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At last ... a coffin you might actually want to be seen dead in

By Paul Bignell

Increasing numbers of people are choosing coffins that reflect their idea of a beautiful final resting place. From Rolls-Royce cars and ballet shoes to environmentally friendly wicker casks, people are spending more time planning for their time six feet under.

The latest company to join the market is Guernsey-based Creative Coffins, which has turned to biodegradable cardboard to provide a green alternative to wooden coffins. The firm, originally a design agency, also saw a market for printing on coffins.

"As far as we're concerned, it's just packaging," said Geed Kelly, co-founder of Creative Coffins.

The company began producing coffins in May, and its website has been inundated with requests. "We get hundreds of enquiries every week," said Mr Kelly. "We've had interest from Hollywood to Australia, and South Africa to Indonesia. We've had very positive feedback from funeral directors."

Creative Coffins started after a simple request from a friend who was planning his funeral but couldn't find

an environmentally friendly coffin. It is now producing caskets that range from £295 off-the-shelf to £1,250 bespoke. Designs vary from garden sheds with the words "gone to seed" to wine-bottle motifs.

Other companies have likewise seen an increase in sales of alternative funeral supplies. Mary Tomes, founder of Colourful Coffins, said: "Since we started about five years ago, it's really begun gaining in popularity.

"We've sold over 2,500 coffins since we started and we're trebling the number we sell each year. We've just done one with a painted aquarium on it with the

gentleman's favourite fish."

Dr Bill Webster, a bereavement counsellor, said: "It's a symbolic act to have this personalised colourful coffin. They are saying their loved one was special."

Dr Webster, whose wife died in 1983, says people do not talk about death enough, or their plans for when it happens: "We avoid it as much as we can. When death happens, we wonder: 'What would they want?' I believe a good funeral is the beginning of a healthy grief process."

However, Adam Heath, spokesman for the National Association of Funeral Directors, warns that the business of selecting coffins needs to be taken seriously: "I'm slightly reserved about some of the more wacky ones - you don't want people regretting the choice of design years later."

Sports bag

For the enthusiast who spent a lifetime carting his or her kit and trainers to the gym

