

# Helpful Guidelines for Building a Camper Van

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## Introduction

Patrick Botticelli here from the New Jersey Outdoor Adventures YouTube channel. I've been filming Vanlife Tours for a few years now, and I've done about 300 full walkthrough video tours. I've learned a lot from the people who have been guests on my channel, and I'd like to share some of what I've learned so that you'll be better prepared to build out your own van if you decide to go that route.

I also have over 25 years of experience working in the RV and automobile industries as a salesperson and mechanic; I've gained a lot of knowledge, and it's going to be of tremendous use to you guys if you're planning to build out a van. First we'll talk about what you intend to use your camper van for; then we'll do a broad overview of budget before diving into van chassis and the time frame for your build. We'll then talk about insurance, then systems and appliances, before diving into safety, including weight, and finally discussing your exit strategy.

## 1. Intended Use

Before you start building your van, you need to give some serious thought to what you'll use it for. Will it be for the whole week, or just the weekend? Is it going to be your primary mode of transportation, or are you only planning to take it on the occasional camping vacation? Are you planning to live in it full time, or are you going to undertake extensive trips where you'll be gone for three to four months at a time?

Each of the lifestyles I described above has a distinct sort of build that's most appropriate for it. The way you put each of these builds to use will determine the combinations available to you as well as the amenities that come with them. That's why it's always best to start by writing a list of your goals and needs before you make any other decisions.

It's very likely you'll modify your van construction, your RV build, your skoolie build, or anything else you're constructing in order to fulfill your requirements. I'm sure you've already found dozens of interesting videos on Instagram and YouTube about other individuals who love the lifestyle, and it's possible that you'll receive some ideas from them; nonetheless, in the end, it's up to you to choose exactly what your build will look like so that it best meets your needs.

## 2. Budget

So I've decided that intended use is going to be my first priority, followed by figuring out my finances. Now, it's safe to assume that not everyone will have the same kind of budget. In your budget, you have to include not just the vehicle itself but also the build-out. The budget for the build-out is a distinct aspect, which we'll discuss in more detail later, but first, let's get into the budget for the van.

If you already own a van or you're able to buy one at a very affordable price, you could get into the van lifestyle for between five and ten thousand dollars with just a basic conversion. This would involve pulling the seats and the headliner off, you could easily construct a fast camper van for fantastic weekend vacations.

However, there are various builds and different chassis that may be purchased, and the total cost of them will be much more. If you are going this route, ask yourself, "Am I going to buy something new at a much higher price, or am I going to buy something that's used for the least amount of money and be prepared for repairs on the van chassis in the future?"

And by making payments on it over time, you'll be able to buy a newer van that hopefully won't end up needing extensive repairs in the near future—which can really ruin your vacation or even see you getting stuck if you're in a more remote location.

### 3. Van Chassis

Assuming you don't already have a van, you'll want to give some serious consideration to whether you want to buy a new or used van chassis and what you'll do with it. When it comes to van chassis, you have a lot of different options to choose from. Perhaps the most obvious choice is between a minivan like a Ford Transit Connect or a full-size van; your decision should be based on the kind of van lifestyle you're looking for and what you'll do with the vehicle.

One good option is the Ford Transit (full-size). The roof of the Transit van comes in three different heights: low, medium, and high. The vast majority of individuals would need the high option in order to completely stand up within the camper. The van chassis also comes in a variety of lengths and wheelbases, in addition to the various engine configurations available. You'll want to give a lot of thought to examples, such as the way I utilize my 19-foot-long van, which is an Airstream B-190, on the classic Ford Econoline 3500 chassis with a fiberglass hi-top that I can parallel-park in tight cities like New York. Having a small footprint is great because it allows me to explore cities like this without having to worry about where I'm going to find parking. Of course, the trade-off is that the inside of my van is somewhat more congested. But I'm not living in it full time.

I like to get out of the house and adventure on the weekends, so that's how I utilize my van. What I have inside is ideal for my needs at this point. To sum, start by thinking about how you're going to use your van and where you're going to park it. After that, what kind of layout are you hoping to create?

