



Everything in my garden is rosy...

Grower savours the sweet scent of success

THE celebrity magazine seemed more interested in Prince William's girlfriend Kate Middleton than the bride.

As you turned the pages, you couldn't miss her.

However, in probably the best picture of Lady Rose Windsor's wedding, there wasn't a whiff of Ms Middleton.

The photograph showed Lady Rose and her husband in the doorway of the Queen's Chapel, standing beneath garlands of English roses so perfect you could almost smell the scent.

Even better, those roses were north Essex born and bred, and the woman who nurtured them is on a mission to bring such flowers back to us.

Danae Brook may not have put it quite as strongly as that, but as her company, Country Roses, is the only one in the UK growing true scented English roses, as opposed to rose bushes, then this is a little bit more than finding a niche market.

Country Roses is based in the grounds of Ms Brook's home in Little Horkeley.

The house, designed with a French chateau in mind, fronts 45 acres of mostly arable land, and

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gives Ms Brook and her husband, Robin Duthy, one of the best views in the county. As far as the eye can see is the Stour Valley and there, just beyond the garden, is part of the 2½ acres given to growing roses. In all, there are 12,000 bushes – 60 varieties with their individual scent and colour, and Ms Brook knows how to bring them all to their full potential. That, she insists, is all down to her aunt.

"I have been interested in roses since I was a child," she said. "My aunt was a wonderful gardener and taught me a great deal about roses."

It is a big jump from being passionate about roses to setting up a company which grows and sells them in their tens of thousands to upmarket florists, artists and individual clients. Her roses have found their way on to film sets and, as mentioned, extremely prestigious weddings. And it all began because Ms Brook could not buy a scented English rose.

"This house originally belonged to my mother-in-law, and it had a formal French rose garden," she said. "Those roses had a wonderful scent, but I could not buy them anywhere. I could buy roses, but they were not true English roses because they were not scented."

Come to think of it, most shop-

bought roses do smell of absolutely nothing. You can buy rose bushes which are scented, but not cut roses. Very odd.

"Not when you think purely commercially," she said. "The reason cut roses do not have a scent is because they are cultivated without it. That way, they hardly open and they last longer."

Take in the fact that such blooms travel great distances without spoiling, and you get the picture.

"When my husband and I inherited the house, we decided we wanted to do something with at least part of the land," she said. "Growing scented English roses as a business seemed ideal, especially as the soil and climate here are right for roses – a high sun-to-rain ratio."

So, in 2001, Country Roses was born. The company does not cultivate from scratch. It buys in the rose bushes, then allows them to grow the way they should, complete with scent.

As we sat in the firm's office, just a short walk from the house, Ms Brook handed me about a dozen just-cut roses, all different varieties. Once the awarigs had escaped, I raised the flowers to my nose and inhaled. The scents were subtly mingled. It was intoxicating.

"The varieties don't just have different scents. They each smell differ-

ently during the course of the day," she revealed. "They are remarkable. My favourites? Probably the English apricot Abraham Darby and the Madame Isaac Pereire, a French climbing rose."

Ms Brook is a freelance feature writer. It was through her contacts that she was able to quickly establish a market for her roses.

"I sell mainly to florists. For the Windsor wedding we had to supply the florist with 1,200 roses in water and at the right stage of bloom."

Sometimes she is a little more hands-on. Artist Anya Gallacio, a contemporary of Damien Hirst, put in an order to Country Roses for 10,000 red scented roses for her latest art "installation".

"Her works of art slowly disintegrate, which is what would happen to the roses," she said. "So I went with my oldest grand-daughter to help lay out the flowers, and we really enjoyed it."

She has also set up Country Roses Design with film set decorator Trisha Edwards. Her roses have graced the sets of BBC dramas Cranford and He Knew He Was Right, and the Johnny Depp film Finding Neverland.

"Roses are the champagne of flowers and, with local strawberries, are the scents of summer," she smiled. "But my roses are not just for film sets and society weddings – they are for everyone who wants a rose to smell as it should."

Definitely a woman on a mission.



Everything's coming up roses – clockwise, from above, Danae Brook, owner of Country Roses, and some of her 60 varieties and 12,000 bushes.

Pictures: LOUISE MORRIS (79600-1, 10, 9, 5, 11 and 2)



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