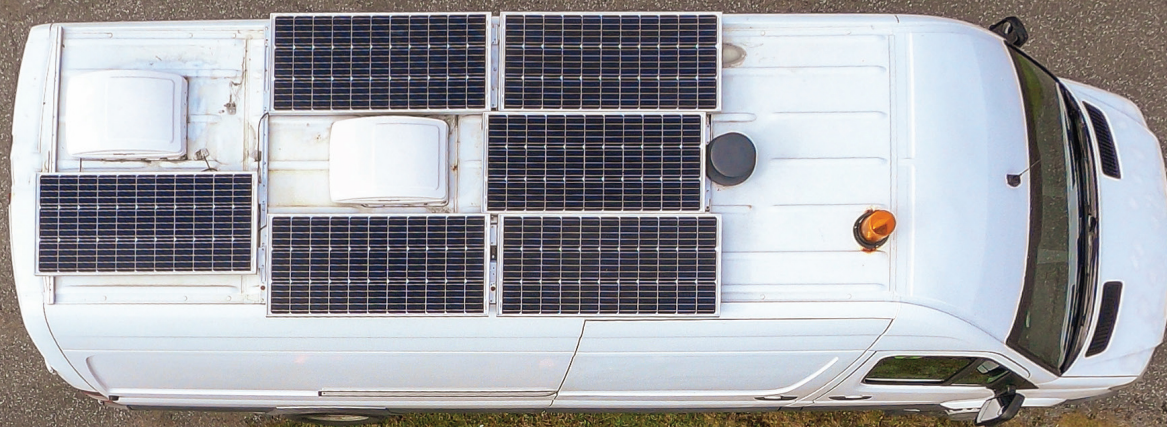


# A Splashy

HOW THIS SPORTY COUPLE CREATED THE ULTIMATE HOME ON WHEELS FOR THEIR SCUBA-DIVING ADVENTURES.



BY ALISHA POSTMA

## First off, a confession.

When I became nomadic several years ago, I imagined bouncing around from one tropical island to another chasing the sun. My husband, Joey, and I are both die-hard scuba divers with a profound love for clear water and warm weather. And while we have done our fair share of island-hopping, never would I have fathomed that we would trade it all in for a van.

Joey and I have been together for ten years; married for five. Those who know us well can attest we are adventure enthusiasts to the core. From Nordic skiing to biking and scuba diving, there are not many things we haven't tried. It's been roughly a year since Joey and I have tackled one of our greatest adventures yet—designing and converting a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter into our own mini traveling RV.

Our van, dubbed the *Fish Bowl*, was built as a means to travel and scuba dive across Canada for our Canadian Splash



underwater photography project. Initially, I wasn't crazy about the idea of restricting myself to such a tiny living space. But this home on wheels, crafted specifically to accommodate our scuba-diving addiction, has truly grown on me.

Because of the specific application of our Sprinter we did the custom upfitting ourselves. With the help of my jack-of-all-trades parents, we pieced together everything from the cabinetry and countertops to the locker, which houses all of our diving equipment.

## DIVE LOCKER TURNED ADVENTURE LOCKER

Creating a Sprinter motorhome with an adventure locker in the back was the big focus of our van conversion. As avid adrenaline junkies, Joey and I wanted to ensure we had the capability and space to transport all of our toys. Being first and foremost scuba divers, the main reason for the locker was to have a waterproof place to not only gear up pre- and



(CUSTOM)

# RV

*Every bit of space is custom constructed to fit this couple's adventuresome lifestyle and includes personal touches like a wood-burned coaster made by Alisha's sister and cabinetry that fits the curvature of the Sprinter's walls.*