How big of a mattress do you want to purchase? This will help determine the size of the chassis you need. The Mercedes Sprinter is another good option. There are two wheelbases available, the 170" (23' length) and the 144" (19' length) wheelbase. With the 170" you can also choose an extended platform that measures 24 1/2'. You could parallel-park the 144" downtown, but the 170" would be more difficult. On the other hand, on the 170", you can fit a large bed in the back and

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have lots of other items that will increase your comfort inside like a complete toilet and shower.

Because of its length and wheelbase, this chassis provides a great deal of adaptability; add to that its general appeal, and you have a highly popular chassis. The Ram ProMaster is also helped by this. It's at a lower profile than most chassis, and it doesn't have a drive shaft tunnel, which is quite great since it's a front-wheel drive, which means the floor is lower, it's more squared off, and it's even larger on the inside.

The ProMaster has a wheelbase of 159", but you can also acquire one with an extremely tiny wheelbase of 136", as well as a 159" model with an extended length. This means that the length of the vehicle that could be supported by that chassis may reach over 21 feet.

Now that you've looked at the various chassis, you've probably noticed that each one comes with a distinct price tag. The most costly option would be the Mercedes, followed by the Ram and the Ford. Taking these three different price points as an example, you may be able to purchase a new Ram for as low as \$45,000 (USD). If you want top end, it will cost \$70,000 for a Mercedes Sprinter that has every option available. Now, as an improvement to that, you could have four-wheel drive or all-wheel drive with the Sprinter, and you could also get it as an option with the Ford.

The Ram chassis, on the other hand, is not offered in a four-wheel drive configuration. That means that if you plan on traveling down Baja California (Mexico), driving it on the beach, or off-roading, the Ram chassis, which has all of the weight in the front, probably isn't your best bet. You could get away with using a Ford Transit or a Sprinter with two-wheel or rear-wheel drive, or you could use an all-wheel or four-wheel drive version of either the Sprinter or the Ford Transit.

Your floor layout is going to be determined by what's below the vehicle after you've chosen the chassis. If you're going to do holding tanks and waste tanks, you'll need to think hard about where you place these things in the van; there



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could be a muffler, a catalytic converter, a drive shaft, a fuel tank, some pollution device, or a variety of other components that could be in your way.

If you have everything planned out for a project, you don't want to find out too late in the process that there's anything that would interfere with it. So don't skimp on planning. You could go to RV dealerships or RV shows, look at brand-new campers, take measurements, and take photographs of the undercarriage in order to fully plan it out before you commit to this project and start preparing for it.

There's also a market for previously owned camper vans and cargo vans. I frequently see vehicles that are off lease or three to six years old that have respectable mileage and are in decent shape. You could save a lot of money by purchasing one of those used vehicles instead of a new one. However, prepare yourself; compared to purchasing a brand-new one, you'll find that you'll need to invest some money in it a little bit sooner down the line. In this case, are you really saving much money?

If you don't need to acquire a vehicle, then build out a van that you already have, which is a very cost-saving way to enter van life. How exactly do you plan to pay for everything? It's important to have a strong strategy not only for the purchase of the chassis, for which you may either pay cash, finance, or lease it in certain situations, but also for the camper build-out portion of it.

According to what I've observed online, the cost of your build-out might range anywhere from \$10,000 to \$50,000 or possibly more. The next thing you need to consider is whether or not you'll need funding for the chassis and/or the build-out.

The majority of companies that sell autos don't have access to financing that covers the camper portion of the build-out. There are, however, certain dealers out there that are willing to work with you and have relationships with a variety of lending institutions. These banks may be able to handle both aspects of it, but you still need to be careful that you don't run out of funds and completely stall down your project since you can't bring it to a successful build completion.

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Now, though, some individuals do it over the course of time. They do a little bit here, a little bit there, and a little bit more there, and they can still utilize their camper van and enjoy the lifestyle even though the project isn't quite complete yet. That's OK if it fits inside the constraints of your financial plan. But attempting to get a personal loan or financing to construct a portion of the project is going to be extremely tough on a DIY camper van that was not built by a designated RV Industry Association manufacturer.

