

“Things are great but we aren’t complacent. We never think, ‘We’ve made it’ – we think, ‘We’re getting there’”

*Original upcyclers Mark and Sally Bailey talk
Clare Gogerty through stripped-back style*

This is one of Mark’s thinking dens,” says Sally Bailey, opening the door to a rickety shed piled high with pairs of traditional Welsh clogs and old shoe lasts. “He’s got rather a lot of thinking dens.”

The results of Mark Bailey’s time spent in his thinking dens can be seen throughout the couple’s homeware store in rural Herefordshire – a collection of farm buildings packed to the rafters with covetable things. These include Mark’s ingeniously upcycled objects: lights fashioned from metal jelly moulds; a chandelier made from stag horns; French apple crates reinvented as bedside cabinets; and those shoe lasts now functioning as iPad stands.

Back in the shed, Mark switches on a vintage electric fire. Its orange heating element cheerfully bounces warmth from its chrome surround. It’s a typical Baileys object: utilitarian, nostalgic, well-designed and discarded by others. The sort of object that, combined with Mark’s ingenious creations and the couple’s unfailing instincts, has built their business from a small antiques shop in South Wales to the influential homewares store and brand it is today. »



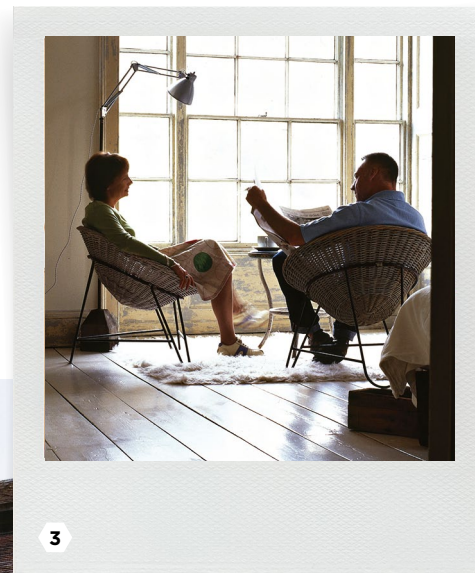
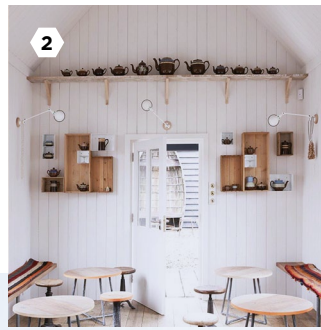
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Mark and Sally Bailey seek out the simple, the useful and the beautiful for the homewares store that shares their name.



Attention to detail is key to Baileys' success: each individual item is carefully selected and thoughtfully displayed.





"I don't like to think of Baileys as a brand," says Sally, pouring coffee into hand-blown tumblers. "We have just started to brand some items, such as the brushes that have been made especially for us, but only because everyone asked us to. It still feels a little odd. I've never done a business plan or managed a spreadsheet or anything like that. It's all up here." She taps her head.

Sally's apparently relaxed attitude to the business could fool you into thinking that Baileys has grown almost by accident. The opposite is true: hard work, a strong design aesthetic, a clear philosophy and an almost obsessive attention to detail has powered its success. "And Sally is really ace at retail," says Mark.

"We had a clear idea of what we wanted to sell right from the beginning," says Sally. "No plastic or packaging. Natural materials, muted colours, recycled and upcycled objects. We're careful about where we source products – honesty and integrity are watchwords. We've been doing ethical for decades!"

Now, with the trend for upcycled and vintage furnishings in full swing, the rest of the country has caught up with them.

REDUCE, REUSE, RESTORE

The Baileys' personal and professional partnership started in 1980 when Sally met Mark at an auction in Pontypridd, South Wales. The friend she was with had successfully bid for a Pembroke table and the two

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women persuaded Mark to help move it. "We didn't tell him that she lived in a third-floor flat in Penarth," says Sally. "I was had," laughs Mark.

The couple married four months later and moved to a rectory in Goodrich, Herefordshire in 1982, where their two children grew up. The house is chronicled in the Baileys' first book, *Recycled Home*, which was published in 2007. "It was a beautiful house, we really loved living there," says Mark, "so I was pleased to document it in a book. It made it easier to walk away." This they had to do when they moved Baileys the business from a disused engine shed near Ross to the farm at Bridstow eight years ago. "We couldn't afford to keep Goodrich on," says Sally. "We paid top dollar to the Duchy of Cornwall for Whitecross Farm," adds Mark, "then had to overturn planning permission to build eight houses. It was a horrendous, nerve-wracking time and financially quite a risk."

The anxiety continued as Mark took a year out from the business to oversee the renovation of the listed farm buildings. Working with contractors,



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THE ORIGINAL UPCYCLERS

Mark and Sally Bailey: a stripped-back CV

- 1956** Sally born in London
- 1957** Mark born in Wales
- 1974** Sally studies interior design at Cardiff Art College
- 1973** Mark is apprenticed to a furniture designer and studies furniture design on day release
- 1973** Mark opens first antiques shop in Barry, South Wales
- 1980** The pair meet at a furniture auction in Pontypridd and get married four months four days later
- 1982** Move to Goodrich, Herefordshire
- 1985** Open first Baileys store in a disused engine shed near Ross-on-Wye
- 2005** Buy Whitecross Farm in Bridstow near Ross-on-Wye, and open new store a year later after extensive restoration.
- 2007** First book *Recycled Home* (2007) published. Two more follow: *Simple Home* (2009); *Handmade Home* (2011)
- 2012** Introduce live ordering on website www.baileyshome.com
- 2012** Winners of *The Telegraph's* Best for Interiors category in their Best Small Shops in Britain awards
- 2014** Fourth book published (September)

www.baileyshome.com

❶ - ❷ The restful Tin Tabernacle Tearoom serves tea, cakes and sandwiches to hungry shoppers.

