

polar bearings

The festive season might lift the spirits of the inhabitants of the frozen North, says Sally Feldman, but do we Southern Hemmers need to take the heat in summer?

If “September is the *Jah*nuary in *fah*shion” – then December is the 30 seconds before the *ahp*ocalypse in entertaining. Since the dawn of time, or at least since I was young enough not to scream when I caught sight of myself in a shop window, we’ve been hot-wired to rise to the occasion, usually at some ungodly hour. Whether we’re soothing paper-cut-induced wrapping trauma with a few nips of late-harvest riesling at four o’clock in the morning, or stirring volcanic vats of peach chutney on a 35-degree afternoon, we still can’t seem to shrug off the urge to spread our wings like domestic goddesses come the festive season. Trouble is, the only wings are on the turkey, which isn’t going anywhere.

The party season is upon us – two months of increasingly complicated, ritualistic and indigestible foreplay leading to the (frequently faked) climax

with the barbecued scampi) or dressing in anything more complicated than a sarong.

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Instead of celebrating the festive season at the end of the year – sooooo North Hem, sweetie – we could have what those in foreign climes quaintly call ‘summer holidays’, and segue immediately from the rigours of a harrowing year’s work into the restorative slothfulness that weeks of warm weather, mangoes and midday cocktails demand.

Swapping a hell-hot Noël for a lightly chilled mid-year Christmas wouldn’t mean much of a sacrifice. Those

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of New Year’s Eve. No wonder so many of us cry headache at this time of year. The only difference is that they’re genuine.

Perhaps it’s because I spent the first half of my life in the Northern Hemisphere, but I still can’t get my head around weeks of sweat-soaked shopping in torrid weather, another week of pounding and folding and marinating (and that’s before I start on the food), followed by two weeks wishing I’d booked into rehab instead of sitting in traffic trying to get to my unreasonably seasonally adjusted beach shack.

With all due respect to the true believers, modern-day Christmas was designed to bring a little cheer to the SAD-addled populations of Europe and North America, where the only light in the midst of a six-month tunnel of darkness is multiple strings of fairy ones wound around a pine tree. It’s the semi-colon in the life sentence that is the Northern winter; a brief but intense burst of colour, movement and alcohol to punctuate the death of hope that only four hours of watery daylight and skeletal deciduous trees can bring. Christmas is just what winter needs.

What summer calls for, however, is a good book, a long, cool drink and an even longer lie down. This leaves no time, and definitely no inclination, for shopping, cooking (apart from tossing a salad to go

grisly office parties would be a much more sedate affair if everyone was too cold to take off their coats (hell, maybe even state politicians would be able to keep themselves nice). And a Boxing Day hangover could be borne with far more equanimity by snuggling under a cashmere throw in front of repeats of *Mad Men*, armed only with a pot of orange pekoe and a plate of warm mince pies.

The winter Christmas would not only free up all those wasted summer hours, but liberate us from needless suffering: toiling over preserves on a crisp June weekend would fill the house with the fragrance of spices (rather than screams of agony as gobbets of boiling relish sear bare summer flesh). Roast turkey would finally make sense (well, maybe not the breast meat) and the flaming Christmas pud could once again take its rightful place centre stage instead of its melting poor relation, the mixed-fruit semifreddo.

Best of all, New Year’s Eve would become a one-off event, unhampered by the tizz of Christmas and all those leftover mini-spanakopita. In fact, it would be the perfect midpoint remedy for the interminable ennui of summer – a light at the end of... oh, forget it. **VE+T**

