

# This Old House

25

stylish flooring  
ideas for a  
small budget  
*p. 96*

## Rooms that make life easier

- > store more mudrooms
- > easy-access pantries
- > clean & tidy laundries

Pro  
secrets  
to build  
your DIY  
skills  
*p. 90*

### Plus

19 ways to brighten  
up any kitchen

Our favorite  
old-house towns

#### SNEAK PEEK:

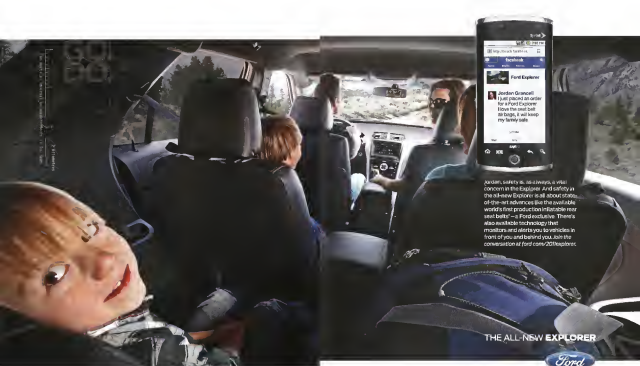
Inside the TV show's  
new L.A. project

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Cover Photography: EBC/STYLING: LISA L. TAYLOR





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[illegible]



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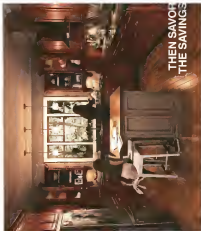


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PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS

## Oh, brother!

"Just cut it—24 inches," my brother said, wielding a full sheet of 16-inch plywood up onto the table saw. "Cut it in half so it's easier to handle."

"No," I said. "We need to do this efficiently. We can't just cut it in half."

"Just cut it," he said, his voice rising.

We went back and forth like this, as we always do, at going about where to set the saw's fence for the bookcase shelves we were making, with one trying to do the math in my head as we fought.

I thank we're both grateful for each other's help on our home projects, but being brothers—each of whom knows he knows more than the other—working together can be akin to debating with gods. It's loud, ingrown, and, more often than not, someone gets hurt.

"Look," I said, "I need two shelves at 16 1/2 inches, which means we should cut the sheet at 22 inches. That'll give me two, and then I can get three smaller 16 1/2-inch shelves out of the extra plywood. Twenty-two, that's that," I said. Which is why we were both surprised when I set the saw at 24 inches anyway and cut the plywood in half.

My brother laughed automatically. Just as he fell back, my wife walked in, saw us looking from each other to the plywood and back and, stringing up the situation, said, "You boys know that if you cut that plywood at 22 inches you would have been able to get three smaller shelves out of it?" Laughing boy snorted.

"Simple math," my wife said. "Yeah, and simple. Heck, it's all simple if you've done it before, and that's the big rub with being a DIYer. You do a project once, start to learn the necessary skills, and then someone before getting past the necessary mistakes to become a master."

Fortunately there are master out there, and some of them are even willing to share their knowledge. That's what you'll find in the article on page 70, "13 DIY Faux-decorists." It's a great story, packed with tips from pros that are meant to help homeowners on a variety of projects. Skill 14 would have been useful for my brother; it offers an easy way to move sheets of plywood solo. Skill 1 is just what I need: how to hang heavy stuff. The tip was meant for things like mirrors, but I figure it could just as easily be used on a glowing ribbon.

*Steve Casperson*  
STEVE CASPERSON, EDITOR  
[acornshouse.com](http://acornshouse.com)

## letter {from This Old House}



"Living makes up" the weathered roofline of a historic home in a neighborhood in

### ONE REALLY IMPORTANT THING I LEARNED FROM THIS ISSUE

GMC is going to give one of you a Chevy pickup truck! All you have to do is answer Reader (Home) Questions. See details on page 92.



# readermail

We love the collaborative spirit of THH readers who write to share their expertise and offer helpful comments on articles we've done. This month, great advice to add to "Fully Loaded Laundry Rooms," a caution about ensuring that indoor plants are pet-friendly, and a tip on finishing off a faux-wood treatment. Plus a Reader Project gift to begin now and be done in time for Mother's Day.

## Laundry room

Your article on laundry rooms (January/February) was very interesting and had a lot of good ideas. I deliver and install appliances for a major retailer and have a suggestion concerning placing front-loading washers and dryers into cabinets and under counters. These washers are extremely heavy because of the bag of concrete around the doors used to counterbalance the spinning mass of clothes. The first on these machines are meant to hold the machine steady during operation and therefore are not easy to slide. If you plan to put the washer and dryer in these positions, consider having a set of slider disks available that can be left in place under the machine to allow for easier movement into the final position. They will protect your floors and make moving the

units out for service or replacement much easier. Also, advise as large holes to allow for backing outside the cabinet before sliding the units in place; with factory bars, you'll still have to work under the counter and find a way out from behind the washers. Keep up the great magazine, and happy laundry day.

—EDMUND LARTOGAN, MO

## Indoor plants for pets

As a fan of your regular pet-friendly articles and projects, I was surprised that the "Cleverer plants" piece (January/February) did not include a warning to pet owners that two of the three plants pictured—English ivy and peace lily—are highly poisonous and potentially deadly to cats and dogs should they ingest any part of the plant.

—JERRY ZAMETHAN, ORLANDO, FLA.

## Bar cart

DANIEL LARSEN, PEPPER HILLS, CA

My mom has always wanted a place to serve drinks to her friends on the deck, so I built her a bar cart (Weekend Remade, June 2010; see [thehouse.com/barcarts](http://thehouse.com/barcarts)) for Mother's Day. I replaced the handle with a turned stick spindle and painted everything white to match the rest of the deck furniture.

**The editors reply:** That's a good point, Jerry. For more information on plants that might endanger pets, go to [thehouse.com/pets](http://thehouse.com/pets).

## Faux wood graining

About 30 years ago, I bought a wood-graining tool that is the same one featured in *Paint Ideas* (January/February), or see it at [thehouse.com/boards](http://thehouse.com/boards). I had an aluminum screen door whose finish had oxidized, and my wife wanted a new, wood screen door. I felt that would be too expensive for our limited budget and that refinishing would do the job. I was right. After some practice, I was able to move ahead with confidence. I named your article called for only four steps, but I added one more. When you get to Step 4, and before the top coat dries, take a clean, dry, soft paintbrush and lightly feather out the top coat. This will soften the grain lines and give the project a much more natural look.

—GERARD WEYMAN, BRANDVILLE, MOH.

## Correction

The name of Velupar's green paint on page 62 of the January/February issue should have read Green Tea (8005-8A), not Garden Tea.

how to  
reach  
us

**The editors:**  
The *Cleverer* magazine, L35 West 50th  
Street, New York, NY 10019  
Or e-mail: [THH@thehouse.com](mailto:THH@thehouse.com)  
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# #19

# The Happy Pup

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# checklist {April 2011}

## EASY WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR HOME RIGHT NOW

### □ Plan ahead for summer color

Look for bulbs such as daffodils, lilacs, and gladioli, which can be planted after the last freeze and bloom starting in mid- to late June. Then, once they begin to bloom, they'll be ready for you to enjoy. To make sure you're ready for the summer, start by weeding each year with a hoe or a shovel and topsoil the ground with gravel or sharp crushed shells.



### □ What's on your checklist?

"I want to make sure my house is ready for the summer, so I'll be checking with a list of things to do." —Bob McElroy, Louisville, Colo.

Email us your ideas at [checklist@thehouse.com](mailto:checklist@thehouse.com)



### □ Dress up your entry

Get in the spirit of National Decorating Month by giving your home's curb appeal a brighten. Brighten your front door with a fresh coat of paint (use an exterior latex), then highlight it with a new ceiling light or sconce. Display fresh flowers from a window box, leave how to install one at [thehouse.com/ideas](http://thehouse.com/ideas).

## TOH TIP

### □ Patch torn window screens

Before you open your windows for a fresh spring breeze, make sure you're not letting pests inside. To repair a torn insect screen, cut a patch that's inches longer and wider than the hole. Unroll its edges, then glue it over the hole's center and weave the rest into the mesh screen.

### □ Give your home a checkup

April is National Home Inspection Month. Ask, contrary to popular belief, inspections aren't just for new buyers—you should also schedule one as a preventive measure after living in your house 30+ years. Have the inspector evaluate a few key areas: plumbing, electrical, and structural. Find a licensed pro at [askthehouse.com](http://askthehouse.com).



### □ Fix a leaky foundation

To make sure April showers aren't sending a stream of water under your home, check your basement during a storm. Spot a puddle? Examine cracks and corners for efflorescence, a white residue caused by water seepage. Find the leak's location. Clear your gutters of debris. If they still overflow, install extra downspouts that will route water at least 30 feet from the house. Fill depressions in the ground so that it slopes away from your home's foundation.



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Edited by Jessica E. Doherty, [jdoherty@uconn.edu](mailto:jdoherty@uconn.edu)

MORE 

## Wallpaper cubbies

**Transforms a blackboard storage unit into a piece that's blooming with pattern and color** by lining some of the intricate spaces with wallpaper. All you need are three or four papers that share a color scheme; we chose botanical prints for a springlike feel. Cut the paper to fit the interior of each nook, including all four sides. Then, using wallpaper paste or a dropcap glue such as Mod Podge, adhere the paper to the inside of the cubby. Wink your way out to the sides, smoothing out air bubbles with a flat edge. Let dry, and use the cherrill's nooks to hold biggiez, cello-whos, photos, and other finds.

From left, Carry-Lined Designs: \$43 for a 27-foot roll and Antonina Walls: \$70 for a 27-foot roll; [gofoilwall.com](http://gofoilwall.com). Full-sized samples are available from \$6 each.

# sponges

An essential for any cleanup, these thirsty cellulose rectangles boast an absorbing array of other uses.

## 1 Sprout seeds.

Embed the ridged or other fast-growing seeds in a damp sponge and place it under an inverted glass bowl in a sunny location. Mist the occasionally. Once you notice seedlings transfer them to soil.

## 2 Catch oil leaks.

Place a sponge in a plastic bag under any leaking piece of motorized equipment to absorb the oil until the item can be repaired.



## 3 Pad your grip.

Make a shovel or rake more comfortable to hold by wrapping it with a flexible sponge reinforced with rubber bands.



## 4 Cradle valuables in storage.

Our damp sponges are small enough to place between bookshelves. As they dry, they conform to the contours of whatever they surround.

## 5 Dry the inside of a vase.

After a small sponge to a ruler or dowel and use it to mop up moisture inside a narrow-neck container.

## 6 Save your soap.

Make a bar of soap last longer between uses by allowing it to dry out on a sponge next to the sink or in the shower.

## 7 Deodorize the refrigerator.

Sprinkle a damp sponge with baking soda and set in an empty fridge drawer to absorb odors between cleanings.

## 8 Protect scratchable surfaces.

Adhere small sponge squares to the underside of vases

the bottom of chair feet or the back of picture frames so that they don't make scuff marks.

## 9 Loosen stubborn wallpaper.

In a pinch, soak a sponge in fabric softener diluted with hot water and wipe over wallpaper corners to loosen the adhesive and make it easier to remove.



## 10 Keep water-loving plants moist.

Place a sponge on the bottom of a planter before adding soil to keep water in reserve.

## Sound 10 uses for something?

Let us and we might feature it in our upcoming reader contribution book. Send ideas to [DELTA@DELTA.COM](mailto:DELTA@DELTA.COM).

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# Beat a break-in

Don't let your home be an easy target. Here, nine expert tips to stop thieves in their tracks

While you'd like to think a cold case happens to you, a home is broken into every 14 seconds, according to the FBI. Luckily, you don't have to be a security professional to protect your property. There are plenty of simple, affordable steps you can take.

## 1. Advertise your alarm

Criminals talking but when push comes to shove, they won't see a house that has an alarm, says Dr. Phil Cromwell, acoustology professor at the University of South Florida Polytechnic. You don't even need an active system: Just assign a yard or eucalyptus window—or better both.

## 2. Showcase Fido

Most burglars don't want to mess with dogs, whether it's a big pooch

or a 90-pound German shepherd. A threatening Basset or Doberman at the back, as on a paw print doormat

3. **Always lock up.** This may seem obvious, but 26 percent of burglars don't have time to get into a home—they walk in the door or climb through a window

4. **Beef up your doors.** Department of Justice statistics show that 72 percent of forcible entries involve damage to the door. To ensure it won't budge without your key, install a deadbolt. Add a solid brass strike plate secured with 3-inch screws that go all the way into the studs

## 5. Fortify windows

Burglars see an open window as a welcome sign, but in the summer it may be a necessary evil. A windowed insect screen

the slider track to allow airflow while preventing the window from opening enough for a person to fit through. Protect older glass with laminate film that makes it harder to break

6. **Guard the garage.** Many people secure their main entry but leave the door from the garage to their house unlocked, says Chris McGee at Los

Angeles-based security consultant with 40-plus years on the job. Even if it doesn't hold up, the garage can become a hidden escape from which they can take the time to unlock your back door to get into your house

7. **Use a timer.** Ninety-nine of 100 burglars will avoid a home if they think someone is inside, says Cromwell. To make your look occupied, put the lights on a timer so that they switch on while you're out. Even better, hook up the timer to your TV. Action on the screen will throw shadows on your windows, creating the illusion of movement

8. **Lighten up your landscaping.** If you have bushes in front of your house, prune them back from the door and below window level. Also, consider prickly plants such as hollies, says McGee, and trim climbable branches from nearby trees

9. **Install "surprise" lights.** In addition to saving energy, motion detector lights add the feeling of being watched when they illuminate a porch or yard. "They're a shock," says Cromwell, "and can stop them from crossing that line from the street to your home."

—NATALIE BRONKHORST  
—KIMBERLY MCKINNEY



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## HOW-TO

## Drill a drainage hole

No matter what kind of planter you have, it needs a drainage hole to prevent root rot. Making the hole yourself is easy—just send on to find the best bit for the job.



