



DIY is not fun and we've finally realised this as a nation

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Homebase has announced the closure of one in four of its stores. Nick Harding, who never did know his awl from his elbow, is glad to see the back of DIY.



Source: Getty Images

When my children have been particularly naughty, I force a little game upon them. We drive to the nearest DIY superstore and I make them search for lengths of 2 x 4 lumber and 30mm self-tapping screws.

They hate it.

"Why can't we go to Primark instead?" they whine.

"Because this is your punishment," I tell them.

And it is also punishment for the other despondent drones you find there, shuffling down the fluorescent aisles behind trolleys designed so that nothing you purchase fits on or in them, breathing in misery and sawdust.



DIY is not fun, and slowly but surely we've realised this as a nation. It is inherently a dull and frustrating pastime. If a job is worth doing, it's worth paying a Polish builder to do it properly. No wonder, then, that Homebase has announced the closure of one in four of its stores by February 2018, with a possible loss of 2,000 jobs.

Defending the decision, John Walden, the chief executive of Homebase's parent company Home Retail, blamed the cull in part on "the rise of a generation less skilled in DIY projects". He argued that people are more likely to employ tradesmen to save time and also pointed to those pesky health and safety regulations that mean only professionals can fit gas boilers and rewire homes as a contributing factor to the breakdown in our relationship with home improvement.

"It's younger people, people who are time-starved, who are more likely to look for third-party help," he said.

It is a far cry from the halcyon days of the last housing boom, when Changing Rooms designers Linda Barker and Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen reconstructed perfectly liveable bedrooms into faux Parisian brothels using MDF with the help of a reformed burglar called Handy Andy. Back then, DIY was approached with vim and frilly cuffs. It was prime-time television. It was theatre.

Personally, I once dabbled. I laid some laminate flooring. I can paint a room. At a push, I'll even put up some flat-pack furniture. But it is always out of necessity, never for pleasure. I am one of Walden's lost generation. My father was the same. Mum did all the DIY in our household. You have to go back two generations to find a DIY devotee in my family. My maternal grandfather could do everything. He had a fully stocked workshop in the garden. He could plumb, strip an engine and do leather work. His home was well maintained but never stylish because in those days function trumped flair.

According to the television DIY expert and Checkatrade.com ambassador Craig Phillips, the DIY gene is passed from father to son. "When I was a child I loved rooting around in my dad's toolbox. I couldn't wait for him to show me what tools were for and how to start fixing things. It made me feel grown up. Those skills are not passed down anymore," he says.

He also argues that the housing market has played a role in our fading interest. "People don't buy houses now until they are in their mid-thirties so they haven't had to learn those skills and repair and maintain their homes. If they rent, the landlord fixes things. Or pays someone else to come in and fix things. But there are lots of online videos and tutorials now, so this generation don't have to rely on being taught by someone in person."

He advises starting small. "Start with small maintenance projects. Everyone has the ability," he says.

And he's right. It's not rocket science. But when you've got Grand Designs on catch-up TV, limited time and nowhere left to stock up on materials, it may as well be.

Try it yourself: online tutorials

1. Diydoctor.co.uk – an extensive forum where you can ask questions and also buy tools
2. Handyguyspodcast.com – video tutorials for every task you can think of



3. Youtube.com/ultimatehandyman – over 300 videos racking up more than 16 million views

4. Thediyguy.net – 'a regular guy showing people how to fix and repair things'

Link: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/diy-is-not-fun-and-weve-finally-realised-this-as-a-nation-9814831.html>