

VANLIFE

JOURNAL



FREE

THE SELF-BUILD REVOLUTION

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Welcome to the very first issue of Simple Vans magazine! We're beyond excited to kick this off and have you with us for the journey. This is our love letter to van life—a way to share the freedom and joy it's given us, built from years on the road.

If you're still dreaming about that first trip, sketching floor plans, or scrolling van inspo late at night, we hope these pages light a fire under you. Why? Because we believe van life can make the world better – one person, one journey at a time. If everyone did it, we'd be living in a utopia by now. So here's our goal for 2025: help 5,000 people make their camper

conversion dream a reality.

And if you're already deep in the van life game—parked somewhere wild, or tooled up and tinkering on your new project in the driveway – we've got you too. Look for a few philosophical nuggets, practical tips, and maybe even the inspiration for your next road trip. Spread the word, and let's keep this rolling!

Oh and one more thing: if you enjoy this issue, visit us at simplevans.eu where we've got tons of guides and a blog to keep you inspired.

- Ben

Cover, here:
Our roving travel journo
[@mywildtravel](https://www.instagram.com/mywildtravel) lives the
Dolomites dream in her
2005 VW T5 (Drifter Kit).
Check out her favourite
destinations on p.40.



The KISS Philosophy

Why Keeping it Simple Wins Every Time

Text: Jason Horton



Origins: Born in the U.S. Navy

In the 1960s, a principle emerged in the U.S. Navy that would go on to influence everything from engineering to business strategy: KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid. The idea was simple (fittingly so): the best solutions are the easiest to understand and execute. Overly complex systems tend to fail when they matter most.

KISS in Action: The Simple Vans Story

As the name suggests, Simple Vans was born out of the same KISS philosophy: Keep It Simple, Stupid. Here's how it happened.

Back in 2018, our founder, Ben, was a partner in a small campervan rental business. Each winter, he and his mates would buy empty panel vans, convert them into campervans, and rent them out to tourists all summer.

It was a great way to learn the ins and outs of van life—what worked, what didn't, and what people really needed in a camper. But there was one problem: Ben realized he hated most of the business.

Sure, building out vans was fun. But dealing with

The KISS Philosophy: Why Keeping it Simple Wins Every Time

makers were packing their designs with features that made them look premium, even when they didn't necessarily improve functionality

rental customers? Not so much. Especially when they called at 2 a.m. to say they'd abandoned the van because it broke down (spoiler: they'd put petrol in a diesel engine). Or when they expected him to personally cover their hotel bill.

That was the moment of clarity. Ben walked away from the rental game and focused 100% on what he actually loved: designing and installing campervan furniture.

The more vans he built, the more he realized something: he wasn't that interested in van conversions—he was obsessed with furniture for vans. He loved the challenge of stripping a unit down to pure utility, refining every detail until it was lighter, stronger, and more functional. And as he kept simplifying, something interesting happened—his designs weren't just getting better, they were getting easier to assemble.

Google's Homepage: The Power of White Space



In the early days of the internet, search engines like Yahoo! crammed their homepages with news, stock tickers, weather, and a hundred links. Then came Google. Their homepage was almost blank—just a logo, a search bar, and two buttons. People loved it. They didn't want distractions; they wanted answers, fast. That ruthless simplicity helped Google dominate the search engine market. It was KISS thinking at its best.



Left: a portable electric cooler is a perfect example of KISS: zero installation hassles, energy efficient, and it doubles up for summer picnic duty.

So easy, in fact, that anyone could build them.

Eureka moment? Kind of. You could call this Ben's "IKEA!" moment. Until now, he'd been designing modular furniture kits to help van conversion specialists save time and money. But didn't it make more sense to put these kits directly into the hands of DIYers?

That's how Simple Vans was born.

The Death of KISS: aka Feature Creep

But there was another thing Ben couldn't help but notice: the competition.

Other campervan furniture seemed to Ben to be over-produced: makers were packing their designs with features that made them look premium, even when they didn't necessarily improve functionality. High-gloss coated finishes, hidden LED lighting, moulded plastic

The KISS Philosophy: Why Keeping it Simple Wins Every Time

edge trim, over-engineered cabinets: all these extras looked great in marketing photos, but they also made van conversions slower, heavier, and way more expensive.

Ben realised that what everyone else seemed to be doing was Feature Creep.

The opposite of KISS, Feature Creep is where a product starts off simple and effective but becomes cluttered over time due to excessive “improvements” that dilute its original appeal.

This often happens due to shiny object syndrome, where brands chase trends rather than user needs, such as smart fridges packed with fragile touchscreens and cameras. In software, ‘bloatware’ slows down once-lean programs, like Microsoft Word evolving from a basic word processor into a labyrinth of menus. At a certain point, diminishing returns in innovation set in, where design choices - like removing headphone jacks from smartphones, or Gillette turning a simple razor into a

Right: when space is tight, every opportunity to simplify and de-clutter should be taken. Here, a portable cooking stove slides discreetly into a drawer when not in use.



The Spork The Swiss Army Knife of Kitchen Tools



What's better than carrying a spoon and a fork? Just carrying a spork. This simple hybrid tool is the ultimate example of less is more—a single utensil that does the job of two.

It's used everywhere, from military rations to ultralight camping gear. And in an era of minimalist design and efficiency, the humble spork is still a KISS masterpiece.

simplicity isn't just a design choice—it's a necessity.

vibrating, five-blade contraption - make products objectively worse under the guise of progress.

Why Simplicity is Essential in Van Conversions

Feature creep might look good in a product listing, but in a campervan, simplicity isn't just a design choice—it's a necessity. Every decision you make affects space, weight, usability, and long-term maintenance. Here's why keeping things simple makes all the difference.

1. Limited Space: Function Over Flash

A van isn't a house, and treating it like one leads to frustration. Fancy, oversized furniture or excessive built-ins might look good in a showroom but can make real-life van living a nightmare.

- Minimal, flexible layouts keep movement easy inside the van.
- Foldable & multifunctional furniture (like a bed that disappears into a bench) maximizes usable space.
- Open layouts over excessive cabinetry prevent the van from feeling cramped.

The best conversions prioritize flow—giving

The KISS Philosophy: Why Keeping it Simple Wins Every Time

you the space to cook, work, and relax without tripping over extra “features” that don’t add real value.

2. Easy Maintenance: Fix It Yourself, Anywhere

A van is a moving, shaking, bouncing home—things will eventually break. The more overcomplicated your setup, the harder it is to fix things on the go.

- Simple hinges, latches, and fastening systems = easy repairs without a specialist.
- Plywood panels and countertops are easy to repair, maintain and replace.
- Choosing standardized parts (like basic drawer slides over custom runners) means replacements are easy to find.

3. Storage: Own Less, Store Smart

Many first-time van builders try to pack their life into a small space—only to realize they don’t need half of it. Simplicity starts with reducing clutter, then designing smart storage for what actually matters.

- Under-bed storage: The best place for bulkier items like tools and outdoor gear.
- Shallow shelves & crates over deep cabinets: Easier to access and organize.
- Vertical space utilization: Walls are great for hanging everyday essentials.
- Soft-sided storage options (like fabric bins) prevent rattling and damage while driving.

The less you own, the less you have to organize—and the more freedom you have to enjoy van life.

