

A Somerset couple set about designing and producing a unique bed that revolutionises the sleeping process. Sonia Soltani finds out how they got on

# Sleeping partners

Shakespeare called sleep 'the chief nourisher in life's feast'. An entrepreneurial couple from Somerset has decided to change the way the world perceives sleep. For most people sleeping is a blissful activity and the purchase of a good mattress can turn into the Holy Grail quest. On the other hand, there are the unhappy few who only think of sleep as a waste of time and a physiological weakness. The subject on which everyone does agree however, is that it is a hard task to find a good bed.

Bespoke furniture designers Colin and Marlene Greenhalgh set themselves the goal of creating a completely different bed when their customers kept complaining about the poor quality of beds on the market. They started their research with the idea that mattresses were dispensable because they were neither durable nor hygienic, and too often hardly comfortable and resilient to human weight. After years of experiments they were able to patent the Ammique system which contours the shape of the body and creates a unique sleeping experience (see box for technical details). Users can choose to lie directly on the plastic rods or, as the company recommends, use a three-layer pad. It has three layers to allow it to be machine washed, as well as giving users a choice of thickness.

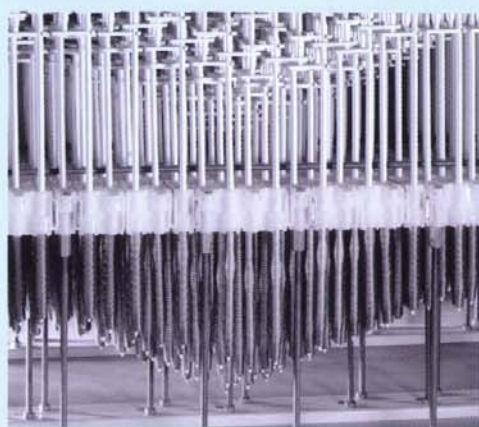
The Greenhalghs want to shake up people's conceptions about sleep, but revolution comes at a price. The Ammique bed displays the flamboyant price tag of £15,000. The inventors' ambition is to open a showroom in London, sign a deal with a hotel in the capital and sell their beds to celebrities. Will they convince Madonna, Robbie Williams and other wealthy clients that sleep is priceless? And how will they reach the wider market their invention deserves?

Meeting the Greenhalghs in their welcoming showroom in Midsomer Norton in peacefully green and leafy Somerset, half-way between Bristol and Bath, one can see that they put their whole heart into their creation. They are enthusiastic about the Ammique bed and dismiss the sceptics' opinion that manufacturers will never want to produce such a different and expensive bed.

'They will, because it works,' they say in the same voice.

Colin says there was a clear gap in the market and some scope for invention.

'There hasn't been any change in the way beds



## How Ammique works

**Ammique comes from the Roman numerals MM1(2001), and Que the abbreviation for quest. Ammique intends to epitomise the quest for a better sleep in the new century.**

**The surface of the patented Ammique system comprises thousands of small plastic domed caps – 7,800 in a king size and 9,800 in a superking. Each cap is fixed on to a plastic rod loosely linked across and down the bed and all move independently. Half of the rods pass through a plastic support and are held within tension springs allowing upward and downward movement. The surface of the Ammique bed contours to the curves of the moving body.**

**The cavity within the structure allows good airflow and the bed can be steamed clean and sections on the side open to allow vacuum cleaning.**

are built in ages. In the bed industry there hasn't been any middle stage between the low tech and the high tech. The bed manufacturers have rested on their laurels,' he claims.

Marlene adds that sleep is a much more important process that people usually think. 'We need something better,' she says.

The couple moved to Bath in 1974. She studied business and management while he trained as a teacher. Designing furniture had always been a shared hobby, so when they decided to set up their own business to have more time for their children, they opted for bespoke kitchen furniture and founded Mainstay in 1986.

Nine years later they started developing the project for a new bed, using the manufacturing facilities of Mainstay and their own financial resources to support the expensive and meticulous experiment. They went through the usual hardship of the independent inventors, but did not lose their determination.

Marlene says: 'We always knew it would work. It made such a big difference to work together. It must be quite a lonely road for one person working alone as an inventor. For us it has been a good journey.'

The division of tasks meant that Colin was responsible for the technical aspect of the work and Marlene dealt with problem solving.

A journey finally culminated with the trade launch of Ammique in 2004 and the commercial launch in June 2005 at the Grand Designs Live Show at Excel in London. The bed received positive feedback and the Greenhalghs are now ready to display their creation in London.

Anyone who has had the chance to lay down on an Ammique bed will testify, that it is the most comfortable experience ever. It is as if your body loses its weight and each particle is supported by the softest and strongest structure. It is a very hygienic option because it prevents the accumulation of dust or body fluids within the structure. One wonders why nobody thought of it before. The inventors say that the Ammique bed doesn't only ensure the best sleep available to human beings, but it also lasts for a whole lifetime and beyond.