There are loans available for recreational vehicles with terms ranging from ten years to twenty years. It's a financing option for both the chassis and the conversion at the same time. In addition, when these RV manufacturers purchase the vans, they get a new vehicle MCO (manufacturer's certificate of origin) or MSO (manufacturer's statement of origin), and when the conversion is complete they create a second MSO for their conversion. Then when you go to your Department of Motor Vehicles, they merge those titles into one. So basically you can have a vehicle identification number for the Ford Transit but it will be titled as the conversion manufacturer's name and the model they call it. An example would be a Winnebago Revel RV built on a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 2500 144" chassis. The bank considers this to be an RV, and they'll finance the whole package as one loan—an RV loan. You need to make a comparison between the amount of money it will cost you to construct your own RV and the amount of money it would cost you to purchase an RV or camper van from a dealer right away.

## 4. Time Frame

This brings up another point, which is the window of time you have to work with. If you want to get out there and start van life in six months, but you've had to build up your van, that may be an issue if you can't complete it in time.

In all candor, the majority of folks I've seen who do their own DIY projects find that it takes twice as long as they anticipate it to—for example, if they think it will take three months, it takes six months. Even if they predict it will take six months, it will take nine to twelve months. Keep this in mind when you're deciding on a chassis and all the other things we've talked about so far—don't let an inaccurate estimate of time delay your path through life, or the experience you're hoping to have.

Now let's also talk about insurance.

## 5. Insurance

You can get RV insurance that will cover the van and the chassis as one unit. Another option is replacement insurance, which you can buy when you purchase a standard RV from a dealer that specializes in RVs or from a private party. Let's imagine you purchase a camper van for \$150,000, and then you get into an accident that totally destroys it. It's covered under the same insurance policy as an RV. Let's pick just one example, a Winnebago RV. It has a used or replacement book value to cover the cost of replacement. If you do your own building, you have to be prepared for anything that may come your way. It's possible that the insurance will cover little more than the van chassis; in other words, it won't cover your build-out. If you were to total your van, you would probably remove all of your pricey batteries and converters, fans, and solar panels off the roof since they won't be covered by your insurance.

There's a possibility that the upfit will be covered by certain insurance carriers; these will bring it up to a specific limit when they summon it. Consequently, if you invested \$30,000 in your build-out, they may pay for upfits on the interior costing \$10,000, but they probably won't cover the complete build-out as a camper van. In fact, some insurance companies might not grant you coverage at all if the van has been transformed into a camper.

You want to make sure your inquiries are somewhat safe, right? You should be careful not to put yourself in a position where you can't get insurance by, for example, posing an excessive number of inquiries or making an excessive number of recommendations.

## 6. Systems & Appliances

Next, let's talk about power systems and appliances. What do you anticipate the lifestyle to be like, and what products do you plan to use? There are some individuals who construct vans but don't install air conditioning on the top of the vehicle because they think they won't need it. That's not a problem. If they later decide to install AC, then they'll need to reserve space on the roof for it, including removing any solar panels that are already there. In addition to this, they'll need to have enough money in the budget to purchase the unit and install it on the roof. You'll also need an adequate power system to support it. It's possible to install rooftop air conditioning that operates off of 12 volts DC (direct current), but many rooftop air conditioners run off of 120 volts AC (alternating current). If your battery system isn't capable of supporting it, you have two options: either bring a generator with you or find a campsite that has shore power with 20, 30, or even 50-amp connections.

If you did the latter, you wouldn't quite be self-contained. However, you could use the generator or plug into campgrounds on extremely hot days only. Some individuals don't bother with conventional methods of air conditioning and instead rely only on a pair of ceiling fans, like MaxxAir or Fantastic fans. I do have a rooftop air conditioner on my vehicle, in addition to a 3000-watt inverter. To power the inverter, I have 12,233 watt-hours of lithium battery capacity, which means I can keep that air conditioner running continuously throughout the night without draining my lithium battery bank.

