

Machines for living in

Living space, operational hub, moving vehicle – a boat must both be and balance all of these things when it's also your family home, says **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn**

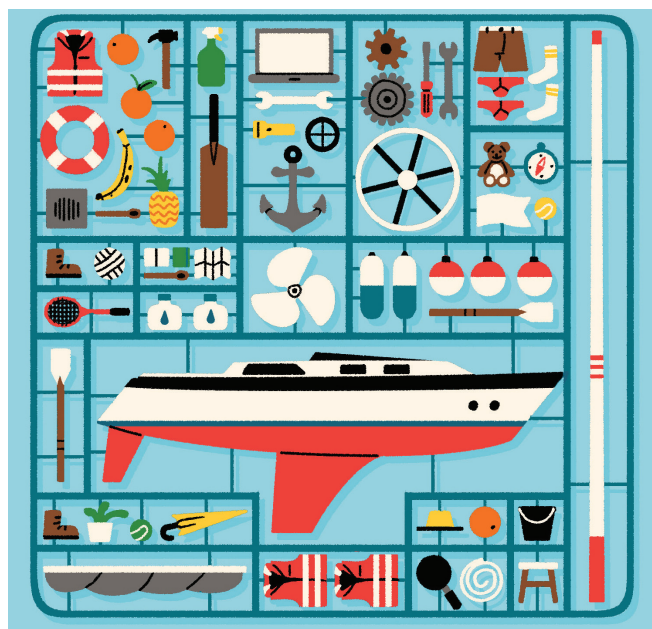
When we first set out from the UK a lot of the messages from friends back home would ask what boat life was like. I would reply: “Imagine your house and your car, rolled into one and put into an environment that’s constantly trying to attack it. That’s what keeping a boat is like! Things break, salt water corrodes, and time and use wear things out.”

With our children I adopt a slightly softer approach and talk about living in our boat home as being a bit like how it would be if we lived inside a clock or a computer. All the parts have to be free to move, all the spaces need to be kept clear: a clock wouldn’t work if a Hello Kitty toy was shoved into its gears, and computers don’t behave properly if they’re opened up and have jam smeared all over them.

Our early sailing learning curve meant realising that we would often need to move our yacht unexpectedly, at a moment’s notice and in difficult conditions. So there was good reason not to have too many sundowner cocktails on shore as dealing with a dragging anchor in the middle of the night while fighting a hangover is less than ideal. And failing to safely put away the washing-up or take down the laundry would often come back to bite us if a sudden wind picked up or a swell set in. Trust me, you don’t want to be chasing your underwear across an anchorage by dinghy...

I’m often in awe of just how hard the spaces have to work for the boat to be so multi-functional. This sofa I’m sitting on has our dried goods stashed in the back of it and our water containers underneath; that bunk for our five-year-old also stores our spare headsail and the canvas that encloses our cockpit; those boards under our bed separate our clothing bags from the steering quadrant and autopilot.

It’s also interesting how quickly any free space gets taken over. We have a large, solid oval table in our saloon and it’s our everything table. That is to say we eat every meal at it, the children play, draw and paint on it, we explore books, practise writing and



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work with numbers using it, we construct dens under it, and it also has a highchair clamped onto it. It’s the go-to space for laying out the provisions when we’ve just stocked up at the market. On its surface pumps are deconstructed, engine filters are positioned, things are taken apart and mended, and charts are flattened out and consulted. And sometimes, just sometimes, I’m allowed to write at it.

The combination of maintaining a stimulating and welcoming family home to three active children with all the kit, instruments, order, functionality and free space of a working, global cruising yacht is the absurd contradiction that we currently live in, and to fully be both is a constant puzzle.

Our prep for moving involves removing countless toys from

the cockpit and stowing buckets from the previous day’s water play. I have to shove a host of tiny and intricate handmade paper creations unceremoniously to one side in order to place our log, current cruising guide and pilotage notes on the chart table. Wooden maracas, a pull-along bee and a set of Russian dolls are transformed from charming playthings to painful missiles if not packed away for passage so I hop from cabin to cabin, cramming things into cupboards, scrambling to up-anchor before the tide turns.

Yet amid the chaos, the innumerable squabbles over putting things away or tidying up, there seems to be a healthy and fulfilling equilibrium that we have stumblingly arrived at. I’m hand-steering under sail as our two-year-old chatters happily, tucked under the sprayhood with her giraffe and monkey. Below us her dad is pottering in the galley, starting to prepare lunch. Our eldest, now 7, has flipped down the pull-out seat at the chart table and is quietly and carefully making a card for her best friend in New Zealand, oblivious to the motion of the swell, whilst her brother is at the saloon table, drawing apple trees and turtles.

Our home is a device, a mechanism for movement, our tool to travel this endless sea. And yet at times the vast ocean is reduced to a mere backdrop, it’s simply the street we live on. Life afloat, it turns out, is equal parts sailing and also just being.



JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL PARKIN