

Junk FOR joy

Escape to the Country and *Countryfile* presenter Jules Hudson has found home among the gentle hills of Herefordshire with his partner Tania and black lab lolo. He has just built himself a workshop (or Man Cave, as he calls it), with a wood burner, easy chair and a chop saw. Here he ponders the endless potential of scaffolding, why repurposing feels innately good and how every boy needs a shed

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I'VE ALWAYS HAD A PASSION FOR UPCYCLING AND MAKING STUFF. It's what I've done since I could walk. My dad taught me how to put screws into wood and how to hammer safely. Even now, during breaks in filming *Escape to the Country* you'll often find me crawling under tables looking at joints. I love working out how things are made, and I often find it's the simplest things that are always made the best. The army have a phrase: Keep it simple, stupid. If you keep that in mind whenever you design something – a wall, a door, a building, anything – you can't go wrong.

I LOVE TO BE IN THE PRESENCE OF CRAFTSMEN WHO ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT THEY DO. These are the people I aspire to – skilled folk who can actually contribute. We don't value apprenticeships enough in this country. It all seems to be about degrees these days. I hope we can get away from that because I see too many people going to university for the wrong reasons and I think we've got far too many graduates. I've got a couple of degrees, but I've probably learned more with my hands than I ever did with a book.

IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME HOW VERY FEW PEOPLE HAVE A PRACTICAL APTITUDE FOR EVEN THE MOST BASIC OF TASKS, WHETHER IT'S WIRING A PLUG, PUTTING UP A SHELF, OR EVEN PUTTING TOGETHER A FLAT PACK. It's a shame we're losing those practical skills, things like drawing a straight line, understanding how things are put together and how to dig a hole safely. An appreciation for materials, and their value, is something we should be embracing.

I WANT MY HOUSE IN HEREFORDSHIRE TO BE A HOME. My space is really important to me. I think a lot of it has to do with me growing up in a B&B. I just found I never had my own space. Then I went to boarding school, then university and then finally in my 20s I bought a house in the Welsh Cambrians – it was the first time I could shut the door on the world and say: 'This is mine. This is me.' That's why I fell in love with it, and why I put so much effort into making it look beautiful.

A LOT OF THE THINGS IN MY HOUSE HAVE A STORY. I have a soft spot for military paraphernalia. I've got WWII German rangefinders and mortar shells in my kitchen and a



machine gun in the corner of my dining room. Who knows what action they've seen? I love buying rickety chairs to fix and for Tania to upholster. All the walls are higgledy piggledy and I've got a priest hole in my bedroom. People love to tell stories about things in their home. You can't do that if your house is full of stuff from a high street chain.

WE'RE RATHER SPOILT IN THIS COUNTRY FOR BEAUTIFUL ARCHITECTURE, BUT I HAVE A SOFT SPOT FOR GEORGIAN BUILDINGS. I think that goes back to my education in Classical History and Archaeology. I'm by no stretch of the imagination a mathematician (that's why I'm on the telly), but there is a proportion to neoclassical architecture that the late Georgian movement captured beautifully. It just looks right – and I'm a great believer that if it looks right it is right. They're tall, they're grand, and there's a simplicity to them. I love Medieval architecture, too. That's why I've chosen a Medieval gem as my new home. We're slowly peeling back the layers of history as we go. It's fascinating how houses breathe – people chop and change them, rip out old stuff and put modern stuff in. I want to do the opposite.

ALL MEN NEED A MAN DRAWER. In mine you'll find dead batteries, a compass, air rifle pellets, hair gel, torches, an old badge from my army days and a rubber glove. Anything I can't decide what to do with goes in here. And the saying goes that every man has at least one shed project in him.

I've gone through several incarnations of man cave over the years. I've transformed the old stable block here into a workshop. To work on an old building like this one, you need an operating base; somewhere to make a mess. I share it with my partner Tania, who's learning upholstery, so her side will be neat, clean and piled high with fabrics, whereas mine will be down and dirty with a wood burner and a couple of easy chairs. I've built a workshop table out of steel, which will sit in the middle of the workshop awaiting all my future projects.

