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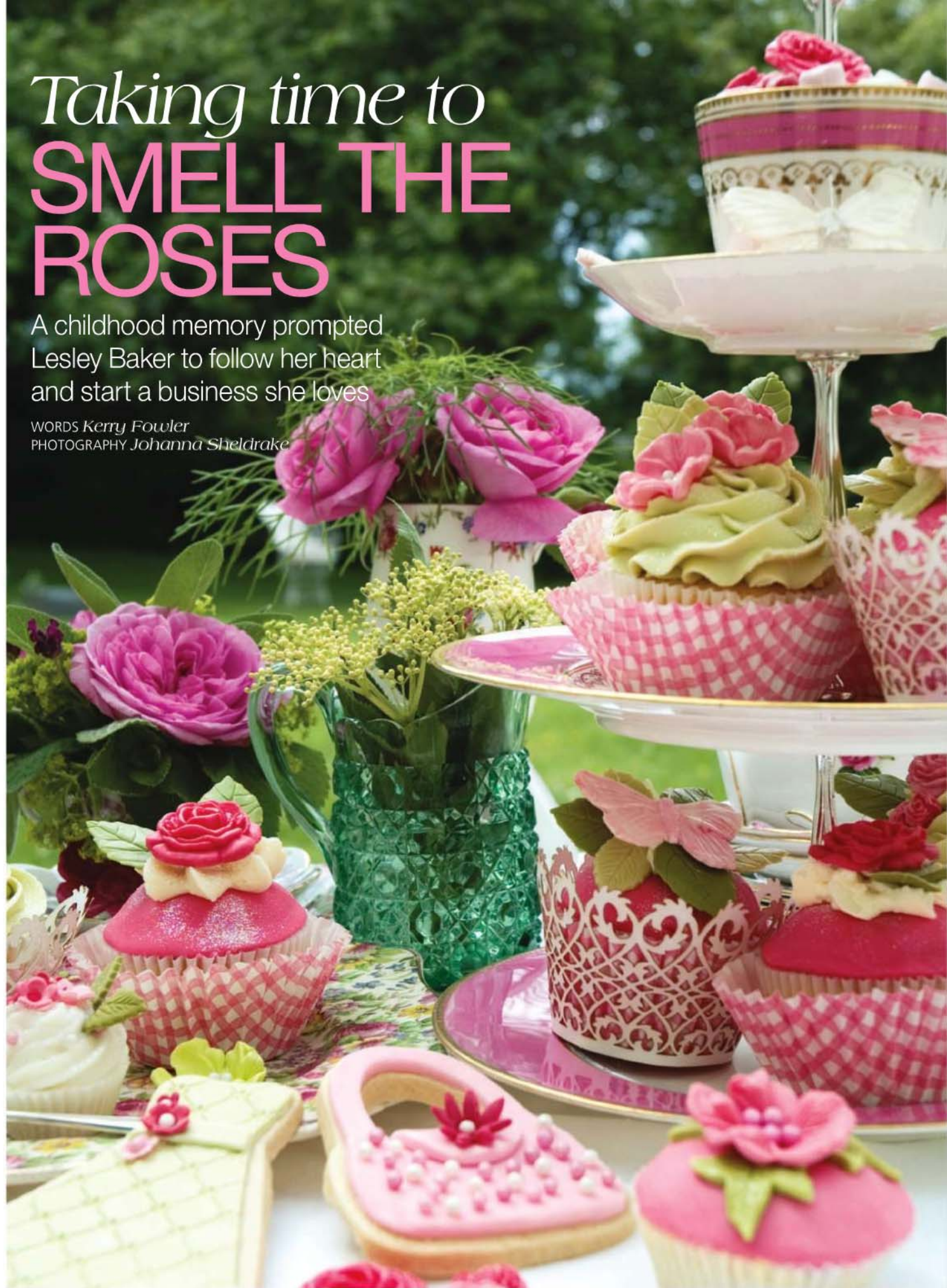


