



Year of the Snowgoose

Bella Radcliffe, wife of Radio 2 presenter Mark Radcliffe and mum-of-two, tells Gillian Hook about her homelife in a pretty Cheshire village and stretching her wings as an interior designer

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN COCKS

Above: Bella at work in her studio with a client's 'mood board'
Below right: The Radcliffe family's idyllic cottage in Lower Whitley, near Warrington
Opposite: Interior designer Bella with her husband, Radio 2 DJ Mark Radcliffe

What a difference a year makes. Twelve months ago Bella Radcliffe was still revelling in excitement after her interior design company won an unheard of double in a Chester-based competition.

The triumph, which she shared with her then business partner Michele Rothwell, was all the more remarkable because they had formed the company only two months earlier and Bella had begun studying interior design for just nine months.

Now Snowgoose is her solo venture and she hasn't looked back. 'Things could not have gone faster or better for a first year of trading and I truly love my job,' beams Bella at her home in Lower Whitley near Warrington that she shares with husband Mark Radcliffe, the Radio 2 presenter, and their daughters Mia, nine, and Rose, six.

'Mine is such a lovely job because I'm surrounded by beautiful things all the time, it's creative and I get to try so many

different styles. And I can fit it all around my family.'

Bella, 39, originally worked in television production in London where, among other things, she organised coverage of The Brits, Glastonbury, the Cannes Festival and The White Room, the music programme on which she met Mark.

After marrying in 1997, they both worked in Manchester, Bella for Granada on Stars In Their Eyes. She then became a stay-at-home mum until both girls were at The Grange School in Hartford.

'I wanted a change of direction. I took a part-time course in interior design at Mid-Cheshire College for a year and I loved it. I found I could do things I didn't realise I could, like draw,' said Bella.

It was at this time that she met Michele, whose children also went to The Grange. Together they formed Snowgoose, won the double award at the homes show and Bella graduated with distinction.

'We were shocked to get both awards →





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because we knew it had never happened before. But it gave me confidence in myself and other people confidence in us, proving that we weren't just two housewives playing at it.'

Earlier this year Michele left to pursue her own interests, but there's been no stopping Bella. 'It's had a momentum all its own and I didn't need to push it. I currently have major domestic projects in Wilmslow, Knutsford, Walton and London and a property development in North Manchester.'

So what has been her favourite project to date? 'There's merit in every job and every single time it will be different. I've enjoyed the London job because I've been given complete creative licence by the owners, but working in Cheshire suits me better.'

Bella begins her commissions with a few fabric samples and colour ideas: 'I like to get inside the head of the client and get exactly what they want. There's always one thing that will start the ball rolling: a favourite piece of furniture or painting for example.'

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'I used to create 3-D miniatures of the



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- 1 Mia's ethnic style bedroom with earthy reds and oranges
- 2. A corner of the living room. Is someone in the house interested in music?
- 3. Pretty glassware adds interest to a bathroom shelf
- 4. Blue mood in the guest bedroom
- 5. Bella used cool neutrals in the conservatory

room, but they're too time-consuming, although Mia and Rose loved that and made some of their own – they were like little dolls' houses.'

Her workspace is just off the family's living room and is bright and airy. It is decorated with floral paper and a huge clock dominates one wall. In one corner is a desk and computer for the administrative side and in front of the window is a table piled high with paint and fabric samples, mood boards and magazines.

'I don't mind doing the admin: it's like project managing big live TV events, getting in joiners, electricians, fitters and so on. You get to know who you can trust. I have a brilliant seamstress who does an immaculate job and two brothers who do the upholstery. Being willing to organise everything including the workmen is appealing to clients too.'

She can also call on the services of husband Mark, who broadcasts from Manchester Monday to Thursday, to help out in a different way: 'He's brilliant; he's always been very supportive of me and what I want to do and he's very hands-on with the children.'

Snowgoose Interiors can be contacted on 01928 712736 email bella@snowgooseinteriors.com, or see www.snowgooseinteriors.com

Bella's style

Bella describes her own home as 'decorative and eclectic: 'I love things to be visual with plenty of distraction but at the same time our house is a home with children and a dog, so practicality and comfort are also important.

'I don't get too hung up on the period of a house: while I am sympathetic to its origins I don't feel that just because a house is Georgian, for example, that the decor has to adhere to that style.

'The girls' rooms were influenced by them: Mia despises pink and declared she wanted a red, orange and purple room! I went for an ethnic interpretation inspired by a wall hanging which perfectly combined the colours.

'Rose on the other hand is unashamedly girly and definitely wanted pink. I kept it a soft pink and introduced sage green to give her room a French country feel – had I gone 'princess pink' she would have tired of it too quickly. The patchwork bedspread was the starting point.

I do love beautiful objects (or 'clutter' as Mark sometimes calls them) and have items I have collected from far and wide: the gramophone from Malaysia, a painting from Rome, bedspread from India, all of which were carried back as hand-luggage.

'I do not believe that interior design needs to be untouchably expensive: I am a great fan of Ikea, BHS and the like. A beautiful vase in my study which is often admired was £12 from Matalan.'