



Why Do-It-Yourself?

The kids activities don't fit their rooms anymore		I want the extras that I can't afford to pay the builder to do	I love the act of building - it feels so rewarding	
	I want to do one thing each year to improve our home			I am sure we can do at least part of this project ourselves
I don't really know what we want, but just want to get started			I have a unique design idea I want to try	
	It is a lovely old house - just needs some love & elbow grease		We have the tools, so let's use them!	

Why Do-It-Yourself?

Many practical and inner reasons lead folks to engage in Do-It-Yourself, (or DIY) Home Renovation projects. No matter how far you take it – renovation will change both your home and your life. So, check these reasons out – where do you fit in? Hey, why are you headed for the hammer?

Practical reasons to DIY

Circumstances change - Your situation may have changed and you need to accommodate it. You may have more kids or an empty nest; a special one to care for; new hobbies; or home business ventures. Perhaps the kids are outgrowing the nursery? Or Nana is coming to live with you? Or the kids who were all gone are coming back? Change is likely to happen to families – that is the way it goes. Bounce back or be bounced! So, I say, “Let’s get out the hammers and play a little hammer ball!” Who’s on the Home Team?

Special results - You can tackle unique projects that are beyond the imagination or sensibility of a contractor. (Maybe contractors have more sense – but many DIY projects have turned out well). I have had professionals tell me that they would have to charge double to do what I had in mind. Do you hear this a lot, too? Well, either change your plans or roll up your sleeves. There are many ways to get it all done – from 100% Do-It-Yourself to 50% to even 10%. You can have the contractor do much of it and then set you up to do the



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laborious, expensive part, or, you can dig out the books and learn some new stuff and tackle it all. It's your call – you're the boss!

Money - You might only be able to afford the materials, and so Do-It-Yourself makes a comfortable home accessible to your budget. You might not have the wild designs I tend to get into (being an artistic type). You may just want a simple home addition that makes life better. You can make this happen because you do the labor yourself. Even if all you can afford are the materials for your new roof (as an example), and you are able to borrow the brackets, you will stay dry for less money by doing it yourself. Just a pause for preparation can help you do it right. Consider some advice from the experienced folks you know, ask a lot of questions, and listen. Then visualize the process. You can succeed.

Re-Use, Re-Cycle, Restore - Doing-It-Yourself, you are often able to make use of salvage materials that a contractor would not deal with – saving \$\$ and recycling beautiful or meaningful pieces in the process. We have a great salvage shop here in town. I go in and just fall in love with the marble sinks with old chromed faucets, the hand painted glass globed lamps, and the hand wrought nails from the last few centuries. All say something about quality and attention to detail and I want to absorb this into my own home. I want to have the same feeling of comfort and the “just right” atmosphere in my home that I have experienced in grand old homes, and quaint antiquated cabins. So, I talk with Roy at the salvage shop and ask him to put a piece on hold. I pay the deposit; I take measurements; I hunt for an opening at my house and, “Yes!” it will fit into that wall I had wanted to knock down. Cool! I check with my team – and, “Well, sure, OK.” And, “Yay!” Another project is born.

Many Extras - You get extras – because you are doing it yourself and can take the time – extra plugs, extra space, extra insulation, and more. You are not in a hurry to make a living at this and can really make the footing drains a work of art or take the time to lay in complex wiring patterns.

Pleasing your family - You make your partner happy – they want it “just so” and you can fulfill that. Isn't it nice to please someone? They wanted the walls wallpapered over here and painted over there, – and you can do that. Nice.

Good Activity - DIY renovation is a constructive activity that can provide exercise, focus, and a nice result. Hey, isn't this better than being a couch potato? How many at-home activities are this useful AND non-fattening?

Lessons - It teaches the children how things are made and how to appreciate them. It can be a good team activity with growing children, provided care is taken to target their developmental level. If you think about their needs, you can actually involve them in some pretty cool projects. For example, seventh graders can get into math by calculating the amount of concrete needed for a patio pour or learning about geometry in tile cutting by placing pieces with the least amount of waste. Little kids – preschool-aged – can get into the scrap wood pieces, lining them up or sorting them. Eight-year-olds can sort nails, or even bang some in (but not finish nails please). With some help, they can chronicle their work and show it to the class at school to get extra credit.

Property Value - It increases the value of your home and property. An improved home is just simply worth more. Check with a realtor for some perspectives on what would most increase the value of your specific house.

Satisfaction - Hands-on work at home can be extremely satisfying and an antidote for the stresses at work, whether you do manual labor or have a desk job.

If you have a day job that does not produce immediate results or that is repetitive, then building something can bring immense satisfaction and provide a balance for your senses. When you step back and see something take shape, and it does not disappear or need to be done all over again the next day, you get a positive message: your efforts are effective, your persistence is fruitful, and your vision is meaningful. Feeling that you do have an impact can overflow into the rest of your life and provide you with a certain satisfaction that cannot be derived elsewhere.

