

TV's Linda rocks out



By Aled Thomas

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SHE'S an expert on the jungle, but design guru Linda Barker came to Cheltenham to sing the praises of stone.

The interior designer and television star who featured in *Changing Rooms* and made the last three of *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here* officially opened the new show room of Mandarin Stone in Montpellier Street.

And she said the family-run company – which sells stone flooring, wall coverings and bathroom and kitchen furniture – was the sort of business to succeed during the recession.

Linda said: "At this time a small company like this can do well.

"People want something individual and Mandarin



Pictures: Daniel Martino C951121-9



■ **A GOOD START:** Katharine Hughes, Linda Barker and Alma Small

Stone can offer something unusual that not everybody will have."

The designer said that she used stone floors in her own house and underfloor heating made it a pleasurable surface to walk on.

She added: "People think of stone as cold but with underfloor heating it acts like a radiator and stores heat.

"Lately there's been a trend for white bathrooms, but people are moving away from that. We'll probably never go back to avocado suites, but stone has such warm colours."

Showroom now open for stone

Owner of the shop, Alma Small, said the move to the new showroom was a vote of confidence in Cheltenham.

She said: "We've been in Cheltenham for five years, in Montpellier, but we've outgrown that.

"We needed a much bigger

space, but that show room was brilliant for us."

Mrs Small explained that the complexities of fitting out a show room in stone meant the new shop was refurbished while the old one remained trading.

She added: "Cheltenham is a good trading area for us. Our headquarters are in Monmouth so we can deliver here quickly."

At the opening, Canapes were supplied by Cheltenham caterer John Gordon and guests sipped glasses of sparkling white wine from Strawberry Hill in Newent.



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