MY LIST OF STUFF TO DO IN THE WORKSHOP IS ENDLESS, BUT WHAT I REALLY WANT TO DO IS PLAY ABOUT WITH SCAFFOLDING. There are so many things you can do with it – you can make candle holders, book ends, beds, tables, you name it. It's so easy to get hold of, and really cheap, too, especially if it's second hand. I'd love



Old crates and veg boxes are perfect for quirky shelving

to just get a box of bits and pieces, put a steel blade in the chop saw and see what I can make with it over a weekend.

THIS YEAR, MY RESOLUTION IS TO LEARN HOW TO WORK WITH WOOD. There's a man living nearby, who I met while filming *Countryfile*, called Sherwood Keogh. He's known as a bodger, or a forester, and he's spent 16 years living the dream. He's built his own house right in the middle of a woodland. I look at guys like him and realise they're not slaves to the normal stuff like we all are. Yes he's making a living like the rest of us, but he's immersed himself in the great outdoors in a way that we can only dream of. He was a chemical engineer in his previous life, but he walked away from it. I want to do a green wood course with him and learn how to make hurdles and furniture. I also want to learn how to weld properly. You'd be amazed how many things need welding. Once you know how to weld, it opens up all sorts of possibilities for making stuff for your home.

ON MY DAYS OFF, MY PLAYGROUND IS WYE VALLEY RECLAMATION, ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF HEREFORD. It's a huge place filled with stuff sourced from demolitions

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and house clearances – stuff everywhere. I wander around and it's amazing what jumps out at me; rows and rows of cisterns, toilets, doors, baths, wagon wheels, pipes and crates. It really gets my imagination going. I reckon I can make that door into a coffee table, use that crate as a shelf, hang that cistern up in my garden and grow plants in it, turn that old wagon wheel into a chandelier, turn that metal bed spring into a notice board. If you're looking to do up your home just go to one of these places and spend a good few hours wandering round, be open minded and use your imagination. Even if you're not doing up your home, it's such a fun place to explore, pick things up and put them down again, and wonder about the people who used them before.

RE-USING AND REPURPOSING THINGS FOR MY HOME INNATELY APPEALS TO ME. I can see why it wouldn't appeal to other people, because unfortunately we live in a society with a disposable culture. We want everything brand new, with a guarantee, wrapped in plastic. There are endless choices for endless items. And when it breaks, we throw it away. Whenever I go to the tip, it breaks my heart to see some of the stuff getting thrown



You can lay wagon wheels in the garden and grow plants between the spokes



“Whenever I go to the tip, it breaks my heart to see some of the stuff getting thrown away, like huge skip-fulls of timber.”

After a good rummage, Jules finds a gate for his garden

out, like huge skip-fulls of timber. If, like me, you have a wood burner, you look at that and think 'What a waste of valuable stuff!' Where does it go? It should be split into kindling and left at the gate with a sign saying 'Help yourself'. Things like this need to change.

THERE DEFINITELY SEEMS TO BE A RESURGENCE IN PEOPLE CRAFTING HOMEMADE THINGS AND BUYING SECOND HAND STUFF. The recession is certainly a factor in it, and I think there is also a generation, thankfully who are still alive, who didn't grow up with the kind of opportunities and luxuries that we all have – the wartime generation. They're the ones who know how to make beautiful quilts, craft things and refurbish furniture. Younger generations are beginning to realise it's not just a quirky thing that old people do, there's actually a lot of sense in it.

I ALSO THINK PEOPLE ARE GETTING FED UP WITH TV AND COMPUTER GAMES AND WANT TO GET CREATING, BUILDING AND MAKING. There's a mental reward in these things – it's good for the soul. As creatures, we were born to create. We've got dextrous fingers and we've got inventive minds. That's how we're geared, and what separates us from the animal kingdom. If we end up in a place where we can't do that, then what's the point? I personally don't want to live my life just buying stuff.

THIS WAY OF THINKING WILL STICK BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE GROWING AWARE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF IMPORTING STUFF FROM OVERSEAS. Just look at one of those container ships that come in from China on the Solent – they are enormous: four times the size of the Titanic. And they are carrying container loads of stuff, most of which is going to go into a landfill within the next 10 years. It's frightening. We are exhausting this planet. I think the recession, the make-do-and-mend ideas that are returning to some areas of society and our growing awareness of the cost of consuming gives me grounds for optimism. I definitely think it will stick. *

*You can watch Jules in the new series of **Escape to the Country** on **BBC One**. juleshudson.com*

*Hunt for treasure at **Wye Valley Reclamation**, wye-valley-reclamation.co.uk*