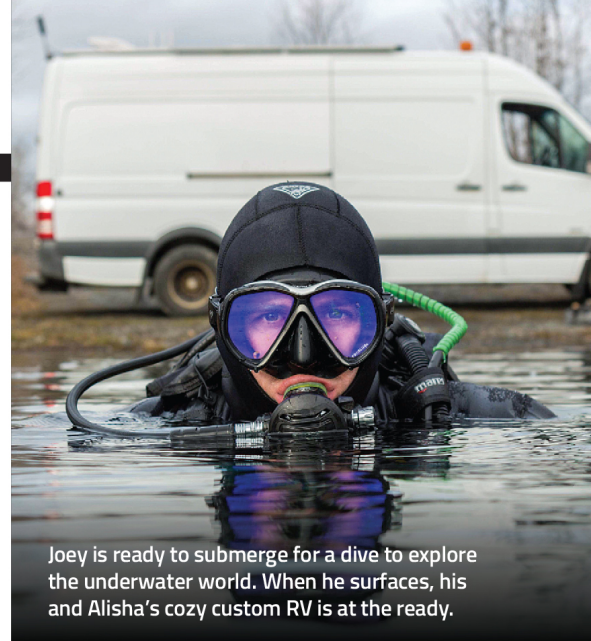
post-dive but also to store and dry all of our equipment in-between locations.

Size-wise our adventure locker measures approximately thirty-four by seventy inches. The walls and floor of the locker are insulated and finished with waterproof material typically used in bathrooms. The joints are sealed together with caulking and fiberglass to prevent water from seeping into the cracks. We inset a fan on the roof to aerate the locker, and on the rear wall we installed a weather-resistant GFCI outlet.

To customize, we mounted a rust-resistant metal bar across the top of the locker. This pole that spans the width of the van serves as a sturdy hanging spot for wet and heavy gear. We also mounted two square storage boxes in the upper right corner, above the hanging bar. These storage boxes are where we keep spare dive parts, repair material, and miscellaneous small tools.

Another specialty feature in our locker is the tank rack we had created by a plastic welder. The rack houses six 14½-inch-diameter scuba tanks that are approximately twenty-eight inches long. To prevent the eighty-cubic-foot tanks from rolling left and right, the side of the holder cradles each individual tank, and we also positioned the rack at a slight backward angle to keep the tanks from shifting.

Our most recent addition is a piping system that channels warm air from the living quarters back into the locker. This system



Joey is ready to submerge for a dive to explore the underwater world. When he surfaces, his and Alisha's cozy custom RV is at the ready.

was put in place when winter rolled around, and our dive equipment began freezing in the rear locker. In order to dry gear and extend our diving season, we pieced together ABS plumbing pipes so that air is funneled directly into our suits as well as into a glove drying rack.

At first glance, the locker Joey and I have outfitted in the back of the *Fish Bowl* is very much specific to our scuba-diving hobby. However, the more time we spend in our motorhome, particularly as the seasons change, the more we have come to realize our locker is pretty versatile in its adventure-sports applications.

In the winter months, we have found the locker super useful for storing snowboard, Nordic ski, and snowshoe gear. In the summer, though we have not used it for these applications yet, the locker could be used for surfing, paddleboarding, and kayaking, providing we incorporate a kayak rack either on the roof or on a towable trailer.



## Choose Your Adventure

*Having a van with a dive locker was a new concept for us. Much of our learning came from experience. Here are some things to consider when building out your adventure locker:*

**How will you connect your locker to the heated portion of your motorhome during the winter months?** You

certainly don't want things to freeze or stay frozen.

**What kind of equipment will the locker primarily be used for?** This will dictate what kind of racks, securing straps, and hanging instruments to put up.

**How will you ventilate the locker?** Let's be honest, adventure gear gets dirty and smelly. You need to make

sure you have the ability to ventilate and circulate the air within the locker.

**Where will my tool kit go?**

As with any extreme sport, adventuring never goes as planned. To make sure you always have the tools, spare parts, and repair kits needed, save space in your locker for a designated tool kit.





The bookshelf over the almost-king-size foldable elevated bed is wired with charging ports and there's plenty of reading light.

## LIVING SPACE

As much as the adventure locker was a large and important component of the *Fish Bowl* conversion, Joey and I also paid heed to the motorhome's living space. No matter what kind of on-the-road adventures we would be undertaking, at the end of the day, the living quarters would be where we spent the bulk of our time cooking, working, and living. In terms of layout, the main items we wanted in the living space were a bed, a work/dining table, seating, counterspace, a refrigerator, and plenty of storage. So we designed and redesigned multiple layouts that would fit into a 133-by-65-inch space, until we finally had something we were both happy with.

