

PAINT IT HAPPY

TV'S SARAH CAWOOD FINDS JOY FROM PAINTING, UPCYCLING AND DÉCOUPAGE. HERE SHE TALKS HAVING A STORIED HOME, LEARNING FROM HER UPCYCLING MISTAKES AND WHY SHE'S ITCHING FOR SUMMER TO ARRIVE

WORDS JO DUNBAR

Best known for presenting shows such as *Live & Kicking*, *The Girlie Show* and *Top of the Pops*, Sarah swapped London for a family home in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. Between blogging and working as a continuity announcer for Challenge TV, it's here that Sarah has had the time to experiment with upcycling. Sarah is married to Andy and they have two children Hunter, six, and Autumn, four.

What are you working on right now?

I've always got my eye out for a new project but upcycling is very much a thing you can only do when the weather is good. Most people don't have a spare room in their house that they can turn into a workshop. It's not feasible, is it? Our garage is full to the brim of tat but also would be a horrible place to hang out on a freezing day.

I do little bits and pieces on the conservatory table – it's warm and sunny in there. I découpaged bathroom cabinets there, but when it comes to the larger pieces I have to wait until spring or summer as then I can really enjoy it. I can't wait to get out in the garden and upcycle!

I've always got little things on the go – if I'm not upcycling then I am painting or découpaging and I like to do other

things, too. I love baking – but for other people: I made sloe gin a couple of weeks ago, ready for next Christmas.

How did you discover upcycling?

My friend Charlie is incredibly arty and she découpages everything. She did her dining table and chairs and said to me, 'Sarah – it's so easy! Just get some Mod Podge and stick stuff on!' The first time I did it. I thought, 'this is ridiculous, it really is easy'. Especially if you have a piece of furniture that shows imperfections after painting; découpaging covers that kind of thing up. We've got bits of furniture that had watermarks and where cheap wood had risen but with découpage you can hide all that.

My first project was a solid oak hallway table that I found in a charity shop. I painted it grey and chucked wax over the top and it's really nice – it's still downstairs in our house now.

I don't really like the contemporary furniture you can buy in department stores, it's too sleek for me. I'm more into having pieces with character and I'm obsessed with hygge. I hate a big light, I much prefer candles and I love an ambient light! Sometimes we can be watching TV and my family will say, 'I can't see!' but I would rather struggle to watch the telly and enjoy sitting in the dark!

There are so many shops where I live in Essex that sell ♦♦



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(opposite page) Sarah découpage a stool that looks pretty in the bathroom.
 (below, left) Andy's grandfather left the couple lots of furniture. Sarah reupholstered this chair – part of a dining set – to give it a brand new lease of life.
 (below, right) A chest of drawers that Sarah upcycled herself.



bespoke furniture – but that would cost thousands. I can't justify a purchase like that but for a fraction of the cost you can achieve the same thing yourself by changing the knobs and painting. We have loads of tester pots of paint in our garage from decorating the house, so I'm going to use them up. I might try to do an ombre chest of drawers working from a dark cream colour to a lighter shade.

Are you teaching yourself as you progress?

I was going to do a painting course at an interiors shop down the road where you got to paint a butler tray and take it home. But I decided to save the money and usually, if there's anything I'm not sure how to do, I look on YouTube. I have loads of books too. You only have to type into Google, 'how to distress chalk paint furniture' and there's a million and one people who have done it before.

Distressing is definitely something you need to read up on before you attempt it, though. I've got bits of furniture that are distressed in really weird places. I thought, 'why does that look odd?' And, after reading, I realised you should only distress edges and corners really, where furniture would naturally be worn or get knocked. You can't have a



distressed patch in the middle of a drawer: that would never get knocked. I worked on my kitchen chairs and the first two are distressed in weird places but the last one was really good!

What is it about upcycling that you like the most?

When I am sitting découpage, distressing and seeing how something is coming to life I do feel very at peace with the world. It's my happy place. I feel very content when I am upcycling and now my youngest is four, I have the time to ➡



(opposite page) An oak table that Sarah painted. She distressed it in all the right places!
 (left) An upcycled bedside cabinet.
 (right) Sarah on the red carpet for the UK premiere of *Water For Elephants*.



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dedicate to it. One thing I think it's important to make clear is not to beat yourself up looking at other people's lifestyles on Instagram and upcycling blogs and think, 'Why don't I have the time for that?' You simply don't until your kids are at school. And no woman - or man - should feel like that. Some people who are successful have help with their kids, or they're paying a cleaner to free up their time. I don't have any of those things so, especially in the summer when I have lots I want to do, the house will get a bit dirty because I would rather be painting something outside.

Is it important to you to fill your house with pieces that have a history?
 We inherited loads of Andy's grandparents furniture and I have upcycled most of it. Whenever I walk around the house, there are bits of his grandad's home everywhere and I think

it's a lovely legacy. A lot of people think, 'Oh, that's really old fashioned,' if it is something their grandparents owned, but it doesn't have to be. You can give it a new lease of life and I have done that with loads of things. We inherited Andy's grandparents' dining suite and had it reupholstered and it's just beautiful.

I also think in this day of such high consumerism, we are obsessed with buying and chucking; using older furniture is a way to be kinder to the planet. My worst nightmare is a house full of Oak Furniture Land! I get that it's really well-made and solid and not veneered but it is so vanilla. 🍷

» Find Sarah's blog at sarahcawood.co.uk
 Twitter: @sarah_cawood
 Instagram: @sarahcawood



Sarah's Little Black Book

Market Deeping Antiques:
 'My mum lives in Peterborough and Market Deeping Antiques market is my mecca. I love it - people sell upcycled furniture and I find a lot there.'
marketdeepingantiquesandcraftcentre.co.uk
 Charity Shops:
 'It's all about the area. Leigh-on-Sea is chi-chi and the charity shops awesome.'
 Homebase:
 'Homebase has a great selection of knobs to transform a chest of drawers or a cabinet.'
homebase.co.uk
 Etsy:
 'I bought vintage comic book pages from Etsy then découpage a cabinet with them. I gave it to a friend for Christmas.'
etsy.com/uk