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## Think Twice Before You Remodel

Embarking on a home project without the needed expertise can be very expensive and have a negative effect on home equity.

We all know someone—or maybe it is us—with unfinished projects throughout the house that our wonderful, not-so-handy spouse decided to do in an effort to save money.

True story: my neighbor had a tree fall and crack his front porch and then, because Murphy's Law lives in my neighborhood, a water main running under his property broke and the city had to dig it out—leaving a ravine in his front yard.

Instead of calling a contractor to rebuild his porch and fix the ravine, our neighbor decided to do the work himself. That was a year ago. Every night after work, he would come home and work on the project bit by bit. He spent four weeks trying to pour concrete.

One project is not enough for our neighbor. While he was fixing the porch and ravine, he also decided to do some siding work on the front of the house and replace his front door. His wife appreciated the cool fall morning breeze wafting in through the plastic he had set up where the door once stood for the two days it took him to finish that project because he was still pouring concrete. Finally, he finished all projects. The door looks great. The porch looks great. No one really understands why he put a sidewalk in the middle of the yard to cover the ravine, but that also looks great. The siding? Well, because the house is 30 years old just replacing some of the front without doing it all, doesn't look so great.

Did my neighbor really save money? That is debatable. While he did not turn money over to a contractor, he turned over a lot of money to Home Depot. He spent a year of holiday weekends, vacation days, every weekend, etc to finish the work. I wonder if he took stock of how much his free time was worth.

This story is not unique. According the U.S. Census Bureau, home owner do-it-yourself (DIY) projects account for 20 percent of all remodeling done and industry professionals say that between 25 percent and 30 percent of their work comes from fixing DIY disasters.

### Stop! Think about What You're Doing

What has caused this influx of weekend-warrior DIYers? Some blame ABC's Extreme Home Makeover; others the Discovery channel's Monster House (you can completely renovate your home into an English pub, Australian Outback or space station in five days!) and then there is the DIY network channel that shows how-tos from electrical work to room additions to fireplace installations all in 30 minutes. The possibilities are endless...

Can you really tear out a wall and install a fireplace with chimney in 30 minutes? The laws of physics, remodeling and Elmer's glue say "no."

"One thing all DIYers need to know is that television shows pay an army of professional remodelers who sit off camera to plan out projects for the actors (hosts) and stand by coaching as the show is taped," says Arthur Kriens, CGR of Kriens Construction Co. Inc., in Sioux Falls, SD. "DIY shows are not realistic, just as movies take artistic license. That is why it is called entertainment."

While most professional remodelers do not frown on some DIY work, all believe that many jobs should be left to professionals.

"The rule of thumb that I always live by is if a handyman service in your area such as 1-800-handyman, etc. can do the project then odds are, a good do-it-yourselfer can do it themselves," says Bob Birner, CGR, CGB of Amazing Siding Corp. in Houston. "If they don't do it, then that is a good sign of needing a professional. We as remodelers wouldn't perform open heart surgery on a loved one without medical expertise. Remodeling is open-heart surgery for the home - only professionals should attempt."

Still think you can tackle a big remodeling project? Bob Van Cleef, CGR, CGB, GMB, owner of Yankee Housewrights in Jamestown, R.I. cautions all motivated DIYers to ask themselves a few questions:

- Have you ever done this before?
- Can you dial 911 when you are bleeding?
- How much money will you really save? (To get a true sense of actual costs of a project, take what you think it will cost in time and money and multiply by three.)

"A person needs to look at a project and what can happen in the worst case scenario and ask, if it came to a disaster can they deal with that and will they know how to fix it? Also, can your marriage survive a disastrous remodel? If you answer no, then hire a pro," says Van Cleef.

Van Cleef and other professionals admit that when it comes to repairs and remodeling their own homes they hire professionals to do it. "I have been in construction my whole life and I still hire a pro to do work at our house because there are certain things even I wouldn't touch such as electrical, plumbing and framing," says Van Cleef.