**terracotta and ceramic**  
Avoid cracking earthenware by marking your target with tape. Then, using a masonry bit with a winged tungsten-carbide tip (shown),



**plastic**  
To drill smoothly through plastic and PVC, use a sharp bit made from black oxide (shown). Work slowly to avoid melting the material.



**metal**  
Opt for a bit made from nitrocarburized metal (shown). For harder metals, first use a center punch to make a dent where you need the hole to be.



**fiberglass**  
Press the carbide tip of a glass and tile bit (shown) into the gel to keep the bit from walking; then slowly press down with the drill. —SAL VINCIGLIA



## HEALTHY HOME

## Allergy-proof your pad

While many of us eagerly await spring for the 60 million Americans suffering from allergies, April—with its mold-friendly moisture and pollen-bearing blossoms—is one of the toughest times of the year. Experiencing sneezing, runny nose, or itchy watery eyes? Follow these guidelines to remove your eyes from allergen outdoors and to avoid bringing them home. —SARIELLE BLUMGELD

**Garden smartly** Pollen levels peak between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m. so save yard work for later in the day. Keep grass cut short, and consider wearing a suit filtering mesh, goggles, and gloves while mowing the lawn. Avoid planting high pollen-producing flowers; patch in some earthy juniper and yuccas, especially near windows or doors.

**Clean your gear** Don't hang fresh laundry outside to dry, and shake out clothes after they've been worn outside. Shower as soon as possible after spending time outdoors. Pets can bring pollen on too, so soak a brush and wet wipes handy to clean off their fur and paws. Place mats or bath mats at the front door. They'll function as a catch-all for allergens and cleaning just for footwear, which shouldn't be taken off as you come indoors, when possible.

**Choose the right ventilation** Invest in crawl-space vent fans to keep humidity levels below 60 percent, which will then limit the spread of mold and mildew. When it's warm, opt for air conditioning instead of open windows to cool the house.

**Manage mold** Gravel or dumping areas of stagnant water in your yard, and be sure to use your property wisely. But not damp, to reduce outdoor mold. Avoid water-linger outdoors—or open the windows—after a heavy rain.

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be perfectly  
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## + PAINT UPGRADE

## Spiced-up staircase

Give a traditional stair railing an unexpectedly playful twist by painting the balusters a rainbow of clover-related food shades. You don't even need to bust your budget on dozens of cans of paint. Simply select a few strong colors. Then mix them with each other or white paint until you achieve your desired hue. Apply each shade to one or two balusters at a time. For others gradually extend as you work your way up the stairs. Here, seed-time greens, turquoise and hints seem to leap out from a backdrop of all-white. A polished wood handrail tempers the look, elevating it to a sophisticated take on painted fencework. —J.P.T.



## + PEST CONTROL

## Take on termites

April's showers and mild temps may bring more than blooms to your block. These conditions also attract subterranean termites, the most destructive wood pests in the country. Here, Steve lives, a 25-year pest-control veteran, shares his tips on beating these saw-toothed invaders—and winning.

**LOOK CAREFULLY** Examine your foundation for pencil-sized tubes, which termites crawl through to reach wood in your home. Also keep an eye on walls and trim for damage indicators, such as cracked or bubbling paint, bulges, or spots that sound hollow when tapped. **CALL A PRO** > See warning signs? A pest-control expert will identify and probe suspect woodwork and use moisture meters to find hidden leaks that may be causing colonies. Often, the best treatment is an EPA-approved termiticide. **PREVENT RETURN VISITS** > Avoid moisture buildup by keeping your basement well ventilated, fixing leaky plumbing, maintaining clear gutters, and diverting rainwater with downspouts or splash blocks. —B.B.



**reader tip** STEVE MACGOTHRICK, INDEPENDENT

When replacing or fixing a toilet, drain as much water as you can. Then place a disposable diaper absorbent-side down into the flush tank or bowl. It will soak up all the remaining liquid, making the repair quick and easy."

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## Vintage space, all-new spirit

A closed-off kitchen was opened up in every sense, adding light, energy, and charm

by AMALIA ISOLSTEIN • Photographs by DAVID FENTON



A good remodel often pays homage to the past while functioning very much in the present. When Stacy and David Erickson bought their 1920s house in Albany, California, they delighted in its vintage charms, which stopped short of the kitchen—a bar-borne box with tile counters and a window painted shut. To create an airy gathering space that would open to a family room, David and Stacy, an architect, along with fellow architect Sarah Wilmer and general contractor Jesse Carlin, bumped out one wall and took down two others, combining the kitchen and a laundry area into one large space. Refrigerator, wine cooler, and a food pantry are tucked up in a freestanding unit that separates the kitchen and family room in the open plan. Clean-lined, no-frills cabinets (some without doors, like the place of stacked apertures, countertops are volcanic stone) and a sculptural range hood hangs from the ceiling. “The kitchen embraces a modern feeling while looking as past show through,” says Stacy of the deconstructed space. “And with an soothing colors, it’s where everyone wants to hang out.”



[before]

**before:** Poor flow and dated materials made cooking a chore. **after:** Fresh colors, an open plan with an integrated eating nook, and built-in areas for storage and prep draw to more Stacy, Ernie, now 10, and Laurel, 7.

before+after: kitchen



## before

The closed-off kitchen, at 242 square feet, was awkward to navigate, with a dead end eating nook.

## after

Enlarge by 248 square feet and opened to the family room, the kitchen now has more prep space and a smarter layout.

**1. Replaced a wall with a unit that divides the kitchen and family room. It holds a deep pantry and dishwasher on one side and in-line equipment on the other.**

**2. Annexed the laundry room** to gain a more workable rectangular space and a wide opening to the family room.

**3. Dumped out the back wall** 3 feet to gain even more square footage.



**4. Built an island** that brings together the countertop oven, and microwave plus prep space, maintaining collisions among cooks, dish-cloths and table-seaters.

**4. Added a built-in barquette** and table for an easy eating nook just steps from the cooking and cleanup areas.



### homeowner tip

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before • after: kitchen

## • the key details

• **The island** holds all cooking functions plus pots, pans, and utensils in a flip-up shelf below the microwave. Connection drawers and overhead storage shelf.



• **Open shelves** keep daily-use items close at hand, minimize the never-fail alarm, and showcase Sherry Eisenberg's design. The island and adjacent cabinets, full of drawers, provide a great place to store.

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• **Soft blue and green** island cabinet and flip-up shelf. Flip-up shelf holds pots, pans, and utensils. Flip-up shelf holds pots, pans, and utensils. Flip-up shelf holds pots, pans, and utensils.



• **A cutting board** overlaps countertop edge for stability but can be moved around easily. It's also a great place to store.

• **The eating nook** includes a family-friendly table that's easy to move, and a built-in plug-in outlet. Fabric: Kraft. Chairs: Design Within Reach.

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## Rag-roll paint for an old-world look

To add texture and depth, reach for a plastic bag

By ERIC HADENMAN • Photographs by WENDY T. WOOD

You've heard of sponging paint with sponges and rags. But a plastic bag? "You'll be surprised," says decorative painter legend Lora. "It works great." To start, put down a latex base coat with a satin sheen (it makes working with the top coat easier). Once it's dry, mix equal parts clear acrylic glaze and latex paint at least two shades lighter or darker than the base coat. Get in with a brush, then use a roller to apply a generous coat in an area no bigger than 4 by 4 feet so that you'll have time to rag-roll before it dries. Press a crumpled plastic grocery sack into the wet glaze, and ramble the bag back and forth in overlapping angles. "You want to let some background color through to give it a three-dimensional look," says Lora. Move to the next section, overlapping the edge of the first. Check the effect before an area dries. If it's not right, sand and rag it again. ■

**bag it**  
The crumpled bag pulls away the colored glaze in a random, mottled pattern, exposing the base coat.



Paint: Sherwin Williams' LaVine Green; Glaze and Rag-Roll: Sherwin Williams' Milk Green (top coat). Base: Benjamin Moore's Shutter Pudding; Lathes: Sherwin Williams' Lathes

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# Simple country kitchen

Crisp, clean, and punctuated with energetic splashes of green, this eating-and-cooking zone is sure to put a spring in your step. Here's how to create a similar space in your home

By JESSICA KIDELL FIDON • Photograph by KENT FRELOAR

Nothing says "fresh and airy" like an all-white room. But a little creativity can leave the space feeling lived-in. To play up its casual personality, a few carefully chosen pops of color can go a long way. Consider this kitchen: While it may feature subway tiles, a mossy subway-tile backsplash, and whitewashed cabinets, furniture, and plank floors, the room also boasts richly glazed pottery, rustic wood storage containers, and brightly painted brass chairs. Potted plants complement the room's handsome country style and bring a bit of the outdoors in. Other cues, like the pendant lamps and glass Mason jars, add rustic character. Want to create a look like this at your house? Read on. ■

## rustic crates

For below-counter storage, think outside the box with stacked pine crates and covered wine crates. Pine crates: \$25; wine crates: \$25; [www.pine.com](http://www.pine.com)



## ornate metal armchair

A dressed with steel cushions. The chair's pale green lacquer is a replica of the company's iconic 1950s design. \$579; [www.furniture.com](http://www.furniture.com)



weave cushion Soften-seated seating with throw pillows infused in vegetable dyes. \$42; [www.village.com](http://www.village.com)



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barn-light pendant Suspended from a chain, this Art Lighting's Industrial Barn Light is a warm glow that casts a cozy atmosphere. \$36; [www.artlight.com](http://www.artlight.com)



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get this look

## glass storage

Modeled after old-fashioned preserving jars, these bright vessels are a clever way to stash pantry staples. From left: \$16, and bottle, \$16; [fishbowl.com](http://www.fishbowl.com); \$12 for three, [worldmarket.com](http://www.worldmarket.com)



## painted farm table

Thoughtful is painted on this one. Inspired by the vintage table shown at left, this affordable handle and four-board option looks like a similar clean line. \$175; [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com)

vibrant container A cheerful gray blue finish on the classic Art Deco shape of this is a good example container. Medium. \$45; [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com)



## bowl cachepot

Upgrade a potted plant by tucking this sleek chime vessel by Rodan. \$15; [www.rodan.com](http://www.rodan.com)



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## what look would you like?

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shopping

## Faux stone containers

Inspired by carved marble and limestone garden antiques, these lightweight pots are just as pretty—and a lot easier to lug around. By JENNIFER KUNZEL • Photography by TIZIANA BELLINI

Nothing transforms a room faster than a tiny oasis. We usually think of it as a tiny oasis. The right one can pack as much decorative punch as the plumpiest of pillows. Today many classic shapes are cast in concrete, an affordable alternative to the real thing, but still heavy to lift. Even better are look-alikes that replicate the most intricate details—down to the porous finish—in lightweight synthetic blends. The ones we like are cast fiber stone, a mix of sand and crushed pebbles combined with fiberglass and stained for an aged look. Shapes run the gamut, from classical urns with a money pot on the inside to simple round pots with mottled tones. Here, 13 of our favorites, all back to back.



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#### Planting Tips

There's more to container  
 gardening than picking a pot that  
 looks good. For the best result,  
 keep these guidelines in mind.

**Drainage** Proper drainage  
 prevents a plant's roots from  
 rotting, so be sure any pot you're  
 planting has a drainage hole in  
 the bottom. Cover the hole with  
 large pebbles or a small piece of  
 screening to avoid soil.

**Soil** Go for a sterile, lightweight  
 potting mix rather than heavy  
 garden soil. If you're  
 using a drainage or water area that  
 has a full drainage hole in a large  
 drainage area, you might want to fill  
 the bottom half with pebbles to  
 prevent it from being soggy.

**Plantings** For eye-catching  
 container gardens, try the "thriller, filler,  
 and spiller" rule. Place the tallest  
 specimen in the center or back as  
 visual anchors, use full, medium-  
 size plants to fill out around them,  
 and let trailing varieties spill over a  
 pot's edge with their cascading  
 form. Don't overcrowd the plants—  
 there is a limit to how many plants  
 can grow in a pot.

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## Curb appeal for a timeworn cottage

A proper entry porch plus new dormers enliven a basic facade

By JESSIE KATZBERGER • PHOTO BY KATZBERGER FOR HOWARD RUSSELL



A brick walk leads to the side of the house.



(Below)

Concrete steps don't extend the widest of welcomes, as Lisa and David Turner know all too well. "The whole entry needs work," says Turner of the 1930s Cape Cod-style house in White Plains, Virginia. The couple approached The Old House to reimagine their cottage's front view, and we called on designer David Hicks of Minneapolis for help. "To give the owners a more substantial entry, we extended the existing gable roof above the door to create a new front porch," says Hicks. In period-appropriate detail—namely, a small column, a square-arched roof, and a small pediment—Hicks's approach—completely transforms the entry's approach. The chimney and side windows get repositioned, and a new cupola adds charm. Two shed dormers (and a little rear dormer) make low-slung upper bedrooms. Gabled dormers would have been the period preference, says Hicks, but shed roofs won't usually compete with the large gable in front. "No question the porch is a really nice enhancement," says Hicks. "And I like the idea of a brick sidewalk, too." ■

### Finishing touches

Period accents elegantly define the new facade.



**lantern**  
A reproduction of a lantern-style light fixture with the house's style. See our Lighting 101.



**carriage doors**  
The garage gets a new look with carriage doors. See our Shop 101 and Lighting 101.



**entry door**  
This new entry door complements the double-hung windows. See our Shop 101 and Lighting 101.



**columns**  
Square-topped composite posts define the new entry porch. See our Shop 101 and Lighting 101.

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  - lower bone mineral density. This may be a problem for people who already have a higher chance of low bone density (osteoporosis);
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## Adirondack chair

Before pulling up a seat to watch summer unfold, consider how these two differ in look, feel, and price. **By** CHERILYN RALDINER • **Photographs by** TIGER DESIGN

A similar pair of chairs, knocked together with solid planks on a lake east of the Adirondack Mountains, was patented in 1903. Within decades, lumberjacks were using scraps to make dated versions, and in no time the economical chair with the deep, raked seat and accommodating armrests became a classic. Though the two shown here share high back and curved seat lines, the budget version is painted wood, while the high-end one is durable recycled plastic and folds for winter storage. Here are a few other ways to size up their differences, from top to bottom.

