

This Old House

MARCH 2005

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All Set & Go is a photography series by David Laundy. The models are dressed in 19th-century style, with the women wearing corsets and the men wearing top hats. The shop is a reproduction of a 19th-century oyster shop.

THE BOLD LOOK OF KOHLER



102 TEAM WORK



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The bay window is actually the base of an original tower in a one-and-a-half-story house. See "Single-Minute" page 70

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COVER PHOTO BY DAVID LAUNDY
STYLING BY DAVID LAUNDY

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indestructible Gap hoodie for grandson: \$29.50

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becomes (liter-
ally) a showplace.



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[LETTERS]



BARN AMBITIOUS

The December 2004 issue's article on barns taking us upstairs (above) was terrific! My friends, Mary and I have a big old red dairy barn on our property that serves as our garage and heated shop. Your article made us give converting it serious consideration. So now we are planning the renovation of the barn. Since we both have full-time jobs (I am a project manager for a large construction company) and plan to do much of the work ourselves, it will probably take a couple of years to complete. Thank you for your terrific magazine, and keep the great ideas coming!

Lena Dawson, Norwood, N. Dak.

CORRECT WIRING

In your November 2004 Homeowner's Handbook, at Step 4, your instructions specify to connect one wire to the black and one to the white. It should be to either connect the wire from the center, or energized, tab of the bulb socket to the black, or "hot," wire and the shell, or neutral tab, to the white wire. Or use a meter or continuity tester to verify which leads indeed the one intended to have the energized leg of the circuit.

Pat Wicks, Valeris, Calif.

WRITER JOE TRUM REPLIES: You're right; if there's any doubt about a fixture properly wired, a continuity tester should be used to determine if the socket is energized. Most light fixtures including the chandelier we installed are powered with brown brown wire lamp cord. One wire typically differentiated or "identified" from the other by a ridge or groove running along its

length, or white taping stamped on the brown plastic insulation. Lamp cord sheathed in clear insulation has one silver wire (the "identified" wire) and one brass-colored wire.

The identified wire should be connected to the neutral (white) wire in the ceiling box; the other lamp cord wire is connected to the hot (black) wire. In fact, that's exactly how our chandelier was wired, though we didn't get into the specifics in the photo caption. Incidentally, if the wires were accidentally reversed, a modern porcelain-insulated fixture would still operate properly and safely, and the only shock hazard would be if someone were to stick a finger into a live socket, touching the threaded metal ring.

SAFETY ZONE

As any architect or builder or as any homeowner whose engaged an architect or builder knows, materials are often delivered late, one subcontractor's job while another sub hasn't yet finished the job, and deadlines are rarely met. Such was the case with our "Split Personality" story (December 2004), where our photographic and printing deadlines came before Mark Davis' loft and stair railings arrived on site to be installed. Naturally such happen both for safety and to meet building codes—requires meetings, which is why we acknowledged the soon-to-arrive barriers in the caption for the photo of the loft. Nevertheless, we were pleased to receive many letters from sharp-eyed readers questioning the use of the photograph—a snap-crucial to telling the story of the building's refurbishment—and the missing railings. To our minds, such a response is a fine testament to the passion, education and safety-mindedness of TDH readers. —The Editor

punch list

Definition: A list of items incorrectly done or waiting to be finished by a construction job.
In "Cave the Nuts," December 2004's TDH, we included one Steven NGF's comment "I can't be adjusted for specific wall lengths" without including techniques for doing so on 2x6s.
Technician: Please email enquiries@tdh.com. The panels are also not embossed, so we used flat machining (CNC routers), and the steps into profile were drilled instead of milled.

Advertisement letters: The December magazine, 168 letters of the month, New York, NY 10018, or e-mail at TDH_letters@tdh.com. Please include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Publisher reserves the right to edit letters for clarity and length and may be used in other media.

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[CONTRIBUTORS]



In "Kiss on Your Floor" (page 40), photographer **William Boyd** approached each wooden model on set in Florence but also took a lot of time to focus on his unique characteristics. "The detail work was incredible," says Boyd. "The richness of the wood just spoke to me." The photographer, a former draftsman in an engineering firm, says he appreciates the precise geometry and texture of the models and sought to highlight these qualities in his pictures. Boyd is currently taking photographs for a Harlem comfort-food cookbook and has worked for Metropolitan Home and Decor. He has a studio in Brooklyn and resides in Lansdowne, Pa.



While reporting on house tours for next month's *TDH*, **Tallei Brady** met Richard Perquillo and Valerie Peto, whose kitchen remodel ("Great Adaptation," page 92) was inspired by a page they'd found in a dog-eared copy of *The Old House*. "The way that they adapted elements of a 1930s Tudor's pantry photo to meet their own contemporary kitchen needs is truly instructional," says the writer. Brady is a former editor at *OG* and has contributed to *Country Living* and *Art & Antiques*. She lives in New Jersey.



While most homeowners chase squirrels out of their gardens, one seemed to chase photographer **Matthew Hillman** after jumping out of a tree and nearly onto his head during the shoot for "Second-Story Job" (page 100). With the squirrel incident behind him, Hillman notes the unique connection between homeowner David Kaimowitz and the home, particularly since Kaimowitz was the builder for the project. "The great joy in choosing architecture is taking pleasure in something someone created that serves it's cool to be able to document that," he says. Based in San Francisco, Hillman has contributed to *Architectural Digest* and *Interior Design*.



"I always liked playing in the dirt," says author **Ken Druse**. A good thing for *TDH*, which tapped the New York Times contributor to help us through the sleep-deprived step of building a DIY hyperbolic garden trough ("Trough Dreams in Elm Place," page 98). All that play in the dirt has led to a passion for purely organic gardening that spans 30 years, not to mention lush gardens in Brooklyn and New Jersey. Druse regularly lectures about gardening and has penned 10 books on the subject. He has also contributed to *Metropolitan Home*, *House Beautiful*, and *Flora & Garden*.

[LETTER FROM TOM]



Time to Take Stock

By TOM SILVA, *TDH* GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Around this time of year, when the incoming spring keeps the weather bouncing between warm and frigid, I find out a lot about my house. Last March, the gutter over my front steps delivered a kind of water baptism—drips, dings, dripping melting snow through a broken and during the day and clogging up my steps at night. Since I've been sidelined more than once by knee and foot injuries, I didn't take any chances. As soon as I could, I got up there and applied new sealant.

If you live in a snow-prone part of the country like I do, your house has been put to the test over the last four months. So now's a good time to make some notes, before the cold weather goes away. Take stock of problems that surfaced this winter. Which windows are drafty and where does the roof ice over? Was the furnace efficient? Did the fireplace smoke? As the weather warms, check driveways, patios, and porch supports for cracks from frost heaves.

While it all dries up, then make a repair schedule. Spread out the fixes over the year. That'll make keeping up the house easier to deal with, and you won't have to drop a bundle of cash to do it all at once, just before winter. By then, you'll be using in your home—at least until you discover what needs your attention next spring.

PHOTO: JIMMI JOHNSON; BOYD: JAMES HARRIS; BRADY: JAMES HARRIS; HILLMAN: JAMES HARRIS; DRUSE: JAMES HARRIS



WHAT'S BENEATH THE SURFACE-
THE VALUE IN
LUXURY KITCHEN MATERIALS

John
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Surface changes are more than skin deep when it comes to decorating your kitchen. Let Coldwell Banker® help you transform the heart of your home and increase its value with the following guide to a selection of top kitchen surface materials.

METALS. Metal cooks love metal surfaces in the kitchen. Stainless steel has long been a favorite counter choice among professionals because of its durability and sleek, reflective appearance. Copper, a fine metal with a history rooted in the kitchen, comes in a variety of finishes, ages beautifully, and offers a naturally antibacterial surface for backsplashes, venthoods, wall accents, and even door panels. Hand-finished aluminum makes ideal flooring with its polished look and easy-to-clean surface, giving you more of that precious commodity everyone appreciates - time.



EXOTIC WOODS. Used for years in estate homes and yachts, rare woods can also bring elegance to your kitchen. The rarer the tree, the higher the cost of the wood. Given these pairs of international forests, the African anigre or Brazilian satinwood, are available in veneer form. Made from very thin slices of wood, veneer is ideal for adhering to hand-crafted cabinets, counters, walls, or even your refrigerator as seen here. For solid wood flooring, consider non-endangered exotics like Jatoba (Brazilian cherry), White tigerwood, or Patagonian teak.



TERRAZZO. Using a technique that hails from 15th century Italy and distinguishes the floors of Doge's Palace, today's craftsmen follow this old wiring process by mixing colored stones or marble chips with tinted cement and then polishing it. Good news for the modern kitchen: terrazzo becomes even more beautiful as it ages. Typically used for floors or walls, it's also possible to construct countertops with this appealing surface. Designers customize the look by choosing smaller chips-Standard Terrazzo, or larger chips-Venetian Terrazzo.



DECORATIVE TILES. The ancient practice of using ceramic tiles in your kitchen remains a favorite today. For inspiration, explore corners of the world, such as Iran, Turkey where they've been handcrafting intricate floral tiles since the Ottoman Empire. For a sensual look, investigate Sassuolo, Italy where the tiles glaze with semi-precious stones and leaves of mol gold. Consider even creating a three-dimensional landscape with a wall panel composed of hand-painted ceramic tiles from Jerusalem where the Belgian studio draws on Persian traditions.



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ON THE JOB

Good Hues

House paints get more and more green

Mindful of the safety concerns of prior and DfTers everywhere, the paint industry has recently redoubled its commitment to green paint. Not Jolly Green Giant green or the color-of-a-summer-lawn green, but green meaning environmentally friendly with a "low-VOC" content. VOCs (or volatile organic compounds) are thought to be among the potential culprits behind Sickness often lumped under the heading of Sick Building Syndrome. VOCs can be found in a range of common household products including cleaners, aerosol sprays, disinfectants, even the materials on your floors and walls. In the case of paints, the VOCs helped them flow easier and dry faster. Now, thanks to new formulations, VOCs can be markedly reduced.

Many manufacturers have decided to offer goods that have fewer VOCs than allowed by the Environmental Protection Agency standards. Look for labeling that says the contents have less than 250 grams of VOCs per liter. Some manufacturers have gone even further, offering "zero-VOC" for paints with half a gram or less of VOCs per liter. Fortunately, you won't need to shell out more green for such green paint—prices are comparable to those already on your shelf. Also expect the same breath-taken-in performance. And don't think that Low VOC paints come in a full palette of cool-to-vibrant colors—including, of course, 161 shades of green.

—Scott Schilling

For specific low-VOC paint brands, see the Directory page 101.



COLORFUL HISTORY

Early on, friendly paint. The first people to paint their living rooms—say, cave-dwellers 10,000 years ago, the first colors? Black, then charcoal, white, yellow, and red. From iron oxides in dirt, green, blue, clay, and white, from ochre to bone.

Paint by number. In later times, reds did not mix, and then gold. To make the last shade, hundreds of men combed the desert in search of its source—the female cochineal beetle. Making a quart of paint added another bug.

Colored eggs. Pope Leo X once anointed a boy in gold paint as a symbol of the Golden Age of the Medici. Unlike the real-life actions in *Da Vinci's* the boy died from toxins in his paint.

—C.J. Hughes

ON THE JOB

ORIGINS

The flashlight is one of the most important tools for the window glazier. It is used to inspect the glass and the frame, and to illuminate the work area. The flashlight is also used to inspect the glass and the frame, and to illuminate the work area.

FROM TOP: WINDOW - MADE IN U.S.A. - C. or D.

Windows—just like old

When the British government imposed a hefty luxury tax on the Colossus 1767, which included a levy on window glass, the fledgling American glassmaker, Thomas Filing the Long's, called on the famous show front cityways—with the bottom of each border and such "bull-eye" glass cut from the center of sheets of blown glass. These days, getting the nearly impossible but historically significant bull-eye looks a lot less political. You don't need a bottle of Robert Lachman, owner of Sugar Hollow Glass, makes these beautiful re-creations for old home renovations. In his New Bedford, Connecticut, workshop, Lachman handblows bull-eye glass in sizes ranging from 3 by 3 inches to 9 by 7 inches and offers them cut square or blown round in clear and light green. Most go in historic colonial-era homes, which often have five-pane transoms above the door, though Lachman notes that more and more of his work ends up in new homes built in older styles. Blowing a pane from \$40 to \$65 per piece, a pane of bull-eye glass is a fairly inexpensive (yet, sadly, still novel) way to give a new house a vintage look. —Jason Carpenter

For more information, contact: Sugar Hollow Glass, 2050 166-6416; info@sugarglass.com

10 THINGS WD-40

It started when we discovered there was nothing like it for on-the-truck-back publicity of neglected golf shoes. Then we found the WD-40 ("Water Displacement," perfected on the 4166 model) introduced by the Rocket Chemical Company in 1953 for club members and discovered 1,000 more uses. Time and its be the WD-40 tape, not sticking to anything and pretty much undoing anything else. And yes, you can use WD-40 to remove slat tape, along with.

1. Removing liquid nails and other glue from fingers and paint from shoes.
2. Removing tar, grease, and dirt from anything like foam tires and carpets.
3. Pre-lubricating nuts—and when sprayed right into the box, keeping them from rusting in the basement.
4. Fixing really aging, weathered plastic and vinyl parts.
5. Sliding up steel wheels so they slide right through the material.
6. Lubricating paintbrushes.
7. Keeping rust off those air conditioners you never get around to covering or removing.
8. Keeping grass from sticking to mower blades—and also from wheels and snow from snow shovels.
9. Unlinking small chains.
10. Aiding defunct belly trampoline windows, the enemy of knuckles everywhere.

—Terry Sullivan

REMINDER: REFRIGERATOR SAFETY

What homeowner doesn't love the cold ones provided by portable built-in refrigerators like the Sub-Zero, Viking, Jenn-Air, and KitchenAid? How about those who have put in solid ones by hand? Though it's by no means common and reports of injuries are fairly rare, built-in refrigerators are not without their dangers. If they're carrying a full load of groceries and aren't properly installed, "connections must be made to the wall, but sometimes they're made to the wrong wall," said Michael Weissberg, owner of Koush Kitchen & Bath in New York City. When properly fixed in place, however, such units are completely safe and just the thing for your own late kitchen renovation. Just make sure to read the directions. —C.J. Hughes

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CABIN CLASS

Repays these nostalgic memories of boy Scout camp, college orientation and that first business retreat—the cabin is the new dream getaway. At least according to Linda Leigh Paul, anchoring *The Cabin Book*. From Lake Michigan's shores to the Rockies peaks, the time is perfect for those inspired by the small-summer-home trend—ranges the book to showcase 20 interpretations of the American architectural can for a generation that wants their vacation with lots of space and light. Cabin Fever Cured.