On the other hand, the weather is usually chilly enough at night that I could get away with simply turning on the fan and leaving some windows open and still be quite comfortable. Determining whether or not you need or want to have air conditioning is the first step in determining whether or not the expense can be accommodated within your budget. Think about future additions; leave a location

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on the roof open, have a 14" by 14" cutout there with maybe a MaxxAir fan in it, and in the future you can always pull out the fan and put air conditioning in.

You don't want to build the van in a way that would prevent you from altering it later on, do you? Maybe down the road, you want to be better prepared for the heat. My van is an Airstream B-190 from 1997. They constructed appliances to run on propane back then. There are still campervans on the market that contain propane appliances, but the vast majority of individuals who construct their own recreational vehicles today utilize diesel heaters, gasoline heaters, and lithium batteries to power various components.

Therefore, if you're going to install a heating system, you need to decide whether to install a propane system. This will depend largely on your vehicle; for example, if you have a Ram ProMaster chassis, you'll probably want a gasoline heater, such as a Wabasto heating system. There are some folks who have gasoline-powered Ram ProMaster chassis vans, but they have diesel heaters on board. What they do is have an auxiliary diesel tank that they fill up whenever they want to operate the heating system. This gives you flexibility, but you pay for it with diminished storage space.

If you decide to go with a Mercedes Sprinter, you should know that the majority of them will be built on a diesel engine. So it would make sense to buy a diesel heater that you could connect to the standard diesel feed coming off of the existing 24.5-gallon tank. This tank would supply fuel not only for the engine but also for the onboard heating system while you're driving or parked. Finally, there's the Ford Transit, which comes in either gas or diesel configurations.

The next topic on the agenda is the plumbing system. Some individuals want to have a warm or hot water heater on board, and one that's powered by propane is an option for them. They now produce water heaters that are 12-volt DC powered, or you could use 120V AC powered.

The power requirements for each of these water heaters will vary. Some builders use Bosch AC (120-volt) water heaters. Operating this style water heater

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consumes a significant quantity of power, which might be an issue for you if you're not hooked into shore power and don't have a sufficiently large lithium battery bank. As an alternative, there are systems that use the engine coolant to circulate through a heat exchanger, which can also provide hot water on board.

Some individuals put a long PCV tube on the roof and let the sun heat the water, then they take an outdoor shower; because of this, we find that the majority of DIY vans, in contrast to manufactured vans, have showers outdoors. If you're opting for an indoor shower, do you need or want a dedicated space in your van for it? If not, you could use a laundry tub with a shower curtain that hangs from the ceiling and then pull out the kitchen faucet to use as your shower. The tub can be emptied into a container for proper disposal or is can be pumped into a holding tank on the van (if equipped).

It's important to consider all of these factors before installing an indoor shower of any kind, but this is one option. What strategy do you have in place for removing the water from the pan? Now you need to get a water pump in order to pump the water elsewhere, which ultimately brings us to the waste management component of the system. The vast majority of camper vans are equipped with some kind of a fresh water tank, whether it comes in the form of detachable jugs or a built-in permanent tank that's equipped with a 12-volt demand pump.

When the water goes down the drain after it's come out of the faucet, it must eventually end up someplace, right? The wastewater from the sinks and showers is collected in what's known as a grey waste tank. This tank's contents are then deposited in an appropriate manner at a campground waste station, a home septic or city sewer, or a proper public dump station. If you have a water-style toilet, the waste is collected in black tanks. If you use a waterless toilet, such as a separating toilet, or if you have a composting toilet, then you don't have to worry about black waste. However, there is some maintenance that you're going to have to do in order to remove the waste periodically from the container, and there's also a urine jug that you're going to have to empty in a responsible manner.