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### IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

If you want a reasonably durable but durable chair that can be folded up for storage.

### IS IT FOR YOU?

If you see all the perks aside like the idea of painted wood, and even a covered porch.

### how it's made

Recycled. Most items are made from recycled plastic and 5. Armrests in three pieces, with a handful of plastic-wood hardware. Color runs throughout, but scratches may show. Low maintenance.



### how it looks

A beefier profile with a broad, contoured back, a wider seat, and a visible folding mechanism. Arms are wide enough for a phone. Plastic is visible, even when it's all glowing.

### how it feels

Stays right in its seat and substantial. Textured finish tries to suggest wood grain.



### how it feels

Better fit for smaller people. Under the seat, smooth finish is wood, which feels more natural.

### how it's made

Lightweight spruce and fir is reinforced with two layers of polyurethane and a top coat of paint that's supposed to be long-lasting. Made in Asia. Arrows in some parts indicate sites of plastic hardware that's weather-proof.

### how it looks

Slender profile with a narrower back and shallower seat, though always in a slightly less than elegant. A mesh one side enough for a coffee mug, with no visible stitching. Glossy finish.

# The old and the beautiful

For the fourth year in a row, we've tracked down North America's most timeless neighborhoods—places where lovingly crafted old houses have extraordinary pasts and unarguably promising futures. BY KATHY WATSON

This  
Old House  
2011  
Best Old-House  
Neighborhoods



**MUSEUM OF LOUIS**  
This historic brick  
mansion is typical of  
Victorian grandeur in the  
St. Louis neighborhood of  
Compton Heights.

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From a former industrial area leached today as Toronto's answer to hipper-than-hip Brooklyn, to a once-maligned Chicago suburb that's now the go-to spot for affordable Craftsman-style bungalows, many of North America's best old-house neighborhoods are in long- or formerly forgotten cities, towns, and 'burbs that are worth a fresh look. They're also places where you'll discover some of the best, most architecturally eye-popping older houses on the continent. With help from our friends at Portland, Oregon-based PreservationDirectory.com—who distributed an annotation for more than 14,000 historical societies, neighborhood groups, and preservation nonprofits—we've cracked down all the best, best places that are home to block after block of truly breathtaking, Cape Cods, Colonial Revivals, Victorian-era cottages, and more. Check out the following five pages to see us all the old-house neighborhoods that won over the critics of This Old House this year. Then find the one—one from each state plus our favorite Canadian picks—online at theoldhouse.com/best-places.



## Best for bargains Compton Heights, St. Louis

- The entire neighborhood is a historic district
- Incredible estates—yes, actually, mansions!—for less than \$300,000
- Walk to parks and art museums

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD** is the storied southeast St. Louis neighborhood, a children's haven in shady front lawns bordering massive brick and stone houses, any of which could legitimately be referred to as "our manse." The streets, lined with towering trees, are named after men of letters, such as Hawthorne and Longfellow. The literary theme makes sense: Compton Heights has retained the look and feel of the 1800s, when it was developed, and to this day feels like it was torn from the pages of a Victorian novel. The neighborhood has other charms as well. "The homes here are unbelievable," says Gregory Ziegler, who along with his wife, Gayle, scored a 5,000-square-foot 1911 Beaux-Arts house several years ago. Their home features massive roof overhangs, stained-glass windows, hand-painted murals, vaulted ceilings, and a red-carpeted staircase. A similar, five-story upper version of the Ziegler's house—a blockover recently sold for less than \$200,000.

## SHADY LANE:

Architectural  
staples in Compton  
Heights include  
Tutor-Saville  
(ABOVE)  
Children search  
for eggs during  
Compton Heights  
annual Easter egg  
hunt (RIGHT)

**THE HOUSES** They were built by the city's most affluent barons and businessmen—"John Francis Quincy, the guy who started Monsanto, once lived right next door," says Gregory. These wealthy families sought out the finest architects, who took elegant styles—such as Beaux-Arts and Richardson Romanesque—to new, more flamboyant heights. Prices start at around \$150,000 for a single house in need of a gut renovation. While many single-family homes have been restored others, owned by longtime residents, sit for sale at an excellent buying opportunity. Frequently retaining their original details, rehabbers will also be happy to know that deed restrictions have long prohibited conversions into harder-to-reconstitute units.

**WHY BUY HERE?** Unlike many urban neighborhoods, Compton Heights has never experienced a significant period of decline. The entire section is listed as a local historic district. A 60-year-old homeowners' association keeps things tightly knit, organizing an annual Easter parade, an Oktoberfest celebration, and a Halloween festival with horse-drawn hay rides through the streets. There's also a large community garden, and the neighborhood is bordered by a park, a 36-acre green space surrounding a 19th-century brick water tower.



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### Best for cottages Whittier Mill Village, Atlanta

- Houses surround a 22-acre park
- Quiet wooded lots
- 15 minutes from downtown Atlanta

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD** Jen Stephens and her husband were struggling to find a desirable, and affordable, neighborhood near downtown Atlanta—until they discovered Whittier Mill Village. “We had no idea this place existed,” Jen says. “A lot of people in Atlanta have never heard of it.” Hidden on the city’s largely industrial northwest side, along the Chattahoochee River, the residential area was established in the late 1800s for employees of the Whittier Cotton Mills. It started with 30 wood-frame cottages, and many more went up during a 1990s expansion. After the mill shut down in 1971, the houses remained occupied but the settlement was more or less forgotten by Atlantans. Then in 1994 the Trust for Public Land purchased the factory property and turned it into a 22-acre park, considerably raising the area’s cachet.



#### PORCHES AND PARKS

A former family water bottling spot the neighborhood is still 100% the neighborhood includes a 22-acre park (ATDC).

**THE HOUSES** There are 100 original wood-frame cottages still standing, and newer houses built to resemble the old ones have increased the stock. Built in the Queen Anne and Georgian styles, the houses feature pitched roofs, pine millwork, and wide front porches. Prices range from the mid-\$100,000s to more than \$400,000.

**WHY BUY HERE?** A new generation is discovering Whittier Mill Village, driven by the close community and a 15-minute back-road commute to downtown. This side of Atlanta is seeing a market upswing as industrial buildings are redeveloped into loft-style, attracting young professionals and new businesses.

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## Best for rowhouses

Leslieville, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

- » Walk to markets, bakeries, and cafes
- » Commute to Toronto by streetcar
- » Walk or bike to Lake Ontario beaches

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD** Once gritty and industrial, the east-end Toronto neighborhood of Leslieville (population 27,000) has gained traction as families, artists, and business owners arrive en masse, lending the fashionable scene safe streets, proximity to local beaches, and—at least by pricey Toronto standards—the affordable housing alternative. “Leslieville has completely changed in the past three years,” says Jason George, who works at the children’s boutique Baby on the Hip. It’s one of many new businesses, including pubs, restaurants, and a cheese shop that have opened in Leslieville in recent years.

**THE HOUSES** “There’s definitely something refreshing about this place,” says David Dunkelstein, a Realtor who runs TorontoNeighborhoodGuide.com. Three-story Victorian rowhouses with steeply pitched gables line narrow, tree-bordered streets. Prices for two-story rowhouses and vernacular-style cottages start at \$300,000 (JRS)

**WHY BUY HERE?** It’s one of a few desirable neighborhoods in the center of the city, a few blocks from the city center. Downtown is a swift 15 minutes by car or trolley.



**FAMILY WAY** Torontonians with kids are gubbing up Leaside’s old restaurants (PHEON) and want to live near the Long Queens Street (JFT)



**CITY LIVING** Would-be Bay Ridge folks crave the Renaissance Revival rowhouses with limestone facades, most of which are located in the city’s oldest rowhouse district (JRS)

## Best for urbanites

Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, New York

- » Great views of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge
- » A small town in the middle of a big borough
- » Rtn a Norwegian bakery, an Italian butcher, and a Middle Eastern grocery, all on one block

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD** Drop home to thousands of Norwegian shipbuilders and their and their immigrants, this old-school Brooklyn neighborhood on New York Harbor is home to a dozen home-kind of place. Families walk together after church on Sunday or gather at the locally owned restaurants, pizza parlors, and bakeries that line Third Avenue. “We like things about here,” says Victoria Holmes, who grew up in the community of 70,000. “We also like the green space, the waterfront access, and the village atmosphere. We’ve got it all.”

**THE HOUSES** Two- and three-story single- and multi-family brick-and-brownstone rowhouses are common, as are wood-and-stucco Tudor-style and limestone-front Renaissance Revival rowhouses. This is New York City, of course, where affordable means anything under seven figures. A two-story brick rowhouse with original millwork and pocket doors might go for \$500,000. A restored 1900s Tudor rowhouse recently listed at \$550,000. Renaissance Revivals start at \$750,000.

**WHY BUY HERE?** It’s just over an hour by subway to midtown Manhattan. Young families and professionals are coming for what no one can take in most New York City suburbs: a single-family house.

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## Best for waterfront views

The West End, Alameda, California

- » Beautiful views of San Francisco Bay
- » Commute to Oakland in minutes
- » Good schools and a low crime rate make it great for families

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD** Just off the shores of Oakland, Alameda is a 23 square-mile island located smack-dab in San Francisco Bay. While the area has long been lauded for the stunning Queen Anne and California bungalows on its eastern edge, lately it’s the West End that’s getting the attention. Once known for the massive Naval Air Station that called Alameda home, the west side’s fortunes changed dramatically in 1993, when the U.S. Navy packed its bags, leaving behind enormous hangars. Before long, a new crop of enterprising Californians started to arrive, converting the cavernous spaces into fitness studios, fitness centers, wineries—even an ice skating rink. Over the past decade, as retired military families have gradually sold their Arts and Crafts bungalows and Victorian cottages, the West End has adopted a young and trendy identity. “It’s hip, it’s edgy, and it’s family friendly,” says Kathy Lachar, Managing Director of New Yorker who bought a 1920s Craftsman bungalow here eight years ago. Kathy, who serves as executive director of the West Alameda Business Association, says Alameda is growing popularity can also be attributed to the dozens of restaurants and businesses, new and old, along Webster Street, the neighborhood’s

main commercial drag. “You have Dick’s Barber Shop which has been here about 50 years, next to Luvale, a ritz new women’s boutique that sells clothing made by local designers,” says Kathy. “It’s very diverse.”

**THE HOUSES** Modest Arts and Crafts bungalows and Victorian cottages that once housed military personnel and generally never saw work are coming on the market at reasonable prices. A 1,377-square-foot bungalow is for sale in 1925 was recently listed at \$259,000.

**WHY BUY HERE?** Housing values are expected to rise as redevelopment continues in the area surrounding the former base, making a case for anyone interested in buying to act now. The West End offers gorgeous views of San Francisco Bay and a regular farmer’s market, wine tastings, and summer concerts. An underwater tunnel gets you to Oakland in two minutes and it’s a 20 minute ferry ride to San Francisco.



A SHORE THING

Many of the West End’s old Victorian cottages are being restored (ARW). Alameda’s numerous yacht clubs and marinas make it a boat lover’s paradise (JFT)



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**SWEET  
AND LOW**  
Brick bungalows  
dominate the  
Berwyn area, a fact  
that's celebrated  
each year during  
the city's  
Bungalow Tour  
(below).

## Best for bungalows

### Berwyn, Illinois

- > Just seven miles west of the Chicago Loop
- > Big, beautiful bungalows with original oak millwork
- > Tasty restaurants, Irish pubs, and one of the best annual reunions in the Chicago area

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD** "People used to snicker whenever you mentioned Berwyn," says photographer Matt Schudermann, who purchased a brick bungalow here five years ago. Indeed, many Chicago-area residents only knew of the area through a so-so movie TV showcase on which host Sven-Göran Eriksson is hilariously chastised working-class Berwyn. But this city of 53,000 is doing a throw from Chicago proper as it shakes off its butt-of-joke status thanks to an affordable housing stock, a slew of recently opened restaurants, shops, and watering holes, and an enviable proximity to the Loop. The Chicago Tribune even called Berwyn "the center of the middle-income buyer's market." Landlipo a stronghold for Czech and Italian transplants, Berwyn is becoming a choice for families and young adults, as well as artists and writers, looking for a laid-back, livable, more economical alternative to the big city on the lake. Many residents even prefer to spend evenings and weekends right here, taking in dinner at one of Berwyn's many eateries, a 10th Street Theater show, or a jazz gig at the famous FloDard's.



**THE HOUSES** Brick bungalows and English Tudors with high-pitched roofs along with wood-sided Queen Annes are the primary home styles here. Thanks to a long history of single-family ownership, most houses retain their original layouts, many with oak millwork, subway-tiled kitchens, and stained-glass windows. The average bungalow price is around \$275,000. Anyone interested in learning more should consider attending the city's annual Bungalow Tour, which takes place in September. (Find out more at [berwynbungalow.org](http://berwynbungalow.org).)

**WHY BUY NOW?** The Berwyn-to-downtown commute is 15 minutes by car, though Chicago's closest elevated train stops a bit farther away. The long Oak Park suburb is nearby, helping to keep housing costs stable. ■

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PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS

## Remaking vintage details

By re-creating beloved touches in their Spanish Colonial Revival for a new addition, the owners of the latest TOH TV project are respecting the past while building a future. *By KEELE SANDOLFF*

"Not all houses like ours still have to many original details," says Keri Albrecht, pointing to the original hardwood floors, ceiling medallions, Art Deco tile, and ornamental plasterwork that give personality to the current *This Old House* TV project, a 1933 Spanish Colonial Revival in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles. Keri and her wife, Mary Blee, are grafting a two-story addition onto the back of their 3,500-square-foot single-story home, including an enlarged kitchen, a family room, two additional bedrooms, and two bathrooms. As much as they look forward to having some breathing room for their growing family, they're also insistent that the new spaces blend as seamlessly with the older ones, some of which will remain virtually intact. "Our house is a classic Spanish Revival—and we want to keep it that way," says Mary. To do so, the TOH crew is working closely with Los Angeles-based *Home Front Design* to replicate the period details and finishing touches that make this house so special in the first place. Read on to learn how they're doing it.