—C.J. Hughes



Lather, Rinse, Tan, Repeat

Close your eyes and imagine the extravagant amenities at a George "Mac-Tan" Hamilton's Indulgence. Now open 'em and take a peek at what we at *The Old House* think should be done. The Indulgence custom-made tanning shower, which puts the bronze on while you wash off. The Indulgence acrylic, water-tight panels cover the housing for 24 tanning lights, 12 on each side of the shower walls. The lights claim to be low-UV, which means you'll need to make extra trips to the mall to get Hamilton's gems—can't have the \$21,000 for the showerhouse lookin' simba! You can always strafe your custom shower for \$11,000, but that model sticks all its nips on one side of the shower—which means you need to rotate as you sizzle + sizzle. —Joan Carpenter

LINOLEUM FLOORING

Invented in 1860 and a kitchen mainstay into the 1950s, linoleum sheet flooring is a mix of linseed oil, lime, pine resin, and wood flour—nearly all appeared in the 1800s due to interest in water- and low-cost-to-install vinyl. That's changed, though. Thanks to a desire for more traditional products and handsome alternative floor-composites such as Parbo. If you'd like such a look but installation costs stay on your flooring dreams, Parbo's dovetail interlocking squares are for you. Each square is a combination of linoleum (leaf, H&F, or High-density Sportboard (Ordnite), and oak, pattern) which provides auxiliary support. Squares (2 by 12 inches) and rectangles (12 by 48 inches) come with interlocking grooves and lay over existing flooring; no adhesive needed. Make a dovetail or other pattern by interlocking different colors, or you can lay down a solid color. To cut the squares to fit your floor's dimensions, use a saw.

One caveat: While ideal for high-traffic areas like kitchens, linoleum isn't suitable for wet areas such as bathrooms, because, as with any product with joints, water can seep in and cause damage. —Derek Stalling

Interlocking Clicky Parbo costs \$5 per square foot; for more information, go to www.parbo.com.



[ORIGINI: ANSWERED]

© 1936 Invented by David H. Hill, the partner of Conrad Hubert, who founded The American Electrical Novelty and Manufacturing Co. Later renamed Eveready, built the first flashlight. Police officers were early big fans. —C.J. Hughes



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Tools for the Do-It-**H**erselfer

If you're thinking about buying hand tools for that lady lady in your life—or if that lady is you—the home-improvement industry is clamoring to sell the long-neglected do-it-yourselfer lightweight hammers and hacksaws with ergonomic grips. Curious to see how well the gender-specific tools performed, TGM asked three handy-women to put some popular kits to the test. —Alex Hirsch

—Army Numbers



TEACHER TRAVELER 5-10-08

[illegible]

150LB hammer, slip-joint pliers, utility knife, multi-bit screwdriver, tape measure, siding block, level, framing carpenter's pencil, gloves, safety glasses

Reviewed by Alexandra Hancher, *TCM* writing editor

CONC. The 3-sound hammer 5-1/2-in.-diameter, plus, and lockers are too small for many household projects. And the magnetic, air-actuated ball level in the kit.

INSIDE: The gender-free bag and tool designs remind the idea that women don't want to be treated differently.



WHAT TO CHANGE: I'd prefer finger locking pliers and a lightweight hammer. I own a hammer which is both light and powerful.

SLEEPERHEAD TOUGH TOOLS. \$49.99

www.pearsoned.com

TOOLS: Hammer, crescent wrench, level, tape measure, tongue-and-groove pliers, long nose pliers, multi-bit screwdriver, screwdriver, pitcher, holes, nails, screws.

Tested by iStockphoto.com, 2009.com, and

PROS. Overall, the quality is very good and the nationalized prices are hard to find.

CONS: The 18-cord hammer is oversized for hanging pictures and underpowered for sawing through. Another nail, wire and hole detector is useful.



WHAT IT CHANGES: The kit could use a pair of multipurpose electronic pens, with droppers sized for different gauges of wire.

0-495-995

Ammonium ions

TOOLS: Hammer, slip-joint pliers, adjustable wrench, pencil's lead, tape measure, multi-bit screwdriver (flat-head, spade, Phillips), level, picture hooks, nails, screws, anchors, foam-board easel.

Tested by Kevin Flatt, carpenter and set designer



CONS: The 6-inch-adjustable overcoat wrench is tricky with a stubby grip. And the short tie rods are loose and could slosh about.

PRO: The fastener is in a pretty good, if not a-bitch slip joint place and it's a screw driver, so it's well designed.

WHAT I'D CHANGE: A manual on how to use the book would be more helpful than the run-around. Who really knows how to use all the different blades on the 5-in-1 besides a kid?



EVERY HOME DESIRES ITS OWN BEAUTY TO YOUR HOME.
BUT A FIRST IMPRESSION IS MADE AT THE FRONT DOOR.

Manufacturing the Self: A New Code of Ethics

Having the opportunity to go to a well-known university, the high school of Nicosia, a unique collection of talented and friendly, in English, gave us insight and friends. They helped us to understand the city and its culture, to be able to understand the Greek and Turkish.

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ACCENTS

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HOUSE CALLS SMART SOLUTIONS FOR KITCHENS & BATHS



The new eating area is outfitted with a bar for entertaining (foreground) and a computer station (far left) where the kids can do homework. The pantry cabinet (near right) holds cereal and snacks; art supplies are stored in the white glass drawers beneath the window. Using a mix of painted and natural wood finishes fits the Craftsman style of the house. The green table and chairs are all that remain of the old kitchen.

A Man With a Plan

An architect uncamps a small kitchen to create a multiactivity space for family and friends.

BY CLARE WATSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN KOSTERMAN STYLING BY TIGER CHAPMAN

In a household with growing kids, spending time in the kitchen is all too often a square play. Mom and Dad are colliding with hot baked goods in hand, there's never enough room to sit or dine, and nobody can open a cupboard door without a box toppling out. That's what finally prompted architect Charles Cook and his wife, Ellen, to remodel the kitchen in their 1930s Wilmette, Illinois, bungalow. They knew just what they needed: a microwave low enough for their three boys—aged 5, 10, and 13—to reach, a designated area for Thia to do the baking she enjoys, food-prep counters at different heights (Charles is 6 foot 4, Thia, 5 foot 4), and a big, storage-packed island where the kids could have a snack or guests could hang out when the couple entertains.

Since the existing kitchen formed into a larger eating area, Charles's first move was to flip-flop them to take advantage of the bigger space for cabinets and appliances. Then he widened the footprint by borrowing from an adjacent family room, which was being added on to. He separated work zones by function—a baking counter next to the range, for instance, and a sandwich-making area next to the fridge. Where possible, the cherry cabinets were put together in floor-to-ceiling groupings that minimize long runs of countertop and give a more polished, farmhouse-like look.

"When you design houses for a living, you know how to hold in every little thing you've ever wanted," says Charles. "This kitchen's got something—and plenty of room—for everybody." (continued on p. 38)

It's where your kids will grow up.
 And you will grow old
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The Plan

Creating specialized work areas and a kid-friendly island made a place for everything (and everyone) in this open-plan space.



WHAT THEY DID

- REARRANGED AND EXPANDED THE OLD KITCHEN.** To enlarge the work area, the locations of the 20-by-12-foot kitchen and 12-by-12-foot eating area were swapped, and the footprint was pushed 8 feet into the family room, which was also enlarged.
- PUT IN MORE WINDOWS.** For symmetry and ventilation, a new window was added to the right of the stove to match a reconfigured one on the left. A skylight over the sink lets in more light, offsetting the darkness of the wood cabinetry. Keeping the upper sink wall open creates an interior "window" into the family room.
- GAVE THE UPGRADED APPLIANCES A BUILT-IN LOOK.** Cabinetry panels disguise the Sub-Zero fridge, the dishwasher and the wine cooler in the eating area. The range is set into a custom-style surround that conceals the exhaust hood and a spot where the kitchen's exterior wall juts 16 inches into the room.
- MADE MULTIPLE WORK STATIONS.** Next to the fridge is a sandwich-making counter. 42 inches high for the very tall footstool, below it is the built-in microwave. The baking center to the left of the range has a standard 36-inch-high counter storage for ingredients and bowls below, and a narrow base cabinet for baking sheets right by the oven. In addition, the eating area has a computer desk and a bar for entertaining.
- ADDED A BIG CENTRAL ISLAND.** The family-room island is approximately 4 1/2 by 7 feet. It holds a pull-out trash bin, bins and cabinet drawers, and open shelves for pots. It also doubles as a casual dining area.

BEFORE: The old kitchen was room and a half, and the layout was confined by an island too large for the space. **AFTER:** The reconfigured kitchen's cooking area has a large central island. With drawers on either end, built-in legs, and a snack counter, it's the home-guest-friendly centerpiece. The modern introduction of a big dining table. The stainless steel Wolf range is tucked into a custom-style alcove.



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PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS



The Details

Flair follows function in this stylishly equipped, eat-in kitchen.

1 The **WINE COOLER** from Sub-Zero was installed at waist height as a convenience for the 6-foot-4 homeowner. To create a more attractive display, the toe kicks was covered with cherry veneer. It is vented down to the basement.

2 The **DISHWASHER**, made by Pfaff, is hidden behind cherry panels and elevated 7 inches off the floor for easier-on-the-back loading and unloading. It takes up the lower portion of a chrome cabinet designed by the floor-covering contractor, which has stained-glass doors on top.

3 The **BACKSPLASH** behind the range has a granite ledge to hold hot pots and cooking ingredients. Above it, a travertine arch mirrors the curve of the marble-style range surround. The travertine tiles inside it are set diagonally and punctuated by three decorative nickel-glazed tiles, the whole field is framed with a border of green sintered-marble mosaic.

4 The **COMPUTER DESK**, custom built as cherry to resemble an old-fashioned secretary, holds the family PC and a TV that can be concealed behind an awning-style lift-up door. Cubbyholes keep paper and envelopes handy.

5 **SHALLOW CUPBOARDS** built into both sides of the range surround hold spices and cooking utensils.

6 **OPEN SHELVES** on the range side of the island roll out for easy access to pots and pans. The stainless steel bowls niche are recessed for maximum comfort while working at the countertop.

For more kitchen design ideas, trends, and products, visit www.thisoldhouse.com/kitchens

MY THREE SONS

“It’s no accident that there are three metallic tiles in the backsplash, three cabinet doors above the range, and trims of pendant lights. I chose the motif of three as a tribute to my sons, Connor, 6, Alex, 10, and Kyle, 13.”

—Dorothy Clark, *Interiorscape/Interiors*



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Ask THIS OLD HOUSE

Time to Ask This Old House on PBS, Thursdays in the second half of The New This Old House Hour at 8 p.m. ET (visit www.thisoldhouse.com or check local listings).

STUD SPACING

My house was built in 1955, and its exterior walls are made of cement block. When I removed some interior walls while renovating the kitchen, I realized that the studs were spaced 24 inches on center. When I install new walls, should I keep that spacing? I plan to cover them with drywall.

Bruce Beach, East Point, AL

TOM SILVA REPLIES: Codes generally allow 24-inch on-center spacing for studs in interior nonbearing walls under certain circumstances even for load-bearing walls. But I don't see why you'd want to do it, even if you can. You don't save much money in materials or man time in installation, and the finished wall is likely to flex if you leave an R-13-filled interior wall with 2x4

studs spaced 16 inches on center and cover them with at least 1/2-inch-thick drywall. That's stiffer and more solid-feeling than anything built with 24-inch spacing.

PUMPING TANKS

How frequently should a septic tank be pumped out? We have lived in our house for four years and don't know when our tank was last pumped.

Doris Curry, Winchester, VA

RICHARD TRETHEWEAY REPLIES: Most tanks should be pumped about every three years, so it's time to have yours taken care of. If you wait too long, the solids that normally drop to the bottom of the tank will have nowhere to go but into your leach field, which is meant to absorb liquid waste only. You'll end up writing big checks to dig up your yard and replace the clogged field.

The timing for this pumping session after this one will depend on how big the tank is (your town should have a record of the tank size) how much you use it and how much solid waste you generate. If you have a small or average-size tank, a garbage disposer in the kitchen or even a lot of go for a shorter time between pumpings. But if you have a large tank or a small family travel a lot, and compact all your bathroom waste, you can probably go longer. Ask the pumpers to assess how full the tank is the next time you pump it out and then schedule accordingly. In any case, err on the side of more often rather than less. Pumping a little early won't cost much, but letting the job until the tank overflows will ruin your whole day.

FENCE SITTING

What's the best way to build a 2-foot-high fence on top of an existing concrete-block retaining wall? I was thinking of using joist hangers to connect the 2x4 posts to the wall's face.

E. M. Turt, Santa Vega, AZ

TOM SILVA REPLIES: I wouldn't do it. Joist hangers aren't designed for that purpose, especially on brittle concrete blocks. Besides, I don't think the exposed metal brackets would look all that good on a fence like this. Neither will 2x4 posts,



Although building codes allow walls that don't bear loads to be framed with studs spaced 24 inches on center, Tom Silva installs the studs 16 inches on center because that makes for a stiffer, stronger wall.



TOM SILVA
GENERAL CONTRACTOR



RICHARD TRETHEWEAY
PLUMBING & HEATING EXPERT

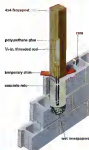


BOBB ABRAM
ROOFING CONTRACTOR



BOBB COOK
LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR

FENCE POST ON A BLOCK WALL.



which just isn't strong enough in any case. Your fence will be stronger and look better if you use 4x4 posts anchored in concrete.

To do this right, you'll have to fill the corners, the holes in the blocks, with concrete at each post location and anchor the posts in the masonry. But first, get the posts ready. Use a 1/8-inch sugar ball to bore a 1/2-inch-dia hole in the bottom of each post. Then soak the ends of the posts in a water-repelling wood preservative—you won't get another chance to do this once the posts are set. The anchors will be 3/8-inch threaded rods, each one cut 22 inches long. Spread polyurethane glue over half the rod length and screw the end that fits into each post's hole.

To fill the cores, wet the inside of the blocks and stuff wet newspaper at least 4 inches down the block wall cavity. They will act like a plug and save you from mixing more concrete than you need. Now fill the cores to the top, agitate the concrete with a stick to eliminate air pockets, smooth the surface, and stick the post rods into the mix. Make sure to keep the ends of the post

out of the concrete, you don't want them to be joined by the wet concrete or forced prematurely like wooden shims to create a 1/4- to 1/2-inch space between the wood and the concrete. Finally check that the post supports on two adjacent sides, and brace it temporarily on those two sides until the cement sets the next day.

Once you have all the posts in place, assemble the fence sections between them and remove the skims and braces. You'll now have a strong, good-looking fence that's even a little mysterious—nobody will quite know how it's staying up on the wall.

SODDY PLASTER

As we were renovating our 1820 Craftsman bungalow, the tarp covering on our roof blew off on an extremely windy day, and water poured in and collapsed some of the ceilings. Now we're wondering if the walls have been damaged as well, though they appear to be in good shape. Is there some way to check?

JOSE VILLARREAL, DETROIT, GA.

NORM ABRAHAM REBUILDS: First thing I'm to the roof back up? No sense in doing anything with the walls until everything's snug overhead. Assuming that's taken care of, you're right to be suspicious of the walls' appearance. Plaster can dry on the surface and waste inside the wall cavities. To find out, drill some 1/2-inch-diameter holes through the plaster and left and reach in with a finger, or maybe with a stiff wire. To determine if the insulation or the back side of the wall is damp, if the inner surface feel dry you should be okay. Just fill the holes with a patching plaster.

But if you do detect moisture, call in a firm that specializes in drying out water-damaged houses. They have giant fans and dehumidifiers to quickly lower the moisture content of wet items, as well as the instruments to measure progress over inside walls. With any luck, they'll have everything dried to a 10 percent moisture content in a few days. At that level, you eliminate any chance of mold taking hold on the plaster.

To find a company in your area that takes care of soggy boxes, log onto www.iaqc.org, the Website for the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification.

BATTLING BAMBOO

When we moved into our house, we had a lot of bamboo growing on a hill beside a river. Every spring the bamboo shoots

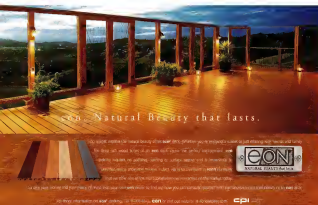
up and I have to cut it down weekly. Is there anything I can do to get rid of the bamboo aggressively?