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I talked with a bus driver one time who told me that during his whole run from New York to Boston, he thinks and sorts through the steps he will take in his home renovation project the next weekend (all the while driving safely I observed). He said he has renovated this way for years and is very happy with his many home improvement projects. While not all of us are so focused, I can tell you that getting into a bag of mortar and mixing it for 15 minutes can really pull the frustrations right out of your muscles, no matter what your line of work.

There are intrinsic reasons to DIY

Supportive Atmosphere - Our homes support our function. Older homes reflect the functions of generations of their residents. Does your own home support the activities and priorities of your life? Perhaps it needs to be changed to help you with the life you choose to live now. Food habits, exercise, togetherness, autonomy, art, expression, communication – all can be enhanced in a well-designed home.



Massachusetts had a fantastic museum called the Concord Antiquarian Society. It consisted of a house with a collection of rooms -- every room depicting a different decade in our country's history. The fabulous guides told us of the lives families led long ago, as we went through each room eventually landing in the Civil War era.

The early settlers had dirt floors and high-backed settles (like a wing-backed wooden booth seat), and lived their lives together in one family room. Most of the day, it was the only heated room, and lighting was extremely sparse. After sunset, very little reading was done -- except by one person who read aloud by the fire or beside the carefully rationed candle. Most folks went to bed about sundown (in the winter -- this is about 5 pm!), and they had to be quiet, since they slept so close that any noise would disrupt others. This simple room portrayed an entire culture of manners, schedules, cooperation, and education that is so foreign to us all today. What would an anthropologist learn about your family by walking through your house?

Identification - We identify with our homes -- their style reflects our values and communicates a message. The home portrays our own sense of how we wish the world to be and how we want it to see us.

Behavior guides - Our home creates its own culture and provides a set of expectations for behavior. For example, someone ringing the doorbell to date our daughter will pick up on what is expected in our family as he enters the yard, comes in the mudroom, hears the sounds of our home, and sees the way the home is made and kept. The same person can enter five houses and behave differently in all five -- from engaging in conversation & joking right away, to standing formally

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while waiting to be invited to speak. You have probably seen yourself do the same. So what are the expectations and atmosphere you want to generate at your home? You can design and create these yourself by doing your own home improvement.

Making things “Right” - Restoring a home makes things “right.” We all take satisfaction in making things turn out right, just as we all like a good ending to a story. We want order, pleasant sounds, and nice colors, to be the predominant view. It feels satisfying.

Redemption - We see value in restoration of the home – like helping the person who has lost their way – had hard knocks, or fallen to pieces.

Renovation gives each of us the optimism that we too can be restored, even though we might have frayed edges, torn pages, scars, bulges, and dents. Fixing our home can encourage us and provide hope for the process of healing in ourselves. It is evidence that the broken can be fixed. We watch as all of this happens in front of our eyes, and at the command of our own hands.

Reflection of inner change - The act of doing promotes change in ourselves. Interesting research has been done on mood: - psychologists have found that if you want to be happy – smile! So, – if you want to change your life, your home, – do it! The inside will follow. Optimism happens – so engage!

Changing our environment can reflect and reinforce changes we want to see inside ourselves and in our relationships.

If you are going through personal changes, it can be very helpful to remove old environments and create new ones. The act of destroying a wall can have a tremendous inner impact as you wrestle

with the forces that resist dismantling. Whether you realize it or not, you can be doing symbolic inner work by taking off patterns or layers that may have entered your life long ago, but are no longer relevant.

It can be quite freeing. Many of us gawk and wonder at a newly destroyed wall, amazed at its bare appearance. We are stunned at this conquest as we listen to the new noises that the house makes. Sensitized by the dirt and dust that lie below the destruction, we pause before cleaning it all up. We must, to catch our breath and to enjoy this moment of victory that tells us that change is possible and worthwhile. We ourselves can also change and it will be OK. Even when our own lives lie in utter dust, we can still move on past habits and relationships that no longer work. We can reconstruct and redesign ourselves and our lives striving toward a new vision. God is not done with us.

Our Dreams - As we sleep, our homes are the background setting for many of our dreams. This is very interesting – did you ever notice this in your own dreams? I have heard many people describe their dreams. Usually the clearest details of the dream identify a specific room or house in which the activity of the dream takes place. Somehow our homes are woven right into



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our dreams. What would your house look like in people's dreams? A ponderable point. So, let yourself dream.

Nesting Instinct - Fixing and finishing a home can provide a sense of completion that satisfies an inner nerve. Somehow we have inner wiring that yearns for nesting. It is called the "nesting instinct." We may have a clue when it is bugging us, but it becomes more obvious when we have listened and responded to its messages for us. A sense of direction overtakes us as we sort this out with loved ones and engage in a planned project together. And as we complete the project, we feel a sense of inner satisfaction.