### Original architectural flourishes

Bona features being replicated in the addition will remain in the original house, including the four-point-vane medallion (top left) and the Art Deco tilework (top right). The star-shaped medallion in the living room. Two, however, were substitutes of the renovation: a bedroom with a medallion, a cable plaster wall detail, and a bathroom with Art Deco tilework. "But the details of these rooms inspired our choices for new spaces in the addition," says Keri, pictured with a still-pregnant Mary and their young daughter (left). The couple's son was born a few months ago.

TOH  
TV



## fancy floors

The floors in the house's living and dining rooms feature a perimeter apron made of strips of oak in a log cabin pattern, filled with a heavier 5/8-in. top of walnut with a square knot pattern in each corner. "Trips and 5/8-in. knots became popular after the Incidental Revolution when wood flooring became cheaper to manufacture," says TOH TV master carpenter Norm Abner. Flooring contractor Luke Hillier created the look for the floor of the new family room (SEE LATER), placing a 1/4-in. oak walnut inlay within the 5/8-in. oak strip flooring, all held together with tongue-and-groove (pine) cut with a router. To make the knots, Hillier milled one end of a long border strip, then rotated shorter strips to form the squares, and completed the pattern by filling the spaces with a pine oak cut 30-45°. Later, the new floors will be stained to match the existing ones.



## a star is born

While the original plaster pattern used in the dining room is made of oak, the TOH project team opted for softer, easier-to-roll paper for the spaces they're installing in the new master bedroom and family room. Custom cabinetmaker Larry Buckner of Buckner Design Woodworks used a molding gauge to copy the original medallion's profile (A), which was then used to make a knife filled into a space to shape that cut the profile from a length of 3/16-in. paper. The four joints of matching strips were mitered at opposing angles, one end at 21 degrees and the other at 68 degrees. Like angles were joined with brass nails and wood glue (B), and the pieces then glued in place during assembly (C). Once finished, the joints were held together with a spray roller drier (D) and a radio frequency glue dryer was used to help cure the adhesive. Finally, the medallion was installed using Liquid Nails adhesive and 24-inch finishing nails driven through the ceiling joists (E).

## tile with style

The original bathroom's colorful Art Deco tile couldn't be salvaged, but Karl and Mary hoped to carry the style forward into the addition. For the downstairs powder room, they made handcrafted reproduction tiles at last year's Yellow Brick Mason Tile West with less expensive black tile from Delta. Here, contractor Jan Sandow installs a border with the same sand/water pattern that edged the old bathtub (A), and tapes with black trim pieces (B). "This is the bathroom that visitors will most often see, so we wanted to pack a punch of expensive punch," says Mary.



## mastering the plaster

Karl and Mary loved the formal "wedding cake" plaster detailing—named for its resemblance to piped icing—on the walls of their old bedroom. To recreate it, Abner first plastered up a 1/4-in. paper, cut out a curved template, and traced the shape onto the walls of the master bedroom. He used a curved great bag (B) with a star-shaped nozzle (the same geometry as the original nozzle) to apply plaster to the walls (A), then removed excess material with a long knife (C). As he cleaned up plaster around the curve, he used the cardboard template to help maintain its shape (D). After the corner detail was complete, Sandow made sure it matched the original profile (E), finally, when the plaster dried, he used a sanding block to lightly smooth the surface and edges to prep them for paint. ■



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## Greening up the roof

Cut energy bills and reduce the strain on the environment with a roof covered in succulents. By KAL VAGLIA • Photography by ALISON ROSA



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#### Tough succulents

TOP: Heavy sedums are most popular for greenroofs because they thrive in soft growing mediums and are drought tolerant. They last over a year or two and occasional fertilize to work their best. Bottom: Succulent plants from a variety of outdoor plants. Succulent plants are drought tolerant and are one of the most economical

A solidly engineered roof helps protect your house against the elements, of course, but the one installed over Sarah Jack and Scott Hanes's eat-in kitchen does that and more. Planted with hundreds of low-growing succulents, the little fire-roasted extension off their 1925 Colonial Revival helps slow down and filter rainwater runoff. Residential green roofs such as these protect natural watersheds from only street erosion by lessening the chance that municipal storm-drain systems will overflow. It also keeps the room below it warmer in winter and as much as 6 to 8 degrees cooler in summer, thereby reducing utility costs. The 140 square feet of pheraps helps absorb air pollutants, too, and—at \$13 to \$45 per square foot installed—should last about twice as long as a conventional roof. For all these reasons, the Bernards, New Jersey, couple felt good about springing for the eco-conscious home improvement. But they also value an aesthetic appeal. “The roof looks so lively and colorful,” says Sarah. “It’s definitely improved our view.”

The FireRoof modular system they chose is typical of residential models, consisting of plastic trays filled with a soilless vegetated growing medium and fully mature sedum plants that can handle both deluge and drought. At 40 pounds each, the trays are heavy and meant to be installed by a certified contractor. R&S Landscaping did the job here. To see how this roof went from bare to beautiful—plus the latest on DIY options—read on.





**4. Cut trays to fit.** Usually trays have 18 in. cut to fit between the last full tray and the opening. An outside measure for each end piece. With a sharp knife mark the full tray and a square. Because the trays are still with growing medium made of soil and peat, it is better to use a square with a masonry blade to cut the trays. The end and bottom of the last full tray is the same. On the top, the material will be the same of the trays. Another look at the measurements for the end pieces, and a final mark on the ground before setting the trays. It is worth the effort to cut the trays to fit.

**5. Remove soil elevations.** High tray elevations filled with a 6-inch-wide web of nonwoven plastic or similar lining allows the growing media to drain and store the water. Along with the corners by 8 in. along the sides of each tray, the elevated height allows soil to be carried between the trays and water, nutrients, and beneficial organic microbes move laterally among the trays. Storing the available water reduces the demand that crops or excessively wet soil will develop. After a couple of weeks of trays are installed, the heater pulls out the soil elevations at an angle to avoid removing the growing medium. The heater helps mold blend together and intermix head induces an space between the trays, increasing the system's insulating R value.

**6. Fix the last modules.** While the planted system can withstand some foot traffic, the best installation pattern is one in which installers can work themselves off the roof without walking too much on the plants. Then, the installer secures the edges to the slats of the modules with exterior-grade screws.

**7. Water wall.** Once the trays are installed, they are watered to settle the soil. Greenhouse plants in these sections usually grow in triplets until an entire tray is a four-week crop of high-quality seedlings. Once a tray is raised during the growing period, the growing medium can be used again if it is suitable for seeds. Dutch and Israeli growers use this soil with a self-cleaning procedure. It is used in the second, third, fourth, and fifth trays. Then, after several months, it is used as a soil for a new crop. This is a good way to reuse the growing medium and to keep the soil clean.



## Kits for DIYers

All modular green roofs are made up of plants, growing medium, and a container. Generally lighter and easier to work with than pre-modules, the DIT versions usually come with fewer plants to help keep costs down.

**Tray modules** Instead of using a trowel or crane to put heavy-plasticed trays onto a roof, the Green Grid system installs in parts. You set up the trays on the roof first, then fill them with a liner, soil, and immediate-plant plugs. \$62-\$146 per square foot, [greeningblowhs.com](http://greeningblowhs.com).

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**Don't miss the Los Angeles Project**

# SEASON FINALE

Tune in as *This Old House* rolls out the red carpet for a dramatically transformed—and respectfully re-imagined—1933 Spanish Colonial Revival in Silver Lake, CA.

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## Project timeline

**FRIDAY** Set and level the post anchors, and build the legs.  
**SATURDAY** Install the legs, seat, backrest, and lattice sides.  
**SUNDAY** Cut and install the rafter assembly.

### tools

design/hammer  
 roller saw  
 jig saw  
 18-gal./driver and 1-inch  
 push/bolt  
 caulk gun  
 4-foot level  
 clamps  
 combination square  
 flexible curve-to draw  
 profile for rafter tails

### materials

All lumber listed is western  
 12-ft long  
 2x4s Get three 8-foot  
 2x6s Get at least four  
 8-foot boards,  
 12x12 24-inch and 3-inch

### boards

2x4s Get at least four  
 8-foot boards.  
 2x6s Get at least two 8-foot  
 boards.  
 2x4s Get three 8-foot  
 boards.  
 2x6s Get two 8-foot boards  
 or two 4-foot boards for  
 the joists.  
 3/4-inch spacers cut from  
 scrap  
 post anchors Get four  
 construction-dive head  
 screws Round-off three ends  
 12-inch 24-inch and 3-inch



1



## 1. Install the post anchors

**A. Make pilot holes for the post anchors.** Cut and screw together four scrap 2x4s to make a rectangular template sized to the bench's footprint. Center the cut list at ThisOldHouse.com Bonus: Drill a centered 1/2-inch hole in each corner. Lay the template on the ground and push a large nail or stake through each hole. Remove the template and part 4 inside.  
**B. Set the post anchors.** Place the tops of the post anchors in the pilot holes you made in Step 1A. Make sure the anchors are parallel to one another and square with the bench's footprint. Place a scrap block of wood into one anchor and aligned with a stringhammer under the other's base (against the board). Repeat for the remaining anchors.  
**C. Level and square the post anchors.** Place the template on top of the anchors and check if level, making adjustments accordingly. Again, make sure the anchors are parallel to one another and square to the bench's footprint.

## 2. Make and install the legs

**A. Dry-fit the pieces.** Refer to the diagram on the previous page. Each leg is made from one long 2x4 bolted up with 2x6 support blocks separated by gaps where the crosspieces, bench, and rafter assembly will be attached. Cut the pieces to size per the diagram, then lay out a set of legs on a flat surface, using scrap blocks of 2x4 as spacers between the support blocks.  
**B. Assemble the legs.** Apply construction adhesive to the backs of the support blocks. Set them in place and drive 2 1/2-inch screws through them into the longer leg piece. Remove the spacers. Repeat for the remaining legs, laying them parallel to the first set to be sure that the gaps between support blocks are aligned.  
**C. Install the legs.** Fit a foot and backing into the post anchor's so that the sides of the legs with the support blocks face each other. Add washers. Repeat for the other legs.



2

## 3. Attach the seat base

**A. Cut and assemble the seat base.** Using a roller saw cut 2x4 spacers to use for the base. Cut the cut list. Sandwich the stringers between the long front and back pieces, as shown, so that the middle one is centered and the outer ones are 5 inches from the ends. Drive 3-inch screws through the front and back pieces and into the ends of the stringers.  
**B. Attach the base and lower crosspieces.** Fit the base into the 3 1/2-inch gaps in the legs so that the ends are flush with the outer edge of the legs. Check the base for level. Drive 2 1/2-inch screws through the front and back of the base and into the inside faces of the legs. Cut 2x4 crosspieces to use and fit the lower ones into the gaps in the legs on both the base. Secure them by driving 2-inch screws through the crosspieces and into the inside faces of the legs. Secure the legs to the post anchors with the supplied screws, adding washers if necessary.



3

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## 4. Attach the backrest supports

**A. Cut the pieces and install the side supports.** Use a miter saw to cut parallel 30-degree cuts in the ends of 2x6 backrest supports per the cut list. Slide the side support between the legs and the seat base so that the bottom of the support is flush with the underside of the base's outer stringer. Clamp it in place and drive 2½-inch screws through the support end into the crosspiece. Repeat on the opposite side.

**B. Secure the center support.** Cut a 30-degree miter off one end of a 2x6 center support block per the cut list. Attach it to the seat base's middle stringer, long edge facing upward using 2½-inch screws. Slide the backrest's center support into the gap between the center support block and the back of the seat base, as shown, and the bottom is flush with the underside of the middle stringer. Secure it by driving 2½-inch screws through the support and into the stringer.



**Tip:** If you prefer a straight backrest, square-cut the supports and use a 2x6 center block instead of mitering them.



## 5. Cut and install the bench's boards

**A. Cut the seat boards.** Cut and attach seat and backrest boards to step per the cut list. The first seat board at the front of the seat will extend to and past the front edge of the seat. Square ends must be attached at the ends to wrap around the front legs. Mark the notch positions, 3½ inches from each end and 2½ inches from the board's short edge. Use a jigsaw to cut out the notches.

**B. Attach the seat boards.** Set the notch widest board in place as shown. Lay alternating 1x6s and 1x4s behind it, leaving ¼-inch spaces between them. Secure the boards by driving 1¼-inch screws through each board and into the seat base's sub joists. The screws heads will be visible so be sure to use the correct color of screws uniformly on each board.

**C. Attach the backrest boards and end up the legs.** Starting at the top, place the first 1x6 board against the backrest supports, flush with the top. Screw the board to the supports as described in Step 5B. Secure alternating 1x6s and 1x4s beneath the first one, leaving ¼-inch spaces between them during installation. Cut the 1x4 caps on so that it fits between the backings. Apply a thin bead of construction adhesive to the top edge of the first 1x6 backrest board and the top of the backrest supports. Set the cap in place and secure it to the supports with 1½-inch screws.

## 6. Attach the lattice sides

**A. Install the remaining crosspieces, and cut and attach the vertical strips.** Fit the upper and middle crosspieces into the gaps in the legs. The middle ones act as supports for the bench. Secure them by driving 3-inch screws through the crosspieces and into the inside faces of the legs. Cut full-width strips to size per the cut list. Center the longer vertical strip between the bench's legs and attach it to the crosspieces with 1½-inch screws. Center the shorter strips vertically and place them equidistant from the long strip and the leg. Attach lattice crosspieces with 1½-inch screws. Repeat on the opposite side.

**B. Cut and install horizontal strips.** Attach the horizontal strips to the inside of the vertical strips at the desired height using 1½-inch screws.



## 7. Install the rafter assembly

**A. Cut the pieces and draw the tail profile.** Cut 2x6 and 2x2 pieces per the cut list. Lay a 2x6 rafter based on the flat, and use a pencil to mark the tail profile on one end. We used a combination square to mark the straight lines; for the curve, we used a flexible plastic edge guard for aluminum bending, or a piece of bubble wrap drawn to the face of the board, as shown, to achieve a shape we liked.

**B. Cut the rafter tails.** Use a jigsaw to cut the tail along the line you marked. Trace the profile onto the inside of the second rafter, and cut the tails. Then use the second rafter to trace the profile onto the opposite end of the first rafter, and cut the last tail.

