READ IT AND LEAP

Yearning for a life less ordinary? Read one of these inspiring tomes and you'll be ready to take 2015 by storm, writes *Claire Allfree*

LATE FRAGMENTS

by Kate Gross (William Collins)

There tends to be a routine vocabulary for describing cancer memoirs – 'brave', 'candid', 'inspiring', even 'uplifting', etc – but Late Fragments (the title refers to a Raymond Carver poem) defies most clichés. Kate Gross died of colon cancer last year on Christmas Day aged 36 and wrote this book in the months before her death for her five-year-old twins. Gross, who worked at Number 10 before founding the Africa Governance Initiative, wrote with steadfast, exquisite skill and although this remarkable book is hard to get through without a box of hankies, it is also one of the most galvanising you are likely to read all year. She wanted to pass on the gift of wonder to her sons; her gift to the casual reader is to inspire them to live life with as much joy, hunger and gusto as she did.

Out today

WHY WE MAKE THINGS AND WHY IT MATTERS

by Peter Korn (Square Peg)

When was the last time you made something proper and lasting with your hands? Peter Korn is a furniture builder by trade and in this little book he maps out the existential fulfilment to be found in producing something useful and beautiful. (Actually, he is prone to using the words 'spiritual practice', but then he is American). There is, thankfully, less of the new age speak and much more of the history of craft and its fundamental role in shaping how we live, as Korn explores why making an elegant chair should be so much more satisfying than staring at spreadsheets. His ideas apply to all sorts of craft – from jewellery to ceramics – and will inspire anyone with fond memories of CDT who wished their working day was more authentic, productive and, yes, meaningful.

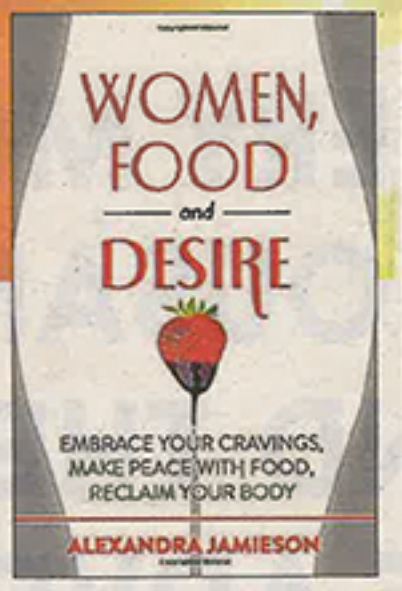
Out Feb 5

HELL AND HIGH WATER

by Sean Conway (Ebury)

Ten years of growing dissatisfaction with life as a corporate photographer prompted Sean Conway to sell his company and turn to swimming the length of the British west coast, ostensibly for charity but also to prove to himself that he could. This account of his training and the event itself has a knowing feel of 'blimey, what a daft idea this is' as Conway battles jellyfish, his support boat nearly sinking, and the loss of his skipper half way through the swim, all the while falling seriously behind schedule. There is something very British about such a lunatic endeavour for so little actual gain beyond personal achievement, but Conway is decent company as he pushes the limits of endurance. For those looking to embark on their own physical challenge this year his story is nothing short of inspirational.

Out Mar 5

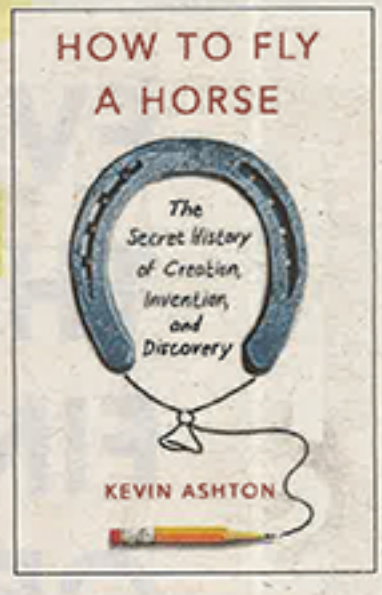


WOMEN, FOOD AND DESIRE

by Alexandra Jamieson (Piatkus)

A glut of diet books in January is as seasonal as booze and chocolate binges in December. Among them, Alexandra Jamieson's book stands out: the former wife of Morgan Spurlock who collaborated on his famous documentary Super Size Me, she understands only too well the manufactured dangers within today's pre-packaged food industry. This book targets women's highly emotional, complex relationship with what they eat and seeks to argue that only by making peace with food can women live a fulfilled and active life. You doubtless feel you've heard it all before but despite Jamieson's regular lapses into therapist discourse, a lot of what she says on the tyranny of unhealthy eating is worth repeating. Plus she is also hot on the importance of healthy eating to improving one's sex life. Amen to that.

Out Jan 15



HOW TO FLY A HORSE

by Kevin Ashton (Doubleday)

Think you aren't creative? You probably aren't doing it right, argues Kevin Ashton in this thoroughly researched account of the history of creativity. His main purpose is to explode the myths surrounding creativity by arguing that many of the world's most impressive achievements were produced by dint of hard work and a bit of luck rather than by rogue flashes of creative inspiration. Ashton believes that all of us have within us the power to innovate and create, and backs up his thesis not with meaningless empowerment mantras but with an impressive range of historical examples. So if your New Year resolution is to play guitar like Robert Johnson, you don't need to sell your soul to the devil – you just need to practice bloody hard.

Out Jan 20