Due to the compact size of the Sprinter we constructed our bed to be elevated and collapsible: Elevated so we could take advantage of storage space beneath the bed, and collapsible so we could fold the bed away during the day, affording us extra living space. In size, the bed is slightly smaller than a king and

## BUILT FOR ADVENTURE

situated at the back of the van, pressed up against the wall of the locker. Above the head of our bed, Joey and my father crafted a narrow bookshelf to hold reading material. At each extremity of the shelf, Joey wired charging ports for our mobile devices.

The table and seating area can be found adjacent to the bed in the midsection of the van. To fulfill our seating needs, we created booth-style benches with plenty of empty space beneath for storage. Though a little tight, the booth benches, which face each other, can fit a total of four adults.

We opted for a pocket-table to use for eating and as a workstation. The table size is made to comfortably accommodate two working adults across from one another. A great feature of the table is that we mounted it on drawer slides, so that when the table is not in use it can be tucked away under the bed.

The cabinetry was the final component of the custom build. This section extends from the edge of the booth benches to the back of the driver's seat. On the opposing side, there is also a cabinet that extends from the booth benches to midway past the sliding door.

## WHAT TO PUT IN YOUR ADVENTURE LOCKER?

*There are so many things that can go into your van's multipurpose locker. Some of our favorite sporting equipment includes:*

**SNOWBOARDING:** Snowboards, boots, helmets, goggles, hats, gloves/mittens, snow pants, jackets, buffs.

**NORDIC SKIING:** Skis, poles, boots, hats, gloves/mittens, pants, jackets, buffs, waxing kit, iron.

**SCUBA DIVING:** Wetsuit/drysuit, BCD, tanks, mask, gloves, hood, boots, regulators, weights, reels, buoy.

**KAYAKING:** Wetsuit/drysuit, collapsible paddles, skirts, dry-bag, rope, safety equipment.

**SURFING:** Surfboard, wetsuits, boots, gloves, hood, fins, wax.

Look over your shoulder—lucky dog Fin, the adventuring pup, enjoys his view while his two-legged buddies get ready to hit the slopes for an invigorating day of snowboarding.



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Our cabinetry is a combination of storage cabinets, counter space, and a spot for our mini chest refrigerator. All the cabinetry was individually built to fit the slight curvature in the walls of the Sprinter. Within the cabinets, we have placed shelves, drawers, and hanging racks depending on what was required to organize. The chest refrigerator forms the base of the cabinet and is boxed in on a slide-out platform. This platform allows us to access the fridge when needed and slide the fridge away when not in use. Except for the fridge, all the cabinets were enclosed using secondhand oak doors.

Incorporated into our cabinets are two distinct countertop cooking spaces. These countertops were created from scrap flooring brad-nailed and glued together. On one of the countertop centers, I incorporated a beautiful wood-burned turtle coaster that my talented sister made. Both van counters are finished with a glossy epoxy coating for protection.

Our most recent project was the installation of a small heater beneath the passenger seat. The heater, an Espar Airtronic D2, taps into the Sprinter's diesel fuel tank. The heater has a programmable thermostat and has kept us nice and toasty even when temperatures have dropped down to a frigid -22°F.

#### POWER SUPPLY

Like most RVs our adventure van has a battery bank at the heart of its power supply. The 420-amp-hour AGM battery bank is charged in multiple ways. The first way is through shorepower, which can be hooked up to an external source such as a campground power outlet. The second is via the eight hundred watts of solar panels on the roof. The last way our motorhome charges is while driving, through its alternator. The car or chassis batteries are connected to the bank or coach batteries through a Smart Battery Isolator.

When our motorhome is not being externally powered, a three-thousand-

watt inverter connects the battery bank to the entire van's power outlets so that even when we are camping away from shorepower we have both 12-volt DC and 120-volt AC power options. The inverter is easily capable of running our double-burner induction cooktops, refrigerator, waxing iron, gear dryers, or charging mechanisms for our underwater cameras and dive torches.

#### BRING ON THE ADVENTURE

Come hell or high water, for us, the scuba diving (and adventuring) doesn't stop. It's been just shy of a year since we've been living on and off in the *Fish Bowl*. Of course, as with any first-time DIY project, there is always room for improvement and we are constantly making tweaks.

Looking back, as much as I was apprehensive about building and living in a Sprinter van, Joey and I couldn't be happier with the results. This multifaceted RV is the perfect little vehicle for road tripping while catering to our adventure-sport-loving genes. ■



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