

Home



KEN MCKAY/TV/SHUTTERSTOCK; INSTAGRAM: @EAMONNHOLMES

TIME AND SPACE THE WAY WE LIVE NOW  
EAMONN HOLMES

The broadcaster on his garden robot and finding ‘sex toys’ in his kitchen

Home means Belfast. There are lots of things I don’t know about myself but one thing I’m certain of is that I’m a Belfast man.

**Where is home for you at this point?** Pre-pandemic, home was always in an airport, usually Heathrow. But post-pandemic, Surrey has had to be home, but it’s not where I come alive. Although there is no shortage of local people who will stop and talk.

**Do the Holmes family have any time-honoured domestic rules?** My mother, who is 93 this year, used to say to my brothers and I, “Never eat in anyone’s house.” She’s a germaphobe and believes that you’ll get poisoned everywhere. She wouldn’t even eat in a restaurant. My father, on the other hand, would have anything and everything. My brother Brian still doesn’t eat at other people’s homes.

**How different is your present home to your childhood home?** Space. I grew up one of five brothers in a house that was one main room and a kitchen downstairs, and upstairs two bedrooms and a box room.



Above: Holmes’s parents. Below: Holmes with his George Best art



**What is the style of your Surrey house?** It’s a big, homely property and Ruth [Langsford, Holmes’s wife] and I bring different tastes to it. I like traditional on the outside, modern on the inside.

**Do you rule the roost in yours?** Absolutely not. Ruth is the kitchen queen. My involvement in the kitchen is nil. I pass through occasionally; I like to know how the fridge is stocked.

**When guests visit do your duties extend beyond uncorking wine?** I do open the wine. I’m the host with the most. Ruth is the worrier. She has three friends in particular who she’ll have in the house, who seem to drink a lot and eat canapés; I’m warned not to enter the room. I say, “The thing is, Ruth, it’s me they want to talk to, not you.” And she says, “If you have to come in, only come in for five minutes.” So I’ll walk through as they un-pop their prosecco and they’re all singing and dancing; they’ll go, “Ohhh, Eamonn, Eamonn, Eamonn.” And they’ll all want to talk to me and I can see Ruth giving me the evil eye. I give them advice. Ruth will tell everybody what they want to hear but I’ll tell them the truth.

**Do you help to clear up?** Ruth cleans up before serving food, which I think is a nonsense. If I was to create a sandwich and then rush in for the second half of the match or whatever, she’ll be in behind me 15 minutes later saying, “Who left the kitchen in a mess?” I’m like, “Who do you think? It’s hardly the next-door neighbour.” Then she’ll be ... “Get in here and clean that up,” and then that creates a row. I don’t see why it can’t wait half an hour before it’s cleaned up but she’s an order freak. The other thing is, she has all of these devices that look like sex toys. They’re lime green and yellow and made of rubber. If I empty the dishwasher, I have no idea where they go, so I just leave them out.

**Are you sure they’re not sex toys?** I don’t know what a sex toy looks like; I’m a Catholic. I look at these things and I say, “What on earth is that, Ruth?” And she’ll say, “It’s an avocado-stone scooper.”

**Is the garden more your domain?** I do like to keep the lawn looking like a professional football pitch. We have just got a robot mower. Oh my God, it’s brilliant. I sat two days ago and just watched it do its business. I call it Herbie; short for Herbivore.

**Tell us about your cinema room** It’s a shrine to Manchester United. I’ve got various mannequins in United kit. They’ve no heads on them, which can be frightening for Ruth when she walks in. She tends to avoid the place. I’ve got lots of original United artwork; I’ve just commissioned a George Best piece.

**Where’s the grimmest place you’ve lived?** I don’t do grim. One of the reasons I never did the university experience was the prospect of living in substandard accommodation. My son is at university in Manchester and the next time I visit him I’ll be wearing a hazmat suit and marigolds.

**Interview by Nick McGrath**

Farm to Feast: Best Menu Wins – is on weekly on BBC iPlayer at 8.05pm



DRIVEN MAD BY STATION BULLETINS

My garden backs onto the railway station platform at Hurst Green in Surrey. In the past two years we have been bombarded with loud announcements. These don’t always refer to train arrivals (which we accept), but to all sorts of trivia: they warn us about taking a bottle of water in hot weather or advise that if you don’t feel well, don’t board the train. All common sense. The number of announcements can be between 12 and 20 an hour. We have written to station personnel and to Southern, the train operating company, but to no avail. Peter Cole

Railway stations are owned by Network Rail, but most (including Hurst Green) are managed by the train operating company. I suspect that Network Rail is responsible for the generic announcements that you hear, but the train operator may be responsible for the physical arrangements that cause the announcements to be heard outside the station. You should make a formal written complaint to both organisations. To succeed in a nuisance claim, you need to show that the announcements

represent an unreasonable interference with the enjoyment of your property, bearing in mind the time of day of the announcements and their frequency, duration and volume. Your complaint should set out the full details of the nuisance and how the noise affects you. If the complaint does not cause the responsible party to take measures to help, apply to court or invite the local council to investigate the complaint as a statutory nuisance. I suspect that a court would find that these announcements – directed as they are to customer safety – are a reasonable use of land, and provide a benefit to the public that outweighs the inconvenience to you. Railway operators also benefit from a statutory defence to nuisance claims. So you might not succeed, but the railway operator may be encouraged to make adjustments to reduce the impact, such as moving speakers, erecting sound barriers and/or reducing the hours of use. Your complaint might carry more weight if it is supported by other residents.

Ed Cracknell, partner, Russell Cooke solicitors, russell-cooke.co.uk

Send questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice given without responsibility

READERS’ CLINIC  
HOW DO I GET THE STICKY RESIDUE LEFT BY LABELS OFF JAM JARS? I’VE TRIED EVERYTHING

Sissel Harrison

We spray with WD-40, scrub off with a kitchen scourer and wash with detergent. Mimi Zadeh

Peel or scrape off the paper label, smear the residue with margarine and leave it overnight. In the morning it will wipe off easily. Susan Woodroff

My mother-in-law told me to use mayonnaise. Just rub a bit over the area, leave it on for a while then rub off. Huw Taylor, Bridgend

Vodka! Put a dab of neat vodka on a dry cloth and rub over the residue. It was highly effective at removing label residue from my son’s school lever arch files. Jennie Sanders, Cardiff



I use (liquid) lighter fuel. It leaves no residue and is almost odourless. Paul Craddock

Avon Skin So Soft

(apparently it’s also good for fending off mosquitoes). Carol Anderson, Blackpool

Paint thinner works instantly. Wash the jar before using. Mike

I use CarPlan Tar Remover. Wash well before use. Russell Beach

I peel off the paper then place the jar in a large jug. Fill with cold water and leave for 24 hours. Using a sharp knife, scrape off the sticky residue. If any remains, put the jar in the freezer overnight and scrape the residue while it’s frozen. Margaret Lindsay

**FUTURE QUESTIONS**  
● How do you keep bath towels nice and fluffy? I haven’t got a tumble dryer.  
● Is there anything that glows in the dark to subtly light up a bathroom at night?

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