Wayne Schwartzel,
Bismarck, Mo.

ROGER COOK REPLIES: Too bad you can't hire a panda to do this job. They happily eat up to 35 pounds of bamboo a day. But with pandas in short supply, the only practical way to get rid of bamboo is to keep cutting it down to ground level or spray it with an herbicide or both.

A small chensow will make short work of the mature stalks. Follow up with a weekly herb using sliver mower. Also, keep an eye out for shoots beyond the perimeter of the grove; some bamboos will send underground runners, called rhizomes, up to 25 feet from their base. By next season, hopefully, your bamboo will be gone.

Once bamboo is established, there are two ways to eradicate it: Chop it down to the ground and mow over it until the roots die, or poison the shoots.



WITH ALL THE SMOKING AREAS REMOVED FROM THE BUILDING, PHIL KNEW HIS BEST OPTION WAS TO HEAD STRAIGHT



If you decide to use chemicals on your bamboo, glyphosate-based herbicides are usually effective. Be sure to follow the instructions exactly. They all agree that they come in contact with, and you don't want them to reach the river. One approach I've found to be effective is to let the bamboo shoots grow to 2 or 3 feet in early spring, then spray them with herbicide. Then every time a new shoot reaches that height, spray again.

Herb's another option to consider. Rather than eliminate your grove entirely, cut it back to a manageable size, then contain it with a physical barrier. One off-the-shelf product uses thick interlocking polyethylene sheets buried about 3 feet in the ground. Containment systems should withstand vigorous frostmats but try to grow over the barrier. If any of them succeed, you'll need to remove them.

By the way, not all bamboo is such a headache. "Clump-forming" bamboo is not invasive and doesn't call for heroic containment efforts.

SEALING A FOUNDATION RACEWAY

We upgraded the electrical service in our 1940 Victorian about 10 years ago. The new wiring came into the house through an opening in the foundation wall that was originally used to pipe casters water into the house. But new when it rains, water seeps through the opening and drips on the service panel in the basement, where the circuit breakers are. My son temporarily solved the problem by laying

large piece of plywood across the house to deflect water. I was hoping you might have a better-looking solution.

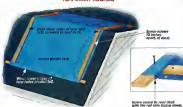
Ann Gung, Miami Beach, Fla., Mass.

NOL WILLIAMS REPLIES: First of all, don't mess with the panel. It's well made, electricity and water are a dangerous combination. It's not a problem to be ignored, either. Water in the service panel means corrosion, which can prevent the breakers from tripping when circuits overload. Now only this: It is to call a licensed electrician. However, you should be able to make the necessary leak-stopping repairs yourself.

First, find out how the water is coming in. If it's seeping in on the inside of the plastic conduit that comes through the foundation wall, the problem might be something as simple as a loose-roof cover on the gutters. That's the fitting on the exterior of the house where the outside wires make a 90-degree turn and go inside. All you need to do in this case is tighten the screws that hold the cover in place.

But if water is coming in around the outside of the conduit, which is more likely, head to the basement and look for gaps between the conduit and the concrete. For any gap there's less than 1/4 inch or so, stuff foam-backed rod into the cracks, then seal it with a two-parture sealant. This is a very flexible sealant and sticks to all sorts of building materials, even when they're slightly damp.

TEMPORARY ROOFING



For bigger gaps, head back both inside and out with hydraulic cement. Wear rubber gloves to protect your skin against chemical burns and work quickly because hydraulic cement sets up in minutes.

While you're at it, do what you can to make sure water doesn't collect near the pull box. Sloping the ground around it away from the house should help a lot. And finally, make sure your gutters aren't dumping water into this valley.

NOL WILLIAMS is a former electrical contractor and building inspector and the author of several books on electrical codes. He lives in Memphis, Tenn.

EMERGENCY ROOFING

Any hints for temporarily protecting a storm-damaged roof? We sure could have used this information during the hurricanes we had last year.

Nancy Rice, Princeton, N.J.

TOM SALVA REPLIES: Anybody who lives where hurricanes or tornados are a regular threat needs to know a little about emergency repairs. But that same know-how can be helpful in other parts of the country, too. It doesn't take much for a heavy tree limb to snap and take out part of a roof, for instance.

Basically, what you want to do is cover the damage with a woven plastic tarp that is held in place with 1x3 wood strips. Here's how I do it. First I roll one and at least twice

around a long 1x3, then screw it to the underside of the roof. The 1x3 "roll" should be against the roof so it won't collect water and debris. The rest of the tarp goes over the ridge and down the other side of the roof several feet beyond the damage. Then I roll the opposite end of the tarp around another 1x3 and screw it to the roof strapping, roll side down. Now it's just a matter of using more 1x3s and screws to hold down the tarp's sides. They don't have to be rolled in the laps. A "flat roof" isn't perfect, it's a hint, but it will keep the weather out until someone can repair the damage.

Having said that, this type of emergency repair is best left to someone who has the equipment and skill to do it safely. Roofs are treacherous, particularly when wet and debris is slippery even when dry. You don't want to be wrestling with one in high winds, either. Better to submit a claim for property insurance than to have your family submit a claim for life insurance. ■

To send questions to Ask This Old House, go to www.thisoldhouse.com/askthot or write to: Ask This Old House, c/o This Old House Magazine, 1785 Avenue of the Americas, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10036. We'll select a complete address and date to appear in future issues. Published questions will be edited for clarity and length and may be used in other media. We regret that due to volume of correspondence, we're unable to reply to unpublished questions.

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2005

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[STYLE AND THE HOME]

Iron Clad

Antique hardware resonates with history, and looks as sharp mounted on a door as it does displayed as art.



Though sought after for the design guru and interior decorator, antique hardware can also be a great way to add a touch of history to your home. A single piece can cost as little as \$20.

BY DALE KERO AND LYNN KERO

When we were boys, we loved to collect old wrought-iron hinges, handles, and latches that had been rescued from dilapidated barns near our house in upstate New York. We would spend hours comparing the craftsmanship and design variations, measuring the heat, hammer, and sweat that were cast in the pieces' creation.

Today, antique iron hardware, with its original black surface often covered by decades of paint or rust, is just starting to be more widely appreciated as a folk art form, embraced by tiny institutions that are the result of an individual craftsman's hand.

OF BLACKSMITHS AND BUTTERFLIES

The earliest American settlers depended on hardware imported from Europe, with local blacksmiths simply repairing broken hinges, handles, wagon wheels, and other utilitarian work. It wasn't until the turn of the 19th century, when colonists started mining iron deposits and building great furnaces to smelt the ore, that towns had foundries in which to shape original iron pieces. Then, blacksmiths taking a cool fire hammered hot chunks of metal into as wide as needed butterfly hinges for cupboards and drop-leaf tables, or heavy iron hinges to hold heavy plank doors.

Before American factories started turning out precast glass knobs in the late 1850s, smithies

Antique experts Leslie Kero and Lynn Kero are hosts of First in Time TV series on PBS celebrating the world of design, style, antique architecture, and more. They are also authors of the book *Antique Hardware: A Guide to the World of Iron and Steel*. Find out more at www.lesliekero.com.



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out more at www.lesliekero.com

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Show

laborious thumb latches and handles as a means of opening doors. Decorating the mounting cups in opposite ends of the handle were brass rings of brass and diamonds, or more elaborate engravings, leaves, and scalloped edges. The handle might be flat, round, or a wedge, which would be a good piece of wood.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When you see the metal, the marks on the edges, and intricate shapes are some tell-tale signs of handwork. Items with obvious historical marks were probably made after the Industrial Revolution in the mid 1800s, when perfectly formed, die-cut factory hardware came along, replacing hand-forged items.

Antique iron hardware is especially affordable. You can find strap hinges and single latches for as little as \$30 at antique yards, antique stores, and flea markets. Better design—strap hinges with a single latch—can be found for as little as \$50 and \$200. However, historically decorated pieces can command a premium.

Unless old was strong, hinges are in really good condition, upgrade from hinges are often a better bet for doors that get daily use. Horns, brass, ball and ball, and Old World Shop products are a wide range of handcrafted iron hardware that looks as authentic as any from the 18th and 19th centuries. For custom pieces, the American Association of North America (americanantiques.org) can help locate a craftsman near you.

Antique and reproduction hardware can be used to great effect on a small scale to give a new cupholder or handle a period look. Or a collection of old pulls can be hung on a wall, or tied out on a tablecloth to be used as well as admired. Leng's hand-painted straps made for his antique as an order to reveal their simple and emphasize their sculptural shapes.

Whether you put old iron straps and latches to practical use or display them like abstract art, at least one part of their appeal remains the same: they connect us to the past, and to the people who were in and out of these doors so long ago.

G&A

CURIOUS ABOUT YOUR
CURIOUS TOPICS?
TOP EXPERTS HAVE
THE ANSWERS

REFINISHING HARDWARE

I'd like to refresh these old strap hinges to use on a cabinet I'm making. What's the best way to remove the paint and protect the metal underneath? —*id, you@news.cnn.com*

This is a nice set of early American hinges with drawn profiles, S-shaped pins with a spike on one end that goes into the door or window frame, and a shaft on the other for the strap to pull on. I typically advise people to remove original paint because it's part of a piece's history but in this case, the flat finish is pretty bad-looking. To strip the paint without damaging the patina underneath, use a gentle alkaline-based paint remover such as Peel Away 1, then wipe the hinges with a mixture of equal parts of soap water and vinegar. Dry them with a soft cloth and apply a thin layer of Baker's wax to prevent further rust. Or if you want to go to a little more trouble, here's a recipe for a traditional preservative that's been used since the Middle Ages:



Age: You'll need equal parts benzoin, turpentine, and linseed oil. I like to add a teaspoon of Japan drier (available at craft stores) which makes the linseed oil dry faster. Heat the benzoin in a double boiler, then remove from heat and add the other ingredients, stirring the mixture until it forms a paste. Rub it on the iron to dry it, prevent further rust, and highlight the textures in the metal. You can also use this paste to protect other household ironwork, such as fireplace tools and eadings. —*Ken Kasper, a preservationist in Maryland, Vice, and president of the Anti-Blacksmith Association of North America*

For more ideas, www.fine-homes.com

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES HARRIS

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[LUXURIES]



This medallion gets a three-dimensional effect from sections of alternating dark walnut and lighter maple, rimmed by a border of cherry and red oak. 30 inches in diameter. \$490. Cheryll Manufacturing Corp., 800-382-6544.

A classic compass rose, in cherry, white oak, orange, mahogany and maple. 28 inches. \$2,048. Pine Lines Manufacturing, www.pinelines.com



Walnut and two African hardwoods, maple and oak, on a background of maple veneer in the swirling, scalloped pattern of this hand-carved example. 46 inches. \$2,798. Renaissance Floor Interiors, www.hardwoodfloorsandinteriors.com

More on Your Floor

Modern technology revives the age-old beauty of inlaid wood medallions

BY C.J. HUGHES PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM A. BORD, JR.

European nobles first started decorating floors with inlaid wood medallions in the 1500s, and for centuries thereafter those works were the mark of European extravagance—the only people who could afford the painstaking labor needed to create such intricate designs. It was a craftsman's art to the Sun King himself, Louis XIV, who performed the art of inlaying as he knew it today, combining precisely cut slivers of mahogany, exotic woods into dazzling, scroll-work designs on the floors of Versailles.

Some artisans still make medallions the old-fashioned way, carving each piece by hand, but many now rely on modern technology: the carbon-dioxide laser, which can quickly shape wood into just about any pattern that can be entered into its computer-controlled brain. That makes today's affordable ones so regular in fit. Which is not to say that if you pop one of these medallions into the floor of your entryway, it won't look like a million bucks.





The deep background of African adinkra sets off details in maple, oak, walnut, and wenge. 41 by 55 inches. \$2,755. Renaissance Floor Inlay.

A study in contrasts, this medallion takes on a complex mix using red/black woods—oak, maple, cherry, maple, mahogany, poplar, and wenge—and even touches of rosewood. Approx. 38 inches. \$5,000. Oakleaf Floor Designs. www.oakleaf.com



Based on a rubbing from a five-foot-tall decoration, this sliding tray has a diamond center with radiating lines in mahogany, wenge, maple, and white oak. 24 by 48 inches. \$4,000. Oakleaf Floor Designs.



This medallion gets its labyrinthine effect from abstracting lines of bloodwood, tulowood, wenge, maple, oak, and holly. 36 inches. \$1,750. Fine Lines Manufacturing.



No fewer than six varieties of wood make up this elegantly simple design. It's a subtle contrast with the lines of a hand-carved, 30 inches. \$1,300. Oak Floor. www.oakfloor.com



At around the hand-cut, 12-sided medallion that makes it a showstopper, its low-profile, wenge, red-bellied maple, and oak set out from behind cutlaid of Central African wenge. South-West Asian medallion and oak. 50 inches. \$2,755. Renaissance Floor Inlay.

A simple face of interlocking lines surrounds an eight-pointed compass in cherry, maple, and white oak. 20 inches. \$540. Oakleaf Floor Designs.



A stylized compass rose in the center, an all-starburst design is surrounded in maple and wenge with a broad-leaf design complementing the radial motif. 24 by 38 inches. \$1,200. Oakleaf Floor Designs.



With its repeated pattern and chevron geometry, this medallion in maple, oak, tulowood, wenge, and oak has the mesmerizing quality of an optical illusion—just be sure to look down before, not as, you walk on it. 38 inches. \$3,090. Oakleaf Floor Designs.

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BY JAMES HILSEY PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLES SCHULTZ



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Stairs That Disappear

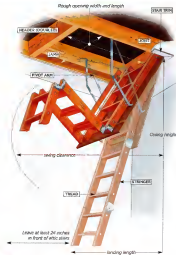
Climbing up to the attic should be easy—and safe
BY ANDY ENGEL

About a year ago, Tim Siler was halfway up a folding attic stair, trying to figure out why it wasn't working right, when a loose screw popped, snapping, and the stair swung out from under him. Tim crashed to the floor and broke his foot, an injury that forced him to spend the next six months on crutches. "The lesson? 'An attic stair is a ladder,' says the The Old House general contractor. "You wouldn't use a broken ladder, and you definitely shouldn't use a broken attic stair. Replace or repair it immediately."

Such experience may be common, but lots of people take their attic stairs for granted, or put up with ones that don't operate smoothly or have loose or broken parts. Every time you pull down the stair, check that the hinge pins and bolts are tight, the springs are anchored securely, the pivot pins are straight, and the rails and treads are intact. And when you step on it, it should feel solid. "An attic stair shouldn't move at all under your weight," says Siler.

You can get replacement parts from most manufacturers, but if the repairs are numerous or frequent, it's time for a new stair. There are plenty of choices that will fit into an existing opening—typically 22½ or 25 inches by 24 inches. Some slide, some fold, a few have risk-free collapse like an old-fashioned diving board. You have your pick of wood, aluminum, or steel in different heights, weights, and load capacities. You can find ones that normal or shallow angle, stairs that take up minimal landing space, or stairs that are tightly bolted to the floor or even to the house. (For a look at the options, turn the page.)

While you're at it, take note of road work. A road stair is a big plus when you're storing a box of Christmas ornaments. And whether you want a round or flat or a gray, yellow, or red wood finish. "Make sure it's tight, too, and make sure before setting foot on it."