4. Simple Systems: Power, Water & Cooking Without Overkill

A common trap in van conversions? Over-

A common trap in van conversions? Over-engineering the essentials.



Above: This telescoping drawer embodies KISS—no complex hinges or foldouts, just a smooth, sturdy and instant outdoor kitchen.

IKEA: The Flat-Pack Revolution



Before IKEA, furniture was big, bulky, and expensive to transport. But one day, in 1956, an IKEA employee had an insight while trying to fit a table into his car: What if customers assembled their own furniture?

By shipping products as flat packs, IKEA slashed costs and revolutionized an industry. Customers embraced the DIY spirit, and IKEA became a global giant. It turns out that keeping things simple—not just in design, but in logistics—can change the world.

The KISS Philosophy: Why Keeping it Simple Wins Every Time

A simple, well-thought-out van interior isn't just easier to live with; it's also visually calming, uncluttered, and effortlessly functional.

engineering the essentials. A reliable, easy-to-maintain setup beats a complicated system every time.

Power: a Portable Power station = zero installation hassles or troubleshooting installed circuits..

Water: A manual foot pump or gravity-fed system is more reliable than a complicated electric pump setup.

Cooking: A gas stove works anywhere—no need for induction cooktops that demand heavy power setups.

Every time you add complexity, you add more points of failure. The best van builds do more with less—ensuring that everything you rely on actually works, long-term.

Simplicity as an Aesthetic

The Russian Pencil vs. The American Space Pen



A classic tale of over-engineering vs. practical simplicity. During the Cold War, NASA faced a problem: astronauts couldn't use regular ballpoint pens in zero gravity. The ink wouldn't flow properly. Their solution? Develop the Fisher Space Pen, which used pressurized ink cartridges. It worked perfectly—at a cost of millions in research and development. Meanwhile, Soviet cosmonauts? They just used a pencil.

(Okay, this story is an urban myth, Fisher developed the pen and both sides ended up using it, but the story remains a perfect example of how simple solutions can often beat complex ones.)

Left: A small van conversion is the ultimate exercise in functional minimalism.



KISS isn't just a design principle—it's an aesthetic. A simple, well-thought-out van interior isn't just easier to live with; it's also visually calming, uncluttered, and effortlessly functional. Clean lines, honest materials, and a focus on usability create a space that feels good to be in.

That's why all Simple Vans furniture is built from bare, untreated poplar plywood—a natural material with its own warm, organic beauty. Instead of covering it with artificial, plasticky coatings, we encourage van builders to use natural oils, waxes, or plant-based paints to highlight the wood's natural grain and texture. The result? A van that feels inviting, timeless, and truly yours.

Because at the end of the day, simplicity isn't just practical—it's beautiful.

When it comes to Campervan conversions, there are more ways than one way to skin a cat. But while DIY builds are getting more doable than ever, there's always something to be said for handing it over to pros who nail the tricky stuff like insulation, wiring, and those little finishing touches. Simple Vans works with some solid experts in France who know their way around a van – meet Van Landes, Avanoa Campers, and Vanister.

Pro Profile

Meet Three Top Van Conversion Pros



Van Landes

Nestled in peaceful Saint Michel Escalus, Van Landes is all about sustainable van conversions. Using locally sourced, eco-friendly materials, they transform vans like Volkswagen T5s into thoughtfully designed road homes. Founder Rodolph Gros emphasizes that meticulous planning is key—doing things in the right order prevents wasted time and effort. Best part of the job? “Seeing the space come to life and knowing it’ll be part of someone’s adventures”

Why Simple Vans? “I started out by fitting one of their first kits, and it just clicked. Their modular designs make our process smoother, letting us focus on perfecting the whole conversion. Plus, the quality-to-price ratio is unbeatable.”



Avanoa Campers

Based in Trans-en-Provence, Avanoa Campers is all about tailoring vans to fit what you need. They handle the full deal—insulation, electrics, custom layouts—and make sure it’s built to last. Founder Alexis is an advocate of clean, functional furniture and natural finishes – the bare, unfinished plywood kits supplied by Simple Vans are a perfect fit with this aesthetic.

Why Simple Vans? “With Simple Vans kits, we can customize vans quick and still get every detail right.”

Best part of the job? “Seeing the space come to life and knowing it’ll be part of someone’s adventures”



Vanister

Based in Lyon, Vanister specializes in converting small-to-medium sized vans. Their typical clients are active, outdoorsy couples – often seasoned campers upgrading from tents or downsizing from bulky motorhomes to enjoy the freedom of a sleek, efficient setup. Founder Stéphane Reboisson says every stage brings out the perfectionist in him, but “The step I am always most careful with is cutting the metal sheet for ventilation or window installation – there is no going back.” The real payoff, he adds, comes from “seeing the excitement in clients’ eyes when they take delivery of their finished van, ready for the open road.”

Why Simple Vans? “It is easily customisable, and forms the foundation of my conversions.”

Mes 5 Destinations Préférées

Texte: Virginie Chabert Photos: @mywildtravel

Rencontrez Virginie, une aventurière nomade qui partage ses récits de voyage captivants sur son blog et Instagram @mywildtravel.

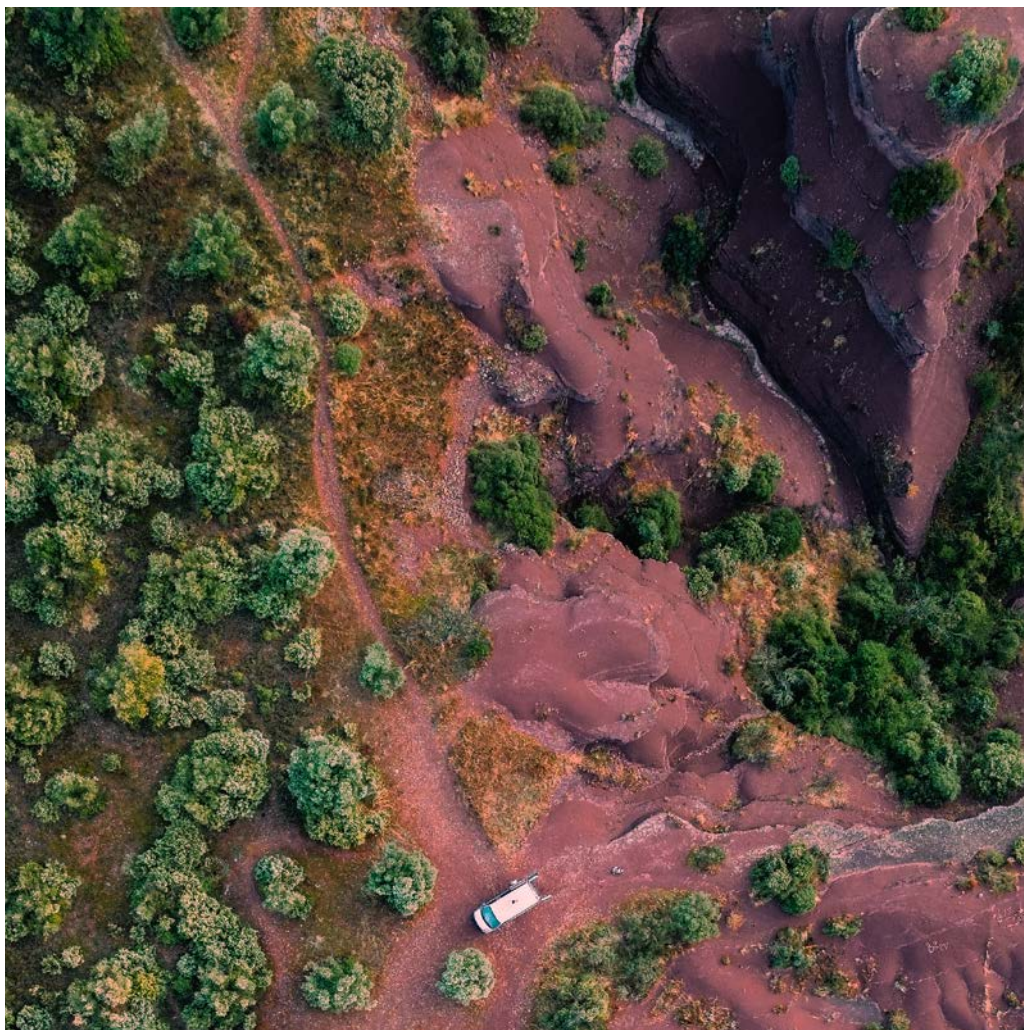
« J'adore mon métier—explorer des lieux magnifiques, tester des itinéraires, inspirer les autres à voyager autrement. Le van apporte l'aventure sans traverser le monde. »

