been smooth – literally or figuratively. 'Following your dreams rarely brings the results you expect', Nadia shares. 'Choosing truth over comfort is not a reward-based decision, it is an initiation – one that leads straight into the deepest transformation of your life. It reveals the scars we carry, the stories we tell ourselves and the lies we learned to survive.'

Nadia has found that while cities have a tendency to distract, nature has the ability to reveal things we may have been trying to avoid. 'Walking the path of authenticity is not for the faint-hearted', she warns; 'it is not a sprint, but a marathon home. Along the way you may have to let go of people, places and comforts that once felt safe – but we grow strong by allowing ourselves to feel weak.'

'Vulnerability isn't a flaw, it's the true strength of the soul', Nadia continues. 'Freedom begins when we stop ignoring the cries of our soul and finally learn to come home to ourselves.' The reward is not success as we were taught to recognise it; it arrives disguised as a return – a slow, sometimes painful journey back to your true self. One that humbles, softens, breaks you open and teaches gratitude.

Here, Nadia introduces some of the people who, like her, have been drawn to Central Portugal in search of an alternative lifestyle, hallmarked by freedom from systems that seem increasingly outdated and unfit for sustainable, heart-centred living. We asked what brought them here and what, if anything, they need to make their journey smoother.



HEL SOOKHRAM FOUNDER, MYOHO VALLEY AND VALLEY RADIO

I left conventional life behind in 2006 – not as an act of escape *per se*, but as a commitment. I knew early on that the structures offered to us were too narrow for the way I wanted to live, love, create and relate. I spent years travelling, learning, unlearning, building and dissolving; each place gave something, but none asked me to stay in the way Portugal did.

What drew me here was the space. On first glance there's hardly civilisation; the wider community here seems quiet, but it's lively when you know where to look. Finding my private valley, filled with an abundance of resources, nature and a village to rebuild, was a sign to stay. It was a space to build something new: a life aligned with the seasons. I slowly learned to remove pressure placed on myself, by myself; to breathe and slow down into a pace that allows for presence.

People arrive with intention. Many are restoring old ruins, land and themselves at the same time. I notice guests often arrive exhausted by noise, speed and expectation; what they leave with is simpler and valuable. Nervous systems that have softened, clarity about what matters and a sense of belonging to something more primal and wise than any manmade system. Connection to ourselves – to nature. Nature is not a backdrop to life here, it is in fact the boss.

What do you need now?

Depending on the timeline, some long-term residents who want to clear land, build up and plant and manage food, and help to create inter-dependent autonomous areas within the space. In the longer term, someone to buy most of the land.'

More is at myohovalley.com



ELINE VAN DER STRAETEN

ARTS & CRAFTS PERSON

I got to know the land I live upon about five years ago; back then I was volunteering at a project I now live next door to. The place felt untouched. There was clean soil and clean air, and the waters that flowed were sweet and transparent. It is such a rare event to walk on land so pure that my body instantly felt its clarity. I fell in love with its wilderness and quietness.

Buying the land was an initiation into an era of self-discovery and reclaiming my sovereignty. I grew up in Flanders, Belgium – a region that's very busy and dense. Early on I felt something was missing. After my studies in art school, I sold my belongings and started backpacking around the world. I spent most of my twenties living nomadically until I came to live in Central Portugal about a year ago. Here, time seems to move more slowly and there is room to live with the seasons of nature.

I strongly believe that our environment is a reflection of our inner state and that the two are inseparable. To live closely with the land is a practice of balancing out the forces of the inner and the outer worlds. I can listen and just be with myself without distraction. I tend to the garden and my dreams. I love to make arts and crafts in old-fashioned ways that take time, patience and dedication. I guess it's an act of rebellion to reclaim the slow ways of living in a world moving so fast.

What do you need now?

In winter I am in hibernation mode, so I don't need much besides a warm place and yummy food. With the arrival of spring, my plan is to bounce back into making the land more comfortable. I will need enthusiastic helping hands to co-create and co-habit with me. You definitely need some good team players by your side when living off grid!

Follow Eline on Instagram @eli_s_dwelling



ZARAH AHARON

FOUNDER, MAJUMA VALLEY

I have always loved travelling, searching for beautiful and unique places, being close to nature and discovering new cultures. When I was 22, after spending a few months in Central America, I began dreaming of one day owning a piece of land where I could create my own little paradise and share it with others.

