

## Snap, Crackle, Screwed and Glued

Posted on March 4th, 2008 by FixerJay

The title sounds like a RICE KRISPIES commercial, don't it? Well, it's not! I simply want to cut you in on a whole new generation of ready-to-use building products and some free fix-up advice that can make amateur carpenters and struggling handymen look like trade school, professors — Well, almost anyway! Newcomers might be slightly ahead of me on this stuff, but you old-timers can back me up here! Fixing houses today is a whole different ball game in terms of ready-to-use materials and instructions on how to do things. A friend of mine who is about a whisper away from being a total klutz recently re-wired two add-on rooms in his house with just a little help from the clerk who sold him materials. Very knowledgeable, the clerk explained exactly how to install new wires and even drew a simple sketch showing my friend how to connect all the circuits together! The fact that Bob didn't burn his house down or electrocute himself sold me on the proposition that today's do-it-yourself movement has come along ways since the time I did my own plumbing work!

### HOOK-EM UP AND GLUE-EM

It seems like only yesterday that do-it-yourself owners had to learn some basic soldering skills if they intended to do their own plumbing chores. Today, unless you're messing around with copper supply lines, basic plumbing parts are all made from plastic! You simply cut-em with a hacksaw and glue-em together! All that maze of twisted pipes under the kitchen and bathroom sinks — It's all plastic now! The whole shootin' match comes in a cardboard box with pictures on the back. Every clerk at the do-it-yourself store is happy to explain what goes where if you get stuck or end up with parts left over.

Giant handyman stores are in fierce competition for the do-it-yourself trade. They stock acres of every building product imaginable for doing your own home improvements — or fixing something that's busted! The whole idea is to hook a new generation on doing stuff for themselves. Don't read me wrong here — Not every job is a candidate for do-it-yourself investors. As a general rule, I'd be very careful with jobs that concern safety ~ like gas piping and electrical upgrades. These jobs normally require building permits and because of the extra liability, contractors should generally do the work.

### THE MAJORITY OF FIX-UP IS CREAM-PUFF

Drain lines are glued together and even those hard-to-bend chrome supply lines under the sink can be substituted now. Flexible polyethylene lines of various lengths with screw-on fittings at both ends are the amateur plumber's dream come true! Personally, I never did master those flared ends with compression fittings. My plumbing jobs generally leaked for a week or so — Nothing serious, but with screw-on connectors I can plumb like a pro.

## Featured Speaker Article

Not so long ago, installing plastic laminated countertops (FORMICA) could be a major undertaking. Plywood or pressboard panels and a thin plastic sheeting had to be pressed and glued together, then held snugly with special wood vises until it dried. Gobs of glue or air bubbles could make the job look like a third grade woods shop project. Today, you buy countertops already made! They even come with 45° angle cuts so you can build professional looking corners. All you need to do is cut a whole for the sink and glue the sucker down to the cabinets and presto! You've taken a giant step toward modernizing an ugly kitchen or bathroom.

### YOU WON'T GET HIGH ON PAINT FUMES TODAY

Not so long ago, painting was a stinky job. Oil-base paint, in a small room or closed-in area, brought tears to your eyes. Cleaning up the mess with solvents or thinner took almost as long as the painting did and the solvent smells worse than the paint. Water base latex paint put an end to the stink problem, plus it cleans up twice as fast. You don't need cans of thinner sitting around either. Plain old tap water cleans up your mess.

Painting is a major part of fixing up rundown properties and fortunately everyone I know can paint without too much training or education. Easy-to-use rollers, extension poles and airless sprayers help anyone look like a pro in no time at all. Also, most physical therapists agree — Painting is one of the most complete body exercises you can do. Almost all major muscle groups get an excellent workout when you paint. It's well to keep this in mind before you re-new your membership at the local gym.

### CABINETMAKERS ARE GONE WITH THE BLACKSMITH

Kitchen cabinets with damaged drawers and missing parts were once an expensive fix-up chore that required special skills. Today, you can purchase any size cabinets you need ~ already built and ready to install it in kitchens or bathrooms. They're available with finished surfaces or you can paint them yourself and the best part is — Almost anyone can install them with a few brief instructions from the vendor or a friend.

### TUBS AND SHOWERS

Tub kits and one piece shower enclosures made from fiberglass and plastic sheets (skins) are available for every size bathroom. They are very easy to install if you follow the instruction brochure the clerk can give you where you purchase materials. I use plastic shower kits (plastic sheets) in my older houses where only a tub exists. I always convert tubs to a tub-shower' combination. The only tools you'll need are a tape measure, straight edge marker and a pair of scissors. The waterproof plastic sheets overlap each other and are easily glued to any wall surface. By replacing the tub faucet with a shower diverter faucet and installing a short riser (chrome pipe mounted up the wall) and a shower head, you now have a very inexpensive, but efficient, tub-shower combo!