Pour Virginie, la route est synonyme de liberté : se réveiller face à de nouveaux paysages, avancer à son propre rythme, chercher sans cesse des vues à couper le souffle. Mais c'est aussi beaucoup de travail.

« Une vidéo de 30 secondes peut demander des heures de tournage et de montage. Quand sa passion devient son métier, la frontière entre travail et vie perso s'efface. »

À travers son objectif, elle capture l'essence du van-life—l'aventure brute, les trésors cachés, l'appel de la route. Ici, elle partage cinq destinations incontournables, promesse d'évasion garantie.





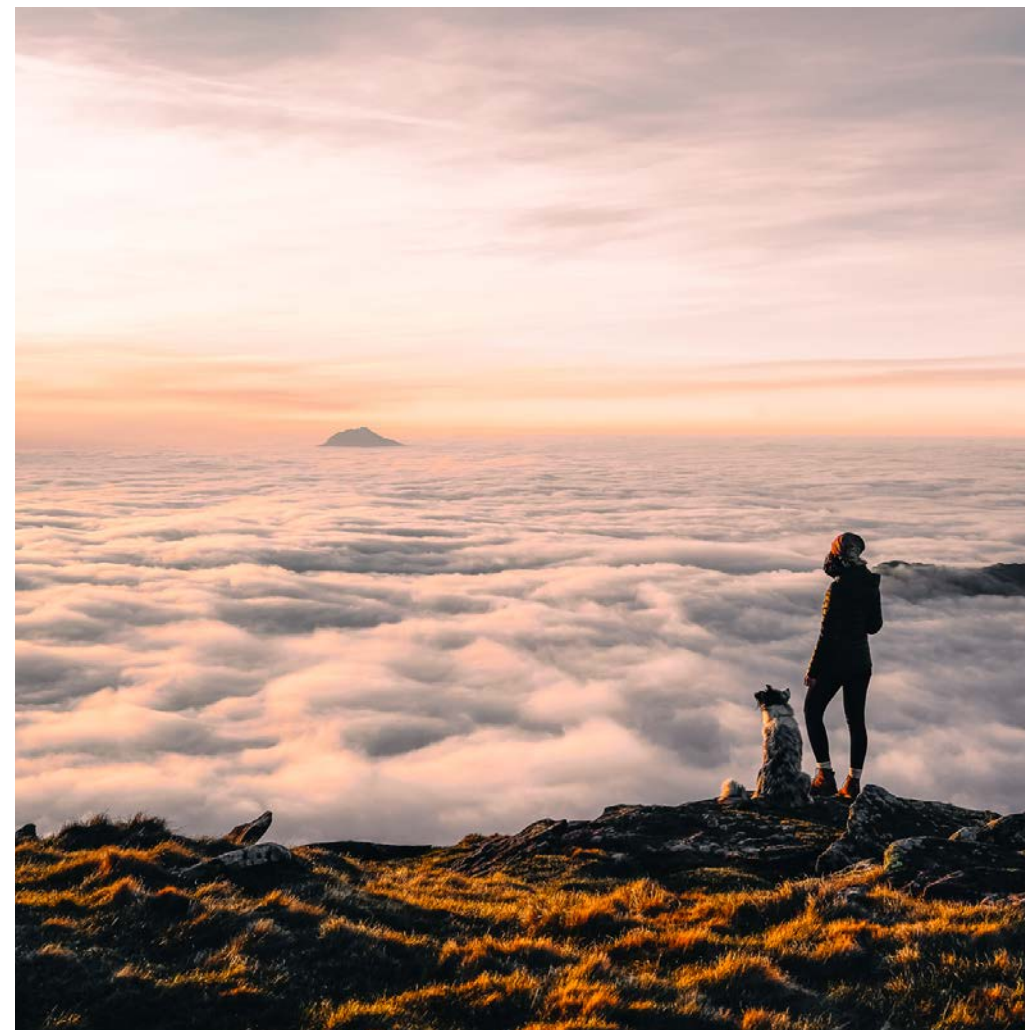
Canyon du Diable

Un voyage hors du temps

Ce lieu me fascine année après année, et je ne m'en lasse jamais. Avec ses paysages rouge et ocre, il donne l'impression d'être sur une autre planète—et pourtant, nous sommes bien en Hérault, France.

Le Canyon du Diable, sculpté par l'érosion, évoque les grands déserts américains. Il est particulièrement saisissant au lever ou

au coucher du soleil, lorsque la terre rouge contraste avec le vert de la végétation et le bleu du ciel. Juste à côté, le lac du Salagou offre un décor tout aussi irréel, avec ses rives lunaires et ses eaux scintillantes. Que ce soit en randonnée, à VTT ou en kayak, les paysages sont à couper le souffle.



Artzamendi

Mon spot préféré pour le coucher du soleil

Perché au-dessus de la côte basque française, Artzamendi est mon lieu de prédilection pour admirer des couchers de soleil incroyables. La vue panoramique sur l'Atlantique est à couper le souffle, et c'est aussi un superbe point de départ pour de nombreuses randonnées.

Je conseille d'y aller entre avril et juin ou

entre septembre et novembre, quand la météo est idéale et que les sentiers sont plus tranquilles. En été, les routes étroites et escarpées peuvent être très fréquentées, mieux vaut éviter cette période. En hiver, si le ciel est dégagé, on peut observer une mer de nuages en contrebas—un spectacle dont je ne me lasse jamais.



