

## The irresistible charms of Chatsworth and its owner

The Dowager Duchess of Devonshire, who has just died aged 94, did a brilliant job of turning her home into a theme park, and the results were emulated all over the world. She connected with people from all backgrounds and walks of life and was completely unstuffy.

A couple of days before her death, I paid my first visit to Chatsworth, walking over the hill from Bakewell, stopping for a cuppa at the charming tearoom in Edensor, the village where she spent her final years living in the former vicarage. Chatsworth has always championed contemporary art, and I went to see the annual sculpture show arranged throughout the spectacular gardens. The gold-painted window frames of the main house were ablaze on a balmy autumn day and I wondered how much it would cost to emulate them in my farmhouse in North Yorkshire, where the sun hardly bothers to peek through from December to March.

Deborah Cavendish combined a brilliant eye for money-making with impeccable taste, flogging every aspect of the Chatsworth lifestyle in her many retail outlets on the estate – from blankets to pies and jam, chocolates, wine and even clothes pegs.

My favourite piece in the art show was a giant marble wing, entitled Maro, by the president of the Royal Academy, Christopher Le Brun. Elegant and mysterious, it would make a fitting memorial to this delightful woman.