In 2017 I visited Portugal for the first time and immediately fell in love with the energy of the land. It felt calm and untouched, with stunning beaches and many places that weren't overly developed. Out of curiosity, I started researching properties online and was surprised to find that in Central Portugal, beautiful land was still affordable – even on a modest budget.

After a few trips and many viewings, I walked into one last real estate office and asked about a small piece of land with a ruin. When she showed me the photos, I knew instantly. When I arrived there in person, it felt like home – not a logical choice, but a deep, inner knowing.

Nature is a huge part of my everyday life. Living so close to trees, plants and animals feels deeply healing. The seasons make you constantly adapt to a new situation. After almost 34 years in Amsterdam, I can finally be my true self instead of the constantly overstimulated version of me.

A lot of people who have been staying with us are saying they really feel recharged. A stay here also shows people the more difficult parts of themselves, so they go through it. It can be rough, but afterwards they feel lighter. No noise, no distractions – just you.

What do you need now?

What I need now is people to spread the word of Majuma Valley. This year I want to start renting out my place as a whole for groups – for parties, friends, small events and retreats.

More is at majumavalley.com



DANA VAN DER ELST

INTUITIVE (RELATIONSHIP) COACH

Nature is the answer to almost every question you could ask about why I'm here: what makes this place special, how the area supports me and what our visitors and I get here that we couldn't get anywhere else. I don't just mean nature 'around us', but the realisation that we are nature. Living this raw rewilds us!

As a species, we are so far removed from our natural state that we have forgotten it. Avalon helps us remember, and with this comes a remembering of our spiritual self and the innate gifts to which we all have access: intuition, inner wisdom, higher guidance and connection with the energetic field that connects everything. Away from the noise and distractions, we remember our true selves.

I host retreats at Avalon, our off-grid, conscious eco-community, to facilitate this remembering. Here, the land helps you connect your roots with the Earth and, at the same time, to your connection with the stars.

What do you need now?

What would help the world tremendously is for women to trust their higher guidance and start acting on their intuition. I would love to connect with more women through my Avalon Community App, where we practise our intuition together. I have developed an Intuition Ignition Course so that more of us can start using our intuition and higher guidance. Through my app, I can reach more people. My app will also be the main way to promote retreats and coaching here in Portugal.

Download the community app at avalon.passion.io

Find out more

Information about Freedom Ville and how to book a stay is at freedomville.pt

Valley Fest 2026

Get set for the UK's first mainstream regenerative festival

On 30 July 2026, a quiet stretch of Somerset countryside will become the launchpad for something far bigger than a music festival. Valley Fest 2026 is being positioned as the UK's first mainstream regenerative festival – an event designed not merely to reduce harm, but to leave the land, the community and the festival sector itself better than it found them.

Overlooking Chew Valley Lake, Valley Fest has long celebrated food, farming and music – but the 2026 edition brings a step-change in ambition. Organisers say regeneration – restoring ecosystems, strengthening communities and redesigning systems – will sit at the heart of every decision, from food sourcing and land management to energy, infrastructure and partnerships. It's a shift that will begin before the festival gates even open.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

On Thursday 30 July 2026, Valley Fest will host the inaugural Wake the Valley Symposium, a full-day international summit designed to lay the intellectual and practical foundations for the weekend ahead.

The Symposium will bring together farmers, scientists, policymakers, artists, impact investors and business leaders to define what a regenerative festival model truly looks like. Rather than a series of abstract discussions, organisers promise tangible outputs: land restoration commitments, corporate pledges, policy recommendations and measurable ecological goals for the festival site and beyond.

Partners include OMMM and Greenpeace, whose mission to demonstrate positive action for the planet will anchor the programme. Facilitators are expected to co-curate sessions and lead immersive workshops exploring soil health, biodiversity, circular systems and cultural change.

Morning sessions will tackle what organisers describe as 'the limits of incremental sustainability', arguing that simply reducing emissions or waste is no longer enough. With a keynote address from leading global regenerative thinker Rob Hopkins, panels will explore how festivals, as cultural accelerators, can reshape public imagination.