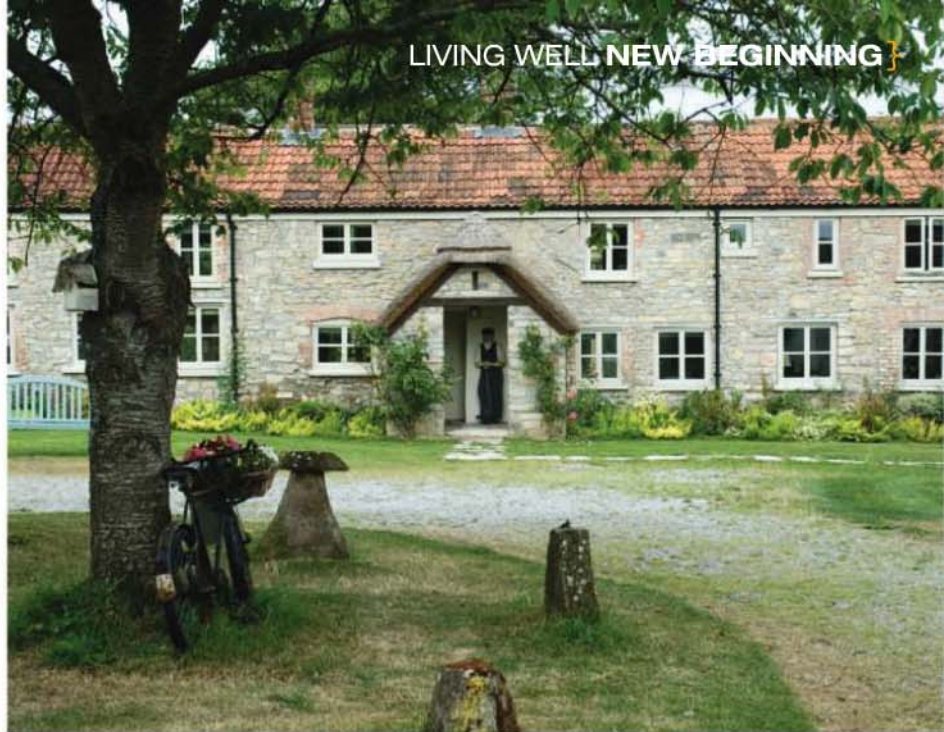
Taking time to **SMELL THE ROSES**

A childhood memory prompted
Lesley Baker to follow her heart
and start a business she loves

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PHOTOGRAPHY *Johanna Sheldrake*





OPPOSITE Just some of the wonderful cakes and cookies inspired by a much-loved relative

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
Transformed from a row of peat workers' cottages, Lesley's idyllic home is the base for her china hire business; Lesley's new life is miles away from her old job as a bookkeeper; flower arranging is another string Lesley has added to her bow

Each time Lesley Baker packs up her china for a wedding, christening or special family occasion, she recreates a little piece of the past. Her vintage collections of glorious mismatched china pieces trigger a treasured childhood memory: visits to her great aunt Vera, where the table was always set with a beautiful tea service and homemade scones were served with clotted cream and jam.

'Aunty Vera's pink china was her best set,' says Lesley, 48, who set up hire business Poppy Greens in Meare, Somerset, last year after spending most of her working life as a bookkeeper. 'She always had lace cloths and vases of cut flowers on her table, but the jam and cream are what I remember most. We didn't have those things at home so it seemed very special to me.'

Vera, who is now 102, helped Lesley to realise the importance of making people feel welcome.

'It was all about making an effort, which gets overlooked in this day and age,' says Lesley.

When Vera moved into a home at the age of 99, she insisted her great niece should have her pink china, and Lesley was thrilled to take possession of the delicate rose-patterned set. The chinaware looks particularly fitting in her home – a row of converted cottages that she and her husband Steve, 57, turned into one space after moving to Meare four years ago.

The property is in an idyllic setting with orchards, gardens, and 30 resident chickens and ducks – miles away from Lesley's old life as a bookkeeper. The

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