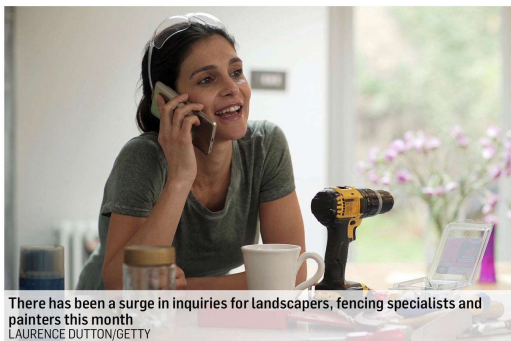


## Home front

Martina Lees



# Build, build, build in case we lockdown again



There has been a surge in inquiries for landscapers, fencing specialists and painters this month  
LAURENCE DUTTON/GETTY

Have you had the builder round yet? This week Boris Johnson is expected to announce “Build, build, build” as his new mantra to move us on from “Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives”, the “Stay alert” variation and “Get Brexit done” (remember that?). But it appears the nation is already at it.

Mybuilder.com, which helps owners to match their projects to screened tradespeople, experienced its busiest week in history from June 15 as the lockdown in Britain was eased. Trade on the platform is up 50% on last year. Checkatrade, a directory of tradespeople, had a record-breaking day on June 16, the day after non-essential shops reopened.

Landscapers top Checkatrade’s chart of the most in-demand trades — up 214% on last year — and are followed by fencing specialists and tree surgeons. “For many the lockdown has been the catalyst for full-scale landscaping projects,” says Carl Goulding of Mybuilder.com.

Electricians are sought after, wanted to add outdoor lighting and help to create home working spaces, Goulding says. There has been a “huge surge” in inquiries with the company for painters this month, as well as kitchen and bathroom refits.

Some of these are to fix DIY disasters. Martin Roberts, presenter of the BBC’s *Homes Under the Hammer*, confessed to ending up with an unusable shower after trying to replace the silicone himself.

I suspect, however, that the home improvement boom is largely the result of pent-up frustration — and the fear of another lockdown. The reality of full-time WFH and full-time parenting of two children under six put paid to my ambitions of patching up the loose hinges and scuffed walls. Last weekend my husband called in the handyman (alias “Dimitri the machine”), who achieved in five hours what we’ve been putting off for five years. Domestic bliss at last.

Georgina Broadhurst, who runs the Surrey branch of Just Shutters, testifies to this. She mothballed her business in March after its Chinese supply chain shut and orders dried up. Expected sales of £150,000 dwindled to £3,000. Now the work is back as clients locked in their living rooms call to replace “curtains they’ve been looking at for eight weeks”.

Can we expect this to last? Broadhurst doesn’t think so. When she found out that small-company directors such as her would receive almost no government support, she co-founded Forgotten Ltd, which campaigns for the more than three million people excluded from state aid during the pandemic. “I just think this year is going to be an annus horribilis of epic proportions,” she says. The lucky ones are building now while they can.



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