



City slicker

Words Victoria Macmillan Bell Pictures Mark Fagelson

IDEAL FOR ZIPPING AROUND LONDON, **THE VAUXHALL AGILA** PROVES THE PERFECT PARTNER FOR A CAPITAL DAY OUT



Rob Baines

CO-FOUNDER, SNOG

Canadian-born Rob's first job in catering was in London. "I started at Westminster Abbey about 20 years ago in their first commercial enterprise, a coffee shop."

Rob lives between New York and London but is keen to point out that Snog is a UK-based company that uses organic UK produce, something of which he's very proud.

He admits he has little downtime, but on a free weekend he would jump on a plane to New York and spend it at the Hamptons.

Who for him is the greatest-ever Brit? "The Queen. Her role has been flawless and I have an incredible amount of respect for her."

"I think England offers the most creative minds in the world. The advertising talent here is amazing and that's why we, as a company, wanted to get involved with the UK and launch ourselves from here."

"London is one of the greenest cities in the world. I walk my dog in Hyde Park morning and night and enjoy the outdoor spaces on a daily basis."

Is there anything he'd like to change about England? "I'd like to give everyone here a decent nutritional education so they're more aware of what they're putting in their bodies."

Snog has branches at 32 Thurloe Place, South Kensington; 9 Brewer Street, Soho; and Westfield Shopping Centre, Shepherd's Bush. www.ifancyasnog.com. Prices from £2.85.

There's something delightful about being in London on a sunny day, especially when you've decided to indulge in a quintessentially British outing in the stylish Agila ecoFLEX.

Armed with a shopping list, I head across Battersea Bridge into the West End, nipping in and out of traffic, and find myself on a very quiet Piccadilly before turning into Jermyn Street and spotting a parking place right outside Fortnum and Mason, my first port of call.

It's an agile little car the Agila, but as a city car its size plays just as important a role as does its excellent all-round vision. Several scooters are parked overlapping the space I'm after but I'm tucked in, meter fed and walking into Fortnum and Mason's stationery department in no time.

Fortnum and Mason has stood on this site for nearly 300 years. Its pale green bags have been marched around London for decades and it's now possible to buy their own leather-bound stationery in this British establishment's chosen pale green hue, which I do: a notebook, edged in gold.

First box ticked, I exit back onto Jermyn Street where the snazzy metallic Lemon Grass colour of the Agila stands out in the row of mostly silver or black parked cars.

Next I put my notebook to good use and drive over to Covent Garden to another great British institution, *The Lady* magazine, where Rachel Johnson, sister of London's mayor Boris, is about to slip her feet under the editor's desk. I've arranged to meet Ben Budworth, Publisher and Chief Executive – and great grandson of the founder – of this magazine for 'gentleladies', England's oldest weekly that's been in continuous publication since 1885. Needless to say, Ben hasn't been there quite that long!

Central in Ben's office is a large antique table around which we sit surrounded by vast oil portraits of his ancestors. I ask Ben what being British means to him.

"Head to Gatwick airport – if you want to see every bit of England under one roof, it's all there! I think part of being British is

moving quietly; running silent, running deep as sub-mariners would say, quietly getting on with things. I think *The Lady* is all about the silent majority; our readers would be fantastic in the secret service because they wouldn't want to stand out too much. That would be considered vulgar."

Should we be more patriotic, more proud of our nation?

"I think we've got immense reason to be proud. We suffer from believing what is written in certain sections of the media. Britishness is about not being the loudest and not being the first over the line, which opens us up to accusations of non-competitiveness."

Flying into the UK on the red eye from the States is one of Ben's greatest pleasures. "Seeing the rolling countryside brings England home. There is so much on offer here beyond our cities."

What about Ben's perfect British Sunday? "Firstly, it needs to be on Saturday so you don't have to go straight into Monday. I'd wake up in Suffolk, with an uncluttered day ahead."

And who in the public eye encapsulates *The Lady* reader of the future? "At the moment, that would be Joanna Lumley but in two years time maybe Claudia Winkleman, Kate Humble or Olga Polizzi, the Hotel Inspector."

Leaving Bedford Street and *The Lady*, what amazes me about the Agila is the power from the 1.3 litre ecoFLEX turbo diesel engine which, offers 75PS and yet there's no shortage of power and acceleration. The Agila's five-speed manual gearbox works smoothly with powerful delivery and makes cutting through the back streets a breeze.

And when you're laden with bags, the Agila's height and wide-opening doors are really useful when loading and unloading.

A rumbling stomach alerts me that I'm hungry – time for a 'Snog' then. I streak through Notting Hill to the vast new Westfield shopping mall for a 'Snog' with Rob Baines, co-founder of this über-healthy frozen yoghurt company.