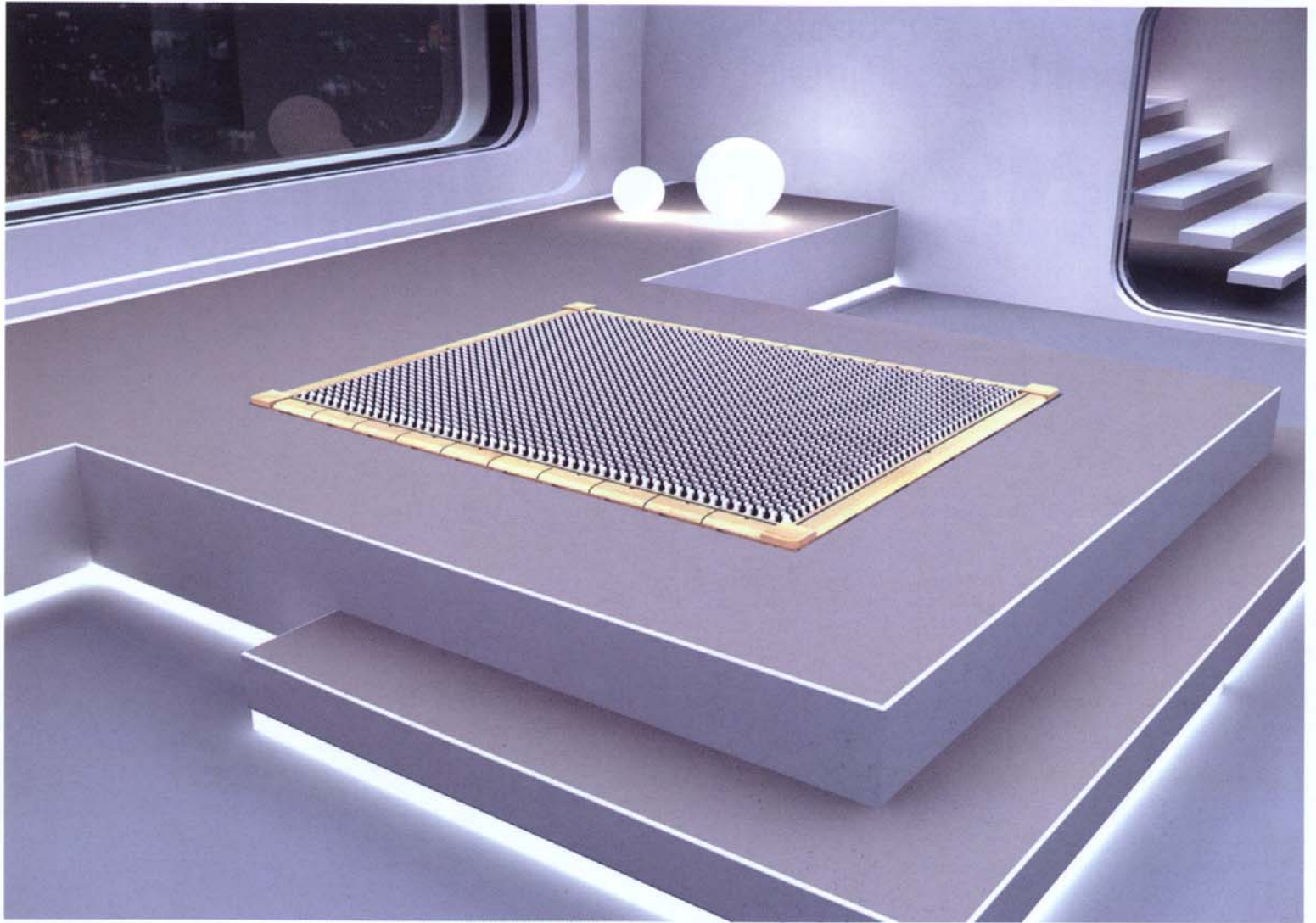
So far only eight people, including parents of an asthmatic child to facilitate his sleep, and two luxury hotels – the Cotswolds House Hotel and



'There hasn't been any change in the way beds are built in ages... there hasn't been any middle stage between the low tech and the high tech'

**Above:** Cleanse Flat line  
**Below left:** Touch line king bed with leather headboard  
**Centre:** Drift line king bed with Canadian maple headboard and footboard  
**Right:** Fuse line king bed featuring Jo Downs' designed coloured glass headboard and footboard





**Above: the Deep Ammique bed integrated into the floor**

**Below: the Montrose Suite at the Cotswolds House Hotel**



Bath Priory Hotel – have ordered an Ammique bed.

The Greenhalghs do not want to compromise on quality and are deliberately chasing the high-end of the market. Everything is hand-made in Britain – an Ammique bed takes up to 60 man-hours to build – with high environmental standards in mind.

Collaborations with local artists have been set up, such as glass artist Jo Downs from Cornwall who has created the vibrant headboards and footboards of the Fuse collection. Only the noblest woods are used, Canadian maple being the most popular so far and the bed is complemented by refined and delicate textiles and beautifully embroidered patterns.

Ammique evokes a world of luxury, calm and

**‘We always knew it would work. It made such a big difference to work together. It must be quite a lonely road for one person working alone as an inventor. For us it has been a good journey’**

sensual pleasure. The Greenhalghs think the perfect outlet for their invention would be a London hotel entirely dedicated to relaxation through sleep. Considering the rat race atmosphere of the capital, this might be a sure winner. To make it big in the bed market the couple is fully aware that they need to be present in London, but not alongside traditional beds. Not out of snobbishness, Colin is prompt to explain, but because such a new concept needs a tailor-made surrounding. ‘Ammique has a massive global potential,’ Colin thinks. He would like to work with interior architects to integrate the bed within a larger design.

The Greenhalghs have also thought of less glamorous prospects for their invention. They are particularly interested in the health possibilities of Ammique. They are currently in talks with University College of London which would like to conduct further research on the subject. The King’s Fund has also recognised the opportunities such a bed could provide for serious burns victims and the elderly. Colin and Marlene say that they could expand the patented body support system to chairs and footstools.

Witnessing their energy and commitment, one is certain that as soon as they get a showroom in London and a celebrity endorsement, the two inventors are set to make their mark in the soft world of sleep.