GETTING THE RIGHT FIT A Before replacing an attic stairway you need at least three critical measurements: the width and length of the rough opening, and the ceiling height. **Measure the rough opening's width and length** in three different spots, at the top and bottom of the opening. Choose a stair that fits into the smallest of these measurements and is long enough for your ceiling height (you may have to trim to fit). For a folding or sliding stair is a close or other tight space, you also need to **measure how much swing clearance and landing length** the stair will need when lowered. (Make sure to check manufacturer's specs before purchasing.) To make this task easier, hang a weighted string from the header where the stair's hinge will be attached, and measure out from the string. Replacing an existing stair is a two-person project that can take a morning or a weekend, depending on your skill. But if it's 35 pounds overhead limit your string out, hire a contractor to do it for you.

www.theoldhouse.com

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Stair Roundup

No matter which stair you choose, make sure it has a load rating of at least 300 pounds, which ensures that treads, stringers, and hinges will be more robust than on lighter-duty models.



LOWEST MAINTENANCE

Metal Folding Stair

Aluminum or steel folding stairs cost more from wood, but you get long-lived, rusted construction and in the case of aluminum, significantly lighter weight. Only consider models with slip-resistant treads.

Show: The all-steel Sumner S2200 fits a 20½-inch rough opening but provides a wider stair width than that of a wooden model for a 29-inch opening. One person provides a quiet, most when closing the cover door. \$350. www.sumnerstairs.com

STRONGEST

Sliding Stair

The oldest type of attic stair is a counterbalanced spring-and-weight ladder that gently slides to the floor when you pull down the cover door. Since they move, these stairs are sturdy, rigid, and can hold up to 800 pounds—more than any other type. No other pull-down stair can reach as high, either some models fit ceiling-clear 12 feet. Keep it noted: There has to be sufficient clearance under the roof for the ladder to slide up, and the attic floor must be free of clutter along its path.

Show: The Steelcase Stairway Co. Model 26 can handle 600-pound loads. Its weight is counterbalanced by four spring-loaded chains, which allow you to control the ladder's slide with one hand. \$850. www.staircase.com

HIGHEST COMPACT

Telescoping Stair

The big advantage of its telescopic-style stair is how easily it fits into tight spaces even a closet. When a folding stair needs, several feet beyond the ceiling opening to unfold, telescoping stairs extend out in a straight line. They also adjust automatically to ceiling height. There's no trimming needed at installation.

Show: This Clack made all aluminum model weighs 100 pounds and has a load capacity of 300 pounds. The cover door is waterproofed and insulated to R-4. \$425. Clack USA. www.clackusa.com

HIGHEST COMMON

Wood Folding Stair

Two ½-inch-ladder sections unfold when the stair is opened, allowing it to reach the floor. When closed, all the sections tuck up neatly inside the rough opening. Treads range from 5½ to 1½ inches thick, thinner ones typically have steel support rails underneath. **Show:** A pine stair from Sweden has 1½-inch-thick treads, rated for 350 pounds. The door is weatherstripped and insulated with R-10 foam. \$375. Resource Conservation Technology. 409-866-0486

For more on this, go to www.houzz.com and type "attic stairs" in the search box.

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TROUBLESHOOTING
COMMON PROBLEMS

4 GAUGES AT HINGES
A sure sign that something is sagging, putting excessive strain on the hinges. Check and tighten all bolts on the hinges, and make sure the jamba is snugly anchored, as described below. A gap like this could also result from a bottom section that has not been properly trimmed to fit.



A BENT PIVOT ARM An arm that's out of alignment makes it difficult to open and close the stair and doesn't provide necessary support when the stair is down. In this case, the bent arm means the spring can't function as a counterbalance, increasing the strain on the pivot points and the chance of screwdriver loosening. Buy a replacement arm, available from most attic stair manufacturers, and bolt it onto the jamba.

BOARD-DOOR TRIM PULLING AWAY FROM THE CEILING This is an unmistakable sign that the stair's jamba is loose and pressing down on the trim around the access door. To fix it, push the trim up flush with the ceiling and hold it in place with shims dipped between the jamba and the framing, wedging at the hinge end and on the sides directly beneath the pivot arms. Reson the jamba through the shims using 1/4d common nails, wood screws, or lag screws. Drywall screws or bare nails aren't strong enough.

handrails

Massachusetts homeowner Leonard Flint needed handrails in his stairways, but was puzzled by how to put them in. He emailed Ask The Old House, and Tom Silva showed up to lend an expert hand.



irrigation

Outside of Los Angeles Roger Cook and specialist Bob Gidycz help homeowner Sherry Shook restore water to her slice of the high desert.

sinks

Minnesota homeowner Anne McCadden tried to fix her rusty bathroom and kitchen with a potstickers, Richard Trethewey provided a more professional solution.



closets

California couple Brandon and Marlene Gauthier's sliding closet doors were stuck. They emailed Ask The Old House, and before long Tom Silva put them back on track.



what's your problem?

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Look, But Don't Touch?

Landmark status for your house can mean money in your pocket, but it may come with strings attached

BY DANIEL AXST



Rosemary Diaz is proud of her 1920 Normandy Revival house and the early 20th-century houses that surround it in Yonkers, New York. She'd never want anything to change the character of the community. But when local officials considered redesigning her Park Hill drives, Diaz balked. "I'm very much attached to the neighborhood and my house, so it was very difficult for me to take a stand against it," she says. "But it was so concrete."

Like many homeowners, Diaz was afraid that owning a "historic" home would mean she couldn't freely make whatever alterations

she wanted to her property. For example, if her house had been landmarked (which, in the end, it wasn't), she would have had to get approval for any change to the facade, from a new paint color to replacing roof shingles.

But there are other types of historic-house designations that impose no such constraints,

Preservation restrictions might impinge on your right to redesign your porch, but they can also prevent your neighbor from erecting a vinyl-sided McMansion in place of the clapboard saltbox next door.

78,000

properties have been added to the National Register of Historic Places since the register was created in 1966.

and even come with big advantages. So if you own an old house—or are thinking of buying one—it's pays to understand the various ways you can take advantage of its historic status.

THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The best-known historic-house designation is a listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a roster of properties administered by the National Park Service. While such a listing saddles a house's period architectural character—and often prestige that may lead to a modest resale boost—it's a consolation "honor" and carries no restrictions on what the owner can do to the property.

That means a listing is protective, not

The downside of a historic district is having regulations. The upside is gaining tax breaks and an increase in property value.

Two years ago, for example, the National Register-listed Middleburg Mansion, at 5594 Querry Lane in Charlotte Hills, Illinois, was threatened by a local church's plan to use a parking lot. Even the country's early 2,500 National Historic Landmarks, a much more honorary designation bestowed on properties deemed to "possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or representing the heritage of the United States," can be altered or bulldozed.

So why bother going to the trouble of applying for a National Register listing? The answer is simple: tax breaks.

If your house is at least 50 years old and is a good example of a period architectural style, getting a listing can open the door to significant financial benefits—either income tax credits and/or municipal property-tax reductions—that can offset the cost of fixing the place up. And, for instance, eligible owners of National Register-listed houses up to a 50 percent annual reduction in their property taxes. Other states allow municipalities to lower property taxes on restored houses or offer non-voluntarily rate. (For more information on National Register listing and its applications, go to www.nps.gov/learning/index.)

STATE AND LOCAL DESIGNATIONS

In addition to National Register listing are the myriad designations administered by states and municipalities, the most common of which are local historic districts. Unlike their honorary counterparts, these are considered "restrictive"

and require current and potential owners of old houses to weigh the pros and cons more carefully.

On the upside, inclusion as a local historic district can truly accomplish a government's goal of keeping her houses and neighborhood intact for future generations. There are also considerable financial benefits, in the form of tax breaks that parallel those for owners of National Register-listed houses, and significantly higher resale values. In Charleston, South Carolina, for instance, houses in the town's official historic district sold for 21 percent more, all other factors being equal, than houses not in the district, according to a 2008 report by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. On the downside—as a historic district goes some way to help you resist an upgrade your property

George Thomas, an architectural historian at Philadelphia, runs up against this situation all the time. In many historic sections of town, he says, simply adding a new porch light can be problematic. But that degree of restrictiveness may be the exception more than the rule. In most places, historic-house regulations are not all that oppressive, says Paul Cassey, director of the University of Georgia's Center for Community Design and Preservation. He surveys preservation controversies around the country and, based on 708 responses, found that local boards approved required changes more than 91 percent of the time. Of course, that may leave at least a touch to do with homeowners knowing what alterations will

pass muster as it does with neighborhood preservation boards. Both agencies with explicit historic-preservation boards, regulations typically end at the front door, with a house's exterior, and often only the facade. Changes that are invisible from the street, such as a rear addition that alters local zoning requirements, are likely to be approved, if they are required at all.

To homeowners who rely on their oldest possessions for their neighborhood's architectural integrity, shoring by historic-district restrictions is worth the hassle, because the same regulations that encourage you to keep your porch also protect you from a neighbor demolishing or building the dilapidated sidewalk and door and put up a vinyl-sided McMansion in place. And the cost of making improvements starts to look a lot less daunting when you know that the house is a lasting part of the life.

For more on coping with regulations, visit www.thisoldhouse.com and type "living" in the search bar.



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Installing Undercabinet Lighting

BY JOSEPH DEJONG PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOLLY SMITH

There's a missing element in most American kitchens, and it's not a \$7,500 range or a 4-door refrigerator. No, it's simply good lighting. And a well-lit kitchen begins with undercabinet task lighting. These hidden fixtures, which are fairly easy to install beneath upper wall cabinets, bring the counter-top in bright white light—a boon for everything from doing veggie to making recipes. Connect the fixtures to a dimmer switch, as shown here, and you also have the key to dramatic accent lighting or a night light for midnight snackers.

If you're a bit tentative about working with electricity, don't worry. This installation is simple and shock-free, as long as you cut the juice at the breaker box first.

TOOLS FOR THIS PROJECT

DRYWALL SAW

(to cut the hole for a new electrical box)

WIRE STRIPPERS

(to remove insulation from wires)

CORDLESS DRILL

(to drive screws and bore holes)

LINEMAN'S PLIERS

(to cut and twist together wires)

FLAT PRY BAR

(to remove the old electrical box)

PHILLIPS AND SLOTTED SCREWDRIVERS

1/2-INCH SPADE BIT

(to bore a hole in the wall for a new cable)

COST:
\$100 to \$125
(to install one 23-inch-long halogen fixture and dimmer)

TIME:
2 to 3 hours

DIFFICULTY LEVEL:
Relatively easy, requires following the directions, but no heavy lifting



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You can do it.
We can help.



SHOPPING LIST

1. LIGHT FIXTURE

Undercabinet lights are available in fluorescent, halogen, and incandescent models. We chose low-voltage halogen for its bright yet soft light (see "Choosing the Light" for right bottom). Measure upper wall cabinets to determine what length fixture is required—24 inches and 42 inches are typical sizes. You can snap them together for long runs.

2. DIMMER SWITCH

Needs to be compatible with the light fixture you choose.

3. GFCI RECEPTACLE

Once installed, it's a safety device. A ground fault circuit interrupter will shut off automatically if you receive a shock.

4. TWO-STRAND, OLD-WORK ELECTRICAL BOX

The latter box replaces the existing single-pole receptacle type in the backspash wall. An "old-work" box is for nonsplicing—its first knockout behind the device is to lock it in place.

5. TWO-STRAND WALL PLATE

15/32-IN. ODD-METALLIZED ELECTRICAL CABLE Photo-resistant cable often referred to as Romex. A trade name. The 15/32 designation refers to its two 14-gauge copper wires—it's rated and it's hot. It also holds a bare ground wire. You'll need 4 feet of cable. Includes 300-volt rating, but you'll cut from the 100-foot roll.

7. GROUNDING RING, CONNECTOR, CABLE CONNECTOR, WIRE CONNECTORS

8. WOOD-OR PLASTIC CABLE PROTECTOR

May be required by some jurisdictions to protect exposed cable. Made from wood or plastic. "Nonmetallic" means it's 1/2 inch thick.

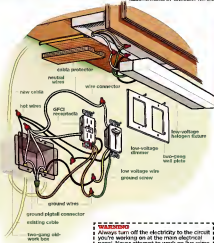
Retrofitting undercabinet lights is like any add-on electrical project: The key is finding a nearby source for electricity. The easiest undercabinet light installation employs features that merely plug into an outlet, but the exposed cord can be an eyesore.

That's why we opted for hardwired fixtures, which require running 15/32 electrical cable behind the wall. However, we were able to simplify this process by tapping into a nearby backspash outlet, which means the new cable only has to travel a couple of feet to the bottom of the upper cabinets.

While doing the wiring, we replaced the backspash out-

let with a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlet. Code now requires all basements, garages, and all "wet" rooms to have protection from GFCIs, which instantaneously cut power when they sense a short circuit. We also added a switch for the new light, which required us to replace the old electrical box with one double the size. Enlarging the hole for the box is simple in drywall (see Step #2). If your backsplash is laminate or solid surfacing, drill a hole in the two new corners and cut out the wall with a saber saw and a fine-tooth blade. If you have tile or stone, carefully use a Dremel-type tool with a carbide bit.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GREGORY NEMEC



STEP BY STEP



1

TRACE OUTLINE OF NEW ELECTRICAL BOX

- Turn off the electricity to the kitchen at the main electrical panel. To be sure the power is off, plug a radio into the countertop wall outlet you'll be tapping for electricity, and make sure the radio remains silent when switched on. Or you can use a lamp—and make sure it doesn't light.
- Remove the wall plate, then disconnect the wires from the receptacle and remove it from the electrical box.
- The box is nailed to a wall stud on one side or the other. Find out which by peeling between the sides of the box and the drywall.
- Hold a two-pole, old-work electrical box over the existing box in the wall so the top-right corner of the hole is on the unattached side of the existing box—away from the stud—and then trace around it with a pencil (LEFT).



2

CUT A HOLE FOR THE NEW BOX

- Use a drywall saw to cut along the pencil lines (LEFT). Keep your cut shallow and be aware of any resistance, in case there are hidden pipes or cables in the wall.
- After enlarging the hole, make sure the cable coming into the electrical box is loose; then use a flat pry bar to remove it (RIGHT).



3

RUN A NEW LENGTH OF CABLE

- Hold the light fixture in place temporarily and locate the predrilled hole in the back that you will knock out to create an opening for the cable.
- Make a mark on the wall straight back from this "knockout" plug. Use a stud finder to see if there's a wall stud between the mark and the hole for the electrical box. If so, make your mark to the other side of the stud.
- Use a 3/8-inch-diameter cordless bit to drill through the wall directly below the upper wall cabinet. Or if the plywood back of the cabinet extends down into the wall, bore the hole through the plywood.
- Cut a length of 15/32 non-metallic electronic cable long enough to reach from the 3/8-inch hole in the two-pole box hole, plus 24 inches.
- Feed one end of the cable into the 3/8-inch hole bored in the upper backsplash wall.
- Then gently reach into the hole where the electrical box will be installed, grab the cable end and pull it through into the kitchen (LEFT).



4 INSTALL THE LIGHT FIXTURE

- Remove the cover and the metal socket strip that holds the bulbs from the light fixture so you have room to work.
- Hold the fixture against the underside of the cabinet, then slide it forward until it's hidden behind the cabinet's front edge.
- Screw it to the cabinet with the screws provided (LEFT).
- Use a dotted screwdriver to pry the round knockout plug from the side of the light fixture.
- Install a cable connector in the knockout hole to hold the cable in place, and protect it from the fixture's sharp edges (RIGHT).
- Strip away 6 inches of the outer plastic sheathing from the end of the cable.
- Feed the cable through the connector.
- Tighten the connector screws to secure the cable. Be sure the connector clamps down on the cable's plastic sheathing, not the individual wires.



