

Richard Shears
worked as a sculptor
and heating engineer
before he set up his
retrofit business

RICHARD SHEARS: THE RETROFIT HUB

Why did you get into retrofit?

I started out working in sculpture. It's something I've always done as a hobby and then I got a job as an apprentice with a sculptor. But I needed a fall-back – and that was plumbing. I went to night school and trained as a heating engineer and began to understand about energy efficiency and heat loss.

I realised that when houses got cold, the problem wasn't always the boiler, it was the house itself. That's when I really started to learn about retrofit. It was only meant to be a career back-stop, but I've been doing it for ten years now!

I began doing home energy efficiency assessments and then started making retrofit improvements to people's houses. That's how I moved from general plumbing to construction.

After that, I did retrofit jobs with people who had a similar outlook to me – we were all interested in eco home improvements and we felt it was an increasingly important area of work.

How did you grow your business?

Getting more experience of retrofit; doing different jobs, it all snowballed, and I got more work. I do a few partial house retrofits now but mainly single measures; insulating

In our new contractor case study series, we ask builders, installers and trades how they got into retrofit. Find out about the benefits of working in eco-renovations and how you, too, could make the move.

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Richard does a range of retrofit work including insulating floors and lofts

floors and lofts, installing triple glazed windows, adding external and internal wall insulation.

The Retrofit Hub grew out of me being a contractor and doing retrofit on the front line. But a stumbling block was always getting people to do it with me. We definitely need more contractors to work in retrofit.

When the Retrofit Co-ordinator course came out, that was the direction I was going anyway – organising retrofit projects – and the role suited me well. Now I do a lot of planning work, getting energy efficiency projects ready.

I often do this coordination work for People Powered Retrofit. They have householders who want retrofit improvements and I organise projects for them. People Powered Retrofit are brilliant at engaging householders and educating them about the process, so they are ready for contractors.

What are the benefits of working in retrofit?

When I was a plumber, I hated ripping out bathrooms that were only two or three years old. So, the idea I was making a positive contribution to the planet through retrofit – that really appealed.

Also, retrofit isn't just about building something, it's the 'geekery' around it – how well a heat pump or floor insulation performs, how much it saves on energy bills.

I also think it's about 'future-proofing' your business. If you don't do retrofit, you'll be left behind.

Find out more about Richard Shears and the Retrofit Hub at: theretrofithub.co.uk

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