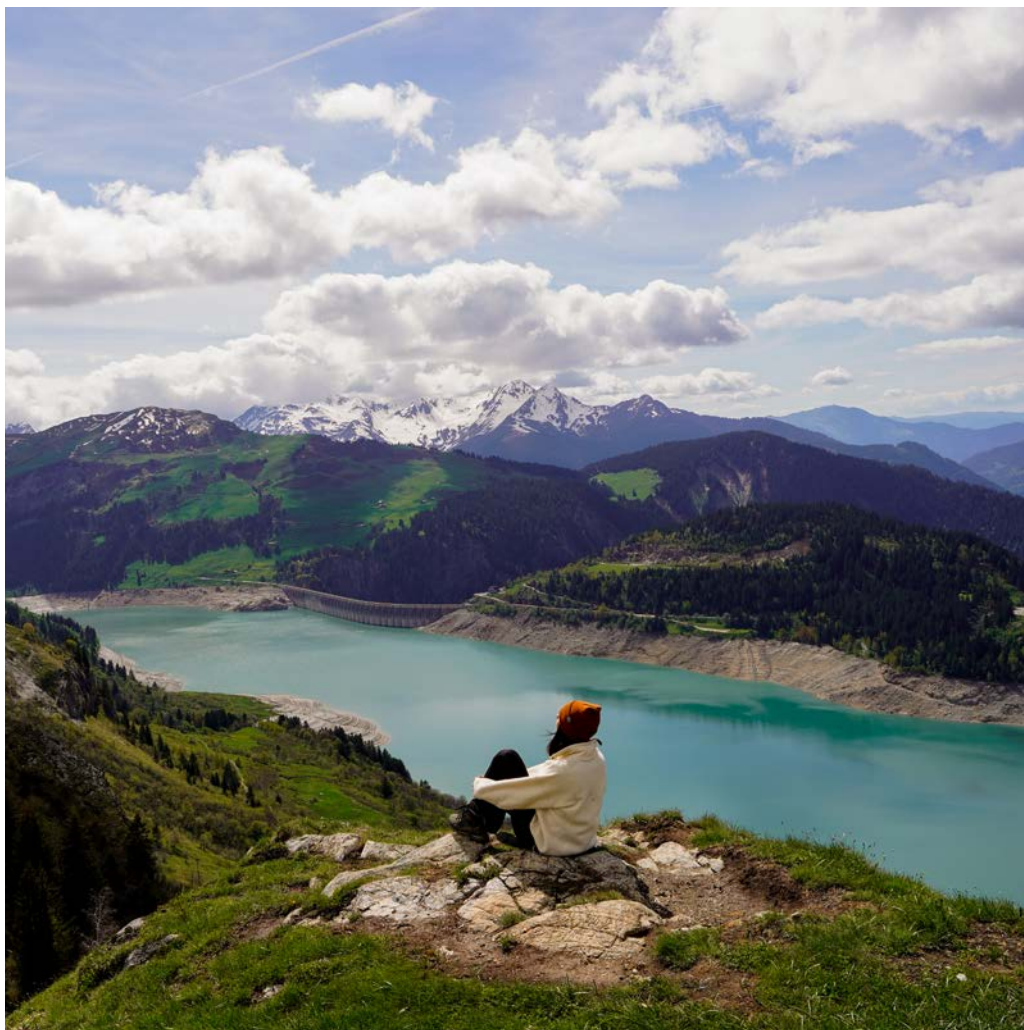
Les Dolomites

Un road trip montagnard inoubliable

Les Dolomites sont l'un des paysages les plus impressionnants que j'ai explorés. Entre sommets vertigineux, lacs cristallins et sentiers de randonnée à perte de vue, c'est une destination de rêve pour le van-life. Les meilleurs spots pour la nuit ? Passo Giau ou encore Passo Sella, pour passer la nuit entouré de montagnes grandioses. Le départ du sentier des Tre Cime di Lavaredo. C'est cher, mais assister au lever du

soleil depuis là-haut en vaut la peine.

Des randonnées comme Cinque Torri, Lago Federa et Cadini di Misurina offrent des vues spectaculaires, tandis que Lago di Sorapis fascine avec ses eaux turquoise irréelles. Je privilégie toujours la période de mai à novembre, lorsque les sentiers sont accessibles et la nature à son apogée.



Lac de Roselend

Un joyau caché dans les Alpes

Au cœur des Alpes françaises, le lac de Roselend est un refuge de tranquillité entouré de montagnes majestueuses. Que ce soit en longeant ses rives à pied ou simplement en profitant du paysage, cet endroit me permet toujours de me déconnecter complètement. J'y vais de préférence entre la fin du printemps et le début de l'automne, quand

la foule a disparu et que la nature est à son meilleur. La randonnée du Pas du Roc offre une vue spectaculaire sur les sommets, tandis que celle du Lac des Fées est une balade accessible et magique. Un détour par le Lac de Saint-Guérin s'impose également—ses eaux limpides et son atmosphère sauvage rappellent les grands lacs canadiens.



Monegros

Une nuit sous les étoiles dans le désert espagnol

Le désert de Monegros, au nord de l'Espagne, est l'un des endroits les plus surréalistes que j'ai découvert en van. Ses paysages arides et ses formations rocheuses spectaculaires donnent l'impression d'avoir changé de planète. Cet immense espace sauvage est parfait pour les amateurs de solitude et d'aventure.

Je recommande d'y aller au printemps ou en automne, car la chaleur estivale y

est écrasante. Mes spots préférés incluent Tozal Solitario, une formation rocheuse emblématique, et Tozal de Colasico, qui offre une vue panoramique incroyable. Après la pluie, certaines routes deviennent impraticables, alors je vérifie toujours les conditions avant de partir. Passer une nuit ici, sous un ciel étoilé, dans un silence absolu, est une expérience inoubliable.

Back in the day, building a camper van meant two extremes: either spend a fortune on hiring a van conversion professional, or save some cash and Do It Yourself. DIY builders fell into three basic types: a) highly skilled, b) on a tight budget, or c) about to lose their sanity. Fortunately, with today's modular furniture kits, plug-and-play systems and expert services... there's now a third option: take on the bits you can handle, and outsource the bits you can't. Let's take a look at the various stages of a van conversion, how much work and expertise is involved, and how the DIY/Outsource options stack up.

Short Cuts

What to DIY and What to Outsource

Text: Ben Burnett



Stage 1: Cleaning and Prepping

Every van conversion starts here: stripping out rust, grime, and whatever the last owner left behind. Think dusty floors, oily walls, and maybe a rogue screw or two. It's not glamorous, but it's the foundation for everything else. It's also when you get an up-close-and-personal overview of your van, where any minor (or major) bodywork problems get identified.

DIY Overview:

Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

Time: 4-8 hours.

Skills: Basic elbow grease and research into cleaning products.

Cost: €50-€150 (cleaning products, rust remover, maybe a cheap shop vac).

Pros: Dirt-cheap, total control, satisfying before-and-after pics.

Cons: Tedious, dusty, and removing old panels can be a hassle.

Outsource Overview:

Trade: Auto detailer or metal prep specialist.

Cost: €200-€500, depending on van size and condition.

Pros: Pros catch every nook, rust turns to dust, and you skip the sneezing fits.

Cons: Eats budget early, less hands-on pride.

Verdict:

DIY this unless your van's a biohazard or you hate manual labor. It's beginner-friendly and saves cash for bigger battles—like wiring or furniture.



Stage 2: Insulation

Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

Insulation makes your van livable—keeping heat in, noise out, and preventing condensation buildup inside the van. It's about stuffing or spraying the right stuff into walls, floors, and ceilings. For this matchup, we're pitting DIY Armaflex against pro-grade spray cork to see what fits your build.

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Cost: €50-€150 (cleaning products, rust remover, maybe a cheap shop vac).