We meet in the 'Snog' pod where Rob is eating a tiny cup of their fat-free goodness >>>

Our Great British day out. Opposite, left to right, top to bottom: A copy of *The Lady* sits snugly in the seat back pocket – buy your own from the newsagent for £1.50; a Union Jack clutch is the perfect partner for our British day out; nippy Agila on the London city streets – the Agila 1.3CDTi ecoFLEX engine offers both financial and environmental savings; on Agila Club and Design models; the large, lidded compartment on the fascia has coin-holders and space for three CDs; the Lemon Grass metallic paint makes an impression; Fortnum and Mason's eau-de-nil notebook; Agila outside Cutler and Gross's shop (see page 43); Snog frozen yoghurt stays steady in the cupholder; ecoFLEX makes for savings on driving and the environment



ROAD TEST



Our car

VAUXHALL AGILA DESIGN 1.3 CDTI 1.6V ECOFLEX

Engine: 1.3 litre 1.6v turbo diesel
 Transmission: Five-speed manual
 Maximum power: 75PS (55kW) @ 4000rpm
 Maximum torque: 190Nm (140lb ft) @ 1750rpm
 Front-wheel drive
 0-60mph: 13.3sec
 Top speed: 103mph
 Combined fuel economy: 62.8mpg
 CO₂: 120g/km

Our route



Left: Agila is easy to park – not that we had too much trouble finding space in Knightsbridge Green. Below: Right: Handy holder for the Cutler and Gross sunglasses. Below: The light, spacious and roomy Agila interior

topped with raspberries and strawberries. I choose to have chocolate brownies sprinkled on top instead of the oh-so-virtuous fresh fruit.

Rob hails from Canada and along with his business partner, Pablo Uribe from Columbia, they have created a marketing dream. “Tell us about your first snog”, “Snogging is good for you” and so on, all of which appear on the back of their cards.

Where did it all start? “Two-and-a-half years ago really,” says Rob. “I travel a lot and had noticed frozen yoghurt selling in other countries but not in the UK. I tried different yoghurts with a view to introducing them here but the problem was that they were all full of sugar. I really wanted a healthy yoghurt without sugar or artificial sweetener, so we went away and did some research and came up with our own version which uses agave nectar, a natural plant extract, instead.” And so Snog was born in Britain – and delicious it is, too.

On my way out I catch sight of a Union Jack clutch in the window of Accessorize, a must-have for a girl about town.

Opening the boot to pack my latest purchase, I lift the bottom shelf up and discover another level of storage maximising space brilliantly and keeping important items out of sight.

Back out into the bright sunshine and mercifully my next stop is to pick up some new sunglasses at the achingly stylish Cutler & Gross on Knightsbridge Green. Every shade and style is catered for, from vintage to contemporary, and I’m keen to try on everything!

First I need to find out what’s in store for



Monica Chong

CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CUTLER & GROSS

Born in Hong Kong, Monica moved to London to study fashion and later met Marie Wilkinson, Cutler & Gross’s Design Director. Their friendship soon became a working partnership, nine years to date, collaborating as a team on every collection.

A city girl at heart, Monica loves London, enjoying trips to the Victoria & Albert museum to spend time in their costume department and library, two spaces that inspire her creativity. Dover Street market is a great spot for shoe shopping followed by lunch at the Wolseley, ending the day with dinner at The Ivy.

Of the British designers, whom does she choose to wear? “Ossie Clark is amazing. I collect his clothes and also Biba – the original Biba. For contemporary designers, I would go with Alexander McQueen and John Galiano.”

What does she think about a national British Day? “I would welcome more national holidays, there aren’t enough. I gave a vintage tea party recently and we had all the flags and bunting out. It was so much fun and a good dose of patriotism. We need more of that.”

(shop pictured overleaf)

16 Knightsbridge Green, London, SW1X 7QL
www.cutlerandgross.com
 Sunglasses from £250



winter and who better to ask than Cutler & Gross’s Creative Director, Monica Chong.

Miss Chong, her tiny frame wrapped in a black dress, is naturally wearing her own design sunglasses today: large, black and very classic. This large frame theme is set to continue over the winter but coloured frames will make an appearance too and boy, is there ever a selection here.

“We work six months ahead of a season like the fashion designers so we’ll do colour predictions, talk shapes and create some samples and then we’ll get the whole range together to shoot it – there will always be a fabulous theme.”

So what can we look forward to as we progress through winter and into spring?

“It’s very black and white essentially.

It’s our 40th year and I’ve styled the theme loosely around the movies *An American in Paris* and *Belle de Jour*.”

I ask her who she thinks has quintessential British style. “Sienna Miller has it and also the new model, Eden Clarke, who features in the latest Burberry campaign”.

