



Jules Hudson

COUNTRY ESCAPE

Although he stops short of howling at the moon or sacrificing virgins, Jules believes there's something to be said for new year rituals and resolutions

There are moments during every new year when I find myself behaving more like a pagan than a Christian. Yes, I was baptised, and no, I don't dance about under a new moon wearing animal skins and a horned helmet, but there was a time when I might have.

Indeed, there was a time thousands of years ago when we might all have worshipped the cosmos and nature rather than any other sort of religion, because, way back when, we would have had no idea that the year's cycle would come again. In short, like many indigenous tribes all around the world even today, we would have been more concerned with doing whatever we could to ensure that the gods would deliver us another fertile year of sunshine and prosperity.

That's why I love seeing nature emerge from the depths of winter to renew itself. It's a timeless moment that has happened for millions of years, and, to my springtime pagan DNA, it provides a comfort and connection to the natural world that is reassuringly straightforward, unbound by the usual trappings of philosophical rules and contentions.

It's this sense of renewal that is this month's theme, but I'm not suggesting you seek out your nearest Neolithic ruin, cover yourself in woad and try to turn the clock back. Nor even that, should you fail in upholding your list of New Year's resolutions, the sun will disappear and the crops will fail.

Scientific enquiry now means, of course, that our ancestral beliefs appear long out of date, even amusing, but there is much we can learn from this sense of annual change, and it's an idea not lost on the marketing departments of publishers around the world. At this time of year the shelves of our newsagents are full of magazines trying to immerse us in a new world of fitness, diet, crafts and hobbies... you name it, someone has spent thousands of pounds on a publication to try to make you feel part of a club that will help you renew yourself in the new year.

Well, my club is open all year round, and it offers a raft of feel-good factors that all help to keep me going. What's more, it's a club I joined as boy. Think upcycle as much as recycle.

I'm championing the idea of

breathing new life into what is already around you, taking the idea of renewal and rebirth to the everyday things that make our houses homes. Doing up and re-purposing tired old bits of furniture and homeware will give 2014 an entirely different feel. It will serve to re-energise your surroundings, for there is much truth in the old adage that a change is as good as a rest.

Forget trawling the high street amid the mayhem of the sales. This morning when I've finished

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writing, I shall be out in the workshop or the garden doing something up. There is a huge list of bits and pieces all requiring attention, but over the years I have come to appreciate the enormous sense of reward I get from seeing a chair, a table, a curio or whatever else it might be, emerge from a state of neglect to a place where once again it is treasured and valued. It's not just the reward of the result; it's the practicality of doing it that is the drug.

I have long believed there to be something in the business of creating things that is as important to the human race as air or water. Our ingenuity is what distinguishes us as humans from the rest of the animal world, and our creativity is as timeless and as visceral as our sense of the changing seasons.

Our ancestors worshipped gods that they believed would bring the winter to an end and ensure the success of the summer. Now that we know the year will renew itself without the need for festivals or favours, we can all get on with the ritual of creation.

Who knows what we'll all make of 2014?

JULES HUDSON was born in Essex but stayed in Wales after studying archeology at Lampeter University. He has worked in television since 1996 and is a member of the Countryfile team, but is best-known as the leading face of Escape To The Country. He moved back across the Border in 2012, to Herefordshire.

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