

Matt recycles bottle tops using his trusty sandwich toaster

FROM WASTE TO WONDER

Discover One Blue Eye, the Helston workshop busy recycling Cornwall's beach plastic with the aid of a trusty sandwich toaster

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: Emma Truscott

From a box of brightly coloured bottle tops, I choose 15. A mix of green, purple, orange and silver. Once attached to our everyday items, these plastic castaways are about to be given a second chance. Matt hands me a pair of thick, heat-protective gloves and I slip them on. 'Right, pop them in,' he says as he nods towards the workbench and to his most trusted tool — a sandwich toaster.

I'm at One Blue Eye, a recycling workshop hidden down a Helston side street. Here, surfer and maker Matt Nott has spent the last four years turning some of Cornwall's discarded beach plastic and post-consumer waste into surf craft, jewellery, medals and whatever else he can think of. Inside, two volunteers sit sorting donations, boxes of shredded plastic await their fate and towers of empty chocolate tubs fill the corners.

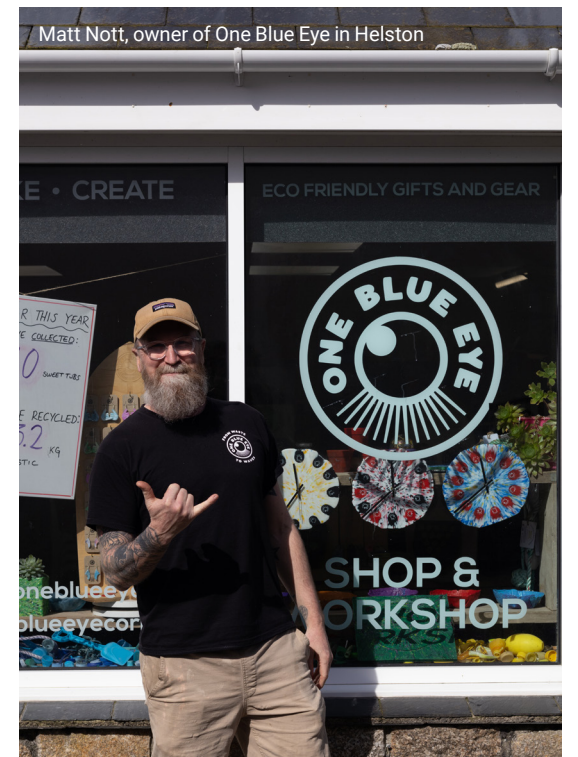
I scoop out the melted bottle tops, roll them into a warm, gnarly ball and hand it to Matt, who uses a press to flatten it into a colourful sheet. From here, he tells me, it could become almost anything. The sandwich toaster, it turns out, is not to be underestimated.

Matt, who's been surfing all his life, remembers when plastic first started appearing on his local beach. 'You see it, because it's in your playground,' he says. 'And you'd always pick up a bit of rubbish on your way back after a surf. You're an environmentalist even if you don't know it.'

Every year, around 11 million tonnes of plastic end up in the world's oceans — that's roughly the weight of 2,200 Eiffel Towers. For Matt, the tipping point came one New Year's Day, on a post-festive walk at Poldhu Cove with his family. 'It had been really stormy, so on that particular day, I was picking up a lot of plastic. That's when the questions started,' he remembers. 'I took some back and found a few videos on YouTube of people using a sandwich toaster to melt bottle lids, making all sorts of things. I thought, what could this plastic be that I've just picked up from my local beach?'

He wasn't the first to ask that question. The Precious Plastic movement, launched in the Netherlands in 2013, >

Matt can make anything from lifestyle accessories to jewellery



had already created open-source designs and simple how-tos so that anyone, anywhere, could start recycling plastic waste in their own community.

Matt spent six months melting, moulding and making mistakes until he felt ready to take the leap and leave his job. In 2022, One Blue Eye opened its doors in Helston's town centre. The sandwich toaster made the move with him, though it now shares the workshop with a yellow injection moulder – a machine that melts plastic and

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injects it into a custom mould – which he's about to demonstrate next.

The coastline isn't Matt's only source of plastic, he explains as he sifts through a container of shredded DVD cases. Sweet containers, detergent tubs and festival cups are all examples of the post-consumer waste from everyday life that finds its way here, too. 'I'm never desperate for plastic,' says Matt, shaking his head.

According to the Big Plastic Count 2024, UK households throw away around 90 billion pieces of plastic packaging a year, but not all of it is being disposed of correctly. Suez, which runs Cornwall's recycling facility in Bodmin, found that 45 per cent of what ends up in the county's black bins could have been recycled. With several million tourists arriving each year from across the country, all >



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with different recycling systems, confusion is inevitable. ‘There just needs to be more joined-up thinking,’ Matt suggests. ‘Plastic comes into the county, and if it doesn’t go out with kerbside collection, perhaps it can go out as something else.’

Matt scoops a measure of DVD confetti into the injection moulder and nudges it down with a small stick. Eight minutes to reach 230°C, he says. While we wait, he shows me what it could become – a soap dish, a coaster, a comb. I go for a shaka key ring. He slots the mould into place, grips the handle of the machine with both hands and turns, forcing the molten plastic through. When he pries it from the steel shape and hands it over, it’s still warm to the touch, marbled in pink, blue and yellow. I’m more impressed than I expected to be. Matt smiles. Apparently, this is a universal reaction.

The injection moulder is portable, allowing Matt to take it to events and classrooms across Cornwall. Rolling it into schools, he holds up an empty Celebrations tub – something every child in the room recognises – and tells them it’s about to become a ruler they can put in their pencil case and use every day. ‘I love when all their hands go up with questions and the gasps when you reveal the ruler, knowing it’s had that little bit of impact,’ he says.

It’s these stories behind plastic, Matt believes, that make all the difference. Old mayonnaise tubs from a café become coasters for its own tables. Broken buckets and spades become key rings for holiday lets. Beach plastic becomes surf craft. On one occasion, Matt made trophies for finishers of the Arc of Attrition, a gruelling

winter ultramarathon along the South West Coast Path, using plastic collected near a section of coastline they had just raced along. By adding value to these items that are destined for the bin, Matt hopes to change people’s perspective, giving them hope and ultimately inspiring them to take action.

I ask him the obvious question: if the plastic problem improves, doesn’t that put him out of business? He laughs. ‘Yeah, that’s absolutely fine. I’ll find something else to do.’ Until then, he’s eager to start making larger items such as belly boards, skateboard decks and surfboard fins. But Matt is quick to point out that the vision doesn’t have to be this grand. ‘It’s not the scale I want to grow, it’s the scope,’ he says. ‘A One Blue Eye available to every community, every school, every Cub and Brownie group.’

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of plastic out there. But Matt is not defeated by any of it. Across Cornwall, he says, people are quietly getting on with it – volunteering, cleaning beaches, doing good things out of the spotlight.

‘There are so many different ways people can get involved,’ Matt says. ‘Even if it’s just coming in and sorting plastic for half an hour, they’ve become part of the solution.’ That community spirit, he hopes, will lead to more workshops on high streets turning local plastic waste into jobs, education and products that benefit people and the environment. ‘Positive things are happening,’ he insists. ‘You just have to look locally.’ ● oneblueeye.co.uk