



If you have £50,000 to spare after the Christmas shopping is complete, here's an idea: it could pay for Father Christmas to arrive at your house on Christmas Eve, riding on a sleigh drawn by six reindeer and packed with presents for your children. Your house would be covered in real Scandinavian snow and your children would be able to spend half an hour telling Santa how good they've been all year and feed Rudolph a carrot.

Like the sound of it? Meet Nick Bolton. He was thrown out of business school and told he hadn't got what it took to be a success, but is top of the tree in the Christmas decorating business. He started the company in Aspen, Colorado but moved back home to Liverpool two years ago and has been such a hit that he plans to open 49 more offices around the country in the next five years.

And as the only bespoke Christmas decorator in the UK, he helps set the trends for fashionable festive colour schemes. And this year's look? A black tree with burgundy decorations.

'Last year it was black and ivory and that's still in fashion,' he said. 'But it's definitely black and burgundy this year. I'm not a fan of black trees, I'm not sure if I would have one in my house but last year everywhere sold out; some places were offering us three times the value if we could supply black trees.'

Nick, 33, has a client list full of international star names from sport, movies and music willing to pay up to £20,000 to have their house transformed inside and out into a Christmas wonderland. He said: 'We can arrange anything; if you want a brass band to play outside your house, or a Dickensian choir to sing carols, whatever, there's nothing we can't do. Our new Santa visit service is for the super wealthy. It is very exclusive and is strictly limited to nine visits on Christmas Eve this year but it is the absolute ultimate Christmas treat.'

But it's not just the rich and famous who

can take advantage of Nick's services. 'Even an average working couple can easily spend £700 on a tree, lights and decorations, and then they have the hassle of putting it all up and trying to make it look good. For a bit more than that, we'll bring a fully-decorated tree round, put it up and make it look fantastic. And then in January, we'll come back and take it all away again.'

Nick's warehouse on a modest Wavertree business park is a far cry from Aspen, Colorado where the business was born by accident. Nick went out there to run an adventure travel company and neighbours admired wife Sarah's festive decorations. 'They asked her to decorate theirs as well and we ended up doing half of Aspen. Over there, it's as easy to find a Christmas decorator as it is to find a plumber. When we had children we moved back and decided to give it a try and see if people here would go for it as well.'

They have. For each of the 300 or so jobs Nick and Sarah will do this Christmas, they will turn down about 20 more. 'We have worked with Premiership footballers, lords and ladies, actors, musicians, hotels... you name it. We do matching themes throughout a house, it's not just the tree. We do garlands, table decorations, lights, ornaments, everything so a typical house can still take us five hours to get it looking right.

'We don't give everyone the same decorations because we wouldn't want one of our big name clients to visit another and see they have the same decorations. We're having some black and white football baubles made for our footballer clients and we might use musical notes on a musician's tree.

'I get to see how the other half live and I fancy a bit of that for myself, but I'm prepared to work for it. We do 18 hour days in the run up to Christmas, so we spend no time at all on our own tree. I couldn't decorate a tree, though. Sarah does all the artistic work.' ♦



ABOVE: More black and burgundy in front of the roaring log fire.  
OPPOSITE PAGE: Candles and lights in the mantelpiece garland provide subtle lighting.

### How Nick and Sarah decorate a tree

- 1 The lights go on first and we tie every other light onto the branch.
- 2 Fabrics and ribbons go on next
- 3 Clustering baubles gives a good effect and we tie them on as well
- 4 We use feature pieces as well, wrapped presents or music boxes
- 5 We put explosions on the top, flowers, branches and lights, not an angel or a star