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With regard to sinks, everyone desires to have a sink on board, but not everyone is required to have sinks inside. I've seen sinks that open out to the outside like a door or window. There's an area that I've seen in vans that flips out of the rear door, or there are containers that flip out of the back door. For water pressure I've seen on-demand 12V DC water pumps, foot rpressure pumps and simple USB-powered faucet pumps. For plumbing lines, I've mostly seen PEX tubing but I've also seen flexible plumbing hoses used.

That pretty much covers the basics of what to know about the plumbing section. Let's have a conversation about power. If you want a significant quantity of lithium batteries, the cost can quickly add up. I have a lot of them, and the installation was very pricey, but it did meet my requirements; your requirements may differ. Therefore, you may begin with one or two batteries, but provide expansion room so that you can add more batteries as your power needs increase.

But those batteries will need some kind of charging, right? You could either install solar panels, as I do on my van, or you could install a DC-to-DC charger that allows the vehicle's alternator to charge the batteries while you're traveling on the highway or at idle in most cases. You may also set up a shore power connection, which would allow you to charge your batteries by plugging into a power source where you're spending the night.

There are also portable gasoline or propane generators, either external or built in to the vehicle, to charge the batteries. When plugged into a generator or shore power connection there would be an on-board battery charger or converter that can convert AC voltage into 12 volts DC, which is used for things like lights and water pumps. However, you could want to run an electrical outlet or have air conditioning, and if you aren't plugged into a generator or shore power, you'll require an inverter appropriately sized to meet your power requirements.

An inverter converts the DC energy stored in the batteries into the 120 volts AC. This will enable you to utilize things like electrical outlets, microwaves, induction cooktops, and rooftop air conditioners. This is another important part



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of that system, in addition to fuses, breakers, and wire, but it's also where the majority of folks go over their budget by a surprising amount.

They have a budget on the batteries and on some of the components, but they aren't aware of how much the fittings, brackets, connectors, and wire will cost. If you're working on a comprehensive project, additional expenses such as fuse holders and breakers may quickly mount up to a significant sum of cash. So when you're budgeting for your build-out, consider adding another 25% for additional items that come up—not only for the electrical side, but also for the plumbing, the fittings, and the PEX tubing.

OK, so how about we speak about the arrangement and the bed, right? Because of the desire of certain individuals to have a bed that's neither removable or adjustable, a standard mattress could be brought on board, and the bed could be arranged in a variety of configurations; you would still have a very good night's sleep.

On the other hand, a bed does take up a considerable amount of room on your floor layout. Some individuals choose to have their Murphy beds flipped up, which, when you consider it, just takes up a fraction of space during the day when you're not sleeping. If the bed folds out, then you have another option for loading and unloading stuff.

Dinette beds are used by many van builders. These dinettes often take the form of a U-shaped or twin bed-like configuration and are able to fold out into a sleeping space at night. However, doing this every night and undoing it every morning can turn into a significant amount of effort.

Think about this: if there are more than two or three stages involved in anything, people are less likely to complete it. For example, in full-time travel, if you're continually folding down and unfolding the bed, there may come a point when you simply say, *Let's just leave this thing down and travel that way.*

Then you find out that you have to eat in the driver's seat, the passenger seat, or outdoors since you don't have a dedicated dining area anymore. You also need

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to consider the possibility of having more passengers. It's often not just one or two individuals that sign up for van life, but also their kids, pets, and/or fellow travelers.

Therefore, you need to think about providing them with more room to sleep and more seating options. You're aware that you don't want a wooden bench with cushions on it to serve as your primary sitting arrangement while driving, right? When it comes to your extra passengers, you should definitely go for some kind of seatbelted seat that faces forward as much as possible. It also needs to be bolted to the frame of the van or to the floor with a thick metal supporting plate and hardened steel bolts.

You may want to integrate something like a split mini-bench. Remember to make a note of that one, since a lot of people utilize the one that came out of the Ford Transit. Ford manufactures a seat system that can be quickly attached to the chassis of even a Ram ProMaster or a Sprinter van using the provided hardware and seat tracks. If you have children, you can install car seats on this, and passengers will be able to sit forward in a really comfortable posture while still being secure.

