



Calum Creasey

# **BUILD A CAMPERVAN**

**The definitive guide**

**Lannoo**

I have spent the past five years building campervans professionally. Before this, I built them for myself and my now wife, Lauren, to travel around Europe in the most affordable way possible. This story has played out in a similar fashion for people all over the world. Those who build their own campervans often start with a modest design and refine it until their skills have developed and their campervan meets as many of their needs as possible.

Some, like me, go on to build many campervans, usually bigger and more ambitious. Yet still try to retain that magic they discovered with that first build. Some, also like me, go on to open their own businesses that build campervans for other people, using the skills they have developed to create bespoke vehicles for those who do not have the time, space or resources to build their own.

These vehicles have the capacity to move you physically, mentally and spiritually. This is a bold claim, but bear with me a moment. I have written extensively (elsewhere) about the 'Why': the dreams that fuel our desire for a campervan are varied, yet when discussed, the same themes reoccur time and time again. I have learned a great deal from every campervan I have built (30+ to date). Each has been unique. Built around the individual. The



ONWARDS

ARB TOURING



ONWARDS

Goldilocks effect in action, where the arrangement of furniture or choice of materials are informed by unique tastes. I have designed bespoke campervans that feel 'just right' and others that have needed adaptation and further refinement. What works in theory sometimes doesn't in practice. But often the feeling of having built your campervan, and the ability to learn from the never-ending feedback loop, can be incredibly satisfying. You may be wondering where you fit into this? You may have considered building a campervan yourself or paying a professional to build one for you. My hope is that this book will be the spark of inspiration you need to embark on your own self-build. This sounds counterintuitive to my business model, and indeed it is. But that's fine by me.

Some finished work you will want to admire, others you may want to throw in the trash and start again.



Whether you have access to a professional workshop and machinery, or a driveway and what you can beg, borrow or steal (not advised) in terms of materials and tools, the process is the same. You may be an accomplished carpenter, or a complete novice. In this book, I lay out the process that we take with those who commission me to build them a campervan. Before we touch any tools, we will start with your mindset, what challenges to expect and how to prepare. Setting your project on the right path early will make all the difference.





Regardless of your current skill level, you have been a part of this creation process since the day you were born. You were wrapped in a blanket woven by human ingenuity, and you slept on a bed frame made from timber or metal. The plates you ate from and the roof that protected you were all assembled, fixed and built by human hands. Do you see what I'm getting at? This book will challenge your current skills. It will instruct you and inspire you. Developing your ability to build a campervan will in turn allow you to approach any building project with confidence. I have seen firsthand how friends who have built their first campervan go on to renovate properties, develop products and constantly stretch the boundaries of what they were once capable of.

The right attitude will prepare you for the difficult moments during your project.





## **WHERE ARE YOU IN THE CAMPERVAN DESIGN PROCESS?**

There are simple campervans and complex campervans. Some are full to the brim with furniture, equipment, tools and everything else you may need for a life on the road. Others are blindingly simple, with next to nothing inside. Some look homemade, like a cosy burrow or hobbit hole. Others stand on the cutting edge, using composite materials and insulation developed by NASA. The intended use informs the design.

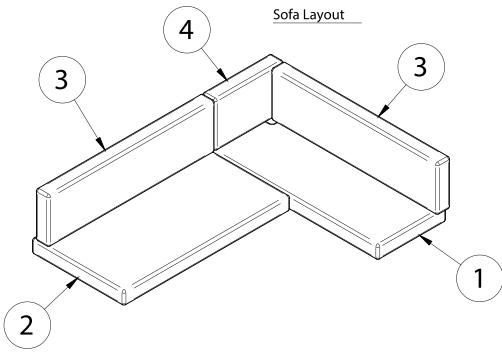
When a customer first reaches out to me, be it with a phone call or an email, I ask key questions to quickly gain an understanding of who they are and how they envision their campervan. I can then see how this fits with what is possible. At this point, we encounter the first tussle between dreams and pragmatism. The limited space available, the considerations of a moving vehicle and the budget define what is possible. Working from these three broad constraints, I approach the design process as a 'conical spiral'.

