



Left: Julie painting aboard her boat.
Below: examples of Julie's incredibly detailed art.



she had a bit of money behind her to focus on her art. 'I decided to just see how it went,' she explains. 'I knew I'd probably get the job if I reapplied, but the thought of painting full-time was too enticing.'

By this time, Julie was selling paintings, prints, and postcards at small art fairs and craft markets. Six months after her redundancy, she was amazed to have made enough money from her art that she hadn't needed to tap into her payout at all.

'Mark saw how much less stressed I felt away from work, and he wanted a piece of the pie,' Julie laughs. 'We began to think about ways we could live for less so that we could both follow our dreams.'

The couple thought of many different living arrangements, from buying a plot of land and putting a mobile home on it, to living in a cabin in the woods. But when they watched a TV show about a couple who lived on a wide beam barge – similar to a narrow boat, only twice as wide – they knew they'd found their dream home.

Water ways

'We sold our house and bought ourselves a boat for around £150,000, putting some money aside in case we needed it later on,' she says. 'It's very comfy, with two double king bedrooms and plenty of space – the rooms are probably the same proportions as in a new build on land. We fell in love with her right away, and named her Weir on the Move, a pun on our surname.'

A year on, Julie and Mark have adapted

well to their new lifestyle. To avoid mooring fees, which can cost as much as £600 a month, they never stay in one spot for longer than a couple of weeks. So far, they've cruised the canals of Wiltshire, but this summer they plan to explore the Thames, mooring at Hampton Court Palace and Windsor Castle.

Working and living in such close proximity could spell trouble for many couples, but Julie and Mark work side-by-side harmoniously. 'The kids said, "There's no way you can work in the same room all day!" and I must admit, we did wonder if it would be a bit much. But so far the only problem we've had has been me wanting to natter occasionally as I paint, but Mark is in his writer's trance.'

The couple love life on the



'It seems absurd that I spent my whole life not knowing I had this skill'

water, and have made many firm friends living a similar lifestyle. 'There's a lovely community of boat owners,' she says. 'On land, we'd say hello in passing to our neighbours before locking ourselves behind closed doors each night, but now we all look out for each other. We get invited for a curry on a new neighbour's boat, or round for a night cap. When you only move at 4 mph, you always bump into the same people.'

Mark's recently released his third novel, while Julie has been very busy working on commissioned pet portraits – the very thing that started their madcap adventure. 'My only regret is not starting sooner – all those years I could have been painting,' she says. 'But we hope we can live on the boat for years to come. There are lots of OAPs on the water, it's a great way to live your life. Our kids thought we were barmy at first, but now they see how happy we are.' ■