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Short Cuts: What to DIY and What to Outsource

Systems Install: Water

Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆ / ★★★★★

Water is essential—whether it's for drinking, cooking, or washing. You can keep it straightforward with a plug-and-play system or go for a full plumbing setup with heated water and built-in tanks. Here's how the options compare:

Simple DIY: Plug-and-Play Cold Water Kit

Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

What You Get: A 12V pump tap & basin, two jerricans (clean and grey water) - a compact, portable sink solution.

Time: 2 hours

Skills Required: Minimal—just connecting hoses and securing containers.

Cost: €150 (tap, pump, jerricans, hoses)

Pros: Affordable, easy to install, no risk of major leaks.

Cons: Cold water only, limited capacity

Complex DIY: Full Plumbing Setup

Difficulty: ★★★★★

What You Get: A sink, mixer tap, hot water heater, under-van water tanks, grey water drainage, pumps, and pipes—essentially a small home water system.

Time: 12-20 hours

Skills Required: Advanced DIY'er: Basic plumbing—cutting pipes, sealing joints, troubleshooting leaks. Mounting sub-floor water tanks

Cost: €500-€1000 (tanks, heater, fittings, sink)

Pros: Hot water, extra storage, a proper kitchen feel.

Cons: Cost, complexity, risk of leaks, risk of van damage, fuel economy (water weight).

Outsource Overview:

Trade: Plumber or van conversion specialist.

Cost: €1500-€3000.

Pros: Professional installation, leak-free system, long-term reliability.

Cons: expensive.



Heating

Just like water and power, heating can be as simple or complex as you want to make it - and as pricey. Climate is also a big consideration - throwing on an extra pullover in the evening might be the only heating you need.

Simple electric's fine for mild climates or short trips—plug and done. Diesel's the king for cold climates or full-timers, but outsource it unless you're a fuel-line wizard—safety's no joke here.

Systems Install: Electricity

Power is essential for van life. Keep it simple with a portable power station and solar charger combo, or go all-in with a fully wired system featuring roof-mounted panels and leisure batteries. A basic setup is quick and hassle-free, while a complex one provides long-term off-grid independence. Let's break it down.

Simple DIY: Portable Power Station + Solar Charger

Difficulty: ★☆☆☆☆

What You Get: A high-capacity battery pack (e.g., Ecoflow or Bluetti) paired with a foldable solar panel-plug-in power with no installation required.

Time: 1-2 hours (unbox, charge, connect)

Skills Required: None - just plug and play.

Cost: €400-€1,200 (depending on power capacity and solar panel wattage).

Pros: No wiring, fully portable, simple and reliable.

Cons: Limited capacity, no hardwired outlets, higher cost per watt compared to wired systems.



Complex DIY: Full Wired System with Roof-Mounted Solar

Difficulty: ★★★★★

What You Get: A leisure battery, inverter, roof-mounted solar panels, charge controller, fusebox and a wired distribution system - off-grid power for everything from appliances to lighting.

Time: 20 hours.

Skills Required: Electrical wiring, crimping, safe power management.

Cost: €1000-€2,000 (battery, panels, inverter, wiring, tools).

Pros: Fully integrated, powers everything, solar keeps it running indefinitely.

Cons: Fire risk if installed incorrectly, steep learning curve, requires drilling through the van's roof.

Outsource Overview:

Trade: Auto electrician or van conversion specialist.

Cost: €1,500-€3,000.

Pros: Professional installation, safe and efficient system, no risk of electrical mishaps.

Cons: High cost, less hands-on knowledge if you need future troubleshooting.

Systems Install: Verdict

Before deciding if you want to DIY or outsource, first decide if you want a simple, basic system, or need a more complex, integrated solution. And that usually comes down to how much time you're planning on spending in your van.



Stage 4: Floor, Wall, and Ceiling Panels/Trim

This is where your van starts to feel like a home instead of a metal box. You'll be installing flooring (vinyl, plywood, or other materials), cladding the walls, and trimming the ceiling—turning bare metal into a warm, inviting space. It's a mix of carpentry and interior design, requiring basic tools, precision and patience.

DIY Overview

Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

Time: 15-25 hours

Skills Required: Measuring, cutting, fitting - basic DIY, but it'll go faster with a few basic power tools.

Cost: €400-€800 (plywood, vinyl flooring, paneling, adhesive, trim, jigsaw, drill).

Pros: Full creative control, significant cost savings, and the satisfaction of watching it all come together.

Cons: Dealing with curved surfaces is tricky, tools can be expensive (jigsaw, drill), and precision is key to avoid a rough finish.

Outsource Overview

Trade: Carpenter or van conversion specialist.

Cost: €1200-€2000.

Pros: A flawless, professional fit with no gaps, plus a much faster install if you're short on time.

Cons: More expensive, less hands-on involvement, and finding a skilled professional takes effort.

Verdict

Go the DIY route if you have a steady hand, a free weekend, and the patience to follow tutorials—it's achievable, and the savings are worth it. Outsource if precision isn't your strong suit or you want a seamless, high-end finish without the effort. Either way, this stage defines the look and feel of your camper, so take the time to get it right.

Short Cuts: What to DIY and What to Outsource



Stage 5: Furniture

Beds, cabinets, benches—this is where function meets design. Your furniture is your kitchen, bedroom, and storage all in one, and it needs to fit perfectly. Get it wrong, and you'll be dealing with rattling drawers and wobbly cabinets every time you hit the road.

DIY Overview

Difficulty: ★★★★★

Time: 20-60 hours (depending on complexity)

Skills Required: Woodworking basics—cutting, drilling, assembling, and some design know-how.

Cost: €300-€1,000 (wood, hardware, cushions, tools)

Pros: Fully customizable, cost-effective if you already have materials, and gives you true DIY ownership.

Cons: Time-intensive, mistakes can lead to instability, and tools can be expensive if you don't already have them.

Outsource Overview

Trade: Carpenter or van conversion specialist.

Cost: €1,500-€4,000.

Pros: Professionally built, sturdy, and a perfect fit with no hassle.

Cons: Expensive, and you lose the personal touch of building it yourself.

Hybrid Option: Simple Vans Self-Build Kit

What You Get: Pre-cut, professionally designed, custom-fit furniture that you assemble yourself—like an IKEA-style build, but made for vans.