**C. Install the rafters.** Sandwich the stringer between the rafters so that the middle ones are centered and the outer ones are 2½ inches from the top edge of the rafters. Secure them by driving 3-inch screws through the rafters and into the ends of the stringers. Set the rafter assembly in place so that the inside faces of the rafters sit against the outside faces of the top support blocks. Secure it by driving 2½-inch screws through the support blocks and into the inside faces of the rafters.

**D. Install the parails.** Lay the 1x4 spaced 2x6 rafters across the legs of the assembly so that the outer rafters are flush with the bottom edges of the rafter tail profiles, as shown. Secure them by driving 3-inch screws through the parails and into the top edges of the rafters.



# HARD- WORKING ROOMS

> Packed with clever built-ins, space-maximizing storage, and nifty organizers, these 10 high-functioning mudrooms, pantries, laundries, and potting rooms offer great ideas to streamline daily life

> BY JESSICA DODD-FEDER  
> PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC ROTH  
> PRODUCED BY COLETTE SCANLON  
> STYLING BY KELLY MCGUILL



These helpful built-ins show an orderly side—and plenty—of the place for everything.

STEP 1

## MUDROOMS

### Mud-Goals

- OPENINGS FOR AIRING OUT DAMP OUTERWEAR
- SHelves WITH BINS FOR CORRALING ACCESSORIES
- A SEAT FOR PULING FOOTWEAR ON AND OFF
- RESILIENT SURFACES THAT CAN'T HURT

### Floor-to-ceiling cubbies

This one-wall mudroom can handle a ton of stuff, from shoes to coats to toys. Here's a way to make it work.

- 1. OPEN STORAGE** Ample 16-inch-deep cubbies—each with a built-in shelf—offer a place to stash footwear, sports equipment, toys, and more.
- 2. NEAR CATCHALLS** Metal bins, fabric-lined baskets, and color-coded boxes organize small items and place off-season goods.
- 3. EASY-GO** High-gloss paintbrushes and more tools provide a place to hang coats, scarves, and hats. Blank area wraps clean.

**TIP** > Check up a crutch in the open space with a colorful, weather-resistant runner. To clean it, just shake it out or hose it down.



## Locker-lined stair wall

A benchtop-grade storage unit mounted along the stairs turns a short foyer into a neat mudroom entry to work.

### 1. CONVENIENT COMPARTMENTS

Open lockers with hooks have the same carried-over form that makes the unit long enough for a front entry. The oak chosen to match the stairs is finished with water-sealing polyurethane.

### 2. CLOSED CABINETS

Refrigerated doors, like terracotta, are backed up together and flip up doors.

### 3. STABLE SEATING

The 30-foot bench projects nearly 2 feet from the wall to provide a safe foothold for reaching top cabinets. Attached supports define the locker frames and divide the stable floor into landing spots for shoes.

**Tip** > Lockers should be at least 2 feet wide. An 8-foot 3-inch space for each person is huge and not unusual.



## Open-and-shut storage

Exposed hooks and drop-open closets and drawers create a high-functioning, clutter-free drop zone. Why it works

**1. EXTRA-TALL CLOSETS** Eight-foot-high doors hold away baskets of balls and outerwear not worn a very day.

**2. OVERSIZE HOOKS** Jackets and bags peacefully hang themselves upon generous hooks above the bench.

**3. HANDY PULL-OUTS** Small, clutter-clearing items, such as dog leashes, gloves, and sunscreen, are concealed inside large drawers. Roomy cubbies offer a glimpse of what's inside and a comfortable handhold.

**4. FLIP-TOP BENCH** Along with providing a spot for slipping shoes on and off, this perch is lit open up to store baseball bats and lacrosse sticks.

**Tip** > Make cleaning up after muddy feet (and paws) a cinch by installing porous towels with a shower mat for moisture.

## 2 PANTRIES

### Smart Storage

- OPEN SHelves FOR QUICK ACCESS AND TO BEG GUILT-FREEHEAVY ITEMS
- FLUX-FREE SURFACES IN CASE OF SPILLS
- GOOD LIGHTING FOR EASY FINDING

These kitchen essentials keep everything organized and out of the cooking zone.

### U-shaped closet

Wynn finishes her look as polished as the adjacent kitchen. Insignia tag a series of cues: Why? It works.

- 1 ADJUSTABLE SHELVES** These shelves can be raised or lowered to accommodate everything from canned goods and recipe binders to rolled-up quilts and linens.
- 2 SPECIALIZED STORAGE** Rods flanking the center and adjustable bins to hang aprons, linens, and whole slabs of meat.
- 3 SPILL-PROOF SURFACE** The granite countertop looks like a complement to the richly stained wood and keeps everything clean.

**Tip** ▶ To keep up lighting in a closed pantry—and a full-size closet—hang a pair of pendant lights instead of just one.



### Shallow space-saver

A fully loaded grid of open shelves and cabinets can disappear behind a functional piece of salvage. Why? It works.

#### 1. STRATEGIC SLIDING DOOR

The weathered barn door is mounted on a heavy-duty track, adding character, hides clutter, and—unlike a swing open door—won't block traffic.

#### 2. LOW-PROFILE LIGHTING

A small, recessed track lighting fixture provides the subtle, vintage look while illuminating items at the back of shelves.

**3. BACKUP POWER** Outlets allow for plugging a microwave and other small appliances to clear space in the cooking area.

**Tip** ▶ Checkboard paint can turn a wall in a blink of an eye, as in this case, an example of a pantry that's not just a pantry.



### Sunny nook

Lots of light makes this pantry more a pleasant disturbance—storage and food prep at once. Why? It works.

#### 1. DEEP DRAWERS

Full extension hardware ensures access to every inch of these pullouts.

#### 2. WELL-PLACED PREP SPACE

A 25-inch deep laminate countertop provides a convenient work surface.

#### 3. EASY ACCESS

Serving bowls sit at the ready on open shelves—and double as a display.

#### 4. CLOSED CABINETS

Small appliances and bulk items can be kept cool, dark, and dust-free behind closed doors.

**Tip** ▶ Wash heavy and frequently used items at waist height.



## 3 POTTING ROOMS

Plant-class fashion adds fun hit of color made for a pleasant gardening place.

### Must-Haves

- A DEEP SINK WITH A RUSTIC TAPSET TO FIT POT-BLIND WATERING CANS
- TALL SHELVES AND ROOMY DRAWERS FOR TOOLS AND CONTAINERS
- WHEAT-GRASS WORK SURFACE AND FLOOR

### Open to the outdoors

A Dutch door blocks pets while letting air and light into a workroom for potting plants and filling vases. Why it works

#### 1. RUSTIC SINK AND COUNTER

Open front has an earthy, bread-oven look, and chips and wear only add character.

#### 2. QUICK-CLEAN VINYL FLOOR

Water and potting soil mop up fast when they smooch into a rubbery film.

**Tip** ▶ Like a deep drawer with a heavy-duty plastic bag to serve as an oil bin.



### Plumbed hutch

A farmhouse-like potting center combines glass-front and solid cabinet doors for display and storage. Why it works

- RUSTIC-BRIMMED SINK** An earthy drip (leaky) half-coat warms with a raised lip helps contain splashes.
- WATERPROOF BACKSPLASH** Classic subway tile gives this cottage-inspired setup a pretty yet practical backdrop.
- EYE-CATCHING SHELF** An open shelf mounted on cork bark is a showcase for clothes, colorful containers, and potted plants.
- TOUGH WORK SURFACE** The nonporous German countertop is well-worn but stands up to assaults from liquid fertilizer, thorny rose branches, and heavy ceramic pots.

**Tip** ▶ Give a touch of flower concrete with its pale but dove-spectacular-style latex paint (see last page 24).

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## 4 LAUNDRY ROOMS

These well-organized, well-lit rooms help take the stress out of washing day.

### Must-Haves

- COUNTERTOP SPACE FOR FOLDING
- CABINETS FOR CONTAINING DETERGENT AND OTHER SUPPLIES
- SINK FOR HAND WASHBASINS
- RECORDERS FOR AIR DRYING



### Bright and spacious

The U shape offers space for eating, washing, folding, and hanging. Why it works

- KITCHEN-WORTHY CABINETS** Custom cupboards painted a vintage green—complete with a half-board backsplash—helps disguise the room's utilitarian look and accommodates every laundry necessity, as well as storing and serving supplies.
- AMPLE COUNTER SPACE** A long run of solid surface holds stacks of folded clothes.
- AIR-DRYING STATIONS** Choosing single-sided wall racks lets out the top when indoors. A shower, outcropped in front of the window, allows damp laundry to get a full dose of fresh air. A coated metal mesh rack set into the countertop keeps linens flat for drying.

**Tip** ▶ Close an under-counter space for a laundry basket or hamper in a closet.



### High efficiency

Everything is within easy reach in this compact, light-filled laundry center. Why it works

- LOW-GATE COUNTER** Front-edge is topped with a quarter-inch create a space-saving folding area.
- OVER-THE-SINK RACK** Laundry hangers can drip-dry over the sink.
- PULL-OPEN TAPSET** An adjustable spray helps with ergonomic hand washing.
- SLIDE-OUT DRYING RACKS** Slatted wood pulls out a generous 27 inches wide and 20 inches deep can handle bulky wet sweaters.

**Tip** ▶ Install an under-cabinet lighting to make loading easier.

By Todd Tuttle, homeowner

# Everyone thought we were nuts

The walls were packed with acorns and mummified squirrels, and raccoons were living in the barn. Still, one undeterred couple set out to turn this centuries-old farm into the ultimate family nest.

We were the first and only buyers here—or maybe never—enough to even look at the place. The yard was a tangle of scrub-trees and pickers, and neither the main house nor the little carriage house beside it were lovable. It grew up on a town next to Randolph, New Jersey, where the farm is. My wife, Kelly, and I were looking for a house in the area and wanted an older home with land. When we first drove past the property, we said, "If that ever goes on the market..." The next time we went by, we saw a For Sale sign.

The original Pungley Farm was 100-plus acres. It was subdivided long ago and designated mostly what New Jersey calls Green Acres—land preserved for public recreation. We bought the three-acre lot along the road, including the 1820 farmhouse, the circa 1760 carriage house, and several outbuildings, for \$281,000.

A series of families had owned and lived in the house, but the main one had been a ramshackle rental house for 30 years. The place was a mess but with some stunner intact. A classic farmhouse, it had a gabled roof, original worry-glass windows, and a sparkling yard. The property layout, with farmhouse, carriage house, and outbuildings in a half-moon configuration, meant you couldn't see the road from the backyard. The Green Acres behind it sweetened the deal. I'd worked summer jobs as a groundskeeper and a furniture finisher, and had done construction. I knew renovating these houses would be a learning experience.

Kelly and I closed on the farm three months after we married. Everyone thought we were nuts, but we had a gutsy idea. First, we'd renovate the carriage house, since it needed less work, and move in. Then we'd relax on the big house. We wanted a large home because we planned to



Photographs by  
TARA GORDON

Styling by  
MARSHALL  
MILNER

OPPOSITE: But a few years ago, the farmhouse was a mess. Kelly and Todd Tuttle, with daughter Griffith, 3, and Claudia, 4, use the kitchen island for dinner prep and breakfast.







**LEFT** A half spiral staircase leads from the kitchen to the master suite and showrooms on the second floor. It used heavy timber truss, which came from a 17th-century kitchen and was prefabricated into the original house by the couple.

**ABOVE** Tally outdoors in the stair run leads to the master bedrooms in the homeowners' design. A small woodshed warms the room in winter. It was a brick that decorated the kitchen fireplace chimney which is also the brick heating furnace in the basement.



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kitchen guy, so I mixed up plaster to look vintage, built cupboard and pantry doors, and framed a wall in old barnwood. Kelly came up with ideas, wiring pipes out of copperware, and I learned from books like Nigel Pritchard's *Restoring Old Houses*.

As we approached our four-year anniversary as the farm's owners, Kelly and I moved into the carriage house. Then we picked up our dog business and drove into the den on the main house.

Like the carriage house, it needed a new roof, the framing was good, so the contractors tore off the curved asphalt and replaced the rotting cedar shakes underneath with new ones. New plumbing, electric, and AC were added in this house, too. Here we found that high-velocity central air, with its CD-size ducts, was fairly easy to install and worth the expense. We were happy with the floor plan but didn't like the tight galley kitchen and wanted more space upstairs. I started looking at addition options that would allow us to keep, open-plan kitchen we

desired of, as well as a second-floor master suite.

From the beginning, I'd sought out materials by rolling clay and Craigslist, finding old floorboards, and a professional Thermador dual-fuel range. One discovery would literally become the heart of our house. On an architect's salvage website, I found a 17th-century two-story timber frame from a Pennsylvania Dutch settler's kitchen in Philadelphia, New Jersey, where my mom grew up. We bought it from Phil Kelley, a preservation expert, who also drew up plans for a foundation and its attachment to the house. We changed his plans as we went, but when we raised it, connecting it to the house with a 10-foot passageway and adding a metal roof, we knew it was a perfect fit. The new section added 900 square feet—space to be our master bedrooms, big kitchen, and connecting Jersey Winter stair case—to the house.

The kitchen was my pet project, and so local paint would be the heart. Bob did the majority on

**RENEW** The homeowners entered the 1,000-square-foot carriage house first so that they could live in it as they tackled the main house. They reused many of the original windows rather than sacrifice the period piece, then finished with new wood storm walls to increase their energy efficiency. Landscaping still in progress is the renovated final phase.



the large walk-in fireplace and built the chimney, too, with multiple flues to serve the new oil-burning furnace as well as a woodstove upstairs. We couldn't find kitchen floor tile we liked, so we considered salvaged brick. Problem was, full-size bricks raised the floor too high. We found a masonry yard that would cut the top off for a 3-inch thickness, and we laid the brick in a herringbone pattern.

Kelly and I designed and built the open-shelved cabinets and the island, and my cousin's husband, a granite and marble fabricator, made the Carrera counter tops. I found the sink, range, and dishwasher hood on eBay. We kept the electrical exposed, it was easier and cheaper than running it through the beams, and we like the industrial look of it. For the pantry, I repurposed a sliding barn door.

