profile

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birthday suit, but the majority is far more
elevate attire, such as a Father Christmas
costume, a Hawaiian outfit, and a twistie. "This is
the joy of my life. You could not love a baby
more," she says. "He is my pride and joy."

Home for the couple is Brookline,
Massachusetts, a suburb built high
with Louis XIV and XV originals
from all over the world.

Their Italian grand piano is a photo of
Yvonne with Bill Gates. "He's a charming
guy," she says, reticently. Does she know him well?
"Yes, Stuart has been an expert witness when
Gates has been taken on court. You should see
the hats mail he receives from anti-Gates people
afterwards. We met him at a party and I made
him do the photo."

Two of Stuart's three grown-up children have
worked at Langley, one for a full year. It's nice
to have someone to leave the kids, especially
property, but the purchase of a castle and its
conversion into a hotel violates four-and-a-half
of Stuart's five rules of business, he likes to joke.
"Number one - don't go into a retail business.
Too risky. Number two - don't go into any
business you know nothing about. Number three
- don't go into a business that's thousands
of miles away from you. Number four - or a
business in a foreign country. And number five
make sure you speak the language. Which is
only half realized here in Northumberland."

"Most of England's castles are in one of two
conditions," he adds. "Either they've been lived
in for centuries and modernized throughout that
time by the architects of the day, or they've been
abandoned and are in ruins. The worst thing
isn't so much the weather, but the fact that local
people steal their stone."

Unique
In this sense, and in several others, Langley
built in 1360, is unique. "The walls are seven
feet thick but the floors were made of wood.
So when there was a great fire in 1428 the floors all
burnt away to leave the shell and the castle was
left this way for almost 500 years. Because the
Roman Wall was so near, he could have used
its stone, but he didn't because it was so hard."

Because of this, it is viewed as one of the
most architecturally pure castles in the country.

Having been vacant for so long, it was bought in
1982 by a wealthy local historian by the name of
Caldwell-Tooker. Before, it was owned by a French
woman, named Josephine. After Caldwell-Tooker,
the place was to fall in love with Langley Castle
the moment it caught his eye.

He says: "1985 was a key year in many ways.
It was the year the dollar hit parity with the
pound, which made English property very
cheap for Americans. Even so, I had no intention
of buying a castle."

"It's amazing he did really," Yvonne reflects.
"My husband is very conservative. I'm very glad,
because it is so beautiful, but I am still amazed
that he did."

"I also wanted one to have added a lot of
rooms," he adds. "Then a friend came across a
little piece in a magazine about this castle for
sale in England and how to write away for a
brochure. I did, out of pure curiosity, and the
pictures were beautiful. I had to go on business
to Europe and decided to take a look at it while
I was there."

Prior to Stuart, the castle was owned and lived
in by the Robins family of Hexham. Stuart says:
"I remember opening the door right here where
we've built a bar on the first floor lounge area,
and finding a jacuzzi. It was full of these modern
touches and I found it magnificent."

"Not long after I bought it into a hotel, the law
came and Langley Castle was one of the few
seats to get a wedding licence. By the middle of
last month, 100 weddings had already been
booked for 2004, making it one of
the region's most popular places
to get married."

"The new castle hotel" into a search
engine and Langley Castle is one of the first
things that come up," Stuart says. "The internet
has worked very well for us, particularly as we
got in right at the beginning of it."

The castle's seven bedrooms, plus a further
eight in the converted stable block, are in high
demand, boasting glorious window seats that
are cut into the castle walls and four-poster beds.

Indeed, the Madmen have trouble looking in
when they visit and frequently stay at a nearby
bed and breakfast.

There are no plans to buy further castles.
Langley has proved a fantastic investment, as
has the Lord of Wollaston title, which was fairly
cheap 30 years ago but which, along with
similar titles snapped up at the time, has
substantially increased in value since.

"Someone sold one in the North East recently
for £150,000. And it's good for one's ego," smiles
Yvonne, with a knowing look to her husband.

"I'm just trying to get into the spirt of things,"
Stuart says. "The castle and the people who live
here have all just stopped in their tracks and said
the same thing. "It's a real castle!"

"I think it's a bit eccentric," Yvonne says, as
if she has never turned a head in her life. "I didn't
marry him for his castle, but I love him just the
same."