Time: 6-14 hours

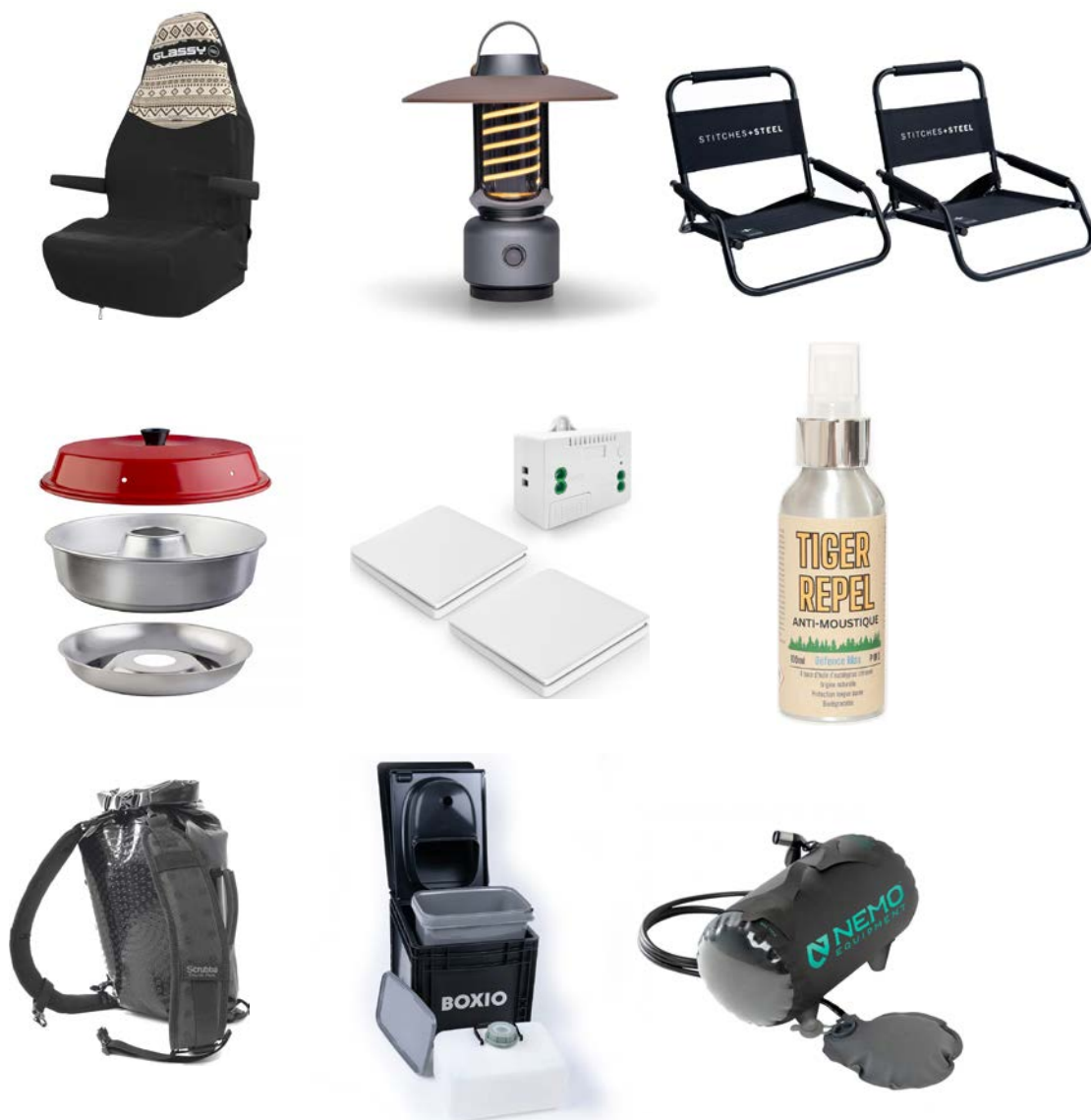
Cost: €1000-€2,500 (varies by kit)

Pros: A balance between DIY and professional quality, faster than building from scratch, and designed for a perfect fit.

Cons: Assembly is easy, some finishing is required.



Verdict: Yes, you can save a little cash and build from scratch if you have woodworking skills and time, or order a custom install if budget allows. But, and we're going to admit we're a little biased here... why would you build from scratch (or pay someone else to) when you could choose a Simple Vans kit? Whether you assemble yourself or hire a pro, one of our modular flat pack kits saves time, requires almost no DIY skills, and leaves you with a professional conversion – without the big price tag of a full custom build.



Accessorize

Stay Civilised in the Wild

Van life is all about freedom—until you're fumbling in the dark, desperate for a shower, or facing the real wilderness (a toilet-free campsite). From lighting to loo breaks, these innovative gadgets keep things... civilised.

Glassy Nordic waterproof seat cover

At best, Van Life is freedom and epic sunsets. At worst, you're in an abusive relationship... with your van. Sand, mud, spills, cookie crumbs – your upholstery takes the hit every time. You say you're going to change... but will you? Will YOU?

It's ok. Tough, waterproof, and stylish, the Nordic Waterproof Seat Cover is here to save your relationship.

glassyeurope.com

Q Camping Lamp

More than just a light, this pocket-sized powerhouse is your rechargeable adventure buddy. Q packs a punch with three brightness levels, flashlight, and SOS mode. The magnetic base and elastic strap mean you can mount it (almost) anywhere – no hands required. Wrapped in a sleek Frozen Gray aluminum body and IPX4 water-resistant, it's as tough as it is stylish.

<https://www.campolibre.eu/>

Stitches +Steel Camp Chair Two

S+S are a UK based outfit specialising in VW van conversions and campervan accessories. Camp Chair Two is a timeless addition to have stashed in your vehicle. Beachside culture and lounge luxury mixed with a sprinkling of weight saving and packable tech. Embrace the smugness of turning those sunset beers up to 11.

stitchesandsteel.com

Omnia

This Swedish-engineered wonder turns any stove into a baking powerhouse. It's basically a cake tin with attitude, using a clever three-part design to distribute heat like a real oven. Pop it on a camping stove or other heat source and voilà – instant oven. If you can do it in a regular oven - heat, bake or cook - you can do it in an Omnia.

omniasweden.com

Wireless Kinetic Light Switch

Let's be real—nobody wants to do a full wired electrical install in a van anymore. Running cables through tight spaces, drilling unnecessary holes... why would you? That's where RF wireless light switches come in. With a simple receiver module wired to your lights and a wireless switch that works from anywhere in the van, you get all the functionality of a traditional setup—without the wires.

Defence Max - Tiger Repel Tropical Mosquito Spray

Nothing ruins a summer evening or a tropical getaway faster than mosquitoes. Sticky chemical sprays and overpowering scents don't make things any better. That's where Defence Max - Tiger Repel comes in. This mosquito spray ditches DEET in favor of Citriodiol (a natural eucalyptus extract) and lavender, so you smell more like a spa than a science experiment.

tigerrepel.fr

Scrubba Stealth Pack

Sometimes someone comes out with a simple product that borders on genius. Sometimes they follow up with something even better. The Scrubba is a genius little dry bag-turned-washboard that's as simple as it gets: fill it with clothes, water, and detergent and boom—fresh laundry in minutes. This Stealth Pack version goes even further, adding backpack straps and a portable shower.

thescrubba.com

Boxio Compost Toilet

Bridging the gap between a proper toilet and a squat in the forest, the Boxio is a sustainable, and compact composting toilet. Its interior separator keeps liquids and solids apart, significantly reducing odors without the need for chemicals. The solids container is lined with a biodegradable bag, while the liquid and odor binder—hemp husk—ensures a natural, eco-friendly solution.

boxio.fr

Nemo Helio Pressure Shower

We have a love-hate relationship with traditional solar showers. We love the sun-warmed water; we hate the weak water pressure and the hassle of finding the perfect tree limb to suspend a heavy water bag from. Enter the Nemo Helio, a solar shower that actually feels like a real shower. This genius contraption sits on the ground and delivers steady, pressurised water with a simple foot pump, holding a very generous 11 litres of water.

nemoequipment.com

Size Matters

Choosing the Right Van for Your Conversion

Texte: Stepan Martinek

Nowadays, a 'camper van' can be anything from a car-sized micro camper to a 3.5T long-wheelbase (LWB) high-roof beast. With so many options, how do you choose the right one? Easy - read this!

