

“As I look around, I suddenly realise - joy of joys! - my own furniture is absolutely dreadful

it's what I'm gleaning.) (And, anyway, I'm sceptical. I've proved this sort of theory wrong before.) Oh - the bit about the paint drying quickly? "I'd nearly finished painting my floor at home, when I suddenly realised I'd got to the kitchen and couldn't get back to my bedroom for the night," Clive says. "I got out a couple of fan heaters and, 20 minutes later, it was dry!"

I slightly want to ask how he got the fan heaters, but I don't. Instead, I dust my bookcase, reach for my brush, and start to apply the first layer, under Clive's watchful gaze. Long brush-strokes. Not too thick. Don't go back over it too much.

As I paint, I chat to some of the others. Susie Jones from Didmarton is here partly to spiff up those bedside tables, but also because she came on one of Kate's wreath-making courses. "It was such fun and I really did learn something," she says. As to the tables, "I bought them in a charity shop in Tetbury for £10 each." (I don't want to issue spoilers here, but I will tell you that, when finished, I bet you'd easily pay £200 the pair.)

Jo Living from Bulls Cross is painting her sitting room table an electric (and, aptly,



Katie's bookcase - after

Frith Wood Bluebells) blue. She and her family once owned the fabulous Old Passage in Arlingham, which they built up from dereliction. She now runs a business as an upholsterer and lampshade-maker. "But I love coming to these courses for the companionship and the reassurance. I do them instead of a day at the spa - it's more enriching."

Ruth Jones, meanwhile, owns the Rococo shops in Stroud and Cirencester - her Hidcote lavender tea trolley will be used in-store to display tea sets. She's also going to be selling Kate's entire paint-range.

I finish my first coat - and it looks, as you'd expect, still a bit brown; but promising. But no sooner have I finished than, yes: most of the bookcase is already dry. Time for a cup of coffee, a bit of instruction on finishes (wire wool; wax, etc); and I can already begin again. We break for a fantastic lunch - cooked by Kate - back at the house (red onion tart, salads galore, lemon mousse), some great chit-chat, and a chance to see the results of a previous needlepoint workshop (NB, though, everyone takes their own masterpieces home).

Considering these workshops are £85 (wreath-making £70), including materials and food (as well as coffee and cakes in the afternoon), this is outrageously good value! In fact, if you sold your efforts, you could probably enjoy a workshop AND make a profit. Well, Kate? She smiles. "I just want people to enjoy themselves," she says, in a sort of guilty way that implies she persuades her husband she makes more money than she probably does. (But at least he gets to eat the delicious leftovers.)

After lunch, I apply the final touches (two colours means it takes slightly longer) - and the result is transformational. My bookcase has morphed from Olive in *On The Buses* to Kate Moss. And I did it. With almost no effort. And it was fun!

When I get home - having bought a load more paints - I have to be physically restrained from painting everything I can get my hands on. (My biggest success is with two very cheap flat-pack bookshelves that now look a million dollars.) This is life-changing!

Seriously, these workshops are inspiring - and a great way to make new friends. And the results are quick and fantastic: the plain pine kitchen table now has everyone green with envy; Jo's tired sitting room coffee table is funky and vibrant.

Admittedly, I look the worse for wear - covered in paint. But the other great news is that it washes off easily. "Except on the patio," Ian points out crossly, where I've been working on the flat-packs. I could have a go at scrubbing it off. On the other hand, maybe the easier solution could be a patio in full Giffords rouge-red. ■

Water Lane Workshops, at Water Lane Farm in Selsley, near Stroud run from 9.30-3pm, priced from £70-85 including equipment and lunch; www.waterlaneworkshops.co.uk

Water Lane Paints, £15 for a litre (£10 for 300ml) are on sale at Rococo Home & Gifts, 30 Kendrick Street, Stroud, 01453 764399 and 12 Black Jack Street, Cirencester, 01285 650308

