





although we were really hoping it wouldn't come to that."

"In the end," says Jason, "I went to the unemployment office, and found someone who spoke English. She'd just had a request from a local electrician for a person who could work immediately. I did a practical test on a fuschboard, a quick interview, and started on the Monday; that got us into the official French system and I worked for him for two and a half years."

**Family changes**  
In 2004, the couple had their third son, Jude, who is disabled and has learning difficulties, which changed everything about their family life. Jason applied for parental leave but found himself in court accused of professional misconduct. He won the case but it was, understandably, an extremely difficult year.

Aleth worked in a supermarket until – again through friends of friends – Jason found a job in Brest with a marine company.

"In 2006, our youngest son, Axel, was born and although a recurring problem with my knee meant that I had to leave my job, the good news was that I then had the experience and contacts needed to set up on my own."

**The tea room**  
"How did the tea room come about? That's a good question!" laughs Aleth. "I was always very aware that we were totally dependent on Jason's work and that if ever I had to pick up the architecture, I would have to train again and validate my qualification, and would then probably have to commute to the cities, which was far from ideal. At the time, we entertained a lot, and

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our friends always said we should work in catering.

"We had very different ideas. It was a time of, let's say, some tension." A look passes between them. "Jason felt that for the first time we had a fairly stable income, the house was mortgage-free and essentially finished, but I was itching to start a project and began looking at places with potential for gites or tea rooms."

"Of course, when I came to this place, I immediately saw what I wanted to do, but Jason is far more realistic than I am."

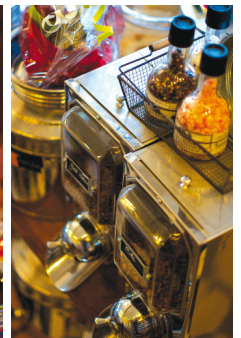
These pages: the family work very hard but find the quality of life to be amazing

"It wasn't just the renovation," explains Jason. "The biggest problem was that it had no garden, and we have four boys. But then, I started thinking, when they're a bit more independent, they could walk to the beach from here. I could see it could be something really special – eventually! I suppose it was a leap of faith."

They bought the building in December 2010, and it was without water, electricity or heating. Miraculously, in May 2011, they opened a restaurant and tea room at the premises (thanks in no small part to Jason working an epic final 27-hour shift).

"On the practical side, the businesswomen's network, Entreprendre au Féminin [www.entreprendre-au-feminin.net], was really supportive. However, I had no catering experience and, because I wanted everything to be home-made, I was working from 8am to 8pm non-stop. The first year, a friend worked with me, but the second year I employed two local girls, which didn't work out."

"Aleth pretty much broke down for a week," recalls Jason. "Our accountant told us not to make any rash decisions when we were so tired. However, the paperwork was piling up



**The secret of our SUCCESS**

My vision was always to offer teas and restaurant meals, always with one vegetarian option, and always with home-made pastry using organic flour from a nearby mill. The organic and home-made aspects are essential to our reputation; many places now just offer reheated frozen dishes, but here you come in and it smells nice, because everything is baked on the premises. You don't get that in many places any more and it makes a difference.







up, I was letting clients down because I was having to rush back and forth to fetch supplies and help out at the tea room; and we were barely seeing the boys... you simply can't go on for long like that."

"The boys were so brave," remembers Aleth. "They'd left a house with a room each, all done, to come to a wreck where Iouis had to spend six months in a tent in the loft. It was a lot to ask."

At this point, Aleth decided to stop the restaurant service and concentrate on the tea room and gifts. This proved to be a wise decision. The tea room has proved to be a huge success. It's a quirky, British-French tea room that, as well as serving home-made, organic goodies, sells everything from Cornish clotted cream to pastel-striped cupcake cases, colourful tableware to old-fashioned boiled

## Quick QUESTIONS

**French or English at home?**  
English with an occasional Franglais phrase thrown in.

**First drink of the day?**  
Jason: Coffee first thing, only since I've lived here, then tea all day after that.  
Aleth: Tea, always – we even take a flask with us when we go out for the day!

**Favourite French Cheese**  
Jason: Goat's cheese from Cap de la Chèvre  
Aleth: I like Roquefort, but we do miss Cheddar cheese!

**Cheese course before or after dessert?**  
Before, like the French.

sweets. On every shelf, there are gift ideas, little indulgences and practical kitchen utensils, making it an Aladdin's cave of delights, with a magical atmosphere that is certainly heightened by Aleth herself, with her ebullient personality, and the couple's strong partnership. This year too, the couple will resume the restaurant service, thanks to a trained chef working alongside Aleth, who will now be more free to spend time enchanting customers with her natural warmth.

**Any regrets?**  
"There have been moments where we considered going back to England," admits Aleth. "In fact, when it was really tough, we even asked the boys how they felt about it. They all said they'd like to visit, or maybe study there, but not live there permanently. "The children have things here



that they would never have had in England," admits Jason, "like, for example, Marcus and his surfing. Their quality of life here is amazing. We would have had to earn and pay an awful lot more to get anything like this in England."

"As we are standing now, in a state of exhaustion after 10 years, I'm aware it's been a very long road," says Aleth. "Sometimes it feels as if we're always chasing after something. It's been exciting but it has been tough, no doubt about it. But then, are we the people to sit around and do nothing?"

*"The children have things here that they would never have had in England, like Marcus and his surfing"*

The question hangs in the air for a few moments, before Aleth adds: "Some of our customers have suggested that we make this a franchise, and open tea rooms in Nantes, Bordeaux, and Lille. Even America or Australia have been mentioned. It's true that if this business were in the city, it would be less seasonal, and I would be able to spend more time with the boys."

"But then," adds Jason, "so much of the atmosphere here is the building; you can't necessarily reproduce that."

"Still," resumes Aleth, with a smile. "It makes you think. Maybe an idea for the future?"

Whatever the future holds for this enterprising family, you can't help feeling it will be a bright one. **LF**  
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Facing page: the tea room is an Aladdin's cave of delights. This page: the family feel they belong in Brittany