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Cosy, comforting suppers for Sunday nights in
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Building the world's longest model railway
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Sunday



40 ways to survive 'break-up season'

January puts extra strain on relationships – [Anna Tyszack](#) explains how to keep yours on track

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CRAFT & COLLECTING

Well that's one way to keep plastic out of the ocean...

WOODWORK

Surfers love nature, yet most use non-natural boards.

Madeleine Howell meets a craftsman steering his own course

People are drawn to wood. We have a connection to it. I think it goes pretty deep. I don't know of anyone who doesn't enjoy woodlands, and being around trees. Whenever you put anything wooden in front of people, they want to touch it."

Surfer and craftsman James Otter contemplates the timber in his workshop, where we are shaving gently curved wooden surfboards by hand with block planes and jack planes. "I've never even put up a shelf before," I announce proudly, pleased with my progress.

"I can tell," Otter jokes. Oh. A little more practice needed, perhaps. But in any case, the notorious Cornish rain is pelting down outside. Buddy the resident Labrador is keeping us company, and as someone with little (read: zero) wood-working nous, I'm finding this surprisingly therapeutic. I could get used to doing this sort of thing more often. I think, suddenly regretting all the mucking about I did in design technology at school.

The wood we're working with has been cut to make two 'skins', one for the top and one for the bottom of the board. A lightweight, poplar plywood framework has been cut for the inside with a computer-controlled router and glued on to the bottom skin. Thin strips have been run along the rail before the

skin has been glued on - leaving us with the rough blank that we're busy shaping now. Otter himself is a born maker, the grandson of both a farmer and a carpenter. He followed his twin passions for furniture-making and the ocean to Plymouth University, where he studied design and making. Masterfully, he welded the two pursuits together with his award-winning wooden surfboard designs. "I enjoyed furniture making, but when I applied that knowledge and that skill set to surfboards, I knew it was what I wanted to do," he explains. Intriguingly, Otter is the only person in the whole country to be making wooden surfboards. His finished product is 30 per cent heavier than a foam

FUTURE IN OUR HANDS
Otter uses chisels and planes to methodically shape the finished product



SKELETON CREW
Working on the frame which will hold the two 'skins' of the surfboard



BACK TO NATURE
James Otter on shore; below, with Madeleine Howell

SURFBOARDS DECONSTRUCTED



NOSE
The nose is the front third of the surfboard. The design of the nose plays an important role when dropping in and out of waves, and can vary in width, curvature and thickness.

RAIL
The rails of a surfboard are its edges. Surfboard rails run the full length of the board on each side from the nose to the tail. They are vital in determining how the water will move around your surfboard, and are most narrow at the nose and tail and thickest in the centre.

TAIL
The tail is the back end of a surfboard, and also affects the flow of the water and the movement of

the board in the waves.

the board in the waves. The rails of a surfboard are its edges. Surfboard rails run the full length of the board on each side from the nose to the tail. They are vital in determining how the water will move around your surfboard, and are most narrow at the nose and tail and thickest in the centre.

board, and therefore not so useful for competition, but it has an extra glide and momentum, an organic feel and an incomparably pleasing aesthetic.

At Mount Pleasant Ecological Park in Porthtowan, on the north coast of Cornwall, Otter Surfboards runs five-day workshops throughout the year where Otter guides surfers and makers (and novices in both, such as myself) to make boards for themselves. This year, he will also be offering paddle-board-making workshops. As well as coming away with a board



to keep or give as a gift, people often leave with newfound confidence in their abilities. "We don't have any time pressure. We do things methodically, and we trust the process," Otter says. "We had a chap last year who said he'd never built his confidence so much in a week, which was quite powerful. He didn't realise a surfboard could do that. Others come in couples or with relatives and realise how important family is to them. We've had a few fathers and sons bond over it." Surfers are well known for whimsy,

but there really is a synergy to the whole thing, I suggest. Plastics are one of the biggest threats facing the ocean's ecosystem today (check out Surfers Against Sewage), so it makes more sense for the stereotypically "at-one-with-the-ocean" surfer to use a board made of natural materials. "You look down at a wooden board and you can't help but be happy," an enthusiastic Otter agrees. "I just fit."



era. Foam boards didn't emerge until the Fifties, and it wasn't until the twenties (when plywood became commercially available) that a Californian lifeguard named Tom Blake started making hollow wooden surfboards using the skin and frame technique. Before that, crude wooden boards had evolved from those of the Tahitians who settled in Hawaii in the 13th century (I refer you to Matt Warshaw's *The History of Surfing*, and to the California Surf Museum).

