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# SOUTHERN Daily Echo Est. 1888

## Does B&Q's Hampshire Redundancies Mean Our Love Affair with DIY is Over?



By Sarah Jones

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Review



B&Q HQ in Chandler's Ford

THEY make it look so easy on the TV – in 60 minutes your home can be transformed into a palace, with little more than a lick of paint, some new cushions and a staple gun.

In the glorious pre-credit crunch years, as the housing market boomed, DIY was all the rage as people sought to improve their home on a shoestring before upsizing to bigger and better things.

The likes of Laurence Llewelyn- Bowen, Linda Barker and “Handy” Andy became household names as they dominated our TV screens showing us how easy it was to Do It Yourself.

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But the gloss faded when the recession bit hard, with Hampshire-based retail giant B&Q announcing this week it was axing 220 jobs.

While the firm has declared that the job cuts are not a reaction to poor trading conditions and are instead part of a three-year “realignment” process, the sums

speak for themselves.

Announcing plunging profits earlier this year, after the wettest summer in 100 years, B&Q is certainly feeling the pinch.

Kingfisher, the group that owns B&Q, said that £30m had been wiped off the group's profits as demand for gardening and outdoor maintenance goods plummeted. And DIY spending in general has fallen to a record low.

So is our love affair with pulling on the overalls and getting our hands dirty over?

It certainly seems to be getting the serious cold shoulder treatment if you look at the hard facts.

Amid the continued squeeze on household finances and depressed property prices, DIY sales have plummeted to their lowest level in over 15 years, according to research by Lloyds TSB.

The bank's annual home maintenance survey revealed that households spent £7.8 billion on DIY in 2011 – equivalent to around £300 per household.

That's the lowest total since records began in 1996, and almost half of the £15.5 billion spent at the peak in 2004, when Laurence and his chums were hot property.

Pre-recession, between 2001 and 2007, spending increased by almost a fifth as the housing market rocketed. This included a staggering 82 per cent rise in spending on tools.

But since the bottom fell out of the industry, the decline in DIY spending has been dramatic, falling by 44 per cent.

And it's not just garden and outdoor equipment that has been affected. Last year saw significant declines in spending on both DIY tools and materials.

Everything from plumbing tools to garden trimmer sales suffered, plummeting by almost a fifth.

With economic conditions expected to remain challenging, the DIY squeeze is "likely to continue for some time yet", says Suren Thiru, Lloyds TSB housing economist.

With many homeowners choosing to stay put and wait for property prices to recover, it would be logical to think that home improvements would be all the rage.

So if we're not doing the DIY, who is? Have we decided to leave it to the professionals to do a better job than us? No is the simple answer.

Despite a small rise last year, there has been a steady drop in spending on tradesmen's services in the last ten years, which have fallen 40 per cent overall since 2001. It seems that we're just not spending full stop when it comes to DIY.

In fact, a recent report showed that two-thirds of us – around 14 million households – are living amid an unfinished home improvement project.

The RatedPeople.com poll of more than 3,200 families highlighted just how many of us embark on DIY that either goes wrong, falls apart or is never completed.

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The report found most householders took up to six months to fix the problem.

But 16 per cent lived with it for more than three years.

But it's difficult to ignore that dodgy paintwork or half-finished kitchen forever.

And these botched jobs could be the biggest false economy of all.

As Andrew Kaye, Director of Studies at [Southampton City College](#), says: "If you get the right kind of DIY training behind you it will be more cost-effective in the long run. It only takes a few mistakes and you're calling in the professionals anyway."

Offering a range of part-time DIY adult courses, Mr Kaye says they haven't seen a post-recession fall in student numbers.

But while they continue their love affair with DIY, others blame money worries for choosing separation instead.

The industry must hope an economic upturn prevents full-scale divorce.