Whether you're planning weekend getaways or full-time van life, this guide will help you pick the best panel van for your needs.



Define Your Needs

Before checking out van models, think about how you'll actually use your camper van. Consider trip length (weekend warrior or full-timer?), what activities you're into (hauling surfboards or bikes needs good storage), how many people are coming along (solo needs less space than a couple with a dog), and what features can you live without (fixed bed? shower? toilet?). Remember, more features usually mean you'll need a bigger van. Getting clear on these things will help you figure out the right size van for your conversion.

Understanding Van Sizes

Van sizes are often classified using manufacturer codes like L1H1, L2H2, and so on. The L refers to the length of the van, while H refers to its height. For example, an L2H3 van is a medium-length, high-roof vehicle. Different manufacturers have slightly different measurements for these categories, so always check specific dimensions.

To keep things simple, in this guide, we will categorize vans into three main sizes: Small (S), Medium (M), and Large (L). This will make it easier to compare options without getting lost in manufacturer-specific terminology.



Small

Compact vans like the VW Caddy, Renault Kangoo, Citroën Berlingo, and Fiat Doblo take minimalism to the next level. These micro-camper conversions are the most car-like option, making them an ideal choice for solo travelers, weekend adventurers, and stealth campers who want an easy-to-drive, fuel-efficient vehicle with just enough space for the essentials.

On the smaller end of the scale, compact vans have cargo areas around 3m² to 4m², meaning layouts need to be clever, modular, and highly efficient. On the larger end, some maxi versions of compact vans—like the

Caddy Maxi or Berlingo XL—offer a bit more room, bringing the cargo area closer to 4.5m² to 5m². While they still don't allow for standing room, they provide better sleeping arrangements, additional storage, and the ability to fit small fixed kitchens or slide-out worktops.

Popular Models: VW Caddy/Citroen Berlingo/ Renault Kangoo/Fiat Doblo/Peugeot Partner

Pros:

- Cheapest option for a camper conversion.
- Very easy to drive and park.
- Great for stealth camping.

Cons:

- No standing headroom.
- Extremely limited space.
- Best suited for short trips.



Medium

There's a reason Traffics and Transporters are the most popular van conversions. Not only do these small-to-medium sized vans offer a good balance of space and drivability, as a conversion project they aren't too... ambitious. They're also a great choice for owning and driving: bigger than cars, but once you get behind the wheel, you soon realise they are not really any more difficult to drive.

On the smaller end of the scale, these vans are decidedly more compact, with the cargo areas landing somewhere around 6m². This means layout choices are limited, every inch counts, and most conversions require smart space-saving solutions such as folding beds, compact kitchen units, and multipurpose storage areas. They're ideal for solo travelers or couples who travel light, love minimalism and don't enjoy indoors yoga.

On the larger end, these vans offer a noticeable step up in living space, layout flexibility, and overall comfort. With a cargo area closer to 8m², a Trafic or Transporter with a long wheelbase and higher roof provide proper standing room and space for a larger kitchen and extra storage—but you need to consider your own driving skills as these longer vans aren't as easy to manoeuvre.

Popular Models: VW Transporter, Renault Trafic, Ford Transit, Peugeot Expert, Mercedes Vito

Pros:

- Easier to drive and park than a large van.
- Enough room for a functional camper setup with standing headroom.
- More fuel-efficient than large vans.

Cons:

- Less space for extra features like a full bathroom.
- Taller individuals may find some models less comfortable.



Large

For those who dream of a full-featured home on wheels, large vans like the Mercedes Sprinter, VW Crafter, Peugeot Boxer, and Fiat Ducato offer the most space and flexibility. With cargo areas ranging from a modest 10m² all the way through to a cavernous 17m², this is a big category, with lots of options to work through.

On the smaller end of the scale, L2 vans like the Peugeot Boxer L2H2, Fiat Ducato L2H2, or VW Crafter MWB offer a balance between spacious living and manageability. At around 5.4m in length, they provide enough room for a fixed bed, kitchen, and seating area, while still being easier to drive and park than their longer counterparts. Layouts often require some clever space-saving solutions, like slide-out tables or compact bathroom setups, but they offer a solid blend of functionality and practicality for those who want a livable, but still relatively nimble, camper.

On the larger end, L3/L4 vans push the limits of van conversions, stretching beyond 6m in length and opening up true home-on-wheels possibilities for full-time travelers, families, or those carrying significant gear. The trade-offs come in the form of conversion cost, fuel consumption, parking, and a more cumbersome driving experience.

Besides extra space, an upside to these vans is the price: they're often significantly cheaper than small/medium sized vans on the used market. Downsides: as they are real works vans, they are often dented and messy looking. For those after a bargain this is a good thing, but for those looking for something cleaner and fresher, look for ex-rentals which are usually sold around 50,000km.

Popular Models: Mercedes Sprinter, VW Crafter, Fiat Ducato / Citroen Relay / Peugeot Boxer

Pros:

- Plenty of layout options, including space for a fixed bed or shower.
- High roof allows most people to stand up inside.
- Surprisingly cheap to buy second-hand.

Cons:

- More expensive to convert and run.
- Tricky to drive and park in urban areas.
- Height: restricted parking, high toll road fees.

It's not just about fitting into a van—it's about making sure the van fits you.

Zen and the Art of Downsizing

Besides the more obvious considerations we've already talked about in this article—equipment, trip duration, and passengers—there's a more fundamental question when choosing the right van size: How much space do you want to take up?

In Japan, efficient use of space is not just a necessity—it's a celebrated art. There, you'll find people happily living in vans that many Europeans would consider micro campers. Thoughtful design, multi-functional layouts, and a minimalist mindset make compact living not just possible, but enjoyable. As the Zen saying goes, 'Desire little, know sufficiency.' When every inch is designed with intention, less isn't just

enough—it's freedom.

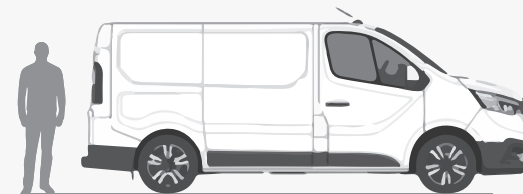
That's not to say a high-roofed, long-wheelbase Sprinter is never the right solution. For some, the idea of folding your van's furniture up like elaborate origami feels like a creative challenge. But for others, it seems exhausting and claustrophobic. Some of us thrive in expansive, open spaces where we can spread out without compromise.

It's just one more thing to consider. After all, many people drawn to a camper van project are looking to create a personal space that's a reflection of their lifestyle and comfort needs. In the end, it's not just about fitting into a van—it's about making sure the van fits you.



Mini Van

- Cargo Area: 3-5m²
- + Cheap to buy and convert
- Cramped living space.



Medium Van

- Cargo Area: 6-10m²
- + Balances space with driveability
- 2 people max.



Large Van

- Cargo Area: 10-17m²
- + Large living space
- Higher running costs.



De gauche à droite : Tim, Ben, Stepan, Marion. Photo de Riley Hobbis.

The Van That Started It All

“So, how did you first get hooked on van life?”



**Ben
Founder**

The van I have the fondest memories of was my second—a beautiful, banged-up old Peugeot. It was the first vehicle I got after moving to France, 21 years ago. At the time, I was living in a seasonal rental with five other people, crammed into a tiny space with no privacy, high rent. Then one day, I drove past a van for sale in Hossegor—900 Euros. I thought, that’s two months’ rent... and wheels to drive around! I bought it... and that was the start of the best summer of my life. I loved it. I had freedom. I could keep all my stuff with me. It was perfect.

