



Hothouse

SARAH HARTLEY'S
PROPERTY GOSSIP

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Tessa's long wait to forge a new life

Just by the very sound of it, a place for sale called The Old Forge, in the pretty village of Wheatley, Oxfordshire, should have Fulham wives tugging at their husband's pinstriped sleeves. But somehow, this family home has, as the agents say, been overlooked.

Its owner is famous enough, Tessa Dahl - daughter of Roald and mother of model Sophie - who may have once moved house six times in three years but right now is stuck in New York waiting to

get rid of The Old Forge so she can buy an apartment over there and something smaller in Oxfordshire.

'The property is brilliantly eccentric,' says Tessa. 'I love the white wisteria around the front door, the plethora of wardrobes, which manage to hold 25 years of my clothes, and the fact that I can drive to London in 50 minutes.'

The five-bedroom, three-storey house first went on the market in the spring at an optimistic £675,000 with agent Morgan Associates. But since the summer, Oxford-based Kemp & Kemp (01865 510000) has been trying to sell it at a 'softer' price.

'The price was maybe a bit on the high side,' says agent Claire Moloney.



LIFE ON HOLD:
Tessa Dahl at The Old Forge in Oxfordshire and daughter Sophie, inset

'We have changed our marketing strategy and are now looking at offers in excess of £600,000.'

Structurally and decoratively, The Old Forge is in fine form, says Moloney. 'Tessa has really good taste. It feels like you are in London.'

That's what may be putting off the weekend market. If you already feel hemmed in by streets of 4x4s, you don't want your country place to be right on the road, with no garage or parking. There are however, two

fantastic cellar rooms for wine buffs and an annexe at the back that is still linked to the house with a separate entrance - ideal for a granny, nanny, au pair or boisterous teenagers.

'Once people get inside and see how big it is with its three storeys and six bedrooms, I think they'll be interested,' Moloney says.

Not to mention the fact that Mick Jagger came for tea when he was not really seeing Sophie...