

It's a kind of magic

The Enchanted Christmas House has dazzled Islington youngsters for four years, but what's the story behind it? Founder Margot Sunderland explains all

Anyone who can conjure up characters with the names Betty Bubblegum and Freddie Pillow in a musical called *Santa's Snowball Soup and the Jelly Snails* certainly has a vivid imagination. 'This year we have really gone to town on the imaginary play zones,' says the woman behind the ideas, Margot Sunderland. 'I wrote the play a few months ago, but ideas percolate in my mind throughout the year.'

Santa's Snowball Soup and the Jelly Snails is just one part that makes up The Enchanted Christmas House: you will also find The Garden of Winter Wonder, The Busy Elves Workshop, The Genie's

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Christmas Cave and, of course, Santa himself, all housed within Islington's Britannia Row building. 'I wanted to build on the magic of Christmas for children,' Margot explains the initial inspiration behind setting up the experience. 'There are Christmas Grottos, but once you've got your present that's it. I wanted a three-hour long magical adventure, not just five minutes – something the children will never forget. To see them in a state of awe,



The whole family can get involved with creative games

wonder and delight is so lovely.'

Margot is an inspirational person to talk to. For nearly three decades she has run a host of different businesses, but it all connects into one overriding theme: putting children first. 'I write children's books and child psychology books,' she takes up. 'I lecture all over the world on child psychology and parenting, so this fits in with my passion of wanting to give the very best to children. I would like to publish the plays I've written for Enchanted. I also hope to offer a weekly event for parents and children at The London Art House based on Enchanted – obviously without the Christmas bit – but keeping all that magic.'

For four years, The Enchanted Christmas House has been based in the local area. 'I think Islington is magical to start with,' Margot explains her location choice, 'so upbeat and positive. The Britannia Row building was an old printing factory for years, but top artists have transformed it into a feast for the eyes! It is full of winding passages and lots of big, beautiful rooms, which makes our adventure around the building very exciting for the children.'

Whilst the plays Margot conjures up are fabulously entertaining, there is an ulterior motive behind them too. 'There



The experience is a fun and interactive one

are educational aspects – I can't help that!' she exclaims. 'I'm a child psychologist and have been for years. So all the activities are designed to develop a child's creativity and imagination, and enhance those vital life skills and attitudes of "Yes we can" and "Together we can make something amazing happen".' Merry Christmas indeed.

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Santa's Grotto is the icing on the cake