

luxe

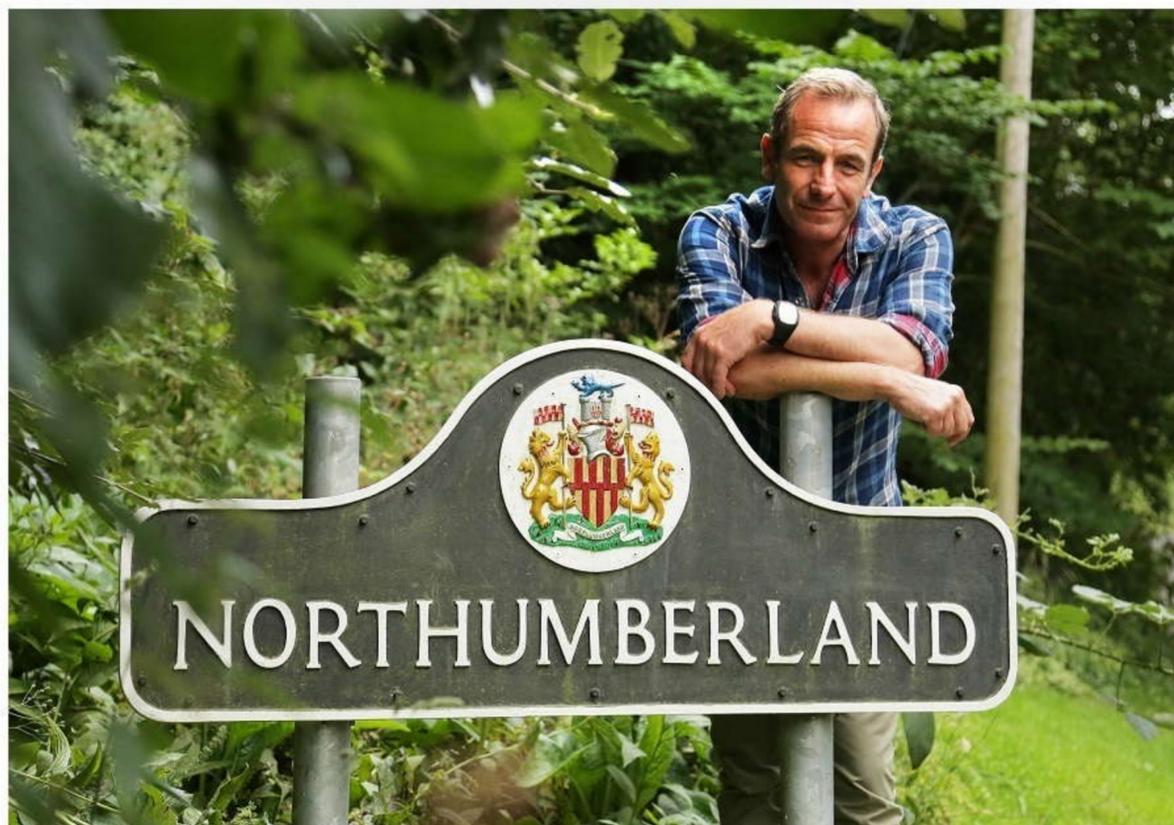
REGIONAL, RELEVANT AND ENTERTAINING.

ROBSON GREEN'S RETURN. Festive luxe. **GOURMET GIFTING.** Whisky galore. **BEST DRESSES.** Cool canapes. **FUNKY FRONT DOORS.** Party inspiration. **MARCO'S FEAST.** Busy women sort Christmas. **HIDEAWAY HOME.** Smart spas. **SOCIAL LIFE.** Big names. **LUXE.**

Green, green grass of home



Robson Green puts down the fishing rod and heavy ammo to re-connect with his Northumberland roots. Kathryn Armstrong caught up with him as he created a stir in Alnwick



It's one of October's most miserable Mondays. Foggy, wet and cold. Northumberland is not at its TV best. But things in Alnwick are stirring. The little town has got the big city jitters as it prepares for a party, its very own 'premiere' no less.

Not since the summer's royal wedding at a castle nearby has there been such reason for finery and flag-waving, though this time it's of a more metaphorical sort.

The great and the good are out in force at the Playhouse where an invited audience – some decked out in their mighty impressive civic regalia – have gathered for a very big night out.

There's a giddy sense of excitement and at its centre is Robson Green who is the very big star of the night. It's the first showing of *Tales From Northumberland*, a TV series which should give a serious shout-out to the attractions of the huge county of Northumberland. Many of the invited audience actually feature in the series or have helped make it happen - so it's a very significant night for them.

By the time you read this, the ITV series will be about a third of the way through its cosy Monday-night slot and we'll have seen much of Robson's khaki shorts and check-shirt summer wardrobe making its way through some familiar landscapes.

Ade Edmondson has done it in Yorkshire, Caroline Quentin in Cornwall. Now Robson is giving the celebrity travel-lit gloss to our very own Northumberland.