7 CONNECT THE NEW DIMMER SWITCH

- Take the loose end of the remaining black wire and connect it to the black wire on the dimmer switch, using a wire connector.
- Attach the dimmer's yellow wire to the black wire coming from the newly installed light fixture (LEFT).
- Connect the bare copper ground wire coming from the GFCI to the dimmer's green grounding wire, using a wire connector.
- Connect the first white wire to the dimmer's white wire, using a wire connector.
- Carefully tuck the excess wires into the box, then secure the GFCI and dimmer switch with the screws provided.

5 INSTALL THE NEW ELECTRICAL BOX

- Hold the new two-gang electrical box close to the hole you cut in the backsplash wall.
- Feed the end of the existing cable—the one that was attached to the soapplate—into the two-gang box.
- Then pull the end of the cable coming from the light fixture into the box also.
- Next, push the box into the hole and press it tightly against the wall (LEFT).
- Note that the box has two screws, one in each diagonal corner. As you begin to tighten the screws, the box's plastic rim will flip up behind the drywall.
- Continue to tighten the screws until you feel the box pull tight against the rear of the drywall, locking the box in place.

TIP: Before snugging the two-gang box in the wall, test it to make sure the first pop-up.



8 FINALIZE FIXTURE AND WALL PLATE

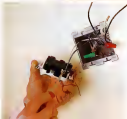
- Start by reinstalling the socket strip in the fixture, but don't put the bulbs in them yet.
- Inside each fixture are a white, a black, and a green wire. Connect them to the wires of the same color coming from the cable, using wire connectors (black to black, white to white, and bare copper to green).
- Once the wiring is complete, add the bulbs to the socket strip and install the cover on the fixture.
- Then screw on the two-gang wall plate (LEFT).
- Turn the power back on and test your work.

TIP: Never touch a halogen bulb with your bare hands; your natural skin oils can damage the bulb. It can also get extremely hot!

6 INSTALL A GFCI OUTLET

- Join the bare copper grounding wires from both the existing and new cable with a green twist-on connector (see the wiring diagram on the far left, page).
- Wrap the pigtail around the green grounding screw on the GFCI, leaving at least 4 inches of the end of the wire sticking out beyond the screw.
- Peel the plastic sheathing off the remaining cable you bought, separate the white wire, and cut two 6-inch-long pieces. Strip 3/4 inch of insulation off their ends with wire strippers and join them to both white wires in the box with a wire connector.
- Fasten the other end of one of the 6-inch white wires to the silver GFCI screw terminal marked "white-wire line."
- Cut two 6-inch-long black wires, as you did the white ones, strip 3/4 inch of insulation, and join them to the black wire coming from the existing (soapplate) cable.
- Fasten the free end of one of these wires to the "black-wire line" GFCI terminal (LEFT).

TIP: Twist wires together with downcut pliers before screwing on wire-connectors.



CHOOSING THE LIGHT

THERE ARE THREE BASIC TYPES OF BULBS USED FOR UNDERCABINET LIGHTING: FLUORESCENT, QUANTUM-HALOGEN, AND XENON.



Fluorescents burn cooler, use less electricity, and are more affordable, but they can flicker, flicker, and produce a yellowish light. Choose a fluorescent fixture with a high-quality electronic ballast for quick starts and quiet operation, and use a cool-white bulb. Fluorescent fixtures operate at regular line voltage (120 volts).

Halogen and xenon bulbs cost more to operate and replace, but they emit a very bright white light. Halogens light is brightest, but xenon burns cooler and lasts longer. Xenon fixtures use low voltage, a transformer steps the voltage down from 120 to 12 or 20 volts. Halogen fixtures come either way: if choosing low voltage, look for a fixture with a built-in transformer.

ONE MAN SETS HIS SIGHTS ON A WEEKEND
HOUSE WITH THE LOOK AND FEEL OF
A 19TH-CENTURY COASTAL COTTAGE

SHINGLE MINDED

With four distinct rooflines, multiple porches, and fanciful details, the wedding house was built in the 19th-century Shingle style, which began in seaside resorts in the Northeast. The stone wall was purposely built low and topped with a picket fence to enable the owner to sit on his back porch and wave to his neighbors.

BY JOHN MARCUS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE WILSON STYLING BY HEIDI LEISS

You could say that the house that Michael Barber built began in a port in a storm. "I was sailing from Rhode Island to New Jersey," he remembers, "and got some really bad weather. I had to get off the water, so I called an old friend who lived in Connecticut, and he said he had a slip I could use." Mike had found his safe harbor.

The storm passed, but before Mike got back on the boat, he became smitten with the area, in particular with the scenic cove of Flowerport. It was clear that the New York-based financial analyst began his quest for a weekend home.

"I grew up on the beach," Mike says. "I'd done reconnaissance of houses in the New Jersey shore, and I knew exactly what I wanted: a charming, old beach house with shingle siding and lots of porches. And I was hell-bent on getting one. If I had found a five-cupper from the 1890s I would have bought it in a second." But as months of searching, nothing like that became available.

"There was one place that had been on the market the whole time I was looking," Mike recalls. "A lovely little Cape on a nice corner lot, right on the water, but a block from the water—it was priced way too high, though. One day my realtor told me the price had come down, but I needed to make an offer that day." Mike did, and the house was his.

STARTING OVER

The 1947 Cape hardly fulfilled his desire of a vintage seaside cottage. "It was basically a one-room house with a porch that had been turned into living space. There was no insulation, and it was freezing. I slept in the attic on a mattress on the floor because I couldn't fit a box spring upstairs, and I could only stand up in the middle of the room. I'd done enough renovations over the years to know that you couldn't fix up this house."

So one night Mike threw a big demolition party, and he and his friends tore the place right to the ground using sledgehammers and an old army truck to pull down the walls. Then he and local architect Susan Dwyer, who specializes in new houses that look old, set out to recreate a classic Shingle-style shore house on the property.

"Mike and I sat down together in my office one Saturday morning (that continued up to 10

BELOW LEFT: An informal dining area off the family room is set in a bay topped with port-hole windows, which it actually the base of the house's octagonal tower. A custom-designed dining table and Windsor chairs, from Ethan Allen, have a vintage look that fits the house.

BELOW RIGHT: Built into a hallway between the kitchen and the foyer is a cherry-wood bar, which comes in handy when the homeowners throw parties. The glass-front upper cabinets hold glasses, while cabinets below them provide wine storage.



Creating the design and elevations behind cabinetry surely gives the small gallery kitchen a custom look. It is open to the family room through a large pass-through (see the left). The sink, backsplash, and countertop are made from painted concrete. "It's not traditional, but I like the distressed, rustic look," says the homeowner.



A reproduction figure hangs from the beaver's nest ceiling of a small recessed-in porch in the massive foyer.

WHAT THEY DID

- TOMB DOWN THE EXISTING HOUSE AND GARAGE.** A rundown 1947 Cape was razed to make room for a new 3,800-square-foot, three-story L-shaped house on the small lot.
- CARVED OUT FIRST-FLOOR LIVING SPACE.** The downstairs holds a dining room, living room and garage in one wing, and an entry, foyer, kitchen, breakfast nook and family room in the other.
- ADDED A KITCHEN AND LAP POOL.** In the triangular backyard space created by the right-angled wings of the house is a basketball

terrace, which can be accessed by French doors throughout the first floor and a narrow lap pool and spa.

CREATED SECOND-FLOOR BEDROOM SUITES AND A HOME OFFICE. Two of the three bedrooms, each with its own bath, have porches. The home office is just opposite the top of the circular stair.

USED KITCHEN SPACE FOR A KID'S BEDROOM SUITE. The third floor has built-in bunkie beds and an adjoining bathroom.



and put nailed it," says Driscoll of the house, the two placed a gambrel-roofed structure wrapped with cedar shingles and accented with painted wood trim.

But as he started to lose lots of weekend guests, Mike wanted four bedroom suites, plus a first-floor bath, a formal living room and dining room, a home office, and a family room. Though the house was a block away from the sea, he also wanted water views. Outside, he hoped to find room for a pool.

A TIGHT SQUEEZE

The resulting 3,800-square-foot house is built right as a ship and artfully wedged onto a tricky triangular lot. "The site dictated how we fit everything in," the architect says. "We were basically squeezing ten pounds of stuff into a five-pound bag."

It was Mike who came up with the idea of making the house conform to the lot, creating an L-shaped structure with two one-room-deep wings. One back, a blossoming patio fills in the area between the wings, with a sunroom lap pool and spa at its 90-degree angle between the ends of the house. Driscoll used the L configuration to create two distinct living spaces. "One wing is the formal wing—dining room and living room. The other wing is informal—kitchen and family room." Nearly all the rooms open onto the patio.

Driscoll's concept for the upper floors were "Mike's Weekend Inn." The second floor holds three bedrooms, each with its own bathroom, some with water views and their own porches. On the third floor, Mike wanted a bedroom and bath designed specifically for his young nephew, who was frequent visitor. So that son built in twin beds with trundle underneath and a bedroom wall decorated with sailor's signal flags that spell out "Brush your teeth."

From the start, possibly as a three-story house in a neighborhood where most of the homes are two- or two-and-a-half-story Capes, but the distinct design features of Shingle style help make the house seem smaller. "The gambrel roof helps us keep the scale of the house down,"

ARCHITECT LEFT: The octagonal room-sized porch is three stories up from one of the second-floor guest rooms. It has expansive views of the sea.

ARCHITECT RIGHT: A port-hole window lets light into an arched vestibule on the second floor. The door leads into a curved balcony that runs across the center of the house.

For design information, visit www.shingledesign.com and type "Built in Shingle" in search box.



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TOP LEFT: The living room fireplace features a cherry mantel and a painted surround designed with nautical rope molding and a two-tiered seashell (ABOVE). The marine-blue tile was sandblasted to simulate sea glass.

TOP RIGHT: The March track wall between the dining and living rooms features structural posts and holds narrow bookcases that flank the two doorways. Two pairs of doors double duty: supporting the two spaces when closed and cleverly concealing the bookshelves when open.

Damon says. "It goes in three stacks for function, but because the third floor is integrated into the steps, lower slope of the gable, it gives the house a two-story appearance."

Throughout the interior Mike and the architect worked hard to create the feel of a 200-year-old finely crafted home, while making the small rooms seem larger. They used Douglas fir for the doors, put wax on the columns, installed marble countertops and nickel fixtures in all the bathrooms—all of which would have been used as the main of the canopy. In addition, many rooms have built-in cabinetry. "We did this to save space and also to reflect the Craftsman aesthetics of the period," says Damon, who tucked cabinets, bookcases, and closets into eaves and under windows throughout the house.

NAUTICAL TOUCHES

Storage solutions combined historical practice with the needs of boatbuilders. "On a boat virtually everything—rifle, tools, books—is built in, so I wanted the house to reflect that design sense as well," Mike says. Many of the closets and cabinets built into eaves have nautical style rope pulls, which he flanked with the doors so that no knots got lost.

Damon had some fun by designing two rooms—a square one over the garage and an octagonal "lightroom" tower on the side of the house nearest the water. The octagonal tower began as a bay window at the first-floor family room and serves as the screened porch for a second-floor bedroom. The architect also stuck in many portable windows as he clambered into walls and floors. "Sun, they're windows," he says. "They also let in light and accentuate the nautical theme."

Mike also requested custom stonework, that results in a lot of local marine history. Baywatch was once a center of the oyster trade, and the scraggy oyster boats would arrive with their holds full of stones for the hulls. The weathered and rounded stones were dumped on the local shores to make room for the oyster harvest. It wasn't long before they were being used in local boat construction projects.

"If you walk around town, you see those stones a lot," says Mike. "I was determined to get that look, even though the stones are only hard to find now." Eventually, the construction crew found more from a Connecticut area that matched the look, and used them to build a high-high wall at the front property line and to cover the wall of the garage, giving the windows peeking above the look of a 19th-century carriage house.

"Just looking at this house you would immediately know you're on the New England coast," says Damon. But, Mike hopes, you might not think the house was built in the 21st century. ■

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JUICE ON THE LOOSE

Tangled up in cordless-tool choices?
We give you power over the options

BY MARK FERRER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES SCHILLER

If it weren't for batteries, the world would be one inconvenient place. From laptop computers to cell phones to submersibles, interchangeable batteries provide the juice that keeps us mobile. And power tools have taken to the technology bigtime. Just about any tool, from the ubiquitous drill (the first to ditch its cord) to more specialized offerings like impact drivers and reciprocating saws, comes battery-powered these days. That means you can work most anywhere you have a mind to.

But clipping a battery on a tool—while it lets you run it up to the roof or under the porch without fear of breaking your neck when you trip on the extension cord—doesn't make it the equal of its plug-in brethren. Even the most capable battery has limits, and getting the most out of a cordless tool requires knowing a few things.

You've come to the right place. For the lowdown on what to look for in batteries and chargers, plus what's new in the world of cordless (saw, gun, anyway), take the TOH tour

It meets the unrelenting torque to drill the undrillable hole. This drill/driver can be fitted with optional quick-change chucks for sizes of bits, making up the adjustable right-angle chuck choice. New Festool TDK 12, \$435.



CORDLESS TOOL CHECKLIST

As much as power supply affects performance, you don't size through a filter with a battery. There are plenty of other factors to take into account before buying a cordless tool, including weight, cost, and the quality of the components. Internal gearing is more durable than plastic. And not every tool that can be battery-powered should be. If all your drilling is within reach of electrical outlets, why pay extra for portability? Here are some other things to consider:

BALANCE: Even a small battery if it isn't the wrong place can be heavy enough to make a tool awkward to use. Some tools have their battery packs inside the handle; others have it mounted below. You can judge balance simply by the charging lead weight. You have to hold the tool.

ERGONOMICS: A tool with a coin-rollable grip is easier to use for longer periods. Most cordless drills, for example, are either pistol-grip (with the handle at the end of the drill) or T-handle (with the handle closer to the middle of the tool body), and each has a different feel. "Bulk-grip" handles are no-clip; they also dampen vibrations that can numb nerves.

WEIGHT: Battery weight increases with every volt. With 14.4v batteries and above, the pack may even mean portable devices to disassemble. In fact, drilling and more weight, some tools can be fitted with detachable power packs that can be used as a tool—a feature you'll be grateful for if you have a lot of screw to drive.

COMPATIBILITY: Every cordless tool comes with its own particular battery and charger and, free, if only less interchangeable. When buying tools from the same manufacturer, to avoid a cheaper plus, look for families of tools that can use the same battery.



Great for light jobs around the house, this driver is **easy to hold** and easy to store—just slip it in a pocket or belt pouch. Variable torque settings bring the most out of a relatively modest 4.8v battery. Includes COORD, \$88.



Drilling holes in concrete and masonry calls for the **rigged features** of a heavy-duty drill. A half-inch locking chuck with carbide jaws holds bits securely, and the rotating handle lets you pull without arms bending. One lb., rugged PWZ, \$249.



Many things come in this small package, including an on-board bit storage, a sliding handle and built-in LED light. The battery **stays in the tool for charging**, so when the juice runs out, you both get a rest. Craftsman 1400, \$35.



Squeezing a rattle tube never felt like that much effort to us, but why struggle at all? A power trigger with a variable-speed switch comes out even the shyest go-to, with **reliably smooth results**. Interchangeable nut tightens adjustable cable tubes of various sizes. Milwaukee 6660-21, \$380.