I didn’t really need to do much to it – it was already set up with two single beds down each side, which was great – and it meant I could have friends join me on trips. But more than the setup, it was the freedom that I remember best. I was nineteen years old, and I could go wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted. No wondering how I was going to get home – my house was always right there.

Of course, it wasn’t all smooth sailing. Technically, the van didn’t have a carte grise—it had been passed through about four different owners before me, with just some notes buried in a huge stack of papers saying, “this is the registration, and this is who we’re selling it to.” Jack,

the Aussie guy who sold me the van, told me, “if you ever get stopped by the police, just show them this pile of papers and they’ll leave you alone.” That summer, I got stopped by the police about six times... and it worked every time!

Looking back, that experience really shaped the way I think about camper van design today. Back then, I didn’t have any tools or skills, and there were no companies like Simple Vans. Even though I would have loved to improve the basic setup, I just didn’t have any options. I didn’t even have a table—I’d just set my cooking stove up on my bed!

Our Simple Vans mission is clear – we’re here to give people the help I needed back then. The convenience, the smart design, the little details that make life on the road smoother. That first van gave me the freedom I’d been looking for, and now, we’re helping others experience the same.



One lesson stuck with me: organization is everything. Whether in a minivan or a Sprinter, digging through piles of gear is always frustrating.

Stepan Marketing

In 2012, after summers working in Southwest France, my girlfriend and I bought a 1999 Citroën Berlingo Ludospace to explore northern Spain. It was our daily car, so it needed to be a five-seater, but we also wanted a quick camper setup. We DIYed a removable conversion box from 15mm plywood, keeping it simple yet functional.

The best part? The pure freedom of just hopping in, driving anywhere, and sleeping wherever we landed. That feeling of spontaneity made every trip special. But space was always a challenge. I'm quite tall, and setting up the bed meant constantly shuffling things around—moving seats forward to sleep, then back to drive. Packing and unpacking became a routine.

One lesson stuck with me: organization is everything. Whether in a minivan or a Sprinter, digging through piles of gear is always frustrating. Smart storage and easy access make life on the road smoother.

Since then, our travel vans have evolved—from the Berlingo to a VW T5 SWB, and now an L2H2 Fiat Ducato. But no matter the size, that same thrill remains: getting behind the wheel and heading wherever the road takes us.

Marion Client Success

I knew I needed a van long before I bought my first one—during a 20,000-kilometer road trip around Australia in an old Ford Falcon. With just a mattress on the floor and a few crates for cooking, I fell in love with the lifestyle. When I returned to France, life without a van didn't feel like an option.

My first real van was a secondhand Hyundai, chosen mainly for the price. It was already converted, with a storage bed and a side unit for water and gas—almost exactly like Simple Vans' Minimalist Kit today!

There are too many incredible memories to pick just one. The long hours of driving with the windows down, not knowing where I'd stop for the night. Wild camping in the desert. Cooking dinner with nothing but the sound of the waves in front of me. Everything about those first van trips felt magical—like complete freedom, wrapped in endless adventure.

But it wasn't always easy. Breaking down

in the middle of nowhere? That happened more than once. And of course, it never happens somewhere convenient—where's the fun in that? (Laughs.)

Over time, I realized how important smart design is. Our bed had storage underneath, but accessing it meant constantly moving things around—not practical at all. I wish we'd had access to the kind of functional setups we sell today!

With a growing family, we tried something different—a 30-year-old Hymer with a bathroom and dry toilet. It's been fun, but in 2025, we've made the decision: we're going back to a van. Some things are just meant to be.



Photo: Riley Hobbs

**Tim
Production**

The idea to get a van came right after I finished my studies and settled in the Landes region. I've always been more of a solitary person, so the van life, alone in nature, felt like the perfect fit.

I didn't overthink my first van choice—I found a good deal on a Renault Trafic and went for it. The setup was as simple as it gets. A few wooden boards to make a basic bed frame, some old mattresses stitched together to create a bed and sofa, and a salvaged cabinet as a makeshift countertop. It wasn't fancy, but it worked.

My first real adventures were in Morocco. I traveled with an amazing crew, and we shared so many unforgettable moments. I can't even pick a favorite—they were all too good. That trip gave me something I'd never felt before: absolute freedom, mixed with the thrill of the unknown.

Of course, the road had its challenges, too. The toughest was in Morocco, on

a surf trip. We found an incredible spot, tucked away down a steep, sandy track. Getting down was easy. Getting back up? Impossible. We tried everything—reversing, gunning it, shifting weight—but the van wouldn't budge. Desperate, we hiked to the nearest town to find a tractor or a 4x4 to tow us out. No luck. In the end, we rounded up a few people and, with a lot of pushing, finally got the van back onto solid ground.

Those first van experiences taught me everything about what really matters on the road. Cooking setups, storage, food supplies, day-to-night organization—it's all about efficiency. That first van was basic, but it was the start of something bigger. It gave me a new way of seeing things—a way of life built around simplicity, adventure, and the freedom to go anywhere.

That trip gave me something I'd never felt before: absolute freedom, mixed with the thrill of the unknown.



Le Baladeur

A Musical Journey Across Europe



Le Baladeur is a media platform that showcases musical artists throughout Europe. Arthur and Tristan travel across the continent in their van, Serge, to meet these artists and offer them intimate live sessions.

Born from two shared passions, music and travel, this concept came to life in January 2024, when Arthur and Tristan set off on a six-month European tour through France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Le Baladeur shares all their adventures on social media, particularly on Instagram (@lebaladeur_), where followers can immerse themselves in their daily life, van living, and musical encounters.

In six months, 15 artists climbed aboard Serge to sing and play on

the back seat. And they didn't want to stop there... After five months of preparation, Arthur and Tristan hit the European roads again in March 2025.

This year, they're thinking even bigger with ambitious new projects! Among them is the purchase of a second van, fully equipped with a Simple Van kit, which they will offer to their community for rent. After making their audience dream through their content, Le Baladeur now wishes to give them the opportunity to experience this lifestyle for themselves.



Kevin Morel

More Than Just a Van



Kevin Morel is a DJ, surf and motorcycle rider, restaurateur, and creative force behind Morex Custom, a brand that is making a name for itself in the world of custom motorcycles and cars.

"My 2021 Volkswagen T6 Transporter, equipped by Simple Vans, is much more than a vehicle; it's my ticket to adventure. It's my second car. Compact and maneuverable, it allows me to access anywhere, whether for motocross, surfing, kitesurfing, or romantic getaways. A perfect way to disconnect from daily life and enjoy freedom.

One of my most beautiful memories? Summer 2024 in Portugal, on a dusty track at sunset. The flaming light, the dust raised by my brother's van, an atmosphere out of time... After 40 km of track, we reached a cliff perched above a surf spot, where we spent the night under the stars, fully savoring this escape.

Thanks to Simple Vans, I have a setup that combines simplicity, comfort, and autonomy. A bright interior inspired by beach houses, a feminine touch brought by my fiancée, and a custom configuration with electricity, roof rack, and heating, to be ready to hit the road at any moment.

With my van, any excuse is good to hit the road!"

