

making and bread-baking to how to cook game and set an attractive dinner table to eager punters who hang on her every word.

"It really has taken off. We are incredibly busy. People are saying that I'm the UK equivalent of America's Martha Stewart, which is very flattering," she said, pouring coffee.

"And one of the nicest things about it is that my business partner is also my best friend."

Dawn-Elizabeth and Judy met when the Rudds moved to Derbyshire 17 years ago. Judy lives at Basford Hall, Leek, and travels over whenever needed.

Snatching an hour before she had to dash off to meet old friend Richard FitzHerbert, of Tissington Hall, Dawn-Elizabeth talked about her lifestyle philosophy.

"It's all about boosting people's confidence. So many people lack confidence taken out of their own environment.

"I've had powerful businessmen from London arrive here in their own private helicopters, saying they couldn't boil an egg. After one short course, I've had delighted e-mails from them saying they could cook everything in the recipe package I gave them.

"It's amazing what people can do with a little guidance. What we are not is a cookery school. Our whole ethos is fun, enjoyment, relaxation, informality. Some cookery schools are so stuffy.

"I believe that if you have a more laid-back approach, people learn more. People who come here chat, meet new people but also learn to do things they thought they could never tackle."

The list of workshops on offer on the RuddMoncrieff.com website includes cookery demonstrations, flower arranging, wine tasting, fine dining, picnics and parties, gardening, children's cookery, teen and pre-university days, men-only days, plus corporate team building events.

Men only days? I was curious. Dawn Elizabeth explained: "There are certain workshops that appeal to men more than women. We get gentlemen who like to shoot and are interested in learning how to prepare and cook what they have shot. Game cookery seems to be more of a man thing – like barbecuing. We do courses in that too.

"Gentlemen also like wine tasting, so we will spend half the day cooking. Then we'll have a smart lunch and do some wine tasting afterwards."

With her PR background, Dawn-Elizabeth has innumerable contacts and anything, within reason, it seems, can be catered for.

Which is why the pair have now introduced a Bespoke Service, tailored to what client wants. And that can be anything from pony-riding to pilates, clay pigeon-shooting to making cupcakes, style analysis to gift wrapping, tea ceremonies to creating a three-course dinner.

There is only one stipulation. The requests must fit in with the healthy lifestyle ethos.

"If the workshops are something which Judy or I can do, then we will run them," said Dawn-Elizabeth. "I generally do cookery demonstrations and things like gift-wrapping. Judy is marvellous at flower-arranging and table centres. We both do style analysis.

"For other workshops, I simply employ an expert. For instance, I've got Jo-anne Jewett, the make-up guru coming to do some sessions later this year.

"Gay Roper from Manhattan Closets is coming in the autumn to talk about how to arrange your wardrobe. Organisation is the key.

"Our gardener, William Hudson, does a gardening talk and tour around the grounds. We have some rare trees here including a Handkerchief tree, which was displayed at the Chelsea Flower Show.

"I grow a lot of herbs and talk about them and how they are used in cooking.

"When we have wellness days, we might invite a yoga expert, have a pilates class or an expert to talk about detoxing and the benefits of green tea. It's all very flexible."

Talking of tea, though, she is careful to protect the privacy of some of her famous clients, Dawn-Elizabeth is happy to mention that food critic and celebrity chef Matthew Fort dropped in recently to discuss the merits of English tea.

Dawn-Elizabeth prides herself on running courses to suit absolutely anyone. Last year, for instance, the pair introduced workshops for teen and pre-university youngsters, teaching them how to cope with life away from home. "We talked to them about how to budget, how to cook simple meals, how to iron a shirt, how to earn some extra money doing something that interested them. Again it was about confidence building."

This summer, the latest innovation is a boot camp. "People won't stay here. They will stay nearby but it will be run like a military operation, though a gentler version. They will rise at dawn, go for runs and tackle assault courses. Specialists will come here to organise it. Our involvement will be with the healthy eating."



Dawn-Elizabeth is vice-president of Treetops Hospice. Below: Former Rams star Andy Todd (Easter Bunny) and Derby County goalkeeper Stephen Bywater at an Easter Egg Hunt hosted by Dawn-Elizabeth in aid of Treetops Hospice. Bottom: Dawn-Elizabeth is seen with Sarah Newton at a Macmillan coffee morning at Burton's Pirelli Stadium.



Dawn-Elizabeth at her home, The Old Vicarage in Shirley.



As far as Dawn-Elizabeth is concerned, nothing is impossible and no-one is too young or too old to benefit from the workshops.

Clients range from affluent businessman and tiny tots to hen parties and glamorous grannies, inexplicably often from Cheshire.

The lifestyle duo also do corporate days for up to 40 people and six themed seasonal days a year which attract around 150 clients.

"For the seasonal events, we put on five workshops and a lunch and also invite various retailers to sell items like cookware and clothing. I love it," enthuses Dawn-Elizabeth. "I get to meet some wonderful people and some of the feedback is marvellous.

"You don't have to have a huge garden to benefit from some gardening tips. I had one lady who lived in a flat in London and all she had was a window box. I showed her that rosemary, which is fantastic for cooking, is also a beautiful plant.

"She was delighted. She wrote to tell me she was growing it, together with basil, alongside some pansies. It's all down to attention to detail and having a little bit of imagination. Tying a bow round a piece of lavender and putting it on a guest's pillow. That's what I'm about."

Her eye for detail and artistic talents, according to Dawn-Elizabeth, are inherited from her mother, Victoria Cluett-Kendall, herself a food writer and lifestyle guru.

"I grew up in a large manor house in Somerset. It was very beautiful. My mother was amazing. She could cook, garden, arrange flowers and was a master at making something from nothing. I never needed to go to finishing school. I learnt all my skills from her."

The phone rings. Dawn-Elizabeth smiles apologetically. It's almost time



to go. Organising the annual well-dressing at Tissington is another activity which occupies her precious time. "I generally do elevenses and light lunches in the hall kitchen – oh, and teatime treats."

Then she also has to fit in her research for Channel Four's Country House Rescue programme.

"It was Richard FitzHerbert who recommended me. I was brought in to advise the eldest son on how to set the scene for a dinner party at Heath House, on the Derbyshire border. I also helped off camera with the episode about Carnfield Hall, near South Normanton.

"They've asked me to help in a research capacity on the next series but I haven't accepted yet. It's very flattering to be asked but this business is so busy and you don't want to spread yourself too thin or you do nothing well."

Despite her declaration, Dawn is currently in the process of writing a lifestyle book. She also does seasonal radio broadcasts about food, table arrangements, frugal food solutions and gift wrapping ideas, writes lifestyle articles for a variety of magazines and plays an active charity role as vice-president of Treetops Hospice and chairman of the mid and west Derbyshire NSPCC.

She was recently nominated for a Community Champions Award for her charity work after raising thousands of pound for Treetops' Ripple Appeal. "I realise that I am a very lucky girl and I think you need to give something back. I like helping people. I've grown up in a family which has always done charity work and I'm lucky enough to live in a place which I can use to help raise money.

"We have an Easter Egg hunt here every year in aid of Treetops. Last year, Derby County players came dressed up as Easter bunnies, including Stephen Bywater and Andy Todd."

I get up to leave. After her earlier frenetic activity, Molly (left) is settled in her basket and barely lifts an eyelid. Even the super energetic have to rest some time.