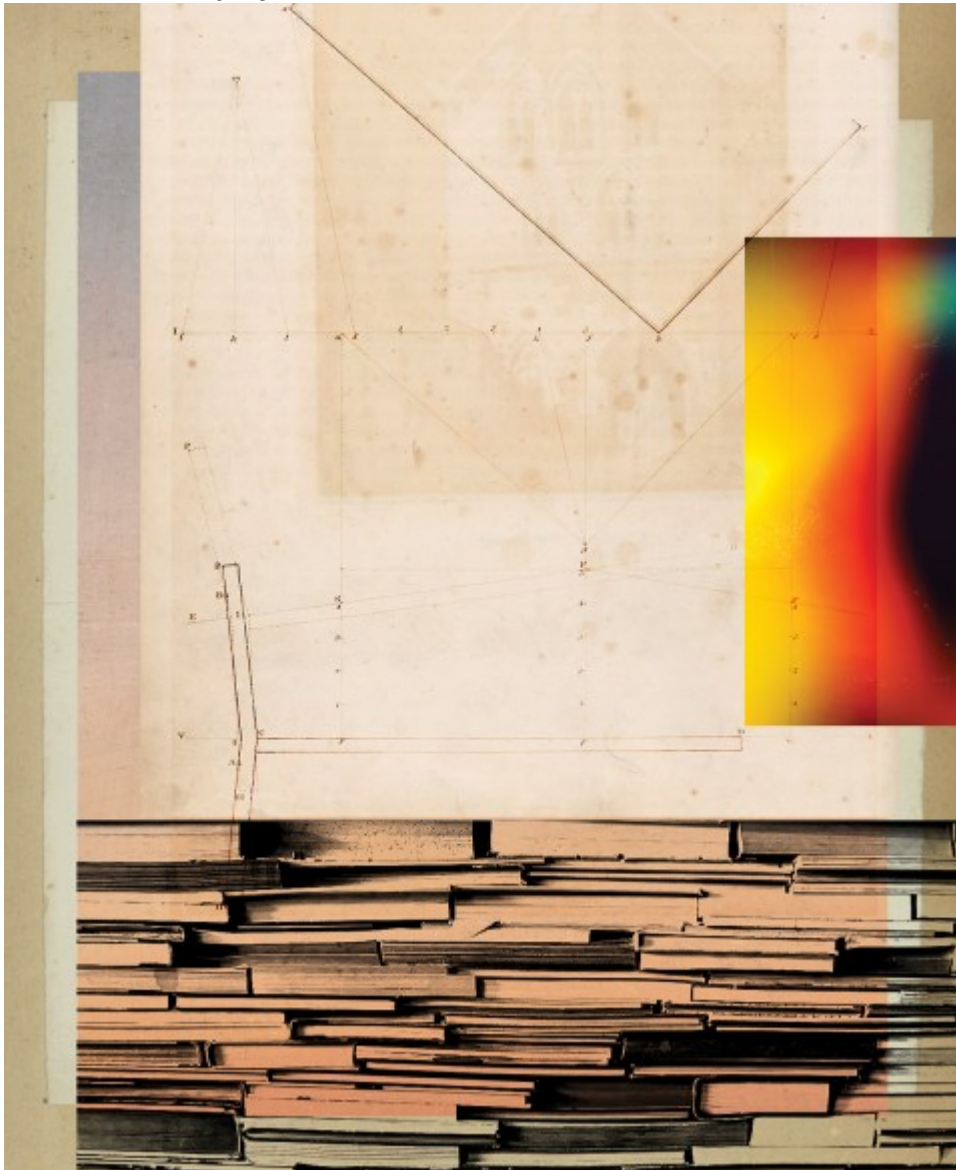


Why make things?

I couldn't afford a nice bookshelf, and I couldn't bring myself to buy a cheap one. So I headed to the hardware store.

by [Brian Bantum](#) in the [August 2025](#) issue

Published on July 29, 2025



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I've been sitting in a new office, in a new house, in a new town for a few months now. My spouse has the gift of gathering and pinning and placing until strangeness fades and a home materializes within days of our arrival. Except for my little office. Here, there are still boxes of bobbleheads and pencils and pamphlets and pictures stacked along the wall. There are books piled on and under and next to my desk. A little disorder is oddly comforting to me, but finally something needed to be done.

I started off scrolling through search results for "bookshelves." The well-made pieces were way more than I wanted to spend, but I couldn't bring myself to buy the cheap faux wood options that littered the apartments of our early married years. So I decided to build some myself.

I measured more times than I could count, drew a few rough sketches, and then went to the hardware store and loaded my little truck with the nondescript pine boards that would become a little home to my things. When it started to come together, the gaps were not quite flush and the angles a little off. There were so many trips back to the hardware store, so many "how to" searches, so many times up and down the stairs to find my tape measure. More than once I thought that maybe a cheap set of shelves wouldn't be so bad.

But the boards were already cut, so all I could do was keep going. It took longer than I thought it would, but there it was, sanded and painted, sitting under my window with books and bobbleheads all in their place. I could still see every gap, and it certainly did not look as neat as the cheap shelves, nor did it seem as unique as the expensive ones.

Even so, every gap also held a lesson—a lesson I would not have learned with a shelf that came to me in a box.

It had been so long since I'd made something that I had begun to forget: Every quick-build shelf or prepackaged meal or AI response bears the hidden cost of what I didn't get to learn. As we get increasingly accustomed to such things, something else gets stolen from us: the mistakes that help us grow.

The next shelf I make will have edges that are more flush, because I'll remember that I need to measure all four corners of the wall. The sauce I make will have a little more flavor as I slowly play with the time or the temperature or the salt. If I just buy or subscribe to the life around me, I will miss the chance to learn the feel of different

woods under my fingers or appreciate what an oak tree looks like before it becomes a board. I will miss the reminders that pieces do not always fit together the way we plan, that dough does not always rise the same way.

These lessons aren't just about the things we make. They are also about the people we become: people who can attend to the imperfections in ourselves and in one another, who can adapt when materials don't quite work the way we expect them to, who are invested in things as more than what can be consumed and discarded, who move through the world a little slower.

But these days, I wonder if the most dire loss is the opportunity to hope that making invites us into. Every time we try to make something, we mingle hope with dust and something comes into the world. And what we make has a little bit of us in its bones, breathed into its being. When we're making in our lives maybe we can see our connection to each other a little more clearly, too.

I'm not suggesting the glorification of a homesteading life or the superiority of people who make their own bread and jam. Our lives are busy and full, and there is so much that is not of our own making that leaves us just trying to find a few minutes of peace or ease in a day. But there is a way that the corporatization of everything in our life grooms a fear of mistakes and offers a kind of airbrushed reality in which even our words don't need to be our own. It might not be in every area of our life, but somewhere, somehow we need to make something, however small. We need to put pen to paper, to pin pieces of wood together, to chop some tomatoes and toss them in olive oil and eat what we've made.

We need to make things because if we don't, we are nothing but batteries for a corporate machine that only needs us for what we buy—and God intended more than that for us. Maybe we can begin to resist by simply choosing one thing to create today.