At its start, it is broad and loosely defined. As we move down towards a finished design, it narrows and becomes clearer. The narrowing process reflects various trade-offs and decisions that have been made along the way. This is informed by our initial constraints and a list of 'hierarchy of needs' that we will come

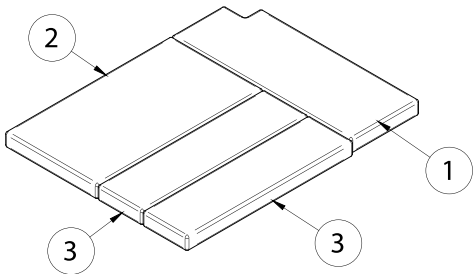




Sofa Layout



Bed Layout



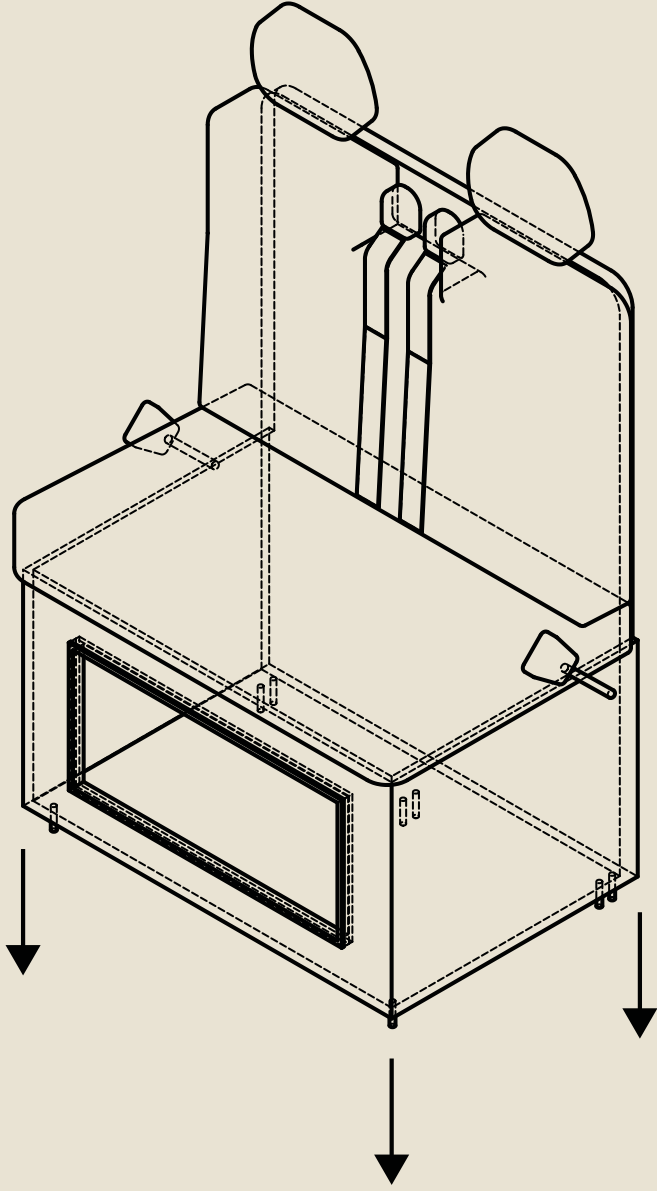
### ADVICE

Simplicity of the bed function will save you time and stress. Don't overcomplicate things. Design your seat upholstery to make up your bed mattress- saves space and money!









The term 'first fix' is taken from the building and manufacturing industries. Once you have a clean blank canvas, first fix refers to the tasks that will lay a solid foundation for the rest of your build. As you construct your interior, areas of the space will be enclosed by sound dampening, insulation, cladding, trimming, flooring and furniture. Depending on how you design these aspects, access later on may be a challenge. In order to minimise this, think of how to future-proof your build.

Conduits are the best place to start. Use flexible versions to allow for easy running of wires, cable and pipework behind wall cladding, flooring and the ceiling. These also protect cables from sharp metal edges. Place extra runs of conduits in areas where you may later add more wiring and put 'chase wires' in these conduits to allow you to pull cable through later. Pay attention not to create tight curves in these conduits.

The first fix is also the stage to cut any holes or apertures in the floor area. These will allow for fitting of gas drop-out vents, and habitation cables and pipework to enter and exit the space. In this stage, we will also cut holes and fit inlets for tank fillers, hook-up inlets and holes in the floor for any services. Remember to clean the edges with your burr removal tool and sandpaper, and coat cut edges with glazing primer.

Any parts of your build that require secure fixing to the chassis, such as travelling seats or 'rock & roll' bed frames that we touched on in Part One, should be 'dry fitted' now. A travel seat