The series' crew was blessed by the best summer in decades as they filmed the region this summer from a base in Alnmouth.

What emerges over eight weeks on screen will surely be a boost to tourism that money couldn't buy for the likes of the parties involved – and they are the people here at Alnwick Playhouse, celebrating their involvement and the start of something big from such money-can't-buy exposure on national TV.

On screen Robson plays to his strength – the cheeky chappie who is one of our professional Geordies. Having said that, he was born in Hexham and in between his globe-trotting acting pursuits still makes the town his home. To camera he is chatty and natural, engaging and awestruck by surroundings he is familiar with but is seeing from a different time and place.

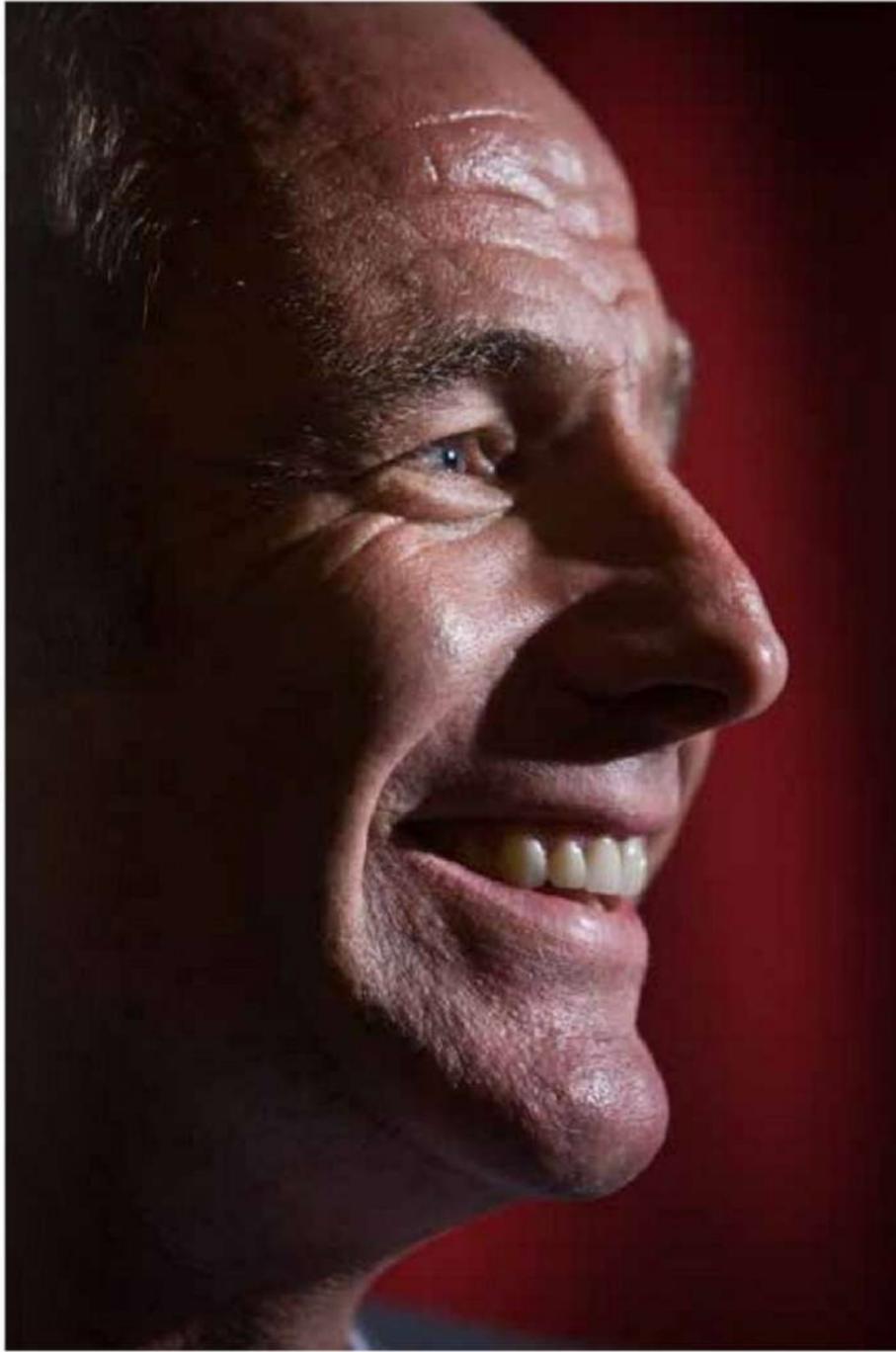
He recalls the young boy driven for what seemed like hours to a holiday in Seahouses. Back there he eats chips before heading to the Farnes where he cuddles a puffin and gets no sleep surrounded by the birds outside, plenty of which are happy to dive-bomb him – they have no regard for a film crew on their territory.

After his sleepless night beneath the gull calls, Robson emerges bleary-eyed and looking as though his nearly 50-year-old face could do with a good iron.