The back staircase directly links kitchen and master suite. The old house's three upstairs bedrooms are now a master bath, a kids' room, and a playroom. Our daughters, Claudia, 4, and Gabriella, 2, were both born during the renovation. When Claudia

was ring, she called the farmhouse "Papa's house." Everytime, her mom would bring her to say goodnight as I worked, so she thought I lived there.

The house's original staircase, now reinforced, leads back down to the dining room and the upstairs living room. Our long table, which I built from leftover floor boards, has a full view of the beam, thanks to the custom-made doorless passage between house and addition. That open-on idea was Kelly's and is appreciated every time we light the fireplace for a party.

For two plus years now, we've lived in the main house, with rooms in the carriage house. This summer, our 10th as the farm's owners, will be devoted to the yard, my landscape designer wife's specialty, with heavy lifting by me. I'm building retaining walls, and there's a lawn no longer up, shrubs to plant, and a patio to finish.

Every time we walk outside, we can't believe what a perfect property we found. A decade of work, yes—but we'd do it all over again. ■

## enter our reader remodel contest!

Win a \$250 gift certificate to the Old House. Send us a photo of your house, a floor plan, and a brief description of the work you did. We'll be here to help you.

# 25 DIY Fundamentals

Sailors call it "seamanship," Scouts call it "woods wisdom."

For homeowners, "it" is simply the must-know everyday stuff that makes us the masters of our domains. Coming up, the experts at *This Old House* share their top tips and techniques for sprucing up and keeping up your home without having to call in the pros.

by Jim Gorman ■ PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA MOSE ■ ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVE SANFORD

## 1 Hang heavy stuff

Studs never seem to be where you want them when putting up an antique mirror or installing a wall-mounted crib. And your usual hangers, like stolen picture hooks or large (but old) wall anchors, tend to pop out under loads greater than 20 pounds. No worries. If the wall hanging is wide enough to span two studs, you can support it with a French cleave. Even if it's off-center. Here's how to make one.

1. Run a length of 1/2-inch plywood (length is 1/4 inch over the hole at 45 degrees, creating a beveled lip on outside). Cut the strips in two.

2. Screw one strip to the wall, one up and away from the wall, for the studs. Check to ensure level.

3. Secure the other strip to the wall, pegging it with the lip facing down and away.

4. Lift the wall hanging into place so that its beveled spine fits into the depression on the wall. Fasten the object, secured ends to match your wall color.



The beveled edges of two plywood strips fit together, forming a joint to support hefty wall hangings.

## 2 Unclog a sink

Strip the caustic chemical drain cleaners, and roll up your sleeves. Attack the clog in the following order:



### TRY THIS FIRST.

Fill the sink with water and vigorously pump up and down with a plunger. Direct pressure at the stoppage, shifting your grip into the overflow hole, says Joseph Rossi, owner of Boston Standard Plumbing & Heating, in Massachusetts.

### DIDN'T WORK?

Pop out the drain stopper (2)—half an hour's soak best to loosen up its hair—by unscrewing it in the direction of the sink pipe and retrieving the plug and (2). Extract the block with your clothes hanger (4).

### STILL NO LUCK?

Remove the P-trap with a bucket and gloves, place leading in the direction of the drain pipe. Have a bowl ready to capture the debris. Inspect the trap. If the blockage isn't there, remove the trap and feed a pipe snake into the drain out to release the clog.

## 3 Free a rusted nut

Many a Saturday project has ground to a halt because of a stuck nut. Get it moving with a support wrench. (Press and adjustable wrenches are prone to slipping into 1/4-inch slots.) Says Richard Treibow, TOH's plumbing and heating expert, attack the problem. If the first method fails, move on to the next.

**TECHNIQUE** Wipe away all moving even in the wrong direction. It's likely easier to reverse course.

**TIP** An impact blow can break a rusty nut. Use a mallet to house the strike squarely on the nut.

**NEXT** Expose the nut by directing a hair dryer or a heat gun at it. Then, give it a yank.

**LOSE.** Clear away debris with a wire brush. Then apply Loctite Wrench on the threads. You may have to try several applications over 24 hours.

## 4 Drill straight, drill true



Even with a steady hand, it's easy for the tool to wander. TOH reader carpenter Harris Allen drills perfectly perpendicular holes using a wood block as a guide. Cut one end of the square square. Using a combination square, draw a line perpendicular to the cut end. Hold the block against the wall and let the parallel line direct the drill bit at the target. Remove the block after the hole is under way. Once the bit is perfectly set, it should drive straight.

## 5 Cut in, crisply

Painting a straight line at the intersection of walls and ceiling at which separates the trim from the walls. To do it, start with a good-quality 2 1/2-inch angled sash hook to guide the brush about halfway and tap on the side of the bucket. Don't squeeze the brush or you'll end up with too little paint," says Phil O'Neil of Interiors Painting and Restoration in Bedford, Massachusetts. Holding the brush parallel to where you need to cut in, make a preliminary "guide strip" about 1/4 inch from the intersection. Working in long steady strokes, fill the area between the strip and the intersection. "The brush will move smoothly and you'll have better control," says O'Neil. Use your sash hook again to remove the excess paint buildup that could show through the rail coat.

## 6 Sharpen a mower blade

You could cut that mower clear across town to a power shop, wait a day, go back, and fork over \$35 for getting the dull blade sharpened. Or you could do it yourself in less than 30 minutes, for free. Safety first. Pull the spark plug to prevent an accidental start-up. Next, tilt the mower, following the manual's safety instructions, and wedge a series of 2x4s against the blade so that it won't turn as you work. Mark the blade with an "X" to indicate its face for normal rotation. Clamp the blade in a vise, and make long passes along the beveled cutting edge with a 1/2-inch mill bastard file (you, that's what it's called). The stroke begins with the top of the file near the center of the blade and ends when you bottom the bottom of the file off the blade tip. Once the edge is sharp and flat, check the balance by centering the blade on an assortment of pieces of wood. Make end a pass with the file if you need to level it. But the blade back onto the mower and you're ready to bring grass up.

### ❓ Unstick a door

A door that swings freely in and out under conditions common in summer humidity. Take note of the sticking points. If the doorjamb is solidly anchored and properly installed, it's likely the house isn't settling. The two main events on the door—the door is swollen, or all of the above. TOM solves just a pin or two of wood in it to ease the tightness of a neck-in between door and jamb to accommodate seasonal changes. If the door is localized, shave the high spot down with the door in the open position. Tom uses the fine bench plane and takes long, smooth strokes with the plane held at a slight angle. (If you haven't read issue 150, skip the "How to Plane" article.) Round over the sharpened edges left by the plane with 150-grit sandpaper.



10 Find a stud

**Positioning a stud** is a part of carpentry, especially on thick plaster walls. The stud is put in place by sweeping a wall with a battery-powered or magnetic finder to locate the approximate location of a support. Measure 16 or 24 inches to either side of an existing stud. Confirm the centers with the stud finder. The artwork comes in varying that you visit the mark by taping the wall with the handle of a screwdriver. A hollow sound means you're between studs; a thunk indicates solid purchase. With drywall, you can also use a flashlight across the surface to scope corners, holes or drywall blemishes. Telltale signs of actual

### Extract a stripped screw

But use or do screen strips a lot more frequently than they used to! I've made one. The first thing to do is switch tools. If a drill driver got you into the mess, it won't win the tip of you out. Instead, grab a screwdriver with a flat bit that fits the screw type, and a hammer. Gently tap the tip into the head to seat it. Using as much downward force as you can muster, slowly back out the screw.

### ● Fix a popped floor nail

**Killer of socks, mangle of flesh:** A protruding nail in a hardwood floor is a hazard. Chances are it will not be pulled out and replaced again. Fix the problem permanently by prying out the offending nail with vice-gripping pliers, rock the pliers against a block of wood to keep from denting the floor. In the nail's place, sink a new screw of similar length, and cover with a dab of wood filler.

**9 Cut crown quickly**

**Installing crown is painless enough** without having to align the existing crown with another saw's vertical fence on every cut. Simply measure out the 1/4" difference and make a difference on your miter saw's deck for perfectly assemble line cuts. Here's how:



Flare mounting: at an angle upside down—screw the back of the barrel round to make contact with the railing rails on the saw deck. The part that is supposed to touch the wall should be up against the saw vertical fence. Secure with clamps. Next, cut a strip of plywood 30 inches long to serve as the horizontal fence. Apply hotglue dots to the sawdeck on either side with rotating control, and press the fence tight to the chains.



Remove the crown and cut away the center section of the horizontal fence at 45 degrees in each direction.



Handle the crown ballast the same as vertical fence and your horizontal one is securely held in place for anchoring.

### 12 Safely work above stairs

ladder than **work a scaffold** or buy an **erected ladder** when making repairs. When a high, sloping ceiling elude anyone, Tom Seaver provides a sturdy platform supported by ladders. Here's how: Open a step ladder and place it at the top of the beam. Then position an extension ladder on the stairs. Holding it between the coupling will lead the arms to protect well. Construct a platform from the desired beams in the ladder by crossing 2x4s to a plywood deck. Nail steps to the ends of the 2x4s to prevent the assembly from sliding off the ladder. Careful.



13 **Make square crosscuts**

**Mark Abraham** has a bagful of self-carpen-ter's tricks, like this one for ensuring that he's leading his saw blade perpendicular to the wood he's cutting. So what? Simply by the teeth of the saw on the edge of the outline and look for the reflection of that same edge in the blade. Adjust the saw slightly until the reflection matches up with the actual edge of the wood. This will prevent you from angling your outline or angling your blade as you saw through the thickness of the wood.



15 Carry plywood

**Chiropractors love plywood.** It's good for business when someone attempts to tote a 4-ft. board single-handedly. Save your back by using a carrier. Tie the ends of a 20-foot rope, creating a loop. Slip the loop around the two bottom corners, reach over and grab the center sections of the rope on either side of the plywood, and lift the board into your underarm. No sweat, no backache.

**15 Stain without blemishing**

**Unseen absorption** can cause stunted wood furniture to look blotchy. To correct wood tones on hardwoods, such as maple, oak, red or hickory, use a wet sandpaper. Run out dark spots with a rag dipped in mineral spirits. The trick with a soft wood like pine, which has a deep oil structure that can soak up too much stain, is to buff with a clear conditioner first, to partially block some of the wood pores. Once applied, you can then stain within 15 minutes.



⑥ Paint with “sprayed-on” results

**Stay on schedule**—free paintless scratch and free oil flushes make sure it looks factory-coated—but don't know how to achieve it. After months free, you will

1. Prep the surface by sanding to knock down dirt and brush bristles. Vacuum and wipe with the Tack Cloth.
2. Enclose a high-boilered, or roller, lawn mower. When dry sand with 320-grit paper and tack.
3. Filter 100 percent naphtha through a disposable shower bag to remove any impurities.
4. Mix in a few ounces per gallon of a latex paint conditioner such as Floetrol to slow dry-time and improve flow. Slowly spread paint to avoid air loss or loss before it cures, minimizing brushstrokes.
5. Using a true quality synthetic brush, apply the paint in long strokes. Carry back without final stroke using just the spine of the brush to smooth the finish.
6. Let the paint dry. Sand lightly between 180 and 220 grit papers; then tack and repeat the final steps.



## 17 Replace a broken tile

To swap a new tile for a cracked one, start by miking up the surrounding grout with a wide-toothed scraper. Cover the edges of adjacent tiles with painter's tape to protect them. Then drill evenly spaced holes into the broken tile's pieces with a 1/8-inch masonry bit to free them from the substrate. Working from the center out toward the edges, gently tap out the pieces with a hammer and a narrow flat chisel, and clear away any old mortar. Gently brush out any of the old mortar. Grout is not so forgiving of removal as the replacement tile is, so back and on the substrate, and pack the joints in place. Let the tiles dry overnight before grouting.

## 18 Cure a loose hinge

A few loosened or missing screws on a door hinge can throw the door out of alignment and expecting a different outcome. Get your screws tightened by removing the hole. The method depends on the hinge and where it is installed.

**DATA CABINET:** Simply remove the small screw and enlarge the hole either by using a drill bit or a screwdriver. Get the glue dry, and the hole will be filled with the glue. Let the glue dry, and the hole will be filled with the glue.

**DATA DOOR:** Widen a block of wood under the door's bottom outside corner. Use a screw and swing the door hinge to the side. From the top of the door hinge, use a 1/2-inch screwdriver. Spread the hinge's glue with a matching 1/2-inch screwdriver. Use a 1/2-inch screwdriver to spread the glue down the hinge until it is flush with the door. When the glue dries, drill a pilot hole into the door and drive a new hinge screw home.

## 19 Drill the perfect pilot hole

Driving a nail into the end of a piece of wood is never a pleasant experience. The hammer and driver the most likely to split the wood. That's where pilot holes come in. By giving the nail an empty place to go, the hammer won't force the wood apart. For a square and accurate pilot, chuck your drill around a finishing nail. But first, snap off the head of the nail.

## 20 Shoot smooth caulk

For a neat bead when sealing around a sink or the gap where shower wall meets tub, pull out the painter's tape. Lay pencil strips about 1/4 inch apart on either side of the seam and tape them in the caulk. To smooth a silicone sealant, which is tacky and difficult to tool, dip a finger in dish soap before running it along the gap of the bead. A finger moistened with plain water works for acrylic latex caulk. Remove the tape when the caulk is still wet. One more finger with dish soap finger smoothed by ridges and gives a smooth, concave bead.



Cut the caulk tube's mouth at a 45-degree angle to create an opening that's just big enough to fit the nozzle. The gap between the tube and the nozzle is the key.

## 21 Cinch down a load

To curb lumber atop your vehicle, the trucker's hitch is the knot to know. Start by tying off one end of the rope to your car's hook or anchor. Next, slide the rope over the load to be lashed down and make a second knot. Wrap the free end of the rope around the trucker's hitch, then thread it through the eye of the knot. This will create an improved pulley, allowing you to tighten down the load. Once you get it snug, wrap the end twice around the truck's side rail to maintain tension on the line and secure using two half-hitches with a quick-release shackle.