### Projects for Dummies

Because not all men or women are created equal, there are some projects the professionals believe can be tackled by DIYers (the outcome will depend on skill level) such as, hanging pictures, interior painting (if you have a week), changing door knobs and cabinet pulls and some aesthetic work such as installing crown moulding (but only if you are really good!).

If you are willing to put the time and energy into a do-it-yourself home remodel, Barbara Rose Peck, co-owner of S.N. Peck Building, Inc. and Case Handyman Services of Chicago advises:

- Follow product directions. Read everything that comes with the product and take it seriously.
- Get a detailed, illustrated home repair and maintenance book.
- Do very careful and thorough preparation: Set everything up and protect surrounding surfaces.
- Practice with the tools.
- Follow safety procedures and use proper safety equipment.

But beware of taking on more than you are capable of doing both in time and skill. “The biggest mistake the weekend handyman makes is to take on a project larger than he can handle in a reasonable amount of time,” says Douglas Nelson, CR, CGR of New Spaces in Burnsville, MN. “I have talked with people who have been remodeling their kitchen for more than two years. Can you imagine not having a kitchen for two years? This is divorce court time.”

### Extreme Home Makeover

While careful attention to detail and directions can help a DIYer with a successful remodel, the National Association of Home Builders Remodelers Council warns against non-professionals attempting certain jobs because of the damage and life-threatening risk these projects can create. The following project should only be done by professionals:

- Electrical – unless you are a licensed electrician do not attempt to rewire their home. If done improperly you can burn down your house.

“We investigated an electrical short in a bathroom fixture not too long ago and found that the homeowner had nailed down some plywood sheets in the attic for storage even though the electrical wires were in the way,” says Mike Dukate, CGR, CAPS, CGB of Dukate Fine Remodeling in Franklin, Ind. “One nail actually split the wire, making contact with the hot feed and the neutral wire and the nail became a heating element whenever the bathroom light was turned on and charred the wood all around it, it was just a matter of time before a fire started.”

- Structural Changes – do not remove or add any walls or cut holes into the roof, you run the risk of compromising the structural integrity of your home and having a really big hole in your roof.

“Once we were unable to take on the repairs of a bathroom job because the homeowner and a handyman took on a master bedroom addition project and created major plumbing, tile and other aesthetic and structural problems,” says Kimberly Bednar of Plekkenpol Builders, Inc., in Bloomington, Ind. “The work had so badly disturbed the area that we were not comfortable with giving a warranty on our work without completely starting from scratch – removing and replacing the addition and all plumbing, including the fixtures.”

- Plumbing – moving pipes can cause a swimming pool in your home at anytime.

“We had a plumbing situation one time where the plumbing drain pipe from the kitchen sink was installed so the water had to run uphill,” says Kriens. “The sink always was slow to drain. This DIY fix-it was discovered by the second homeowner, who sued the first homeowner after he had to pay \$25,000 for the entire kitchen to be redone.”

While many projects look manageable in product fliers there is a difference between what is spent and the “real” cost generated on a project. Many of the products purchased for the DIY market, although designated by a name brand, are not always the same quality available to contractors. Also, many warranties become void by improper installation. If projects are done incorrectly, homeowners can end up with their own Extreme Home Makeover whether intended or not.

“An old trade contractor of mine always said, ‘It is hard to beat a man at his own trade.’ And there is a lot of truth to that,” says Don Novak, CGR, CAPS, GMB of Novak Construction Co in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. “Most people discover that their estimate of how long a project will take is soon shaken when they realize they have bitten off more than they can chew. Usually it costs more for a good remodeler to undue any damage than it would have to hire the professional in the first place and forgo the ‘I told you to hire a contractor, but NO you wouldn’t listen.’”

Remember, DIY projects should be fun. If you don't see it as fun, then DDIY (don't do it yourself). If you have already created a DIY disaster that needs fixed or you value your time and money, hire a professional to do the work.