With the guts to drive 1/2-inch steel up to 21/2 inches long, this tool may become a fish carpenter's favorite. **Quiet** Cordless capability means **no compressor and no air hose to drag around**, and no fuel fumes to keep levels of air safety. Includes 25, \$279.

OH, THE PLACES THEY'LL GO

Cutting the cord has opened up a whole world of creative uses for power tools. Ski-race coaches use cordless drills and 20-inch ice bits to poke holes in the snow for slalom gates. Rescue workers reach for cordless reciprocating saws to fillet crushed auto roofs. Surgeons wield cordless cranial saws. And though you won't find it in any manual, a cordless drill has been used to spin the blades of a blender jar for on-the-go margaritas.

YOU'VE GOT THE POWER

Portable electronics like laptops and iPods finally tip the scales. But cordless tools are "high-draw" devices that give power, perfectly when needed, to generate the torque or turning force needed to slice into hardwood or propel saw teeth through tree limbs. They typically get it from one of two types of batteries.

NICKEL-CADMIUM: This is the most common type of tool battery. No surprise, perhaps, considering that the first one was developed more than 100 years ago. NiCds (called "nicads") are relatively inexpensive and don't require sophisticated chargers. They're steady performers, producing a constant voltage until just before depletion, and divide labor anywhere from 500 to 1,000 charge cycles. Power nicad batteries are less likely to suffer from the dreaded "memory effect," which can keep a battery from charging properly if it has been repeatedly recharged without being fully discharged.

NICKEL-METAL-HYDRIDE: NiMH batteries can store twice the energy of nicads, so the cells needed for a given voltage can be lighter and smaller. They're not susceptible to memory problems, so you can top off a battery pack at any time. And like nicads, they deliver steady voltage until just before giving out. But they are more sensitive to cold temperatures than nicads, tend to "self-discharge" faster (any battery loses power while sitting on the shelf), and don't last through as many recharge cycles. Also, they're expensive—expect to pay up to a third more for an NiMH tool than for an identical nickel-powered model.

TERMINAL TECHNOLOGY

CELL PACKS: Power tool batteries are actually collections of "cells," each with a voltage ranging from 1.2V to 3V. Cells are grouped together in a battery "pack," sometimes also called a "container." For example, ten 1.2 volt cells make a 12-volt battery pack.

VOLTAGE: A lot to water pressure. This is the force with which electrons can be pushed through circuitry. Cordless tools range from 4.8V to 24V. Greater force turns bigger bits or spins a saw blade through harder wood.

AMPERE HOURS: A factor in determining how much work a battery can do. Multiply a battery's voltage by its amp hour (AH) rating. The result is "watt hours," and more is better. For example, a 14.4V battery rated at 2.6AH would perform longer at a given task than a 12V tool would than an 18V battery rated at 1.6AH (24.0 watt hour).

When you're cutting intricate scrollwork, you don't want a power cord getting in the way. The answer's got to be a **built-in blade speeder** for cutting hot blades and a trigger lock to prevent accidental startup. Bosch 5238R \$465



I've didn't know better until I took this electronic drill and designed by engineers from a smaller KODAK. The hook at the base doubles as a rotating work light in auxiliary handle keeps torque under control. Bosch 5238R \$352



When the going gets tough, the tough gets a reciprocating saw, which cuts through just about anything. This one has an **articulating handle** to reach into awkward places. Milwaukee 604M-30 Sawzall \$295

CORDLESS IN SPACE

When Apollo astronauts had to drill core samples from beneath the lunar surface, NASA needed a portable tool to make the job easier. Black & Decker got the assignment, which led to the first commercial cordless drill. The latest power tool in space is the PCT—patrol-grip tool—used to drive fasteners. The tool contains a microprocessor that can be programmed to control torque, speed, the number of revolutions, or even run a specific sequence of actions.

Out in the yard cutting fence posts is up on the tool cutting fence posts is up on the tool. An **ultra-thin-kernel blade** slices smoothly through wood, making the most of every 60 up-flare the saw's "burst" charger. Porter-Cable 6645 \$325



TAKING CARE OF TOOLS AND BATTERIES

Cardless tools don't need much in the way of maintenance. Keeping them clean is the best thing you can do, and there's a matter of regularly brushing sawdust and accumulated grime away from moving parts such as chucks and chuck jaws (drills), blade guards and bevel adjustment guides (saws), and saw shoes (lawn mowers and mowers). If the tool gets a lot of use, extra brushes will have to be replaced eventually.

Batteries and chargers are a bit more finicky and require special treatment. If you want to get the most out of them, here are some tips to follow:

- **CHARGE IT CORRECTLY.** Charging a cool tool and battery results in a more complete charge. *Avoid* charging a warm battery.

- **AVOID STORAGE EXTREMES.** Once a battery is charged, store it in a cool place (60°F is ideal). High heat promotes speed self-discharge, and temperatures above 62°F can do permanent damage. If you're storing the tool for more than a week, disconnect the battery.

- **DON'T OVERCHARGE IT.** Recharge a battery when its tool's performance begins to wane. Trying to wring every last volt out of a battery before recharging shortens its life.

- **CONDITION IT.** As a rechargeable battery begins to die, you'll notice ever-shorter run times. But before recycling it, try conditioning it to remove any memory effects. Some chargers have a conditioning mode that restores life to fatigued batteries. If that doesn't work, then it's time for a new one.

- **KEEP A LID ON IT.** Loose main power circuitry or a bit of kink that accidentally tucks both terminals can short-circuit the battery and even cause a fire. If the battery came with a protective storage cap, use it.

- **KEEP IT CLEAN.** Forest assaults of white powder on a battery or charger only indicate that the battery has been stressed by a voltage-overvoltage charger. The battery could still be okay, but the charger should be replaced. If a battery doesn't seem to charge fully, try dividing the contacts on the battery using a cotton swab moistened in alcohol.



Because its percussive action is directed against the side of the bit, an impact driver delivers a unilateral rotational force—that one produces twice the torque of a drill driver—ideal for driving lag bolts and decking screws. Bosch 25029 \$79



The same battery powers both the probing head flashlight and powerful chisel bit. The 12V MAX battery means the heavy-duty drill weighs less and runs longer than comparable metal tools. Makita ERTW400L 12V and flashlight kit, also sold separately. \$75



If your hands are better than mine, how about the hand? One body—and battery—controls a drill, router, reciprocating saw, circular saw and sander (the last two shared). Sliding downy-hornie variable-speed slider. Black & Decker HTM35-S, \$129



An angle drill can rotate into places *unobtainable* for other hand tools, and the variable-speed paddle switch gives the user plenty of control in tight spots. DeWalt DW9694-2 \$152

WHEN BATTERIES BITE THE DUST

In an effort to keep batteries out of landfills, where they can leach toxic components into the soil, the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation sponsors drop boxes in many home centers (go to www.rbc.org to find the location nearest you). Or you can return worn-out batteries to the manufacturer or to an authorized service center listed in the tool's manual. Don't try to wash out old nickel batteries in the trash is against the law.

For more on going cordless, www.thisishouse.com and type "cordless" in the search box.

Keep what works and lose what doesn't—
that's the mantra
for making an inspiration real.



BY SALLIE GRADY PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE TIGHE STYLED BY SAMANTHA CODLING

GREAT

ADAPTATION



How a
1920s
butler's
pantry
inspired
a very
21st-century
kitchen

It usually happens in a doctor's office or in Barnes & Noble on a Saturday afternoon. Mindfully leafing through a magazine, you halt suddenly, awestruck by the great room, deck, or kitchen of your dreams. The impulse to turn out the page is overwhelming, and it's just a matter of time before the architect, contractor, and, yes, back-lash officer are so spent that

When you're looking to renovate or add on, there's nothing more motivating than a perfectly styled photograph of a finished space. While you might not duplicate it down to the dinner party, the image does serve as an inspiration, something you can modify to meet your own project's needs.

When Richard Pasquelli and Valerie Peto opened a photo of a Chicago millwright's 1920s butler's pantry in *The Old House*, they knew they were looking at the bones of their new addition. "We were envisioning an old-fashioned kind of urban kitchen because of the age of the house," says Richard of their 1294 Hudson, New Jersey, housewife, with its patterned parquet floors, smaller plasterwork, curved mantels, and ornate chandeliers still intact.

Having just moved from a light-drenched New York City loft with two young children and a dog, the couple—who are known to make their own pasta and eat crudités and drink sparkling as-of-now holiday dinners for 30—wanted to build a kitchen they could live in. They started by reimagining it from the basement to the porch level. Working with local architect Peter Johnston and Stackpole Construction, they pulled out an existing three-sided bay window and built a 400-square-foot cooking space and windowed eating area.

The butler's pantry, which still exists at Castle Hall, a 59-room mansion home on Cape Cod built by Chicago industrialist Richard Crane, "was a working pantry," says Johnston, citing the colorful style, color scheme, and dark floors and countertops that Richard and Valerie ultimately selected. "But we were not bound." Let that be the mantra for adapting an inspiration: Keep what works and lose what doesn't. "The original pantry looked like a kitchen in a house with a staff," says Valerie. "This is a family kitchen."

What a surprise their adaptation would be to Richard Crane, whose name lives on in perpetuity on the walls and tables at his Crane Company. The owner of that butler's pantry is said to have opted to "make America want a better bathroom."

Seems he didn't do badly with kitchen either.

At the bottom of the page, there is a small caption: "The kitchen at 1294 Hudson, New Jersey, was the inspiration for the new kitchen at 1294 Hudson, New Jersey." This text is partially obscured by the main image and is difficult to read.

GREAT ADAPTATION

Here's what the couple borrowed—and what they discarded—from the pull-out-the-stops butler's pantry that inspired their family kitchen

1 TWO-STORY PLAN

Here, a second floor is supported with an iron bar at storage cabinets that runs up to the 10-foot ceiling and a rooftop garden is wrought-iron railing visible through the skylight. These details define the area in the second story of the butler's pantry where the finest china was kept.

2 CABINET NICHE

No soap funnels in this kitchen. And a built-in dining and a flat-screen TV with DVD player for television watching.



3 LINEN DRAWERS

Homeowner Valera. He loved the wide, dark linen drawers in the original pantry, the same for place mats.

4 COUNTERTOPS AND BACKSPLASH

Wood counters worked for the original pantry since the space was large for storing dishes and serving meals. But they weren't a consideration for this modern kitchen. Hardwood provides a similar light and dark contrast. The white-tiled backsplash is a visual replica to keep it clean.

5 SLAT-LIKE FLOOR

For the couple, wood the look of the original side table. They went for a maintenance-free alternative to recreate the look. Slat-like floorboards of polished stone tiles in the kitchen at the skylight level.

For more kitchen design ideas, browse products at www.theoldhouse.com/kitchen

6 GLASS-FRONT CABINETS

"We went for a cleaner look," says Valera of their new kitchen. The white cabinets with glass fronts will give them the sophisticated look they want. The couple decided on new glassware and dishes from Crate & Barrel.

8 PERIOD HARDWARE

Artistic touches include the brass pulls from Restoration Hardware. The hardware is the same as the original butler's pantry cabinets.

7 PRO-STYLE RANGE

Since it's a family kitchen, the couple wanted a professional range. The couple's new range was at the top of the couple's wish list. It's a dual-fuel model with gas burners on top and an electric oven below for easy temperature control. Quite by accident, the new range is the same as the original butler's pantry.

8 COLOR SCHEME

What first caught the couple's eye in their original house? The color scheme. The couple's new range was at the top of the couple's wish list. It's a dual-fuel model with gas burners on top and an electric oven below for easy temperature control. Quite by accident, the new range is the same as the original butler's pantry.

ROCK FROM AN EASY PLACE

MAKE A GARDEN TROUGH WITH ALL THE CHARACTER
(BUT NONE OF THE HASSLE) OF HAND-CARVED STONE

BY JASON CARPENTER PHOTOSHOTS BY JENNIFER LEVY



You can build a hypertufa garden trough in a weekend and enjoy its beauty for years to come. In fact, the older and more weathered it gets, the better it looks. On the following pages, garden expert Ann Cruse takes us through the process, from mixing to planting. For instructions on how to construct the form and a list of supplies, see page 101.

English farmers of the 1800s used to chisel feeding troughs for their animals out of local granite and sandstone. Years later, creative gardeners adopted these old containers, covered in moss and worn by decades of exposure to the elements, as decorative planters. Few of these sought-after antique troughs are still available—and even if you could find one, chances are it would be too heavy (and expensive) for you to transport it across the Atlantic. But there's a quick and easy way to replicate the weathered look of these hand-hewn vessels yourself.

The key is a material called hypertufa, a mix of cement, peat moss, and perlite, products readily available at any home or garden center. The name comes from tufa, a natural porous rock that looks much like weathered stone. Combine the ingredients, add water, pack the mixture into a handmade mold, and set it aside to cure for a couple of days. When you pop off the mold, you'll have created a bit of the Old World, right in your own backyard.



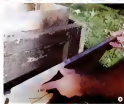


4 When packing the hyperfast mix into the form, take care not to knock the drainage holes out of place. Push the mix lightly, starting with the bottom. Lift an edge to check the bottom to a thickness of at least 20 inches. Insert the inner form and begin packing tightly up the sides. Shovel the mixture in with a garden trowel. Remember the tighter you pack, the stronger your trough will be.

5 As you pack the hyperfast mixture up the sides, periodically tamp it down with a flat piece of wood to get rid of any air pockets. Continue adding and tamping until the mixture is flush with the top of the outer box.

6 The trough will need at least 24 hours to cure enough to uncoat. When you can't scratch the surface with a fingernail, it's ready. Remove all the fasteners and take off the bottom panel. Then remove the outside walls, popping the bottom flaps of the paraffin with a garden trowel. Push the walls of the inside form toward the center so they collapse inward on themselves.

7 When first uncoated, the trough can be treated. By going over the surface with a coarse wire brush and knocking down any sharp corners, you can add hundreds of years of "weathering" and impart an aged look. Once you've distressed the trough, wrap it in plastic and leave it in a cool place to cure for about four weeks, when it will have reached maximum strength. Then it's ready for planting.



INSTANT OLD

All it takes is a few simple ingredients

1 To keep the hyperfast from sticking to the form, the wood must first be coated with a release agent. (For instructions on making the form, see page 101.) You can use petroleum jelly or a piece of plastic sheeting. We brushed on a layer of melted paraffin. Later, any paraffin residue on the troughsides for easy removal with a wire brush or flat putty knife.

2 To ensure proper drainage, you'll need to create holes in the bottom of the planter. Do this with a paper-towel spool or lengths of PVC pipe, cut into four 20-inch-tall pieces and spaced evenly toward the corners of the outside form. Use some of the melted paraffin to secure them.

3 Wearing gloves, dust mask, and goggles, mix the cement, sand, and perlite in a large tub or trough. (For quantities of all ingredients, see "The Recipe" on page 101.) Add the water and acrylic fortifier a bit at a time, turning the mix thoroughly so it sticks together but is not runny. Pull up the nylon reinforcing fibers and add them to the mix. You should be able to form the fiber-reinforced mix into a solid ball that doesn't fall apart.





GETTING STARTED



THIS RECIPE

The amount of hypertufa mix you will need depends on the size of the trough you're making. You can stretch or shrink the recipe if you stick to these basic proportions:

3 parts cement

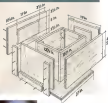
4 parts perlite

Water sufficient to make a firm, moldable mixture, plus a splash of liquid acrylic (about 1/4 the amount of total liquid). A handful of nylon reinforcing fibers.

