



# o the garden orchestra

the themes are sex and death. Daniel Butler tunes in to the dawn chorus

## MY PERFECT WEEKEND

Model and actress  
**Lisa B** loves log fires,  
comfort food and filling  
her Buckinghamshire  
retreat with guests

all the errands I haven't had time to do during the week and, of course, pop into Top Shop.

Our guests will arrive at tea time. It's one of my favourite meals, and makes a fantastic welcome, especially in front of a roaring log fire on a miserable day. I love serving cucumber and salmon sandwiches, cup cakes from the Hummingbird Bakery in Notting Hill and a yummy selection of biscuits from M&S.

It's not uncommon for us to have as many as 18 adults, 11 children and four nannies to stay. I love bringing together a mix of people from all walks of life. It's also a good time for me to do my match-making. I've been responsible for a few successes and a few dalliances, but no marriages yet.

On Saturday evening we'll have a great big feast – something delicious that takes the least effort, although I do have someone to help me. Some of my frequent guests probably think, "Oh, no, here we go again", but my top meal would be a seasonal soup followed by baked salmon, glazed with olive oil, mustard, honey and garlic, covered in chopped cherry tomatoes and served with rice and caramelised onions, followed by a simple pudding of berries and cream or ice cream.

My husband's the wine guy. Before our wedding four years ago, we realised that because we'd just renovated our house, we had everything we wanted.

So our gift list consisted of a plant list, a charity list and a wine list at Berry Bros & Rudd.

Anton and a few friends are closet DJs and we have a choice of mixing decks, so we'll have a dance around. It could be 3am before we're in bed.

On Sunday we'll have a big recovery lunch for everyone who has a hangover or has been up early with children. Shepherd's pie is the perfect comfort food. After lunch, our friends will start heading off. I'm very lucky to have a house in the country, but we're on constant maintenance patrol for problems that need sorting.

Back in London, we'll have a leftover supper of soup and maybe some sausages for the boys, and once we've got them to sleep we'll watch another movie in bed. On Monday morning I'm back to grabbing time in front of my computer between nursery drop-offs, nap times and play dates.

Interview by Tamsin Kelly

✦ Lisa B: Lifestyle Essentials is published by Icon Books at £12.99; www.lifestyle-essentials.com

My perfect weekend is spent relaxing with family and friends at our second home in Buckinghamshire, Tyringham Hall (a 37-bedroom mansion designed by Sir John Soane with grounds later laid out by Edwin Lutyens). The idea is to leave our house in Kensington at 3pm to beat the traffic. But what really happens is we load the children, Orlando, two and a half, and Noah, 18 months, into the car some time after 5pm and spend a couple of hours caught up in the M1 expansion. But once we're there it's always worth it.

After the children's bed and bath time, Anton [Bilton, the property developer] and I will have an easy dinner together, such as grilled steak, couscous and asparagus, and relax in front of a film. If it was up to my husband, it would be an action-packed blood and gore one every time, whereas my choice would be a feel-good period film. I've been flat out working on my book and website, so as long as I promise not to bring my laptop into bed, he's happy to go with my film choice. Last weekend we watched *Perfume*, which was good but nowhere close to the brilliance of the book.

On Saturday we'll get up as late as we can with two small children. If the weather's nice, we'll potter in the garden with the children on the swings and slide. For my 36th birthday last year, Anton gave me a fantastic bike, which has a pod in front that the children can sit in, so we might go for a family bike ride together around the property.

I'm a New Yorker and an urban kind of girl – apart from my Hunter wellies – so I can't pretend to be an active country person. My gardening goes as far as the window boxes. Anton is a real gadget collector and loves his quad bikes. If the weather's bad, we have a fantastic indoor pool. When you switch the wave machine on and swim, it feels as if you're doing laps.

The boys have a nap in the afternoon, so I'll drive the 10 minutes to Milton Keynes for what I call my high-street shopping – bliss! I'll do

### BEAK PERFORMANCE: BRITAIN'S TOP 10 DAWN CHORISTERS



On song: (clockwise from above) blackbird; blackcap; song thrush; goldfinch; right, robin



**1 Robin** One of the first to sing, this intensely territorial bird performs around the year, but in spring is probably vocal for longer than any other (apart from its cousin, the nightingale). The breeding song is a high-pitched, fluting call that somehow seems particularly optimistic first thing in the morning.

**2 Blackbird** Another melodic and familiar resident that is both early to start and highly visible as it perches on a high twig. Its call resonates more than most of its smaller brethren – a clarion to their flutes.

**3 Turtle dove** Sadly now a farmland rarity. Anyone who is fortunate enough to hear these pining tones in suburbia will know why a pair of these birds quibbles as the gift on the second day of Christmas.

**4 Blackcap** Sometimes dubbed the "northern nightingale", it has a melodic, bubbling call – less a tune than a cascade of notes falling away through the foliage.

**5 Willow warbler** Far more tuneful and

tiring than its chill-charm lookable, this migrant adds an exotic dash to the backyard residents. Its song has two parts, the second half a repetition of the first but performed half an octave lower.

**6 Song thrush** This is a genuine composer, repeating phrases (distinguishing it from the larger mistle thrush), before finishing with a melodic flourish.

**7 Wren** Despite his tiny size, a mature male may produce a vibrant "till" of more than 700 notes per minute and the song can carry 500 yards.

**8 Dunnock** This is among the first to start singing in spring, yet its short, intense song is often overlooked – no doubt because of its drab appearance and skulking habits.

**9 Goldfinch** Undoubtedly the most melodic finch (the Victorians used to keep it as a caged bird before its similarly tuneful relative, the canary, took over). Its bright red forehead and gold-barré wings add colour to the bird table, too.

**10 Starling** Not normally thought of as a songbird, this small speckled crow is a fantastic mimic. Its natural song is a series of ticking, whistling refrains, but it cheerfully embellishes these by sampling snatches of song from other species to create an increasingly rich and complex song.

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