Remember to take seating into consideration when you draw out your floor design and then allocate the counter space. I can tell you that I actually find the counter space in my own personal vehicle to be excessive. If I could design mine from scratch, I would have done something that was a little bit shorter so that I could have more room for living. Because there isn't much space to move about inside the van while it's pouring outside and you're stuck inside, having that extra space would be a welcome bonus.

I suggest making a cardboard or wood replica of your floor plan or build and then camping out in the driveway or simply hanging out in the van to get a better view, feel, and measurement of the height of the countertop. Check the height of the seat and how your portable toilet seating position works, regardless of whether you're using a black tank, a composting toilet, or a regular porta potty. Is

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the surface that you sit on comfortable when the cabinet is open? Is there enough space between the back and the wall? Do the sides provide sufficient area for movement?

Cardboard is a wonderful material. If you only need raw sheets, you can either purchase it for a low price or you can just utilize boxes to construct a sample layout for yourself. Either way, you have options. Just so you know, it's going to be very, very beneficial when you're making your layout to mock it up in this manner first.

It will soon become clear to you that some of the things you scribbled down on paper or constructed on napkin will change. It's best to change your mind before you start building the van with expensive raw materials than to make changes mid-build. Another thing you need to consider, obviously, is the kinds of materials you're going to make use of, like plywood, 2x4s, thin wood strips, or extruded aluminum.

## 7. Safety

There's one more item we need to discuss, and that's safety. When I'm out and about, I often come across van designs that are missing an appropriate egress or emergency exit. In the event that there's a fire or any other kind of emergency, you need to make certain that you have an unobstructed way to exit the vehicle.

A fire extinguisher is yet another item that you need to give significant thought to investing in. Have not one but two of them on board due to the fact that they don't look very good and people tend to store them all the way at the back of the cupboard. Perhaps a secondary, much bigger one in addition to the first. It wouldn't hurt to put it in the rear doors, would it? Therefore, when you really need it, you'll be able to throw open those rear doors and put an end to that fire.

The smoke alarm is still another component that's extremely crucial. If your smoke alarm has a nine-volt battery, it should be changed out every six months. Always remember to replace the battery whenever you adjust the time on your clock, every six months. A propane leak detector is another essential piece of equipment to have on board if you want to transport or use propane. You can find these at any RV dealer.

The carbon monoxide detector is yet another item that will be necessary for you. You'll need to own one whether you burn propane, diesel or gasoline for your appliances. You should still install one even if the camper contains all electric appliances since you already have a chassis engine that's internal combustion. It's possible that you're just letting the engine idle, but you still want to make sure that you're not putting yourself in any danger.

If you're planning to install racks or solar panels on the roof, you need to make sure that they're well secured and, if they're movable, that you bring them down before you drive the vehicle. When you're going sixty miles per hour down the highway, the last thing you need is for a solar panel to come flying off and hurt someone.

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Another topic of safety is secondary impact, and it's the last thing you want in the event that you have an accident. Even if you only have to press the brakes extremely hard, secondary impact can cause severe damage if anything flies out from behind you, such a cabinet, a microwave, or a tabletop, and strikes either you or your passenger in the back of the head. Oh my goodness, it may turn out to be very awful, don't you think? You were able to evade that accident suddenly, but something in your vehicle became dislodged and ultimately injured you. Therefore, while you're constructing your build, make sure that all appliances and components are made highly secure.

## 8. Weight

What material are you planning to use for the framework of your cabinetry? When you build a wall out of standard construction materials like 2x4s, there's a significant amount of unused and wasted space which can also amount to unneeded weight. Every time you use a 2x4, you need an additional inch and a half to three and a half inches of room in your work area.

Because of this, you might choose to make your walls much more thin or utilize lighter materials. One option is to use plywood, luan board, pine strips or aluminum stock instead. You might construct an equivalent wall by using 3/8" or 3/4" of plywood in conjunction with a pocket hole screw. This would allow you to free up a significant amount of room.

