

## 'My chickens are an inspiration for my work'

**Christine Kaltoft**, 49, is a jewellery designer and lives with her husband, James, in Finsbury Park, North London. She keeps chickens in her city garden.

**W**hen Christine moved into her London home, she felt incredibly lucky to have a beautiful, secluded garden in the middle of the bustling city. The only problem was that her two cats scared the wildlife away. 'It was horrible when they died, but the upside was that suddenly our garden was filled with birds.'

While enjoying her new visitors, Christine happened to read an article about Eglus – hen houses specially designed for keeping chickens in the city – and decided chickens would be a great way of extending her animal sanctuary. She also loved the thought of collecting freshly laid eggs each morning.

'Eglus are great for urban living because

they're compact and easy to maintain,' says Christine. 'They've got an integrated nesting box and walled insulation. They even have something called an 'eggport' so you can collect the eggs really easily.'

At the time, James was working in Hertfordshire, near a farm that sold chickens. They took the plunge and bought two hens, which they named Maisie and Matilda.

'Hens become tame quickly because when they're ready to start laying (around 19 weeks old) they get incredibly hungry so they want treats all the time!'

When Matilda sadly died, Lottie and Lily were introduced to the Eglu. They each lay an egg every day. Christine can tell which egg is whose – they vary slightly in colour.

'What started as a hobby is now also an inspiration for my work. My jewellery collection is based on a series of sketches I made of the chickens as they strutted, pecked, flapped and preened. My aim

was to capture their lightness, movement and innate 'birdiness'!

'They are so much fun, too, as they often come to the window and stare in, and they all have different personalities – Lottie is a real madam, Maisie is quiet and placid and Lily is bold and fun.'

She's also part of the online community of chicken keepers. 'There's a website with a message board which I'm on most days,' says Christine. 'We used to chat about all things chicken related, but that has now extended into work and personal issues. Last summer I got together all the women chicken keepers who lived in my area. We talked for hours!'

Christine thinks it's important to find a hobby that relaxes you. 'When something touches your playful side, which the chickens do, you become calmer. I love seeing them clucking around and can't imagine life without them.'