

# A guilt-free after-life

*A greener life is something we are all starting to embrace, but what about a greener death? More and more people are opting for so-called eco-funerals. Claire Marshall met one husband and wife team in the Cotswolds who believe they have the ultimate product for a guilt-free after-life.*

Words by Claire Marshall  
Main picture by Steve Richards

YOU could be buried in a plain cardboard box or a wicker coffin or freeze-dried and buried as bio-degradable dust. But does eco-friendly need to mean brown card or twigs and leaves? Alison and Steve Ancrum don't think so. The couple, who launched eco-friendly company Sunset Coffins last year, have created a green coffin, made from 100 per cent recycled newspapers that comes in eight beautiful colours and in a perfectly ridged shape.

"There are lots of eco-friendly coffins on the market, but we were told by a local funeral director that they all had their problems," said Alison, a former nurse and health worker. "Cardboard ones are not very strong, while the wicker ones are known to squeak, which can be off-putting during a service.

"What we have come up with is something eco-friendly, but strong and beautiful to look at."

In fact Sunset Coffins has worldwide exclusive rights to an innovative material made by compressing newspapers until they become much like MDF. Surprisingly the finish on the final product feels velvety-soft and the colours come from a vibrant floral palate – you can even draw or paint on the surface meaning people can create their own beautiful designs on the coffins or even write messages of tribute. Perfect for a unique and stylish eco-funeral.

Five or so years ago there wasn't even a market for this kind of product, in fact the classic wooden coffins have barely changed since Victorian times. However in 2007 Queen of Green the late Dame Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop, had a 100 per cent eco-friendly funeral with an eco-pod coffin made from shrubs and a cremation with special filters designed to reduce mercury emissions. Then last year flamboyant celebrity chef Keith Floyd was carried in a wicker coffin to his humanist funeral.

It's a trend that is growing fast and



Alison and Steve Ancrum of Sunset Coffins with staff members Ronald Bicker and Jackie Creed

coffin makers are cottoning on, with a wide range of green coffins produced out of materials from plain cardboard to banana leaf and water hyacinth.

But many of the products defy the idea of the word 'eco' by using materials flown from half-way around the world.

In stark contrast Sunset Coffins gets its material from a company just down the road from them in Cam.

The business all started for Alison and Steve, both 56, when they were approached by a local funeral director, Jeremy Clutterbuck, who was searching for a better eco-friendly coffin to recommend to his customers. Steve, who runs a plastic box fabrication business, thought he could design the perfect product for Clutterbucks, already an eco-



friendly company with solar panels fuelling the chapel of rest, a solar water heater and a company van that runs on bio-diesel.

It was a case of joined up thinking between the three companies and eventually Alison and Steve launched Sunset Coffins.

"We really feel we have a fantastic product that can go worldwide, already we have had a lot of interest" said Alison, who jokes that as a retired health worker her jobs have really taken her from cradle to grave.

The coffins come in a range of colours including purple and pink and can hold weight of above 30 stone. You can find out more at the website [www.sunsetcoffins.co.uk](http://www.sunsetcoffins.co.uk)