Otter's own fondest memory in the water features his own handwork. "A friend and I were surfing between Christmas and New Year, and it was one of those evenings where the light is amazingly yellow. The sun was going down and the colours of the water and the cliff started really jumping out. I looked down at the board and was like "nature's awesome," he rhapsodises. "And then some dolphins turned up cresting on the wave, so we caught a wave with them, too."

Otter prides himself on caring for the environment, and durability and longevity is a big part of that. Unlike throwaway foam boards, his are heirlooms. Sourcing wood sustainably is important to him, so he works directly

'You look down at a wooden board and you can't help but be happy. It just fits'

with foresters. "I'd rather work with people who have a long-term mindset, focused on looking after the land," he explains. "We use bio resins that have a lesser impact, and we use all the wood; any that doesn't go into surfboards goes into belly boards and hand planes, and anything that doesn't go into those is used as kindling and firewood."

It's a philosophy that fits in well at Mount Pleasant, which sits in 42 acres of sustainable farmland and is a venue for "green" weddings. It's home to the Down to Earth Foundation, which runs events, courses, workshops and volunteer programmes to "highlight our interdependence and connection with the natural environment." It also offers forest school sessions, wild camping with compost loos and solar showers, and fairs and festivals aplenty.

In this back-to-nature setting, Otter's workshop is a calming retreat at this time of year. Down on the coast, there's still a smattering of surfers, out until the sun goes down. It's delightfully remote, but during the summer months I imagine it really comes into its own. If in doubt, paddle out.

From £1750 for a five-day course at Mount Pleasant Ecological Park, Chapel Hill, Porthtowan, Truro TR4 5HL; visit ottersurfboards.co.uk



5 MINUTE EXPERT

Neil Sully on collecting Danish modern furniture

What sort of items, from which era, are collected?

Danish modern flourished from the Forties through to the Sixties. Adopting mass-production techniques, most household items of furniture were produced. Seating is always much sought-after by collectors, from elegant armchairs through to dining chairs. Other ever-popular pieces are sideboards, coffee and side tables and general cabinetry.

What kind of piece might appeal to the entry-level collector?

Research! Seek out the designs and pieces that are aligned to your design preferences and broadly in budget. The benefit of Danish Modern is you don't need lots of it: one or two pieces can make a big impact and can be mixed with different styles.

Can you give some idea of the range of prices for this furniture?

The range is huge. You can still buy a set of four generic teak dining chairs for a few hundred pounds or a Finn Juhl armchair for many thousands of pounds.

Starting out, should would-be collectors go to fairs, auctions, specialist dealers - or take their chances online?

Instagram is good, and there are also a few quality design sites out there bringing the best dealers together under one roof, but you will pay a premium. Visitors to the London Art Antiques & Interiors Fair next weekend will have a lot of options for Scandi design.

Are there traps and pitfalls? Condition? Fakes and reproductions?

Look for manufacturer marks and stamps, and identify design features that will give prominence and that may add value at resale. Most pieces will require some restoration.

Do you have a personal favourite item or designer?

Designers such as Verner Panton, Arne Jacobsen, Hans J Wegner and Borge Mogensen were prolific then and are extremely popular now but my tip would be to also look out for Danish lighting. For



SCANDI STYLE Pelican chairs by designer Finn Juhl

incredible pieces that complement this kind of furniture amazingly well, check out the work of Poul Henningsen and Jo Hammerborg, for instance.