BUILDING THE FORM

Trough forms can be made from plywood, rigid foam insulation, or two cardboard boxes, one inside the other. We used pine shelf board because it is sturdy and can be used again and again. To create the decorative rivets, we glued twisted panels to the inside of the exterior form.

Our trough measured 17 inches wide by 24 inches long by 10 inches high. You can use the same method to build any size trough. For best results, the walls should be a minimum of 2 1/2 inches thick, and the trough should be at least 750 inches deep.



A MOUNTAIN IN MINIATURE

What to plant in your trough garden

You can fill your trough with just about any growing thing. Traditionally they're used for rugged alpine plants which thrive in the porous confining. Small and slow-growing, yet with beautiful flowers, vignettes are well-suited for the limited confines of a trough garden. Good choices are:

hellebores, pansies, and dwarf shrubs and conifers. The important thing when choosing plants is to consider scale and growing habits; you don't want aggressive spreaders that will take over the trough.

The best growing medium for alpine is organic soil with sand, grit, and small stones. A layer of gravel at the bottom of the trough is optional but will improve drainage (aloe filling the trough put a small piece of wire mesh over each drainage hole to keep it clear). And be sure to leave space in the trough for some active rocks—in addition to looking nice, they imitate the alpine environment, protecting plants from the ravages of wind and extreme temperature swings.

Spending of temperature swings, try to keep the trough shaded in winter to limit repeated freeze/thaw cycles, which can do damage to plants and also shorten the life of the trough.

For more garden tips, tools and techniques, visit www.thisoldhouse.com/yard



A HYPERTUFA TROUGH IS A LIVING, BREATHING THING. THE PEAT MOSS IN THE MIX ACTS LIKE A MAGNET FOR AIRBORNE MOSSES AND LICHENS, WHICH SETTLE ON THE SURFACE AND TAKE HOLD. LEFT OUTDOORS, EVEN A FRESHLY CAST TROUGH WILL SOON LOOK LIKE IT'S BEEN IN PLACE FOR AGES.



A GOOD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ARCHITECT AND CONTRACTOR
 IS KEY TO A SMOOTH RENOVATION—
 AND IT CAN SAVE YOU A BUNDLE

CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

HERE ARE **10 TIPS FROM THE PROS**
 TO GET BOTH SIDES WORKING
 ON THE SAME PAGE

BY MAX ALEXANDER ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM BOWER

In a renovation, as in romance, compatibility is key—just asking a couple which spent the night in separate beds after an argument over bathroom tile. But husbands and wives are not the only ones who need to see eye to eye when the blueprints come out and the walls come down. All too often the other principal players on a remodel—the architect and the contractor—are more at odds than in sync. Contractors say many architects don't understand modern materials or construction practices, resulting in costly, impractical designs. Architects complain that overscheduled contractors rush through jobs, making unauthorized changes and compromising craftsmanship. Guess who loses out when there's a conflict? That would be you.

Problems between architects and contractors not only cause delays, they can cost you big bucks. Conversely, a team that works well together can keep costs in check. Maine architect Eric Beckstrom cites the call he got from the supervisor on one of his renovation projects last year: Beckstrom's plan called for lowering the floor of a farmhouse to create a walkout patio off the kitchen, which meant jackhammering away five feet of solid granite ledge. But as the excavation crew got to work peeling away the stone, rubble began tumbling out from under the foundation of an adjoining barn.

The supervisor called off the crew—and called Beckstrom. "It turned out that the ground under the barn foundation had completely eroded," says the architect. Rather than let the contractor work out a complicated (and expensive) engineering scheme to hold the foundation in place, Beckstrom simply redesigned the space as two separate levels, leaving the ledge intact. "If they'd just forged ahead according to the plan," he says, "all hell would have broken loose"—and collapsed the barn. Instead, he says, "we worked together and saved the homeowner tens of thousands of dollars in repairs."

Like any good relationship, a strong contractor-architect alliance requires constant communication. Here's advice from experts on both sides to help ensure that any team you hire will work together without a hitch.

Involve the Contractor From the Start

"To protect this yard [in blue in the floor]," says contractor Vernell Harbert of the Wills Company in Nashville. "You should hire a builder early in the design process. That way we can make sure the architect all every turn and when the details go from paint-grade to clay, we can say 'You just signed the price for \$5,000.'"

The Old House general contractor Tom Saxe puts it more bluntly: "Contractors are not designers, and in my opinion would not be designing houses. But architects are not



builders, they can't possibly be on top of all the latest construction techniques and materials. When builders and architects share input from the beginning, houses are inevitably better.

Connector Steve Crawford, who worked on a TDN TV project in Santa Barbara a few years ago, recalls one renovation he did in Capetown, California, in which the architect had initially designed a redwood and pleig-glass structure that would muffle nearby freeway noise. But Crawford worried about scratches on the pleig-glass, so he went to the architect with a similarly priced alternative: etched aluminum (commonly used in commercial construction) with tinted glass panels. The architect accepted the suggestion and adapted the plans, giving the homeowners a beautiful low-maintenance facade that still reduced noise considerably.

Hire Pros Who Know—and Like—Each Other

Architects have contractors, they've worked with frequently where they have come to trust and would recommend. And there's no disadvantage getting a contractor you trust to refer you to an architect. Los Angeles builder Pat Goring, who worked as an architect's assistant for six years, says a pre-existing relationship can smooth out the construction process, even if there aren't any mind-bending problems. "A lot of architects have styles and details that they replicate on projects," says Goring. "If the contractor is familiar with what the architect wants, so much the better."

Tom Sisk points to his ongoing relationship he has with Stephen Holt, an architect he's worked with in 2001 on TDN TV's project in Manchester, Massachusetts. Having done numerous jobs with Holt, Sisk's mental files now contain a lot of details that the architect commonly uses in his designs. "I know that when he extends a window sill beyond the railing, it should look a certain way," says Sisk. Or that his partial to a particular crown molding. The two have developed a kind of design shorthand, which means Holt doesn't have to create intricately detailed drawings to explain his vision—saving the homeowner billable hours.

Find Out Who's a Team Player

If you can't tell directly from the contractor or architect, then at least check references carefully, asking how well each one got on with the other team members. Did the architect listen to the contractor? When things went wrong, did he come up with solutions? Did the builder consult with the architect or just forge ahead when problems came up? Did he give the architect useful input?

Good communication on a project ultimately benefits the homeowner. When Sisk first worked with Stephen Holt in Manchester for Interior Holt had specified a traditional cedar roof for the Shingle style house. Tom wanted to try a new pressure-treated pine that was half the price, said to weather like cedar and guaranteed to last longer. "Steve was concerned about the color," recalls Tom. "I said give it a year and you won't know the difference. Give it 25 years and you'll still have a roof!" Because Holt trusted Tom, he agreed to the change, today the roof looks better than new, having weathered to a silver gray.

Consider a Design/Build Firm

Design/build or design/building firms are one-stop shops that offer both architectural design and construction services—entirely much guaranteeing good communication between the two sides of the job. Don't if



ON-THE-JOB(SITE) TRAINING

An architecture school teaches students how the other half works.

In an effort to teach building architects something that most better schools without knowing—how a house is actually built—four-year students at Yale University's prestigious School of Architecture are required to set down their pencils and spend a semester building an actual house.

The Yale Building Project, which has been around for 36 years, appears to be making a difference. "Only a very small percentage of these students have any building experience when they come in," says Paul Roux, director of the project. "But they go out afterwards well-versed in the process."

As Matthew Vadenius, a Manhattan architect and program alumni, put it, "It made me appreciate the hard work that contractors do." Roux notes that students learn much more than construction techniques. The homes designed by the students in class—are built in partnership with a local nonprofit group and benefit New Haven's low-income neighborhoods. "The students begin to understand some of the basic problems in these communities," he says. They also witness another effect of good design. "After building them, we often see the neighborhood getting fixed up."



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you prefer an independent architect, there can be a benefit to hiring a design/build firm to do the construction. "By definition, we pay close attention to how design affects cost," says Hammer of the Wills Company, a design/build firm. In one job Hammer's currently involved in, the client is requesting things that will take the costs 20 percent over budget. To bring expenses down, Hammer and his team are going through the design lot by lot—from the broad strokes like whether to build a finished basement or a crawl space, to the details, like whether to use paint or stain on the kitchen cabinets.

Get More Detailed Bids

The conventional contractor bidding process—where large-scope estimates based on a plan and quantity go with the low-bidder—doesn't make for great working relationships because the cheapest bidder is often the one cutting corners on the architect's specs.

A bidding system called value analysis or value-engineered bidding calls for contractors to break down their estimates into detailed components—everything from the driveway to the cost of a new porch to the relative expense of wood floors versus carpet—then work with the architect to fit the design and materials to the budget. "It makes architects consider the cost of their designs," says Gao Dickinson, an architect in Connecticut, and a TDH member. "It also makes builders open up the back box of their bid." He cites an event house he designed where the value analysis showed the homeowners they could save \$75,000 by using high-grade vinyl siding instead of cedar. They chose the vinyl.

Because value analysis takes more effort, Dickinson says many contractors can't be bothered, especially in boom times. But that's changing as more homeowners shocked by the high cost of materials and labor-intensive jobs move carefully. "It's been the very commercial construction is laid out," he says, "and it's becoming the trend in residential work."

Don't Leave Your Architect at the Altar



Don't Forget About the Inside Design

If you expect will include the services of an interior designer, bring him or her in at the very beginning. Designers think about rooms differently from architects and builders and often solve problems that others might miss. TDH senior design consultant Alexa Hampton recalls a meeting with a prospective client, who erroneously laid out the architect's floor plans. I took one look at the master bedroom and asked her what she had the bed," recalls Alexa. "When she said King, I told her that the way the plan was drawn, the bed only had room for one bedside table. She hired me on the spot." Designers can also help plan the best placement and number of electrical outlets, and determine if windows are positioned to allow enough room for curtains.

Typically an architect is hired to oversee the entire building process at the construction administrator (the CA's) in trade lingo). The generally adds about 20 percent to the overall design fee, either in a flat fee or as a hourly charge.

However many homeowners try to save that fee by sending the architect packing once construction starts. That can be a false economy, though, especially if you need to call him back for changes. If the architect hasn't been present throughout construction trying to schedule his time can stop work on a renovation while everyone waits for his callender to clear. And for the architect, sleeping in still getting on the wire is more difficult—and sometimes more time-consuming (i.e., costly)—than if he had been overseeing the project all along.

Architect Eric Seidelman's role as CA paid off on one recent renovation in Portland, Maine, where code requirements limited stair access to a dramatic window well that the homeowner cherished. Because he was on site regularly, he was able to quickly handle with the construction supervisor and the homeowner to come up with a tricky system of tracks and hinged banisters that simulated code and still provided access. Meanwhile, work on the project continued without a hiccup.



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Make Sure Everyone Knows His or Her Job

The general contractor with over 30 years in the business remembers a particular architect: "I hadn't thought out [the] design, forcing the GC to make countless on-the-fly revisions. With each new change, the architect promptly redrew his plans to match the contractor's ideas—then later the homeowner for 'design changes.' Eventually the homeowner fired the architect, which only delayed the job further."

Another architect who has designed dozens of houses in the past 17 years recalls the contractor he hired to build his own house. The architect says the contractor stuffily peered over his extremely detailed and organized drawings and listened attentively during walk-throughs—then proceeded to build the house his own way, ignoring the plans. Of course, the architect demanded the contractor fix his mistakes within months to the owner.

Local architect Jeremiah Eck, who is designing TDN's current project in Carlsbad, Massachusetts, says breakdowns like these happen when people don't respect job descriptions. "The architect has a responsibility to produce the best set of drawings possible that reflect the

owner's intent," says Eck. "The contractor has a responsibility to build what's on the plans, for the agreed-upon amount. When it can all go sideways, when somebody doesn't follow through on those obligations?" When changes do happen, make sure the architect and the contractor are in agreement. Then don't be afraid to ask who will be billing you—and for exactly what.

Pick Up the Phone

As problems come up during construction, the homeowner usually hears about it from the contractor, who is on the front lines. When that happens, don't be afraid to ask him if the architect has been consulted. If the answer is no, call the architect yourself. Dealing with issues as they arise can save money in the long run.

Master electrician and TDN contributor Allen Gullert recently worked on a big project that called for 10 recessed lights. Looking over the plans, Allen noticed that the architect specified a 4-inch can that, in the style called for, would have been a custom-order Sage Gullert. "I called the architect and pointed out you could get the same style in a 5-inch can that wasn't custom, at \$54 less per light. That one phone call saved the homeowner \$5,000."

Put Down the Phone—And Schedule Regular Face Time

Once construction is underway, a good idea is to schedule weekly site meetings with both the architect and the contractor to help problems in the less-than-ideal world. Eck stopped by the Carlsbad job site one day last fall. Tom told Eck he'd grabbed him halfway through the front door. "We're ready to frame those ceilings in the dining room and bedrooms," said Tom, referring to some unusual ceiling designs Eck had specified, and we need to work out how they meet up with the dormer." In fact, Tom already had a solution, but he expected that Eck would design that.

However, Eck knew that if an experienced builder like Tom had an idea, it was definitely worth a listen. So while the complex geometry of the ceilings could have been switched out at the drawing board, Eck instead said, "Show me what you're thinking." Has the latest tape measure in hand, the pair had figured out a back-of-the-envelope plan. "I agreed completely with Tom's solution," says Eck. It's a neat kind of teamwork that makes reaching the big finish a cinch. Now if only closing bathroom tiles were as easy. ■

For more on finding and hiring the pros, visit www.thisoldhouse.com/askajoginghome



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the addition of the glass, a new runner and new, it helped by dropping Crafts-style columns for added impact. The white oak treads of the stairs match the house's original floor, and the handrail, in contrasting black wood, was topped with a hand-made reproduction of solid dark black velvet burl.

RIGHT: The homeowner preserved the beauty of his 1926 bungalow by concealing a new second-floor mudroom addition under the original pedimentable roof. From the street, the once neighborhood wreck looks exactly as it did when it was built, but it's now with a coat of delicious green paint.

A SACRAMENTO STAIRMAKER ADDS A STORY TO A SMALL BUNGALOW SO HE CAN CREATE HIS VERY OWN SET OF DRAMATIC STAIRS

SECOND STORY JOB



Building stairs comes second nature to me. I do it all day long for a living. It's like building a big, complex, beautiful puzzle that gives a balance of practical and aesthetic value to a house. But just a few years ago, I was a freelance stairmaker living in a one-story 1926 Craftsman bungalow. Although center hall porches stretch the two bedrooms, one back house by the time I got my hands on it, I would see potential in the original white oak floors, an arched fireplace, and the very, loaded glass windows. As a home, it sat on a nice lot in one of Sacramento's nicer neighborhoods. In spite of the house's deteriorated roof, cracked plaster walls, water-damaged floors, rotting window frames, and a kitchen so ratty that the fridge sat at the neighboring laundry room, I bought the place "as is" with the idea that I'd get it, and give myself, a focal point—a beautiful hand-crafted curvaceous staircase that I made myself.

PROJECT PARTICULARS

REMODELING COST: \$100,000

TIME FRAME: 4 years

WHERE I SAVED: Doing much of the work myself definitely saved me money though it took more time.

WHERE I SPLURGED: Kitchen appliances, which I bought purely for resale value. I'm not a gourmet cook, but I've heard that the kitchen sells the house, so I thought it was a good investment.