### THE HANDYPERSON-FIXER UNIVERSITY

If you're interested in learning how to install floors, hang doors and windows or plain old plumbing and wiring, then I'd recommend you to go handyman college. No, I don't mean a regular college! Find out where you can attend the free clinics conducted by most of the big handyman super-stores. They're all after your business and nearly all the major chain stores are sponsoring evening or weekend clinics to teach you how to use their materials. I recently learned some new tricks at my local store about finding and repairing leaks on my stupid flat' roof houses. Naturally, they sold me several rolls of fiber tape and a couple buckets of high price "goop" to fix my problems. You simply can't learn enough about fixing leaks on flat roof houses short of just saying no to the next person who offers you one!

### DOORS AND WINDOWS JUST PLOP IN

With ready-made, pre-hung doors, all you need to do is pop 'em in the wall and "trim out" both sides with standard molding and your replacement job is done. Most doors are already factory drilled for locksets (door-knobs). Steel pre-hung exterior doors are my favorite today because they don't crack, split or swell up in wet weather like most wood doors. There's no drilling. All you do is nail the door and frame in place, install a key-set and deadbolt , trim around the edges, inside and out and you've got a professional looking job.

Windows are the same way. Aluminum sliders, both single glazed and double insulated, are ready-made to pop right in the same hole that you remove the old ones from! Replacement windows come in every shape and size you'll ever need.

### ELECTRICAL GENIUS IS NOT REQUIRED HERE

Modern electrical fixtures of all kinds are easy to install. Fans, blowers and a large variety of light fixtures take up whole departments in the home improvement stores. There's no longer any need to tear the walls apart when you need to add another circuit or two. Decorative conduits can be installed along the baseboard without cutting into walls and surface-mount boxes are made in various sizes for hooking up new fixtures. Remember, the old rigid conduits that used to require an electrician with a pipe-bender. Forget that! Now there's flexible, aluminum conduit that goes around corners and anywhere else you wish to run a new electrical circuit.

They even make it plastic covered (weather-proof) for outside uses. Electrical wires are not soldered and taped anymore. They're screwed together with plastic threaded (screw-on) connectors. If you are smart enough to turn the power off at the main meter panel, you can probably tackle most of your basic electrical jobs. It's quite easy to learn the stuff you need to know to install most new fixtures and do minor repairs. Many salesmen working at the handyman stores will actually draw you a sketch to show you how your project should work. Also, there are at least half a dozen good illustrated books, like "Time Life Series", to show you every detail about any wiring job you may wish to undertake. Just remember, turn off the main breaker switch or pull out the fuses before you start anything! If you stick your fingers in a hot splice box and you hear a sizzling sound, stop immediately, pull your fingers back out and re-read this paragraph again!

### WINDOW COVERINGS ARE SIZZLE ITEMS

Curtains, drapes, mini-blinds and decorative shades will make any house or apartment much more homey! More homey translates to 10% more rent when you dress up your houses. Also, attractive window coverings will make an empty house rent much faster than naked windows. These are good sound economic reasons for installing them in all your houses. Anyone can hang curtains, right? WRONG, if you don't believe me chances are you haven't watched tenants install them! One tenant I had installed curtain rods with nails so long, they went clean through the wall and came out the other side. I've seen 48" drapes hanging on 8 foot windows, curtains a foot too short and traverse rods that won't open. Take my advice here — Do this job yourself when the house is empty, before your tenants arrive! If you use drapes and traverse rods, which I like to use for most larger front room windows, be sure you purchase them from a supplier who specializes in selling to apartment owners. You'll find their price much cheaper, plus it makes for easy one stop shopping because they will supply drapes, rods and all the hardware to complete the total job.

### RICH MAN - POOR MAN STRATEGY

People often ask me if it's necessary to know everything about doing fix-up work to be a successful house fixer. The answer is no, but the knowledge is very helpful, even if you don't plan to do the work yourself. The reason is because you need to know how much things cost! In my own case, I did everything I could (90% or so) when I first started out because I didn't have the money to hire it done. Many investors do a portion of the fix-up and contract with others to do what's left. Some investors lack handyman skills and hire everything out! In the final analysis, it boils down to money no matter who does what! Approximately 30% of every fix-up dollar goes to purchase materials. The balance (70%) is the cost for labor. Obviously, you can save \$700 for each \$1000 you plan to spend by doing the work yourself. Saving \$700 is almost the same as earning that much! It makes a pretty strong case for learning how to do your own fixing, I'd say. But, even if you don't move a finger yourself, the more fix-up knowledge you have, the more successful you can expect to be doing this stuff.