## 22 Drive a nail

Hammers and nails have been building for thousands of years, so it's easy to take for granted. Yet, there's a lot of technique involved. The key is to strike the nail with the hammer. Not the head. Good hammering technique begins with properly starting the nail. Cradle upon the handle of a 20-ounce hammer—a good all-purpose size—and give it a firm, light tap. Cradling the handle near the butt, deliver steady blows by swinging from the elbow, not the shoulder, controlling the weight of the hammer as the work. The forward wrist remains stiff throughout the swing, and the very end, when you catch the nail, for extra control. Instead of the nail hitting the nail flatly and making the nail head, the nail head is cushioned by the wood, leaving the head protruding and counteracting with a nail set.

## 23 Limb a tree

Saw off a limb that is more than 1 inch in diameter with a single cut, and you'll have no damage to the tree and your self. As the limb gives way, it swings out and back and swings toward you. So either cut and back out.

1. Using a chainsaw, first cut halfway through the underside of the limb at a distance of 1 to 2 feet from the trunk.
2. Make the second cut 3 inches farther out on the top side. The limb will snap off the trunk.
3. Now saw off the stub at an angle just beyond the branch collar. Never cut flush with the face of the tree or it can injure itself.



## 24 Salvage molding

An old home's interior trim might well be one-of-a-kind—especially decorative window and door casings—so it's worth saving. The less damage you do to existing trim, the better. Here's how to remove it safely.

1. Works 2-inch-wide scraper behind the trim, sliding it the length of the piece while exerting outward pressure.
2. Slip a pry bar into the widest crack with the scraper behind it to protect the wall as you rock the pry bar.
3. When the trim is free, pull out through its unfinished backside by leveraging with metal rippers or longer and greasy pry bars. (Hammering nails back through the trim can cause the wood to splinter and damage the painted surface.)



Use the pointed end of the scraper to remove the molding and prevent floor damage.



## 25 Prune a rosebush

For most modern rose varieties that bloom abundantly on new growth, including hybrid teas and floribundas, prune aggressively. Just be sure to wear long gloves so that you don't get scratched by thorns.

1. In late winter to early spring, cut out all dead and diseased canes at the base with pruning saw. Further cut and eliminate, which look woody rather than green.
2. Of the remaining shoots, cut back the strongest to about 4 inches above soil level with hand pruners.
3. Long off less vigorous canes at 2 to 4 inches. Cuts should be angled and 15 inch above soil.

share your DIY tips

We'd love to hear from you. Send us your best DIY tips and photos to [diy@theowner'smanual.com](mailto:diy@theowner'smanual.com). We'll share them with you.

# ALL ABOUT

## Vinyl flooring

Durable and easy to maintain, this practical, affordable floor covering is continually improving in looks and performance. This Old House's experts explain everything you need to know before you bring it into your home. By Thomas Baker

We love the historic appeal of floors covered with wood, stone, or ceramic. But let's face it: These materials can be high in cost, low in comfort, and often require more care than we have time or energy for. That's why the smart money is often on vinyl! This durable flooring shrugs off street grime, potting heels, and sloppy spills while providing a slip-resistant and often cushioned flooring that doesn't cost an arm and a leg. No wonder you find vinyl in almost every American home—usually in kitchens, halls, and entryways.

This category of resilient flooring encompasses an array of products, including sheets, tiles, and planks made of flexible PVC; rigid tiles that combine vinyl and ground limestone; and soft, rigidlike sheets that are woven from vinyl-coated fiberglass strands.

Regularized in the mid 20th century, vinyl flooring is still evolving. It's more durable—many companies offer lifetime warranties—and can be installed faster than earlier versions. Patterns and textures convincingly mimic the old-school competitors or boldly go in a more modern direction. And in response to health concerns, some flooring is now certified to meet strict standards for indoor air quality.

Putting it all together, we explain the various types, installation methods, and price points. And you'll see striking designs that demonstrate how vinyl flooring can create both vintage charm and contemporary style with equal ease. When a flooring is that versatile and has so many looks, who needs a historic pedigree?

**Anatomy of a vinyl sheet:**  
The following is the most popular type: a cross-laminate polymer

**Top coat:**  
Adds sheen and protects the wear layer

**Wear layer:**  
Resists scuffs and the yellowing effect

**Pattern layer:**  
Supplies the sheet's color and pattern look

**Cushion layer:**  
Adds texture and texture

**Stabilizer:**  
Keeps the sheet flat

**Back layer:**  
Supports all layers



Looks like sheet vinyl, but this floor is actually textured vinyl sheet, a practical water-resistant pick for bathrooms. Similar to stone, *Flint Floor Frenzy Sheet* by Capriamer, \$2 per square foot, is available. [vinylfloor.com](http://vinylfloor.com)

### VITALS

#### How much does it cost?

Vinyl sheets range from 15 to 25¢ a sq. ft. to \$4 per square foot. Tiles typically cost \$1 to \$3 per square foot. Planks run about \$5 per square foot. In each case, installation is extra.

#### DIY or hire a pro?

Homeowners can install most vinyl and plank themselves. Let a pro lay sheet flooring.

#### How long will it last?

When set on vinyl flooring runs from five years to as long as you own the house.

#### How much care does it need?

Vinyl regularly goes easy with weekly water, household grime, and deep colors to keep it bright. Do not use bleach or ammonia. Wipe spills as soon as you can.

#### Where to buy it?

Home centers and flooring retailers sell a variety of tiles, sheets, and planks, and can recommend an installer if the type you choose isn't DIY-friendly.

## Vinyl types

Different ingredients and manufacturing processes impact looks, durability, and how the flooring gets down.

**Vinyl sheet** Invented in 1968, this pre-installed flooring goes down fast and has few if any seams. Composites PVC for toughness, fiberglass for stability, foam gel for comfort, texture, and insulator, and urethane for durability. Because of its quality, it can simply be laid over a subfloor or glued down for more permanence.

**Vinyl tiles and planks** These DIY-friendly products go through a re-manufacturing process similar to the one for vinyl sheets, but they come out harder and stiffer. Glue them down, or join them at the edges and let them "float" over the subfloor.

**Vinyl composition tile (VCT)** Made with a mix of vinyl and ground limestone, these tough 12-by-12-inch tiles are commonly used in schools and other institutions. It has to be glued down. Installation is unforgiving because there's no grout and every tile has to be flush with its neighbors, get a pro to do it.

**Woven vinyl** Strands of fiberglass are encapsulated in vinyl and woven into soft, textured sheets that can be glued down or loose laid. Naturally springy, it's stain resistant and easy to clean and if worn it's replaceable when left alone.

## Install your own vinyl flooring

Learn how the pros do it at [www.floor.com](http://www.floor.com) or [thisoldhouse.com/foam](http://thisoldhouse.com/foam)

## Good, better, best

For vinyl sheets, durability is usually synonymous with the thickness of its pattern-protecting wear layer.



### good

• Overall thickness: 6.0/6.0 inch  
• Wear layer thickness: 10 mils  
• Warranty: 10 years  
• Other attributes: Urethane top coat for built-in stain protection  
Shaw's Corkwood by Woodstock  
Sheeted, \$1.10 per square foot  
uninstalled. [vinylsheet.com](http://vinylsheet.com)



### better

• Overall thickness: 8.3/8.3 inch  
• Wear layer thickness: 10 mils  
• Warranty: 15 years  
• Other attributes: Realistic texture mimics underlying stone, wood, and tile pattern.  
Shaw's Corkwood by Woodstock  
Sheeted, \$1.70 per square foot  
uninstalled. [vinylsheet.com](http://vinylsheet.com)



### best

• Overall thickness: 0.125 inch  
• Wear layer thickness: 15 mils  
• Warranty: 25 years  
• Other attributes: Special urethane top coat offers enhanced performance against stains and marks  
Shaw's Corkwood by Woodstock  
Sheeted, \$1.10 per square foot  
uninstalled. [vinylsheet.com](http://vinylsheet.com)

## > IS IT HEALTHY?

A chief selling point of vinyl flooring is that it's easy to clean, an enviable health benefit. In addition, some manufacturers top their products with an antimicrobial coating or embed wear layers with particles of silver, a potent germ killer.

The knock against vinyl has more to do with indoor air quality. This is due to the potentially lung-irritating and headache-inducing VOCs that are off-gassed by vinyl flooring and the glue traditionally used to hold it down. If you want to breathe easy, choose FloorScore-certified coverings and

adhesives, which meet the building industry's most stringent indoor-air-quality standards. For a list of FloorScore products, go to [fsc.com](http://fsc.com).

## Pick your style

Whether you want something that mimics a natural material or looks more abstract, there's a vinyl for you.

### > SHEET

Widths range from 6 to 13 1/2 feet. Choose one that fits your floor with the fewest seams.

### square stone

Two separate sheets give this textured flooring extra springiness. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)



### quartzite slate

The colors and textures shown are captured in vinyl. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)

\*Prices don't include installation

### classic curves

The "wood" look is re-created with realistic-looking floor. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)



### blue limestone

It has the appearance of granite but without the expense or hard-to-clean grout. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)

### multicolor stripes

Plain, basic ingredients keep this vibrant sheet looking like a modern art piece. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)

### > PLANK

Enhanced strength and a soft lay, allow you to burn a floor that looks and feels like wood. It's a fraction of the cost.

### > TILE

Starts at 6-inch square and goes up to 24 inches.



### metallic stone

Artistic floor tiles that look like a stone. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)

### rich vine

Irregular edges mixed to be around, adding to the tile's stone-like realism. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)



### sky blue

Vinyl sheet VCT captures their vibrant color and characteristics. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)

### stained hickory

Glue these planks down or lock their edges together to make a floating floor. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)

### bleached walnut

Each plank of this floating floor looks like a real wood plank. *Rebel Floor Group's Lany Series* is in Grayscale. \$2 per sq. ft. [rebelfloor.com](http://rebelfloor.com)



## Five ways to cover a floor

Are you tired of bare floors, both inside and outside? Don't worry, we've got you covered. Here are the steps to help you choose the right method.



**peel-and-stick backs** Factory-applied adhesive secures tiles to concrete, wood, or existing flooring. Easy for DIYers to put down, but surface prep is critical to get a strong bond. *Shown: Placé Day Lowest in Midnight Black, \$3.65 per sq. ft. uninstalled. bps.com*



**peel-and-stick edges** Adhesive strips on the edges of tiles and planks create a floating floor that's simple to install and doesn't depend on the condition of the subfloor to lay bonded. *Shown: Arroyo Stanton tile in Courtyard, \$2.50 per sq. ft. uninstalled. shawfloors.com*



**click-and-lock edges** Tiles and planks with this feature snap together without adhesives, so they float over the subfloor. DIY-friendly, as long as the surface is dead flat. *Shown: Adura Plank in Access with Lock/SoleClick connection, starting at \$5 per sq. ft. uninstalled. merrington.com*



**loose-laid** For heavy sheets made with rubbery backings, double-sided tape holds edges in place. Read if installed by a pro. *Shown: Evoluton Terrace in Modus, \$2.75 per sq. ft. uninstalled. congleum.com*



**glue-down** If you want to keep your tile on a hard floor indefinitely, seal it in a brush-applied adhesive over a clean dry surface. *Shown: North Terrace Allmax tile, which has joints that can be grouted, \$6 per sq. ft. uninstalled. ammor.org.com*

## Where to use it

The most popular rooms in the house for vinyl flooring are kitchens and bathrooms, but those aren't the only places where they shine.

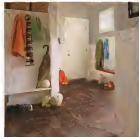
### kitchens

From the start, cooking spaces have been the favorite place to put vinyl because it doesn't mind messy spills, detergent, or the constant cleaning. *Shown: Ultra Mobility sheet in Royal Gold, \$2 per square foot uninstalled. congruist.com*



### child rooms

Vinyl is a terrific, fun way to dress up play areas and bedrooms. And today's scrubbable vinyls wipe away easily. *Shown: Fibertex Easy-Living sheet in Elephant Cherry Light, \$2 per square foot uninstalled. harkent.com*



### bedrooms

Successful sheets offer the look, protection from spills, and vinyl's low-maintenance when you're not. So make sure a bed sheet is in place before stripping out of a tub. *Shown: Ultra Mobility sheet in Paperwhite, starting at \$3.40 per square foot uninstalled. congruist.com*

### utility rooms

Vinyl flooring can bear the brunt of all the dirt, snow—and, yes, mud—trashed into mudrooms or the detergent and water spills in laundry areas. *Shown: Natural Collection Macdonald sheet in Agate, \$3.68 per square foot uninstalled. merrington.com*



### finished basements

Vinyl has no qualms about the elements commonly found in rooms that are below grade. *Shown: FiberFloor Easy-Living sheet in Concrete, \$2 per square foot uninstalled. harkent.com*

## what should we tell you all about?

We'll feature each set, reader subject to our review, in our next issue. Please let us know if you have any questions. [info@harkent.com](mailto:info@harkent.com)

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# ask the oldhouse

inside

STREAKY CABINETS

CRUMBLING MORTAR

LEAKING PIPES

MORE



**39**

tips, tricks, and  
answers to  
your home  
improvement  
questions

**Q** How can I remove rust from my outdoor tools and protect them from rusting in the future?

—MAGGIE@GUTH.MIA

**A** You can cleanup lightly rusted tools with 00 steel wool, a spray lubricant like WD-40 and some elbow grease. Remove heavy rust buildup with a thick coat of naval jelly. To keep rust from coming back, use the following after each use: Wipe tools off any dirt, dry the exposed metal, and spray on a thin film of WD-40. Your tools will look better, last longer, and be a pleasure to work with. —ROGER COOK, TSH LANDSCAPING CONTRACTOR



PHOTOGRAPH BY  
MATTHEW HANSON

## Our cast of veteran experts

TOM SILVA  
General ContractorNORM STILES  
Master CarpenterRICHARD TREXLER  
Plumbing and Heating ExpertROBERT COOK  
Landscape ContractorKEVIN C. CONNER  
Host

**I'm planning to build a deck. What's the best way to attach the rails to the posts?**

—JUSTIN TALENTINO/AUSTIN, TEX.



Holding a rail with its level facing up, Tom Silva smooths the bottom of a dovetail notch in a 4x4 post. A dovetail notch could compromise the post's strength.