WHAT I'D DO DIFFERENTLY: Sub out more of the work. For instance, I should have art someone else do the painting instead of spending the time to figure it out myself.

LARGEST CHALLENGE: Learning new skills. As a plumber and welder. Even picking paint colors was new to me. I thought what I thought was the perfect shade of yellow only to be horrified at the party bus instead of twinkling yellow, less, I learned the same mistakes with another wrong shade.

HOW I SOLVED IT: I finally ended up buying a couple more quarts of paint and mixing my own shade before painting the kitchen for the third, and final, time.



WHAT WAS DONE

1. **UPDATED THE SYSTEMS** including wiring and plumbing.
2. **DEMOLISHED AND EXPANDED THE KITCHEN.** Common-dwelling space from an adjoining laundry room and bumping out one side of the kitchen by 5 feet made room for more storage, countertops, and modern appliances.
3. **ADDED A SECOND FLOOR.** The 500-square-foot addition includes a master bedroom, bath, and walk-in closet.
4. **BUILT CONNECTING STAIRS.** A new fixed curved staircase was built to connect the two floors.
5. **BUILT A ROOM DIVIDER** between the living room and the dining room consisting of built-in columns and cabinets in keeping with the 1920s style of the house.

FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



leading to a new second-floor master suite.

RAIN DELAYS

Although I like to build things, I'd never done anything of this magnitude before. So I decided I'd give myself a year to work out my plans, have them translated by an engineer's friend, and get my permits in order. Then I rolled up my sleeves and set to work.

While waiting to start the second floor so I could build my stairs, I had to wait out California's rainy season, which was hardly the time to be risk-free. So I spent the winter mowing on the old kitchen and adjoining laundry room and building a foundation to extend the house 5 feet into the backyard. The extra space would expand the kitchen to accommodate more storage cabinets and appliances. It would also expand what was then the attic area to give me a 500-square-foot second floor for a master bedroom, a bath, and a walk-in closet.

MOVING UP

Come spring, I started on the second story, building its floor under the old asphalt roof. I knew I couldn't just lay plywood subflooring on top of the existing ceiling joists because that would mean I'd have to make my new truss-like trusses that code allows. So, I had to lower the floor to start the steps, and to do that I had to remove the old joists. But without joists in place, the walls would spilt out, and likely cause the roof to cave in. To keep the walls steady, I found chains across the beams and crossed my fingers. Windy days were interesting, imagining the walls and roof might come crashing down around me, but thankfully, they stayed in place. Then I took everything out of the attic that was in my way, including an old chimney and big, old one-piece plumbing vents, so I could tie the new joists into the exterior walls and lay the subfloor.

Knowing summer days were ahead, I finally tore off the roof and hired local carpenters to install a new one. My plan called for concealing the addition behind the original pitched outline to preserve the view of the house's vintage facade from the street. In my preliminary, I'd seen too many renovations that sacrificed the character of old buildings, so I wanted my changes to blend in with the house's past.

Inside, I set to work building walls for my new master bedroom, bath, and closet. I had everything planned out in my head, including a small balcony in the bedroom overlooking the backyard. It was so nice I got from a neighbor's house, which was the same size as mine. I even copied in design of the windows in sight and treated vintage iron rods, cutting the pieces and then taking them to my brother-in-law Rocky's house. (He'd never worked with iron before, and Rocky works in his spare time, so we made a good team.)

STEP BY STEP

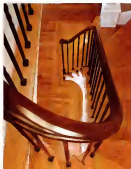
Ready to start the ladder I'd been using to reach the second floor, I tumbled into my favorite project: the stairs. They're modeled after a showstopping staircase I'd seen in an 18th-century new city house. The master you walk in the door, these old stairs entirely command attention,



The homeowner built a new archway between the living room and dining room to match the curve of the house's original fireplace.



White painted cabinets, black granite countertop, and a central island with a butcher block top give the new kitchen a vintage look. The island features a Jomil Air conditioner with a down-draft venting system. A recessed-glass panel door matches those in some of the upper cabinets and leads to the laundry room.



While the winding stair rail looks like one solid piece of wood, it was actually made in sections composed of three hand-carved curved pieces and two straight ones. It was then glued and bolted together from the bottom after which the stairs were sanded to create a continuous look. The alternating straight and curved balusters and iron pieces called "finials," which function to hold the balusters. The homeowner ordered them from King Architectural Metals in Dallas.

PHOTOS BY JIMMY JOHNSON



The homeowner loved that the headboard had a curved, slightly arched shape, though it still had to be made to the original floor plan dimensions and the dining room for the room 2 feet 2 inches needed for the room width.

thanks to their incredibly tight curves. I loved that line, so I duplicated the design, saving down the narrow bedboard and calling a bit to fit my own transfer style and scale. Tight curves also moved space, though I still had to break into the original floor plan dimensions and the dining room for the room 2 feet 2 inches needed for the room width.

The stain's iron balusters are the first I've ever made or installed. At work, I cap balusters made by professional ironworkers, but now, I was my own client. I copied the balusters' alternating straight-and-twisted pattern for consistency. In a small house with clean lines it's good to keep things simple. Anything fancy would have been out of place. I screwed the balusters into the studs with lag bolts, and Rocky welded the iron in place.

I carved the wooden handrail by following a 19th-century technique I'd learned from stair-making books. Starting with a large chunk of black walnut, I roughed out the curved rail with a hand saw, then moved to a 5-inch disk sander, then Dremel tools, and finally sandpaper. Black walnut is not cheap, and it takes careful work not to carve too much wood away.

The handrail has a handsome stain, which I made by boiling walnut hulls—the fleshy part outside the shell—into a thick paste. After applying the stain, I sealed the handrail with three coats of polyurethane.

HOME RENOVATION

As a first-time remodeler, I wasn't sure. Even working nights and weekends, it took me three years to finish the renovation. On one especially intense weekend, my friend Bob, who owns a cabinet shop, and I built all the kitchen cabinets. We worked on a Friday and by Sunday, we brought the rough boxes to my house. We worked on like a dog.

When it came to adding the old parts of the house, I was on my own. The living and dining rooms were one long, low space, so I divided them with an arched wall that echoed the arch of the fireplace and a columned bookcase built in the Craftsman style of the house. This made both rooms much cozier. I also re-draped the plaster walls and updated the existing bathroom with a new, rustic-style tile floor and a refurbished pedestal sink.

Now that I'm done, I'm sure I'll renovate another house someday. It gives you your blood. But in the meantime, it gives me great satisfaction to have taken my house to a whole new level. It's something I feel every time I climb those stairs. ■



Only a foot deep, the balcony on the rear of the house is purely ornamental. The French doors off the new master bedroom were added to bring in light and fresh air. The homeowner also spruced up the backyard view with a new arbor and a concrete patio.

TELL US YOUR STORY

Did you renovate your house and do most of the work yourself? If so, we'd like to hear about your project. Please send copies of before and after photos, a floor plan (we cannot return any materials) and a brief description of the work you did to:

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Though new, the kitchen chrome barstools with vinyl seats have a cozy, old-time look. "They're just like I remember from my grandmother's house," says homeowner Dean Kavanagh.

Inspiration for the vintage club chair came from a *Poppy* Barn catalog the homeowner saw. But he wanted a slightly different design, so he built the chair frame himself out of solidwood and found the leather online that someone else saved up. "I wanted to create a matching set, but the renovation took up all my time," he says.



DISTINCTIVE 1920s TOUCHES

In every room, close attention was paid to decorative touches—big and small—in order to evoke the 1920s spirit of the house.



The homeowner with a friend made the kitchen's painted hatch to look like a vintage built-in. The upper door panels were routed out and replaced with etched glass inserts with diamond panes. "Like the rest of the kitchen cabinets," he says, "I painted them in Western Woodcrafts by Kirby Moore, which is softer than pure white."



Reproduction brushed metal knobs and pulls were chosen for their Craftsman-era character. The homeowner bought them by mail order from Custom Service Hardware.



The 1920 General Electric toaster was wrapped up in a local swap meet for a dollar by the homeowner's brother-in-law. It's in pristine condition, if a bit rusty.



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NORM'S NOTEBOOK

Preventing Glue Stains

Way back when, my father and I built a lot of houses crammed out with stained woodwork. Stain really enhanced the beauty of the clear pine we used, but it also meant we had to be extra careful every time we glued a joint.

Whenever a drop of yellow glue landed on an unfinished wood surface, it leeches behind the finish that keeps the stain from penetrating evenly. So even if you wipe up the drops immediately, you're going to get light-colored splashes after the stain is applied. The darker the stain, the more obvious the splashes. For us, the most frustrating part was that the stain is invisible. We couldn't even tell there was going to be a problem until after the stain went on. But by that point, it was too late. All we could do was to cut new trim and try again.

Eventually, we found a way to avoid all this extra work. We sealed the wood first. After it dried, we went ahead as usual with the cutting and gluing. From that time on, it didn't matter to us if a little glue ended up on the surface of the trim. We'd just wipe up the drops with a damp rag, without worrying about harming the stain.



Save Your Sawdust



One of the things we've known for here in New England—besides baseball, these days—is Yankee thrift. I like to think of it as “using materials wisely,” and for me that meant trying to put every last scrap to good use, even the sawdust.

I probably make a lot more sawdust than most people, so I'm lucky to know a local farmer who comes by the shop and picks up bags of the stuff. I don't actually know what he does with it, but he must seem glad to get it. Sawdust can be used as mulch, as long as it isn't piled on more than a few inches thick and isn't from walnut, which is toxic to many plants. It's also proved an unusual building

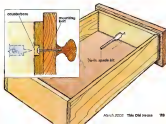
material onto some of my sawdust in a covered grill to quickly absorb spills. Like when I knock over the water bucket I keep around for soaking out glue brushes, or if I accidentally drip latex paint on the floor. But I never saw sawdust to clean up a solvent-based finish, due to the big chance of it spontaneously catching on fire later.

When Bolts Are Too Short

Drawer pulls and knobs come with mounting bolts, but they're not always long enough.

The next time that happens, save yourself a trip to the hardware store by enlarging and deepening the hole slightly from the inside of the drawer using a spade bit. This technique, called counter-boring, creates a recess big enough to accommodate the bolt head so the bolt can stick further out of the drawer face.

Always drill the hole hole first, then follow with the spade bit, centered on the hole. But don't get carried away, unless you test the bit in place frequently, it's easy to bore too deeply.



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Ripping With a Circular Saw

If you own a table saw, you probably use your circular saw mostly for cutting lumber to length. But you can also rip boards—cut them along their length—very accurately by attaching a rip fence to the shoe of your circular saw. This inexpensive T-shaped piece of metal rides against the edge of the board throughout the cut.

To convert your rip cut into safe and accurate, take these three critical steps. First, slide the fence to the desired width of the cut and tighten down its clamps. Then, check the fence's distribution of pressure against the board's edge. The thickness of the board you are cutting. This helps prevent the blade from binding, and is safer because fewer teeth are exposed.

Third, and this is the step most people forget, support the board along its length with a piece of 2x4 lumber. If you don't, the workpiece will bow as you make your cut, which is unsafe and will likely result in a less-than-accurate cut. Finally, drive a few drywall screws through the workpiece and into the board beneath it. That will stiffen the work and reduce the chance of the blade binding, as long as the screws don't protrude, you can then make a smooth, straight cut and to end.



Indispensable Milk Crates

The first time you spot a plastic milk crate at a junk store or a yard sale, buy it. I have an old one I've been using for years as a step stool. Turned upside down, it gives me an extra 50 or 11 inches of height, and all it takes is a quick kick to pop open it. Then at lunch time, it provides a handy seat.

Right now my milk crate is in use as a step stool, or for transporting propane cylinders. The one for my grill just fits into my case, so when I take it in for a refill it doesn't roll around in my car trunk.



Packing It In

Everyone is looking for ways to store put away more tools in their toolbox. My father was no different. That's why he added a couple of wood blocks with bolt-on handles to the underside of his toolbox lid. They were for holding his 2x4 inch lid.

If you have a metal toolbox, you can do the equivalent with some super strong, rust-resistant magnets. Just place a few of them on the underside of the lid, and use them to grip a variety of small steel hand tools—screwdrivers, pliers, and the like. I wouldn't park a sharp chisel on them, however, you could get cut when reaching into the box.

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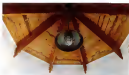


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Turner—
Wicker chair: Home and Garden
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**IDEAL
ADAPTATION**
pg 92-95

Architect: Peter Johnson, Architect, PC, Hillsdale, NJ; 201-659-7400. General contractor: Kevin Stockpole, Stockpole Construction, Conn.



"Single Hinged" page 77: An octagonal tower porch with a hinged center ceiling is just one feature of five all-new, old-book inside home.

pany Inc., River Vale, NJ; 201-750-8500; www.stockpoleconstruction.com. Range: Wolf Gas Kitchens, Wolf Appliance Company, LLC, Madison, WI; 800-370-9131; www.wolfgas.com. Wall and cabinet paint: Benjamin Moore, Mooreville, NJ; 800-944-0400; www.benjaminmoore.com. Cabinet interior paint: Ralph Lauren Paints, 800-579-7634; www.thelac.com. Backsplash tile: Nova Tile Company Inc., New York, NY; 800-636-6845; www.novatiles.com. Cabinet hardware: Tasseron Hardware, 800-762-2009; www.tasseronhardware.com. Ceramic tile floor: Creative Inc., Knoxville, TN; 918-484-2130; www.creativeinc.com. Dishes and glassware: Crate & Barrel; 800-967-6636; www.crateandbarrel.com. Light fixture: Mod Linn, Danvers, CT; 888-833-2884; www.modlinn.com

BOOK FROM AN EARLY PLACE
pg 95-101

Our thanks to Joyce Fitzgerald and Rex Martin, authors of *Creating and Planting Garden Thoughts*, B.B. Mackay Books, 1999.

G&P WE ALL JUST GOT ALONG
pg 102-106

Architect, designer, and contractor—

Eric Beckstrom: Principal/Architect, AIA, Beckstrom Architecture and Planning, Rockport, ME; 207-894-1306; www.beckstromarchitecture.com. Wendell Harner: The Wells Company Inc., Nashville, TN; 615-852-1235; www.thewellscompany.com. Steve Crawford: Crawford Green General Contractors, Carpinteria, CA; 805-684-4155; www.crawfordgreen.com. Pat Qualey: NED Contractors, Los Angeles, CA; 310-935-8932. Stephen Robert Holt: AIA; Manchester, MA; 978-536-1251; www.srholt.com. Duo Dickinson: Madison, CT; 203-285-0405. Alan Hampton: Mark Hampton Inc., New York, NY; 212-751-4111; www.markhampton.com. Jeremiah Bok: Jeremiah Bok Architects Inc., Boston, MA; 617-967-0656; www.jeremiahbok.com. Allen Gallant: Gallant Electric, Lexington, MA; 781-662-6636. On-the-Job Training—The Yale Building Project: Yale School of Architecture, New Haven, CT; 203-432-2288; www.architecture.yale.edu. Matthew Vederment: Knoll &



"Time Adaptation" page 32: The homeowners picked up the key details of the architect design from a photo of a 1920s butler's pantry.

Vandermaas Architects, PLLC; New York, NY; 212-255-0291.

SAVE YOUR OLD BOOKS
pg 108

Our thanks to Alex DeShazo, an emerging young reporter and student from Mount Vernon, Texas, for donating local archives for historic photos and inter-

viewing family members who once lived in the oldest house.

For further information: Franklin County Historical Association, Mount Vernon, TX; 909-537-4760; www.fchsa.com—chbrwvandermaas.com

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