Neil Sully is the founder of Modern-ID.com, which specialises in modern 20th-century design. Readers can claim complimentary tickets to the London Art Antiques & Interiors Fair (Jan 12-14) at London ExCeL via artantiquesinteriorsfair.com/telegraph

ADVERTISING FEATURE

The 'Chocolate Pill' that helps blood flow

A ground breaking new pill that maintains healthy blood flow and boosts blood vessel flexibility is now available in the UK - and it's made from the same cocoa flavanols found in chocolate, over-the-counter painkillers.

The 'chocolate pill' is the first of its kind in the world and is designed to help people with blood flow and circulation. Blood Flow+ dubbed the 'chocolate pill' by the national media, sent the internet into a frenzy with articles appearing on major news websites.

The 'chocolate pill' has been officially recognised by the European Food Safety Authority following studies which showed that highly purified cocoa flavanols contribute to the flexibility of blood vessels and help to maintain healthy blood flow.

To obtain the same amount of cocoa flavanols found in a daily dose of Blood Flow+ you would need to gorge on 400g of a high-quality cocoa chocolate every day, which is equivalent to 2,429 calories and 32% of the daily recommended allowance of fat.

Research has shown that flavanols assist the production of nitric oxide, which in turn triggers the arterial wall muscles to relax. The findings have convinced the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to push ahead



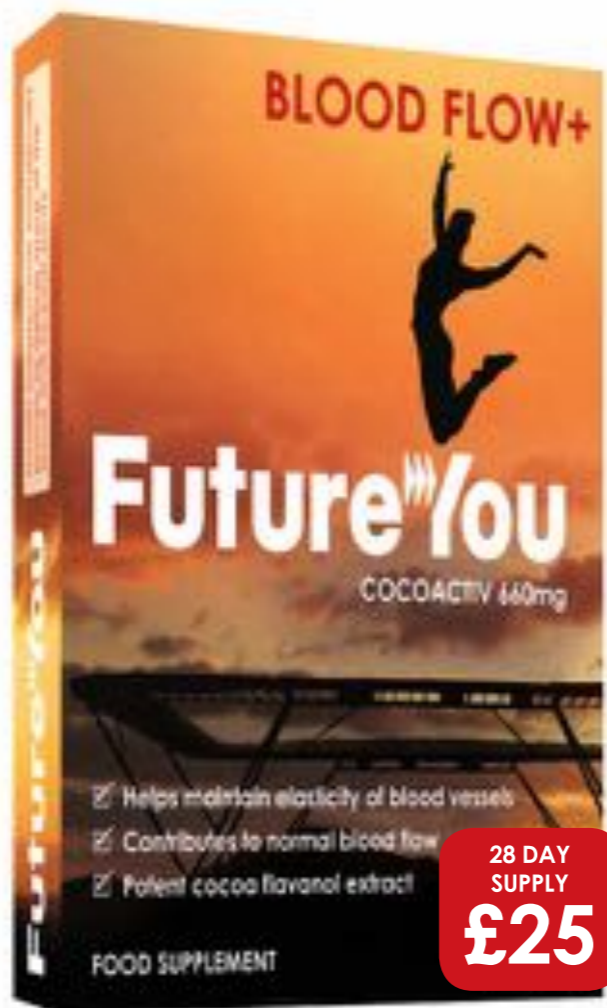
with awarding Blood Flow+, marketed by FutureYou Health, a coveted seal of approval for a product health claim supported by new science.

"We believe this is the way forward," said Dr. Alf Lindberg, former secretary to the committee of the Nobel prize for medicine, and now an advisor to the Cambridge-based research company Cambridge Nutraceuticals, which also launched the well-researched and published 'tomato pill' Ateronon.

A five year programme to track the health of 18,000 men and women aged over 60 is expected to show health benefits linked to improved blood flow in people taking a cocoa flavanol supplement.

of research that has gone into Blood Flow+ and we are delighted that it is the first cocoa flavanol product officially allowed to claim it benefits blood vessel elasticity." "Maintaining the elasticity of blood vessels is very important. Even slightly elevated blood pressure in midlife is linked to increased health risks." Cocoa flavanols are also being studied by American government scientists in the first long-term flavanol project.

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