

Blue note

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn admits to being neither neat nor messy, but she certainly gets the 'everything in its place and a place for everything' mantra with boats

I have never been a neat freak, nor was I very messy in my landlubber life. However, living on board a boat does teach you the advantages of being that bit tidier. But it's a lesson that you learn only by getting it spectacularly wrong to start with.

Our yacht is really a kind of tardis as, once you empty out all the cupboards, drawers and bilges, you'd be amazed at simply how much stuff can be crammed into our floating home. The key to stopping it from becoming chaotic, however, is that everything has to have its own place to stow away into so that it can be both found at a moment's notice and safely squirrelled away while on passage. Multiply that logic by the thousands of items that any normal family owns, ranging from tools to toys, silicone to snorkels, nappies to navigation aids, and you end up with a sort of three-dimensional storage list of our entire boat contents. And then of course James and I will make remembering where something is that extra bit more complicated by moving things without telling one another!

But far from being some sort of obsession with order and cleanliness, the art of packing up and giving every item its proper place is actually a matter of safety on board. Boats move: they lurch unexpectedly, they heel over dramatically and, what's more, they have to be manoeuvred swiftly, unexpectedly, or in the dead of night. If things are not put back where they should be then they can become a flying missile across a cabin or they can obstruct your managing of the boat.

One of the first sails that we did together was in the Scilly Isles. After lunch one day we happily readied the boat and hoisted the main, unfurled the headsail and moved smoothly out towards the next island, whereupon we heard an almighty crash from down below. We looked at each other and realised in an instant that all the dishes from the meal were now in bits on the cabin floor. Our land life had taught us to be good and wash up after eating but our sea instincts were not yet well-tuned enough to remember to tidy it all away in the cupboards.



ILLUSTRATION: AMEE JEWITT-HARRIS

'WE WERE MOVING TOWARDS A REEF PASS WITH SHIRTS, TOWELS AND BEDDING FLAPPING ALL AROUND US'

On another occasion we were cruising the southern coast of Cuba and, having sat at anchor for a few days, we were keen to move on to our next stop. Despite the lack of wind we made everything fast down below and turned the engine on to begin a day of motoring. This time, however, we soon understood that our error was in not prepping the deck. Knowing that we wouldn't be sailing we had neglected to take down all our washing lines, so we were now moving towards a reef pass with shirts, towels and bedding flapping all around us!

Needless to say visibility is rather important on a boat so we hastily scrambled around the deck and bundled all the laundry away.

An ocean passage poses even greater challenges to your stowage skills as the seas are bigger and you're inevitably carrying a

lot more food provisions with you. Our fruit and veg bounces around happily in hammocks, suspended from the roof of the cabin, which normally do well at keeping them safe. But all it takes is one slightly messy wave or hitting the sea at a somewhat different angle and you suddenly have an escapee apple falling down and rolling about underfoot, or a banana bashed to smithereens in a sticky mess against the cabin wall.

And of course, with all that movement, something that was tied down fast when you left harbour may become less secure after several hundred miles. I heard a strange sound in the night when we were mid-Atlantic of something sliding back and forth above my head. I climbed the companionway steps and found James at the helm. He'd heard it too and, in the dark, we were able to make out the shapes of three of our extra diesel jerry cans skidding about the aft deck, having worked loose from their lashings. He clambered out to deal with them but soon gathered that there had been a spill as seconds later he was slipping and sliding round the deck, covered in diesel while I was at the helm in my pyjamas!

These days we're more fastidious, with 'everything in its place and a place for everything'. Which, with two infants around, means keeping shipshape is a full-time job. ✨



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What's your system for stowing important items on your boat?

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