**Tom Silva replies:** I like 4x4 rails so that their ends butt into a notch in each post. Cutting notches takes some time, but it's worth it because the joint turns out strong, it won't come loose, and it looks good, to boot.

To make notches efficiently, you'll need a circular saw, a triangular layout square, a sharp chisel, a binnacle, and a pair of sawhorses. Place each post on sawhorses, and use the square to mark the location and exact height of each notch. These spots are not arbitrary: Boston rails can be no more than 4 inches above the deck, local building codes will specify the maximum height of the top rail.

For 4x4 posts, set the saw blade depth to 1½ inch—any deeper could weaken the post—then use the square to guide the saw as you cut completely across the post at each mark. Now make parallel cuts about 1 inch apart between the first two cuts, and knock out the remaining face of wood by hitting these slots with a hammer. Finally, hold your chisel level-side up, clean up the bottom of the notch.

After you slot the ends of each rail into its anchors, and before you attach your balusters, insert the rail with screws driven diagonally from underneath and up into the post.

PHOTO OF TOM SILVA: COURTESY OF THE HOME DEPOT; PHOTO OF RICHARD TREXLER: COURTESY OF THE HOME DEPOT; PHOTO OF KEVIN C. CONNER: COURTESY OF THE HOME DEPOT

#### REPAIR A LACQUER FINISH

My kitchen cabinets are stained and lacquered, but now there are white streaks on the finish. What happened? Can I remove the streaks without having to entirely strip the finish? I don't really want to change the finish—I just want to restore it.

—DET NAILED, CHICO, CALIF.

**Norm Stiles replies:** Moisture is usually the culprit when a lacquer finish has white streaks. This can happen if the humidity is high or the wood was not dry enough when the cabinets were sprayed. Trapped moisture leaves a cloudy white area called blush that can last several weeks after spraying. But if the lacquer has been okay until recently and the streaks are showing up only on the upper cabinets, I'd suspect they've been exposed to steam rising from a steambox nearby coffee pot. These streaks won't go away on their own. If your cabinets are newly sprayed, contact the cabinet manufacturer or the shop that did the work, because the finish might be covered under warranty.

In other cases, the solution is to apply more lacquer to the affected cabinets. With lacquer, you don't have to strip the top layer; each new coat briefly dissolves the layer underneath, allowing the overcoat into a single film. You just lightly buff the old finish with 400-grit sandpaper or 0000 steel wool fine, then thoroughly vacuum the surface.

Lacquer dries very quickly, which is why it's generally sprayed on. But "brushable" lacquer is usually easier for homeowners to apply. Use a bristle brush—lacquer melts foam brushes—and make sure the relative humidity is below 65 percent or the blush could occur again.



A. Surveyor's plot marker



B. Architect's drafting tool



C. Landscaper's board-foot calculator

Or...



D. Hand saw



A bagworm, almost blind, crawls out of its silk-lined, shikata tube of foliage to find outside-to-inside paths to leave predators.

#### CONTROL BAG WORMS

My evergreen trees have a serious bag worm problem. Even though I've sprayed them numerous times, the worms keep coming back. I've lost two trees already and don't want to lose any more. What should I do?

—CATHY MATROVICH/PLANO, TEXAS

**Robert Cook replies:** A bag worm is a kind of caterpillar found in the Eastern U.S. that gnaws stuff and its eggs by weaving a silken pouch that disguises webbing of the plant it's feeding on. The eggs hatch in the spring, and the baby caterpillars come out to gorge themselves on the surrounding foliage. Arborescent

and ornamental conifers are bagworm favorites, but they also feed on broad-leaved shrubs and on trees such as maples and oaks.

The best way to control an infestation is to have a pest-control pro go spray your trees in early spring, when the baby caterpillars are just emerging and voraciously feeding. Timing is critical: if sprayed even a week or two late, they'll be big enough to cause the problems.

Pests typically use sprays like Bt and pyrethrin, which are relatively benign. But if you'd rather not use chemicals, put row covers over the top of the tree and bait them, or drop them in soapy water.

Continued on page 108



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QUESTION  
OF THE  
MONTH

## Q The mortar joints surrounding the stones in my walkway are crumbling. Can they be patched?

—MILLIE KURTZMAN, MOUNT VERNON, NY

**Martin D'Arcy, owner, DNF Construction, replies:** A stone walkway with cracked mortar is an eyesore and can become a tripping hazard if water gets underneath and loosens the stones.

The best way to repair these joints is with a sand-topping mortar mix, which is stronger than regular mortar and can handle wider joints.

**Ques:** DNF covers about 15 linear feet of 3-by-2 inch joints.  
**Time:** One day to install joints.  
**Difficulty:** Medium  
Sanding and using mortar takes some effort.

I mix it with an acrylic fortifier so that the joints will be less susceptible to water penetration.

The hardest part of this job is chipping out the crumbly old mortar without damaging the stones. Once the old stuff is out, filling the joints is as easy as decorating a cake. Just keep in mind that while the new mortar won't match the existing mortar color, it will lighten and blend in over time. The only way to get the same shade would be to replace all the old mortar, crumbling or not.

Tackle this job only when there's no danger of frost. A two-day delay the DNF can mix fresh mortar

## STEP-BY-STEP Repair a stone walkway

### 1. Chisel out the mortar

Wearing gloves, safety glasses, and knee pads, break out the crumbling mortar with a cold-chisel and 3-pound sledge. Chisel right down to the setting bed, be careful not to hit the stone or use a grinder with a diamond blade to remove difficult spots. Clean out the joints with a stiff bristled nylon brush.



### 4. Trowel the mortar

Push the mortar down into the joints using a brick trowel. Beat roughly level it to the same height as the existing joints. Scoop off the excess mix and dump it back into the wheelbarrow. As you work, dip the trowel in water to keep it clean. Also, sponge-clean the stones with water to prevent mortar stains.

### 2. Make the topping mix

Pour the dry mortar into a wheelbarrow and stir in an acrylic fortifier according to the manufacturer's directions. Add just enough water to give the mortar a dough peanut butter consistency. It should remain workable for about 45 minutes. Before applying the mortar, sponge the stones and joints with water.



### 5. Pack it down

We find it best to mix the mortar to set up tough to use a thumbprint when pressed. Using a brick pointing trowel, knock out and pack down the mortar so that it matches the height of the existing joints. Clean the stones as necessary.

### 3. Fill the joints

Load the mortar into a giant bag or a zip bag that has a 1/2-inch diameter hole you've snipped in a corner. Squeeze the mortar out in a smooth motion, forcing it to the bottom of the joints. Fill them up to 1 inch deep, one joint, leaving the mortar just proud of the stones. Design joints should be half filled, packed down with the trowel, then topped off. If any mortar lands on top of the stone, scrape it off immediately.



### 6. Brush the joints

Run a stiff dry brush or bristle brush over the mortar to break down the surface, sweep away the bumps and ridges left by the brick pointing trowel. Stay off the walk overnight. The mortar will fully harden in about a week. If the weather during that time is very hot, windy or dry, keep the mortar moist with wet burlap.

**STOP DRAIN LEAKS**  
We installed new PVC drain pipes under the kitchen sink five years ago. Unfortunately, the elbow joint comes loose from the vertical pipe, even though we keep retightening it. Can we wrap it with duct tape or glue the joint together?  
—ROSCHENMAN VALLEY, NEW ORLEANS

**Richard Teatheyway replies:** Duct tape won't solve this or any other plumbing problem. And I can almost guarantee that the day after you glue the joints together, somebody will lose a ring down there and you'll have to cut the trap—what you're calling the “elbow”—to remove it.

Chances are pretty good that your problem is due to the vertical pipe, called a tailpiece, or the horizontal pipe, called the waste line, being too short or too long. When they are, the trap and tailpiece can't fit together properly, making it all but



There are three major parts of an under-sink drain: the tailpiece, the trap, and the waste line. A leak here could be the result of bad alignment, a missing washer, or a poor fit.

impossible to keep the joint from leaking.

It's also possible that you're missing the plastic washer that helps seal the clip joint between the trap and tailpiece. Without a

washer, the pipes will leak or cause a part no matter how much you tighten them.

If a washer is missing, simply disassemble the joints and replace it. But if that

doesn't stop the leaking, check the length of the tailpiece. It should be long enough to bottom out against the shoulder inside the trap. If your tailpiece is too short—a fairly common occurrence—take it off and replace it with a new one cut to the correct length.

Finally, it's possible that your trap and tailpiece aren't aligned properly and therefore have to be forced to fit together. If pipes are aligned right, they just clip together. To correct this problem, use a block the waste line or extend it with the help of a gland-on coupling.

**TIGHT FIT FOR CABINET CROWN**  
I installed two new upper cabinets in my kitchen. Both cabinets are on the same level, but one fits against the ceiling nicely while the other one has a tapered gap above it that's too

wide for the crown molding to cover. How can I lower this gap?

—SARAH ROBERTS DULUTH, GA.

**Tam Siles replies:** The best way to cover this gap is to add a filler strip to the top edge of the crown, then trim it so it fits against the ceiling. That way, the bottom edge of the crown will be perfectly level across both cabinets and your out-of-level ceiling will be less noticeable.

Here's what to do for tapered crown: Hold the molding in position up against the ceiling and clamp it in place to show the bottom edge is level. Measure the full length of the gap between the crown and ceiling, as well as the gap's widest point. Cut a wood filler strip that's longer and wider than the gap. Take the crown down, and glue the filler strip to its top edge using woodworking glue and clamps.

When the glue dries, sand the strip flush,

put the crown molding back against the ceiling, and level it. Holding the compass with the points lined up vertically, adjust them to span the widest part of the gap. Now, run one point along the ceiling, making sure to keep the points vertical. The pencil point will trace a scribe line on the filler strip that follows the slope of the ceiling. Use a plane or hand plane to trim the filler down to the scribe line. Now when the crown is installed, it will fit flush against the ceiling with no profile excess.

You can follow the same procedure for so-called, clear finished crown, but you'll need to make great care to select a filler strip of the same color and wood species.

#### got a DIY tip?

Use dry lubricant on your sprayer's trigger gun to keep it from sticking. Find out in *Good Housekeeping's* [www.yourDIY.com](http://www.yourDIY.com).

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**REMOVE PAINT FROM BRICK**  
How can I get rid of latex paint splatters on my brick siding?  
—THERESA DEYTA, ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.

**Kevin O'Connor replies:** According to Rick O'Neil of Masterwork Painting, who regularly contends with splattered paint on brick, you might be able to chip off small dried-on splatters with a 5-in.-1-pc. "But if the splatters are fairly recent, I'll try soap water and a scrub brush," he says. "If that doesn't work, I'll try magic water." If these remedies fail, he just spots on a chemical stripper like Good-Gel. Because brick is porous, he uses a rag to soak up any paint slurry before it can stain adjacent surfaces.

I also checked the Brick Industry Association's website, too. In its "Technical Notes" section is a terrific, free resource typically written in terms that are easy for

homeowners to understand. Technical Note 10, on cleaning brickwork, says that any paint-removal product can be used to soften the paint. It recommends first scrubbing off what you can, then scrubbing the area with a stiff-bristle brush. A thorough rinsing of the area with water should get rid of any residues.

send your questions to askthisoldhouse

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Include a complete address and daytime/nighttime number. Published questions will be asked on radio and/or maybe posted online. We regret that because of the volume of mail received, we're unable to reply to unpublished questions.



## Norm's tricks of the trade

**Q**

I don't always have a rope that's long enough. Is there a way to securely, but temporarily, tie together short lengths of rope?

—WILLIAM WILDMAN, MARLTON, N.J.

**A** Knots that join ropes together are called bends. My favorite one is a short bend, which is easy to tie and won't slip. Unlike the commonly used square knot, short bends are especially handy for joining ropes of different diameters, and they're easy to undo after being under a lot of tension.

## askthisoldhouse

**1** Bend the end of one rope (A) into a loop, called a right. Feed the end of the other rope (B) up through the loop and behind both loops.



**2** Lay the end of rope B so that it goes across the top of the right and then under itself. Tighten by pulling both standing ends. Lay out the bend. Lay out rope B beyond the right.



✓Yes



✓Yes



✗No



✓Yes



✓Yes



✓Yes



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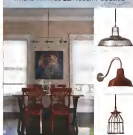
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# save this old house

Huge farmhouse for only a buck!

**Price:** \$1 (must be moved)  
**Location:** Jeffersonville and  
**Contact:** Greg Selzer  
502-254-4534

**The history:** The Civil War was still raging in 1864 when farmer Thomas Benton Jacobs built this rather formal-looking Georgian Revival-style farmhouse on the outskirts of Jeffersonville, Indiana. Just across the Ohio River from Louisville, Kentucky, the town was used as a principal gateway to the South for the Union Army. Soldiers requesting money as a Yankee soldier passed by the place on his way to war. After Jacobs died in 1909, the house became the headquarters of a prison work farm. In 1923, it was sold back into private ownership. It was abandoned in 2006 and acquired by a water company, which is looking for someone to move the place so that new wells can be dug on the site.

**Why save it?** The still-standing 3,450-square-foot house has withstood the test of time and has tons of room for a large family. Plenty of original Georgian Revival details, including doors, windows, and a wide cherry staircase, are ripe for restoration.

**What it needs:** Saving it means relocating it. There's a 2-acre plot just down the road that is available for \$500,000; moving the house will cost around \$200,000. You'll also need to update the kitchen, two bedrooms, and all of the house's systems. Finish the job and you've got yourself a fine farmhouse near the banks of the Ohio. —*HEIDI HANCOCK*



1. With its dovetail marking, ornate end side entry porch, the Jacobs residence is downright elegant for a farmhouse. It's big, too, with a total of nine rooms, including two bathrooms. 2. An original 1864 brick fireplace (one of two) in the front parlor is beautifully built in brickshells, which were added later. 3. The side entry porch retains its original post-and-rail hand-rails railing. 4. A fine-gained door leads to one of the house's three large bedrooms. 5. The house's endwork is a combination of pine, poplar, and cherry. Like the cherry staircase, part of it has been painted over.

## got a house to save?

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