❸ The Baileys concept emerged fully formed: "We had a clear idea of what we wanted to sell right from the beginning," says Sally.

❹ In keeping with the shop's ethos, the first Baileys store was located in a disused engine shed.

❺ - ❻ Their distinctive upcycled style is evident in Mark and Sally's former home, The Old Vicarage.

❼ Baileys specialises in offering new life to old items - from milk bottles to shoe lasts.

he transformed the dilapidated threshing barn, cart shed, granary, stables and house into the clean, lofty retail space, office and home it is today, designing and adapting as he went along.

"It was completely derelict," says Sally. "It hadn't been used for 20 years, so it was a major job." True to their 'reduce, reuse, restore' principles, they recycled what they could and repurposed as many materials as possible. Sheep's wool insulation was installed and underfloor heating was laid beneath the poured concrete floor. Mark made the huge tables from metal frames and concrete, and sourced shelving and crates from factory clearances. Sally kept the existing business running and sourced new stock. One bank holiday in August they moved everything to the new premises and opened the doors. But if they expected everything to run smoothly from then on, they were mistaken.

"Sales flatlined," says Sally. "We'd only moved a mile down the road but people couldn't work it out: I think they thought we'd closed. It was a struggle for two or three years and although things are great now, we aren't complacent. We never think, 'We've made it' - we always think, 'We're getting there'."

A LIBERATING APPROACH

These days Baileys has become a destination store: a place to spend an hour or so, basket in hand, wandering

around the different spaces lost in a shopping reverie. Retail guru Mary Portas has praised the way "it encourages you to meander through its rooms of beautifully merchandised spaces".

All manner of delightful household objects, from wooden dolly pegs to plump sofas, are heaped into crates and packed onto shelves without feeling either congested or unmanageable. This is largely down to the acres of space available (actually 20,000 feet), but it's also due to Mark's expert eye for display. "He's often in here until midnight arranging things," says Sally.

The only grumble comes from occasional customers complaining about high pricing. Old apple crates, for example, sell for £28. "People don't realise that we have to pay to transport the crates from France, then disinfect, pressure-wash and repair them," says Mark. "Quality costs money," Sally adds.

The couple shares the responsibilities for the store: Sally is in charge of sales and buys the stock for the shop floor. As well as overseeing long-term employee Gary Hale in the workshop and creating new product, Mark buys the one-offs and antiques. "I often get up at 3am to travel to the big antique fairs or sales," he says. "It's still exciting; they're adrenaline-fuelled trips." Recent buys have included the contents of a shoe factory with about 2,000 shoe lasts and shoe trolleys, and 10,000 wooden bobbins. »

AESTHETICALLY PLEASING SPRING CLEANING

Domestic tasks the Baileys way

While admitting that cleaning is a constant chore, Mark and Sally are firm believers that it can be much improved by using beautiful tools and environmentally safe products. Best of all, make your own: recipes for linen water and beeswax polish can be found in their book *Simple Home*.

Here are their top five devices to ease the pain of cleaning, all available at www.baileyshome.com:

- ❶ Dusting brushes, from £14. "The goat hair brush has soft white hair for gentle cleaning and is used by many museums and galleries."
- ❷ Washing-up brush, £2.50. "This is Mark's favourite. He uses it all the time."
- ❸ Ostrich feather duster, £24. "The wonderful plumes make household chores feel glamorous. Every man should have one!"
- ❹ The behind-the-cupboard brush, £34. "Handy for reaching those out-of-the-way places."
- ❺ Baileys beeswax furniture polish, 75g tin, £7.25. "This is our very own polish and is simply the best."



*"It's **EXCITING** how many young people are taking up **TRADITIONAL** crafts. If we can **STOCK** their stuff, we will"*

No day is typical at Baileys. Sally and Mark spend the weekends at their other home, three-quarters of a mile drive away, in Hay-on-Wye. "We made a resolution a couple of years ago that we weren't going to work weekends any more," says Sally, "and generally we've stuck to it." During the week, they stay at the farmhouse. "Our carbon footprint is very low," laughs Mark. "We stroll across from the house with our cat Lily and open the store and read emails." After that, anything can happen. They might meet up with business partners to discuss new projects: they've worked with Superdry and the Duchy of Cornwall in the past, among others. Or they could head to a trade show in London or Paris to source new product. "Increasingly, we also discover great things at local fairs and smallholder shows," says Sally. "We've found bakers, weavers, bodgers [hand-turned chair makers] and biscuit makers there." "It's exciting how many young people are taking up traditional crafts like cheesemaking rather than a traditional career path," says Mark. "If we can stock their stuff, we will."

Or they could be pulling together the words and pictures for their latest book. The three titles they've

produced so far showcase not only their homes but their particular style of interior design. This champions 'undecoration', a process of stripping back rather than adorning. It's a liberating approach to home furnishing, where colour charts and wallpaper swatches are redundant. Instead, the bones of the building are revealed by deliberately stripping back layers of paper and plaster and leaving floorboards bare. The colour palette is pale and neutral to create a calm environment in which to display well-chosen, hand-crafted objects.

What next for this enterprising pair? Proofs have just arrived of their fourth book, which will be published this September, and which they researched in Japan. "It has a totally different look to the others," says Sally, "but it will work well as a thread." They're also selling the house in Hay-on-Wye as they've bought a small farmhouse with a huge barn nearby. "It's our next project," says Sally.

Of immediate excitement, however, is the latest arrival in the store: cloth used to wipe the udders of cows. "It's incredibly soft and absorbent," says Sally, laughing. "Very sad, but this is what our life is like!" **S**