And this brings us to our next topic, which is the weight. You decide to purchase a van, and although it has a payload capacity of 3,000 pounds, your van modification weighs 2,800 pounds. You only have 200 pounds left over for people, water, and cargo, and this clearly won't work. You have a weight problem. Not only is the car too heavy for its intended purpose, but its tires and gearbox are also too heavy for the load, and it's not going to drive very well.

Open the driver's door. There's a sticker affixed to it which specifies the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and the cargo capacity (NCC or UVW). After the van was manufactured with the factory options it has already, how much weight is left over before you surpass the rated GVWR? Make a note of it. Now it's time to start totaling up how much all of your materials weigh. Weigh them or make an estimate of what they'll weigh, then add 10% to that number.

I recommend occasionally driving to a CAT scale and having the thing weighed while you're working on your construction to make sure that you don't end up being overweight. The very last thing you want to do is acquire a 1500 series or half-ton chassis, only to find out later that you should have opted for the 2,500 or

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3,500 series with a higher weight capacity instead. This can be a very costly mistake.

The other factor that deserves some thought is striking a balanced load. When a car is developed, it's meant to be fairly balanced, left to right or driver to passenger side. If you wind up placing all your weight on one side of the car, the vehicle will drive quite differently as a result. Your tires will wear unevenly, and you're likely to experience performance and handling issues. When you travel by trucks or it's especially breezy outside, there's a possibility that your van may sway.

So give careful consideration to how the weight is distributed. I know it may seem simpler to place everything on one side and leave the other side open, but be careful that for every pound you put on one side in your build, you put a pound on the other side.

## 9. Exit Strategy

A discussion on an exit plan is something else that I want to bring up. Things change fast; that's just how life is, right? You could be offered a fantastic employment opportunity, but in exchange, you'll have to relocate to another country. Now, you have a project that you've either begun, are in the middle of completing, or have recently completed. In any of these cases, you need to sell it.

It's not too early to think about what you're going to do with your van after you've finished it and your life has changed. Consider the following, too: Where will I be heading next? Who exactly will I be selling the completed van to? If it's not a manufactured RV, how are the people you're selling it to going to secure financing and insurance? The majority of individuals who buy used RVs and camper vans finance a portion of the purchase. This may be in the form of a personal loan, or they may receive partial financing to cover the cost of the RV.

You can also trade in the van at an RV dealership, but this can be much more challenging than selling it to a private party. The prices of recreational vehicles are determined by their book values. When deciding whether or not to provide a loan, banks go through data provided by companies like NADA or JD Power to find the vehicle's trade-in value. To the bank, this is how much the RV is worth.

A DIY camper van is not an RV at all, and there's no book value for the camper. If you try to trade it into a dealer, they're just going to offer you the worth of the van chassis, not necessarily the value of your camper build. This can create a lot of hardship when executing your exit plan. You might have done a great job with your do-it-yourself van, but the buyer could be unable to get a loan for the RV component or the conversion part of it.

As you're building, put yourself in the shoes of the next person and consider what they would like. It might be wise to avoid hyper-focusing on making it precisely how you want, since the person who comes after you might not want it that way. Instead, consider adopting at least some features and styles commonly



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seen in commercially made RVs. Pay a visit to a motor home or RV dealer and examine the vans that are located on their property. Keep in mind that the vast majority of folks who purchase van conversions acquire them from RV manufacturers like Airstream, Winnebago, or Pleasure Way. These companies have large design and R&D departments and also do market studies to see what people want in an RV; they've done all the work for you, and it can be helpful to look at these examples when building your own camper van.

I hope that this list of recommendations has been of some use to you as you set out on your path of building up your own van. Van life will be for me one day; currently I'm just a weekend warrior, but I look forward to the day when I hit the road in my camper van full time. I enjoy following all the guests on my channel, as well as the whole van life community, and watching all the wonderful things they do because it motivates me to do the same things. I look forward to the point in my professional life when I'll be able to carve out sufficient time in my schedule to spend considerable amounts of time traveling.