

The Heart of Matters

This tea-drinking, biscuit-loving shaper of the finest sustainable wooden surfcraft in the land also loves empowering his customers.



◀ In North Cornwall, James Otter crafts surfboards with sustainability in mind, using local materials every step of the way.

▶ Otter in his workshop, where he shapes surfboards by hand and teaches the craft to others.

The surfboard industry is bitterly toxic. This is a well-known but little acknowledged fact. Despite sustainable alternatives having been explored for decades, and many materials showing performance advantages, most surfboards are made with foam and resin, and sustainability is sacrificed for speed, ease, and cost of construction. James Otter, a surfboard shaper who lives in North Cornwall, approaches the art from a very different perspective, with time, care, and passion for the environment and his craft.

Over the last ten years, since I first heard his name, James has been humbly refining his process. He approaches the construction of his unique vessels with a phenomenal input of time, care, and passion. From standing tree to impeccably finished board, James works with local materials at every stage of the supply chain. The boards are made from trees that grow

on the Somerset border in a sustainably managed forest of western red cedar. James likes total transparency of the ingredients that make up his boards. He says, this forest "ensures the timber we use has been sustainably managed and harvested, and encourages the growth of woodlands in the UK." If you compare this to most surfboard supply chains that span many chemicals and continents, it's a refreshing attitude.

Shaping was never really a choice for James. He recalls the start of his journey: "once I began building and shaping the first board, the excitement and enjoyment I got back from it made me realise that making more would have to be part of my future."

Another really special element of his shaping arises from his engagement with the public. James leads workshops about many aspects of working with wood including building surfboards and handplanes. "Since I first

