

# Care & Repair

## Strengthening bonds with the things we buy

In times of economic uncertainty, consumers often revise their thoughts about value. While some people may consider downgrading to less expensive things, many recognize the false economy of buying cheaper items with a shorter life. There have always been enthusiasts who love to restore and repair, but increasing numbers of people now believe that it's wasteful to discard things that are still usable. As a result, quality, durability, and easy refurbishment have become valuable attributes in purchases that individuals

and families make. They are looking for things they can keep and care for and enjoy for longer periods of time.

Financial constraints are reminding us of simple pleasures that we overlooked in more affluent times: taking care of the things we love, and growing our love for the things we take care of.

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### TAKE ACTION – *designing for Care and Repair*

1.

#### *Design for repair*

Lower the barriers to maintenance and repair. Design to allow access to parts that need to be replaced. Provide automatic reminders and indicators. Offer replacement parts, kits and service contracts.

2.

#### *Viable longevity*

Evolve business models that push durability and investment rather than obsolescence. Create limited editions with precious materials, emphasizing heirloom qualities like Vertu phones and Persian rugs.

3.

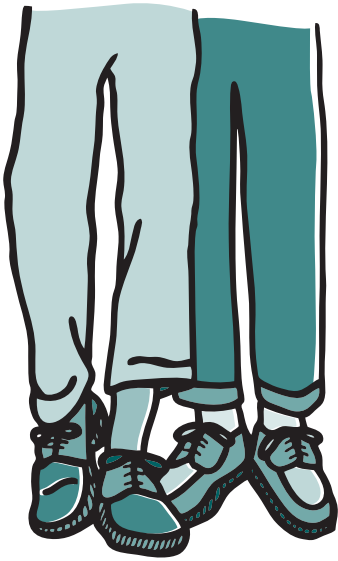
#### *Inviting DIY*

Explore business opportunities that support people's desire to do it themselves. Sur La Table offers cooking classes. Home Depot teaches workshops. REI runs adventure trips based on participation.

4.

#### *Brands that build*

Create enduring platforms that support evolving capability. Let classic forms be long-lived and modular. Think Lego, Harley Davidson, Schwab retirement funds, and software-upgradable cameras.



## Build to Last

The shelves behind the counter at Model Shoe Renew in Berkeley, California, are lined with shiny resoled shoes. “Business is booming,” says owner Peter Kemel with a smile. “This year, everyone’s looking to get another season out of their shoes.”

Allen-Edmonds understands this from a different angle. Alongside its line of handcrafted luxury men’s shoes, the company website has a step-by-step video showing the rebuilding of a shoe using its proprietary “recrafting” service. It’s a powerful message about the company and its customers’ desire to care for treasured personal items.

Certainly it costs less to get new soles than to buy new, but it’s not just about money. “People fall in love with their footwear,” observes Peter Kemel. “I’ve even put new soles on a favorite pair of flip-flops.”

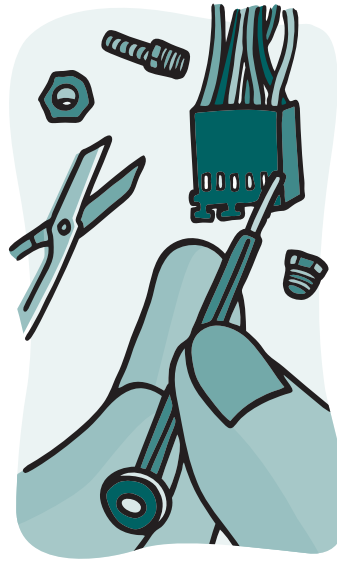
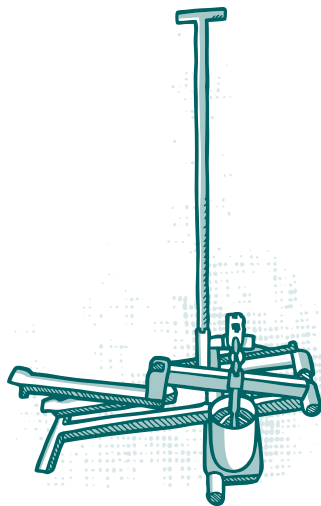
*What new brands or offerings might companies build around people’s desire to cherish things long-term?*

## Design for service

Samuel Ndung’u Mburu relies heavily on his beloved Money Maker Deep Lift Pump. This simple device, which helps him irrigate his crops in the harsh environment of rural Kenya, is actually an elegant feat of engineering that balances extreme economic and cultural constraints.

Design engineer Jon Kaplan explained how economic hardship was a spur to innovation: “Subsistence farmers need to repair their own tools. So instead of a conventional system with tight-fitting precision seals, we came up with a new mechanism that uses a long, sloppy-fitting piston to push water up through the pipe.” But this represents more than mechanical ingenuity. Because the pumps are durable, long-lived, and easy to service with local skills and local materials, they support the independent livelihood of thousands of villagers.

*Can design deliberately lower barriers to maintenance and repair?*



## Cultures of repair

Jan Chipchase, Nokia’s world-roving behavioral researcher, calls them “cultures of repair” — the shops and stalls found in every emerging economy that service mobile phones. Located within a repair ecosystem of enormous scale, these “street hacks” operate with little more than “a screwdriver, a toothbrush (for cleaning contact points), the right knowledge, and a flat surface to work on.”

The repair culture is also taking hold closer to home. Lastyearsmodel.org enlists a growing community of people dedicated to extending the life of products. Rather than discard an outmoded but basically functioning device, they’re dedicated to repairing, refurbishing, or adapting it (and sharing their knowledge): “Fixed a set of iPod speakers today with a new power adaptor instead of buying a new pair.”

*What new business opportunities could support people’s desire to fix things themselves?*

### Modular refurb

The modular format of carpet tiles allows individual tiles to be rearranged or replaced to cope with wear, damage, or stains, instead of installing an entirely new carpet roll. Interface’s FLOR tile system is a relatively expensive initial purchase, but has become increasingly popular because of its long-term economy combined with a pioneering program recycling used tiles.

### Service included

In the UK, Daihatsu recently offered 5 years or 45,000 miles of free servicing for all their Mini SUV Terios registered between January 1 and March 31, 2009. Rather than addressing customers’ concerns simply through extended warranties or insurance, the automaker fulfilled their desire for durable value by offering the option of free routine maintenance.

## MPH



### Making do

As many did during the Great Depression, Americans are making a virtue out of necessity.

“People aren’t throwing things out,” reports Marketwatch.com. “They’re fixing what they have, preferably on their own, from repairing clothes to repairing plumbing problems.” Commenting on products at this year’s International Home and Housewares Show, Tom Mirabile, VP of global trend and design at Lifetime Brands said, “There’s definitely a return to what we might call ‘home arts.’ There’s almost a prideful resurgence of ‘I can do it.’”

### Knowing how

Much like the informal knowledge networks that connect the street hacks of Mumbai and Nairobi, specialist knowledge in our own connected world is now widely available and broadly shared: Check out the step-by-step instructions for fixing a hairdryer at [www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com), or learn how to darn your favorite socks on YouTube.

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

**Be a pattern spotter:** Now that you’ve been exposed to a few different examples, don’t be surprised if you start seeing *Care and Repair* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it’s the next new pattern.

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