

Redo: Remodel Diary

Photographer Dave Harrison and his wife Dawn, a designer, recently bought a dilapidated 1944 duplex in University Heights — one unit they plan to live in; the other they plan to rent out. Dave bought Dawn a journal to keep records and he snapped shots throughout the remodeling process. They agreed to give us their behind-the-scenes before-and-after story from the pages in Dawn's diary.



DAY OF INSPECTION – 1944 duplex in University Heights. David and Dawn Harrison will live in the rear (above). The other one, will be rented (below).

Dawn Harrison's Remodel Journal

12 February '03

It's walk-through day and already we have to make some serious decisions about construction problems — and we have to do it quickly because the seller wants an 18-day escrow. Some of the obvious, major problems are:

- Large cracks in the interior plaster walls denoting shifting foundation
- Old, dirty kitchens with old appliances
- Electrical service is under-powered (60 amps. per unit with fuses)
- Water damage/rotten wood around the eaves and in bathrooms
- Exterior plaster peeling off in places and cracks in plaster
- Water problems around the foundation
- Tree planted tight against the foundation causing big problems
- Old roof needs replacing



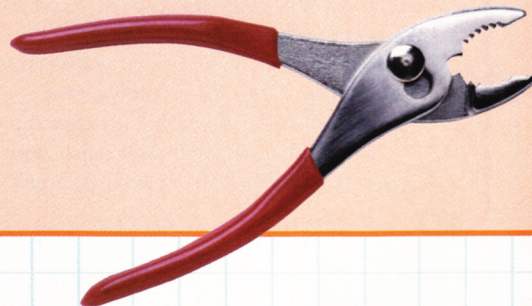
18 February '03

We've decided to take on the project! We will have to do a lot of the work ourselves but Dave has helped out with remodeling enough to know that most of the problems are fixable. We're already discussing remodeling ideas. We decided to completely redo both kitchens and bathrooms with new appliances, cabinets, electrical and plumbing. We wonder, since we're doing our own contracting, how to schedule the work. At what stage do we call in a plumber? Does the electrician need to have certain tasks done before he can do his work?

Acting as Your Own Contractor By Dave Harrison

When you make the decision not to hire a contractor, you're in charge of scheduling all the work. Here's what we found worked for us:

- Get lots of advice. Dawn and I were lucky since my dad, brothers and brothers-in-law all have construction experience.
- Get at least three estimates for any phase of work. We found bids could vary drastically.
- Decide what you can and want to do yourself. Demolishing an old plaster wall is just hard, dirty work. Maybe you don't need to hire someone to do it for you. On the other hand, we found that once we demolished a couple of walls we didn't have a good plan to get rid of the construction trash. If we had hired someone to do the demolishing, hauling rubble away would have been part of the job contract.
- Do your homework in order to have a good grasp of the remodeling schedule. You don't want to tear open a wall only to wait three weeks for the electrician or plumber. If you know what the schedule is you can keep in touch with the various subcontractors and update them as to when you'll need their services. From our experience this is the job scheduling order we would recommend:
 1. Foundation work (wall cracks might be created when everything is leveled)
 2. Roofing (this is messy work; interior ceiling may crack; roofers may step on landscaping)
 3. Exterior siding/painting (also messy work)
 4. Tear down walls that need electrical or plumbing work
 5. Interior electrical work
 6. Interior plumbing
 7. Hang drywall and tape all cracks
 8. Lay kitchen/bathroom flooring
 9. Hang cabinets
 10. Install tile in bath and kitchen
 11. Redo hardwood flooring



20 February '03

We made a budget spreadsheet based somewhat on the remodeling we did a couple of years ago in our condo. We checked out prices at Ikea, Home Depot and Expo Design Center. We also called around to get ideas on costs such as a new roof. (Note: The following table is taken from journal entries dated in February — budget estimates — and on June 6 — actual money spent):

Bathroom

	Estimate	Actual
Tub	\$500	\$400
Sinks	\$500	\$686
*Windows	\$500	\$100
Floor (inc. labor)	\$200	\$175
Lighting	\$350	\$100
Mirror	\$500	\$120
Plumber	\$1,000	\$500
Tile	\$500	\$1,300
Total	\$4,050	\$4,021

(Note: Actual bathroom costs not counted in estimate: faucets \$400; toilet \$90; tub spout \$90; shower arm \$60)

Kitchen

Refrigerator	\$700	\$535
*Stove/oven	\$1,400	\$831
Hardware	\$300	not done
Dishwasher	\$400	\$319
*Cabinets	\$3,000	\$1,400
Countertop	\$1,000	\$1,800
*Tile	\$500	\$1,300
Lights	\$1,000	\$1,200
Plumber	\$1,600	\$1,600
Total	\$9,900	\$8,985

Other interior

*Paint	\$500	\$2,000
*Wood floor sanding	\$0	\$1,600
Drywall	\$400	\$350
Electrical	\$2,500	\$3,000
Total	\$3,400	\$6,950

Exterior

Foundation	\$5,000	\$4,800
*Roof	\$4,500	\$5,800
Stucco	\$4,200	\$4,500
Paint	\$2,000	\$2,200
*Tree removal/trimming	\$500	\$1,820
Total	\$16,200	\$19,120

Total amount spent: \$33,550 \$39,076

*Notes: The Harrisons opted for cheaper aluminum windows because an odd-sized opening meant that double-hung wood windows would need to be custom made. Not realizing how labor-intensive some jobs were, estimates on tile and paint did not include costs for hiring out the work. Labor costs for the roof were more than anticipated. Wood flooring damage was not noticed so the estimate was for cleaning only when professional sanding was required. The estimate on tree removal was for one tree but four others needed trimming and removal left a stump that had to be ground down. Other items were simply too high-end.