By midday attention will turn to practice: regenerative farming, circular infrastructure,



PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES BECK

community equity and new business models. Afternoon working groups will focus on concrete festival challenges, from sourcing food for 12,500 people using regenerative suppliers to designing waste systems where materials become inputs for land restoration. The day will conclude with the symbolic 'Lighting the Regenerative Torch', formally opening Valley Fest 2026.

A LIVING LABORATORY

The ambition for Valley Fest is bold: the vision is for the festival to become a living laboratory for planetary repair. Organisers say regeneration will be embedded across five pillars: regenerative agriculture and food systems; landscape restoration; circular operations; community prosperity and radical transparency. The aim is to create a model other UK festivals can adopt; within 12 months, organisers hope at least five additional festivals will integrate Valley Fest's regenerative standards.

TRANSFORMING A SECTOR

For decades, the UK's festival sector has worked to reduce environmental impact, supported by organisations such as A Greener Festival. Valley Fest seeks to go further, moving from 'doing less harm' to actively improving ecosystems and communities. This includes multi-year land management plans for biodiversity uplift, renewable energy strategies designed to exceed operational needs and transparent impact scorecards tracking soil health, carbon, water and social value.

Corporate partners are also central to the strategy. Through tiered partnerships, businesses will be invited not simply to sponsor but to co-create, piloting regenerative supply chains, investing in local restoration and publicly committing to organisational change. A flagship 'Regeneration Grove' will offer interactive demonstrations of soil biology, water systems and biodiversity in action.

FOOD AS THE MEDIUM

True to Valley Fest's roots, food remains central. Long harvest tables overlooking the lake will host conversations between farmers, chefs, scientists and CEOs. Every ingredient will be traced back to its source. Farmers will sit alongside diners to tell the story of soil, seed and season.

The organisers describe the shared meal as 'the symposium within the symposium' – a space where pledges are made face to face and ideas move from theory to action.

'THE GLASTONBURY OF REGENERATION'

The intention is for Wake the Valley Symposium to be a permanent fixture – an annual anchor event growing year on year to attract international speakers, government delegates, regenerative farmers and creative leaders.

Over time, the goal is for Valley Fest to become what one organiser describes as 'the Glastonbury of regeneration' – not in scale, but in influence. A place where ideas, relationships and commitments form, and the UK's transition from extractive systems to restorative ones is accelerated.

CULTURE & COMMUNITY

As climate pressures intensify and public appetite for meaningful action grows, Valley Fest 2026 is betting that joy and responsibility can coexist – that music, culture and community can serve as catalysts for ecological repair.

When the gates open on 30 July, festivalgoers may come for the music and the Somerset sunshine, but organisers hope they will leave with something more enduring: a glimpse of what a regenerative future feels like – and a role in helping to build it.

Find out more

■ Book your tickets to Valley Fest 2026 at valleyfest.co.uk

COMPETITIONS

We've got our hands on a bunch of prizes from fantastic companies that are doing things differently. We love them all and we want to give you a chance to get to know them, too – so we're running these competitions so you can have a go and see for yourself!

We've handpicked this selection of green pearls – including an incredible opportunity for a retreat organiser to pilot their work immersed in nature in Central Portugal – to help set you on a path to a lighter lifestyle.

To enter and view any Ts & Cs, visit mygreenpod.com



WIN

A RETREAT PILOT AT FREEDOM VILLE

We're offering one retreat organiser the incredible opportunity to pilot their work at Freedom Ville, a restored village in Central Portugal, for up to four nights (exclusive use).

Deadline for entries:
01.07.26



WIN

'HARMONY' CALLIGRAPHY, BY MASTER SHA

One lucky reader will receive this 'Harmony' calligraphy print (worth \$490), created by the artist Dr & Master Zhi Gang Sha, a world-renowned healer and humanitarian.

Deadline for entries: 01.04.26



WIN

5 WEEKEND TICKETS TO VALLEY FEST 2026

Pack your tent and grab your wellies - it's nearly time for Valley Fest! This family-friendly festival is a creative cocktail of arts, music, regeneration and joy.

Deadline for entries: 01.06.26



WIN

2 TICKETS TO WAKE THE VALLEY SYMPOSIUM

Join scientists, farmers, artists and investors for this full-day summit (30 July 2026), kicking off Valley Fest with an exploration of what a regenerative festival model truly looks like.

Deadline for entries:
01.06.26



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