He scrubs up well though. To meet the press and then join the premiere, he's looking relaxed, toned and orthodontically-impeccable.

In his three-piece grey tweed suit and shiny black »

He scrubs up well. For the premiere, he's looking relaxed, toned and orthodontically-impeccable



achieve, the most ordinary life can become extraordinary. "When you're alongside these kinds of people, it's just wonderful. He looked through a telescope and said, 'Have a look at that, it's a cluster that's millions of light years away – you're looking back at a time when Northumberland was a barren landscape'."

He goes on: "If you look at it now, it's still untouched. It's as our ancestors saw the land. He is the kind of teacher you always wanted. All the people I met were inspirational."

The region has always been under Robson's skin – he grew up in Dudley, a small mining village a few miles north of Newcastle, where his dad was a miner. As a young actor he revelled in roles that connected with the region – he talks warmly of Live Theatre's production of Tom Hadaway's *The Long Line*.

He served his time in the theatre before his first television break – as hospital porter Jimmy in the BBC's *Casualty*. He hit the big time and national prominence as Fusilier Dave Tucker in the series *Soldier Soldier* with the memorable episode which involved Green and co-star Jerome Flynn singing "Unchained Melody." ITV was inundated by people looking to buy the song, and the pair were persuaded by Simon Cowell to release it as a single. It

stayed for seven weeks in the UK Singles Chart, selling more than 1.9 million copies and making it the best-selling single of the year.

In 1996, he set up an independent production company, Coastal Productions, with business partner Sandra Jobling to give youngsters from the North East the opportunities he struggled for. The company produced or co-produced much of Green's television work, as well as local productions at the Theatre Royal in Newcastle.

In 2002, Green starred as clinical psychologist Dr. Tony Hill in the crime drama *Wire in the Blood*.

Since then his passion for fishing has occupied much of our screens – with his series *Extreme Fishing*.

He is currently filming the TV series *Strikeback*, a gritty warfare drama that is about as far from a fishing rod and Farne Islands seal pup as it gets.

Which, you guess, is why a brief spell reconnecting with those Northern roots has been such an uplifting experience. "Here you meet people with a definite sense of self – they are proud of where they come from and have an inner peace. "It's a place that still surprises me and I'm coming up to 50 years of age. It's a kind of 'did you know, and if you didn't, let me tell you something about this extraordinary part of planet earth'. It really is. It's really beautiful and inspiring and life affirming."

ROBSON'S TOP TIPS FOR A TRIP.... (IN CASE YOU DIDN'T KNOW)

- > Go to the Farnes, to Bamburgh Castle, which used to be the kingdom of Northumberland
- > Go to Flodden Field and learn about the battle
 - > Swim with the seals
- > Do the Hadrian's Wall walk that the Romans occupied for 400 years
- > Go and see Northumberlandia, the largest landscape sculpture in the world, a beautiful naked woman lying on her side

shoes, he is well-styled and cultured. His suntan is nicely honed not just from the summer in an unexpectedly sunny Northumberland but also from his travels filming *Extreme Fishing*, the show which has made him a pin-up for the wader brigade and then some. He has brought along his mum and partner Steph, a very glam Amanda Holden look-alike. Just two weeks ago he became officially single after a divorce from Vanya Seager. Robson split from his former model wife after 10 years of marriage. After they separated two years ago, Green's hectic filming schedule was blamed for

a stressful mind and gives a sense of peace and remoteness." Many times during filming Robson recalled his time growing up in the region – such as seeing salmon in the Tyne. "I was born in Hexham and there is that analogy with the returning salmon – they have their inner GPS, they migrate and they find their way back. "I had a flashback to when I was a boy – and that saying, give me a boy of seven and I give you the man rang true. It was magical to be back there. "It's an area that I thought I knew well but I discovered things that I never knew. It was incredibly inspirational and life-affirming.

X I discovered things I never knew, it was incredibly inspirational and life-affirming

pushing them apart. They have a 13-year-old son Taylor. Such topics are not however on the agenda tonight. What we do get is the man's genuine adoration of his home area – this isn't an act. "I travelled the length and breadth of the county discovering something new, wondrous and magical. It is an idyllic and beautiful landscape but I was learning something new – parts of Northumberland changed the course of British history. "And it is true that the place eases the mind – I had come from shooting ten action movies and landed here. In a sense it was a case of reclaiming one's identity – it eases

Just to be asked to talk about an area I was brought up in is a real honour." The series filmed over two months and a highlight for Robson was spending time at Kielder – beneath the darkest skies in the country. He met Gary Fildes, a bricklayer-turned-world-renowned astronomer, who is running the observatory in one of the best places to observe the Milky Way, Saturn and meteor showers. "It's just jaw-dropping in its scale and what that young man has achieved. It was extraordinary. When you meet someone and they're so at ease with themselves, who they are and what they want to



Team Green >> Robson's partner Steph and mum Anne share the stage