Victoria Beckham is a huge fan of Cutler & Gross and if whispers are to be believed, she and the C & G design team are going to collaborate on a capsule collection at some stage in the not-too-distant future.

My next appointment beckons just north of Clerkenwell, to meet the elegant founder of McQueens florists, Kally Ellis, to talk through British flowers. I’m greeted by a heady mix of McQueens own frangipani candles and the scent of vast pots of freshly-cut flora, a beautiful place to while away the afternoon.

Kally set up McQueens in 1991 to provide simple, stylish floral presentations to the



Kally Ellis

FOUNDER,
MCQUEENS FLORISTS

Kally is based in London but currently looking for a second home in Suffolk. Her perfect day would involve a long lunch with family and friends, relaxing at home and enjoying her mother's Greek cooking. "Stuffed vine leaves and a soup called avgolemono made with lemon and egg would do nicely."

Working in the environment she does, who would Kally's British style icon be? "Helen Mirren. She is so elegant and regal, but at the same time so normal and down to earth. But architect Richard Rogers is high on the list too."

With so much competition out there from other well-established florists, how does McQueens stay on top of such a highly-competitive market?

"We have a completely different look to most other florists and we're renowned for our trendsetting ways. I employ artists straight out of art college and then we teach them floristry skills. That's how we keep the creativity going. We have a really contemporary edge to what we do."

Those floristry skills can be taught to the likes of you and me at their flagship store on Old Street, which incorporates their internationally-recognised Floristry School.

Kally agrees. "Everybody's house should be filled with flowers. Not having them would be like living in a house without a fridge or a sofa."

**70-72 Old Street,
EC1V 9AN**
www.mcqueens.co.uk
From £40 for a hand-tied bouquet

London market. Some 19 years on, McQueens can now count Bulgari, Louis Vuitton, Cartier, Christian Louboutin, The Grove, The Berkeley and the Connaught Hotel amongst their clients.

What was the British bloom of choice for summer this year?

"We're really spoilt for choice in this country – I think we have the best flowers of anywhere," says Kally. "Amongst those would be the peony, sweet pea and garden hydrangea, which comes to life as the others fade away. They're so versatile and blousy and offer a lovely range of pastel, antique colours".

Kally's own taste is all about simplicity. Were someone to send her flowers, where on earth would you start?

"It would always be one type of flower – for me personally there's nothing worse than mixing. You make a bigger impact by having one type of flower en masse; say a mass of peonies or roses, or even a mass of flowering mint. But that's not to say mixed bouquets aren't very pretty and we do a lot of those."

One thing's for sure, the word 'arrangement' is passé. McQueens provide *installations* for their clients and if you go to any one of the five-star hotels they create for, in the lobby you will see a landscape: not just one installation but several to form an overall theme. This is art, living art, and the vases they use form a major part of it. It may be that they use one huge vase and have just the one beautiful stem in it – the vase then dominates with stunning effect.

This art form has also attracted some major events and McQueens now provide the flowers and styling for the legendary *Vanity Fair* parties that include the Oscars, the Cannes Film Festival and the TriBeCa Film Festival.

I fill the car with blooms – the air freshener of choice surely – and leave the city. I head down the Embankment towards Chelsea, which is now teaming with commuter cyclists.



Above: Agila's engines are lively through the gears. Right: The Agila is big on flexibility, the 'rear seats' fold flat in an easy, intuitive movement to create an impressive 1050 litres of load space – perfect for hydrangeas!

The Agila's high driving position offers a good platform from which to navigate through the traffic. And despite all the flowers in the back, the generous headroom allows for a decent rear view too. The Agila certainly inspires confidence in a city at rush hour.

Sitting on 15-inch alloy wheels I'm really enjoying the ride which seems to swallow up broken surfaces and smooth out bumps without so much as a shudder. Neither am I losing any coffee into the drinks holder – good stability then.

Cruising out of the capital into a burning red sunset I muse on just how impressed I am with the Agila, stylish and flexible. The driving position is just right, the seats are supportive and there are plenty of storage compartments including a perfect slot for my BlackBerry right under the handbrake but totally out of the way.

To my surprise there is over half a tank of diesel left. I've driven from the south coast to London and back and covered most corners of the capital. I think that's pretty impressive, and given that we haven't exactly been hanging around, very restrained of the engine.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO
WWW.VAUXHALL.CO.UK/AGILA OR CALL 0845 600 1500**



WIN GREAT GOODIES

Here's your chance to enter a free prize draw to win the luxury Fortnum and Mason notebook, worth £67, and the Union Jack clutch bag, worth £40, featured on these pages – as well as a year's subscription to *The Lady* magazine and money off delicious Snog frozen yoghurt. For more details and to enter, visit www.vauxhalldriverscentre.co.uk

ROAD TEST