28 February '03

Got the keys today!

1 March '03

Here we are, standing in the kitchen on the first day. Where do we start?

Dave said, "It's a good thing my dad raised me as a construction boy."

We originally thought we'd put an island in our kitchen but there's no way an island will fit. And because of the way they placed the kitchen door, we can't install countertops and cabinets of typical depth. If we have to get custom cabinets it'll send our cabinet budget spiraling. (Note: In the final analysis the Harrisons were able to use an upper cabinet for a base cabinet; they angled the countertop.)

Plus, because the walls aren't plumb we can't install new cabinets or tile backsplash until we have the foundation leveled out and that's going to take about \$4,650. Ouch!



The way the old kitchen door was installed affected countertop and cabinet placement.

30 March '03

I borrowed a friend's pickup today and took four loads to the dump at Miramar by myself. Dave helps me load it, then I unload it myself. Something about throwing junk off the truck feels very good...

Good news! Dave crawled under the house to check for mold and there wasn't any. Hooray!

5 April '03

We've finally made some choices. We're going with Behr's *Pearly Gates* for the wall color. It's white with a very subtle hint of yellow/green. The ceiling is going to be done in *Plantation White*. We chose 3-by-6-inch Westminster tiles for the bathroom.



The Harrisons were able to salvage some fixtures that were period appropriate. Other items they bought new. Clockwise: Existing glass light fixture; IKEA oak cabinetry with brush-nickel pull; Rohl bathroom fixture; Armstrong vinyl kitchen 12-by-12 floor tile; replacement glass door knobs; 3-by-6 tile (green for the kitchen; yellow and white for the bathroom).

Dawn and Dave's Do's and Don'ts

- Use a tarp to get rid of debris. In getting rid of all our construction trash, it helped to put plastic tarp on the bottom of the truck before loading the junk. That way we simply pulled on the end of the tarp to unload.
- Have the installer order your tile for you because they know more about trim pieces.
- Cut, count and lay out tile before the installers show up to ensure that you are not short of tile.
- If you have workers cutting tile, they use a wet saw. Make sure they don't discard the dirty water somewhere you don't want it — like your plants.
- Check all inventory when it is shipped to you before you sign on the dotted line. If you sign for it without checking to make sure it's all there, and don't call within 24 hours to report broken or missing pieces, you will not be able to get replacements without paying for them. (We paid for our trim pieces twice because we signed for a delivery that should have contained the pieces but didn't.)
- Don't tear up your front yard until you are ready to plant new plants.

15 April '03

Dave had to crawl under the house to rewire the phone and cable line. The bungalow seems like it's wrapped several times around with exterior wires and cables. Looks like they drilled wherever it seemed convenient to bring in cable. The space that Dave has to crawl into is only 1½ feet under the joists so he has to crawl on his belly in the dirt. A couple of times my heart dropped when he didn't answer my call...





25 April '03

I am not sure about the look of the kitchen. Dave hung all the IKEA cabinets and I assembled them. The upper cabinets have glass doors with a stainless trim. I'm worried that with the countertop and the fixtures being stainless, too, that we may have too much stainless steel. I ordered another set of cabinets with wood trim to see what works best. We are still deciding.



5 May '03

We ran into an unexpected cost on all the trees — \$1,800. We had to have three palm trees skinned and trimmed, one coral tree trimmed and the pepper tree had to be removed and the stump ground down. Those Brazilian pepper trees are a nightmare! They send their roots everywhere — we found roots going over into the neighbor's yard and under our house. That explains why the previous owner spent a large sum of money to have new sewer lines installed. The old lines were constantly root-bound.



Years ago someone planted a Brazilian pepper tree too close to the house.

30 April '03

The tile setters came and I'm very happy with the 3-by-6-inch tile we chose from Classic Tile & Mosaic. The bathroom is very small so we put in tile wainscoting along the wall. On the floor we did a herringbone pattern. The rest of the wall is a subway pattern in a soft yellow with two white deco liners.



7 May '03

Oh-oh. Dave found another tree stump below the ground, so we have to pay to get someone else back out here to take care of it.

15 May '03

We were supposed to be moved in today, but the date's been moved to the 31st of May. I can't wait until everything's finished and we can move in.

25 May '03

The painters are finished and everything looks so fresh. I felt great for a while but then we lifted up the protective paper we put on the floors during remodeling and found that the old hardwood floors aren't in as good shape as we thought. We're going to have to have them refinished and that cost isn't in our original budget.



Dawn Harrison works on the landscaping of her new home



31 May '03

The floors are refinished and look great but our newly painted walls got marked up. We're going to a friend's house while our floors dry. It's supposed to take three days, so we expect to sleep our first night in our new home on June 3.

(Note: The Harrisons moved into their new home June 6 — about three weeks behind schedule.)

REDO RESOURCES, PAGE 84

