

Remodeling old home is a daunting experience

I KNOW that I am not alone, nationwide statistics confirm this, as well as a tour around the Lamorinda area.

At some point our residents have had or will have this experience, hopefully out of desire and not necessity. And while you could do some of it yourself (but life is too short), you refuse to recognize your amateur status.

Of course, if you have not guessed it by now, I am referring to the pleasure of remodeling, which has once again come upon the Tom family. I can't see putting myself toward the discomfort, inconvenience and the expense of a major remodel at this time, but, alas, I have conceded the battle.

My family chose the Lamorinda area for a multitude of reasons that readers would identify with - the schools, the safety, my wife's desire to be near her sister, a separate home for my in-laws and my needs to, once again, set up a comfortable home for my 6,000-plus rock 'n' roll LPs. That last reason is probably unique to me.

Anyway, remodeling is a strange thing for someone who grew up in an apartment in a New York project. Overlooking the train tracks from my 13th-floor view, I never dreamed about fixing bathroom fixtures, moving electrical sockets or selecting matching kitchen appliances. I am cautioned that only the super does that work on your apartment, which for some 30-plus years was life. To this day, I am hard-pressed to change a light bulb successfully. My ever-patient beloved then asks what happened to the smart guy she married.

So to say it is insanity for someone like me to purchase a "fixer" in the suburbs is quite apt. Now, we are speaking not simply about renovating a bathroom or updating a kitchen from the 1940s with modern appliances. No way! That would be a relative snap. We are talking "MAJOR REMODEL," down to tearing down internal walls and adding square footage to accommodate a kitchen worthy of seating 25 to 30 for holiday dinners and affairs. Then, of course, you must add the requisite boudoir refinements needed (that are seemingly one's constitutional right as one matures) and the attending square footage to accommodate such needs.

Anyway, I must admit to some fault, but nobody told me about the outdoor landscaping and maintenance needs of a home. In San Francisco you get a house and no land. And we have yet to discuss the costs relating to the development of the outside of this abode. All this means to those of us who are power-tool incompetents are two things: money and much more money.

Meanwhile, I don't mean to be a naysayer, but I am not sold on the notion that real estate prices always go up. Yes, I know that Realtors will opine on the scarcity of the Lamorinda housing stock or that your home is not just an investment. For most here who are fortunate to have purchased a home in Lamorinda decades ago, you can remodel to your heart's content as you are in the money. For others, like myself, you have got to ask the question, do you really need a \$100,000 kitchen?

Anyway, built originally in the late '40s, my home has the noteworthy distinction of not only being one of the oldest homes in the area, but also the home of Moraga's first Postmaster General. Rumor has it that the reason I get my mail at 5 p.m. every day is because the postmaster timed her carriers, relying on her own home as the benchmark for when the carrier should arrive. Make no mistake, with some vision, the house has

great character and some very unique qualities for the Lamorinda area. But vision easily morphs miraculously into large amounts of dollars.

When we first moved here, I immediately set to clearing the land to put in a new sewer, necessitating the removal of dozens of neglected pine trees running amok and brush growing in no orderly fashion at all. Soon the dominoes started to tumble. We had a massive excavation with the bulldozer brothers. But for my friend, Gary, who presided over this process for me, I would have had no idea what was transpiring other than to marvel and whine about the complexity and related hits to my financial accounts.

Well, no stopping progress, so the search for professional contractors began and I have made the promise to just keep out of the whole mess. I am sure that is the correct advice since I love my wife dearly.

Everyone will be happier with a more modern facility and kitchen to entertain the masses as the kids get older and we all entertain more. But wait until I tell my wife about the outside kitchen that I have designed.

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