

Fantastic voyage

NEW

Follow six-year-old Barney as he builds a houseboat with his dad, Tom Lawton



Tom's Fantastic Floating Home

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FACTUAL

Inventor Tom Lawton has carved out a career with creations like a recordable alarm clock and 360-degree bubble cameras. However, last summer he teamed up with his son Barney, six, to turn a decrepit boat into the ultimate floating home — with revolving sun-chasing rooms, water slide and a bath under the floorboards. Their imaginations ran riot, but with housing shortages and flood risks in the news, there was a serious point to the endeavour.

'I'm creative for every minute I'm awake,' grins 38-year-old Tom. 'With this, I had the excuse to look at the world through my son's eyes. It's nice to be childish now and then. Normally if you are designing things to manufacture there are lots of complicated constraints.'

While some of the

creations on board were costly, a self-watering and feeding garden was made with components including a toilet brush holder!

'I became an inventor because of my dad,' says Tom, who lives in Wiltshire with his wife Charlie, Barney, now seven, and Rufus, one. 'He would help us make a go-kart or a treehouse, and fix things. That's what you did back then, you didn't just go out and buy new stuff.'

Time will tell whether the new vessel leaves them pleased or with a sinking feeling. But their journey is inspiring and hilarious. Moments before the maiden voyage, the engine fails and the boat's balloon camera floats off. Tom's about to ring the Civil Aviation Authority to track it, but Barney says he needs a poo...

'That's a reality parents know,' laughs Tom. 'You could be set to shake hands with the Queen and that's when a child throws up on you! But doing this with Barney was the best part for me. I like to think this has seared some memories into his mind.'

Tricia Martin



The houseboat takes to the water