Personal Reflection - Personalizing your home makes it pleasing and satisfying to live there – you look around and are nourished by your special surroundings. It just feels good to see your preferences around you.

Self-Actualization - You realize a dream – taking it from vision to action to final product – it brings a great sense of accomplishment. Self-actualization is considered a high-level need for all of us – but has very few opportunities in our lives. DIY can bring this to your life, and it puts extra gusto into your core.

There are advantages to DIY

Out-Of-The-Box - Since you do not know all the "right answers" you may be able to invent some new questions, and answer those. The person outside a field of expertise may be able to invent something that others who are in it cannot. Ever hear, "Can't see the forest for the trees?" It's about being stuck in your thinking and not seeing the solutions that might be right in front of you. Some of the negatives you might hear: "You can't do that – it will never work," are said

by folks who may be stuck in old rigid thought patterns that don't allow new solutions. People today talk about "thinking outside-of-the-box." You can be the one outside-of-the-box if you haven't been box-trained! Hey - Are you a piece worker? You might come up with a very efficient way of setting up a brick-laying task that is a work of art in itself. Are you an engineer? You might design a really cool wiring diagram. Are you a knitter? You might be quite facile at pulling plumbing hoses.

Many surprises are in store, even for the professionals who come to visit a DIY home and see new ideas and methods. I have seen many professionals "borrow" techniques from Do-It-Yourselfers after noticing a smart application of new ideas to their trade by 'outsiders.'

Vocational - You can be your own boss in something, and explore your own visions, pace, planning, and performance – you boss yourself! This may help you understand your own boss's challenges at work and even develop skills that will advance

The Basement

Where I come from, you may see houses that have started with a clearly limited budget – and no credit.

The self-starter borrows a backhoe, gets a hole dug, has saved money for septic and concrete, and so gets a very sturdy basement put in.

The whole community knows that a special day has come when the well is about to be drilled; everyone senses the excitement as the dinosaur-like-rig sits in the yard for days. You hope, with the owner each time you drive by, that water will be reached by the time it drills to 75 feet, 100, or even 150 feet down. At \$25 per foot, you just hold your breath to consider how many loads of wood the owner had to cut & sell to make that kind of money. Finally the rig is gone and the car is now parked there everynight. A joyful chaos sets in as kiddie toys are strewn all over the lawn. The finished basement is now a home!

Word has it that there is a full bathroom, a half-kitchen, and some blankets put up as partitions for bedrooms. A shed now goes up to accommodate the tools. The kerosene heater that used to be in the basement is now in the shed, and a real furnace is in the basement. There is tarpaper on the capped floor above. Come September, everyone knows there are hard numbers being crunched in the home as they must figure out what will happen for winter.

A sign goes up – you catch your breath, uh oh!

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your career. You may find opportunities; I was given several job offers in the field of renovation, but I stuck with my 'day job' as a psychologist. Yet renovating still enriched my day job too – for example, the ability to organize large-scale materials for a project helped me with organizing

large tasks at work.

You drive closer and read – “Lisa’s Pies” or, “Beauty Salon.” Whew! You wondered what they were going to do. You keep rooting for them, and try to find a reason to buy more pies. You stop and get them. You hear about the dreams and the set backs and their insistence on not going into debt.

They have decided to put a roof on the basement for a year or two, and plan to just rig it higher once they have saved for the walls and plumbing for the first floor above, that is yet-to-come but so real that they can see as they talk. They are happy with their plan, and confident. You are so satisfied as you drive away, that you forget the pies and have to go back.

You think about the strength of character that will develop in the children of people like this. You are reminded of the settlers from long ago and think – it’s really not so long ago.

The skills you hone within yourself, without a supervisor watching over your shoulder, may be some of the best skills you have. You have met your own criteria and satisfied yourself; it builds not only your skills, but your confidence as well. Now, put that in your lunch pail and take it to work!

Flexibility - You can plan-as-you-go. Being new to the field – and not knowing how things work – you can postpone some of the

critical decisions until later when you have more knowledge and have seen how the earlier stages go. (Although before you commit to this step-wise type of process, you should enlist a seasoned contractor’s advice early on – just so that you don’t paint yourself into a corner.) After working on a new family room for a month, you may decide to seal a doorway off rather than add on the next stage of an addition. You are not committed as to how far to go – there is no contract, no payments, and no obligation. You can take it one step at a time.

Notes from Why D-I-Y

So, why do you want to do-it-yourself?

Go through the chapter

And mark your initials next to sections that seem to pertain to your reasons for doing-it-yourself

Each of you do this - for yourselves

Now, go back and look again

At what your partner noted as their reasons

Think about it - can you understand why?

Think about it a bit more as you consider their point of view

And find some time to chat together

Go through the chapter and the notes that were made

Take turns describing how that reason relates to you

Take turns listening to the other

(Taking turns will help you keep track of whose story you are hearing)

Why do this?

Because understanding your partner's reasons for joining the project will help you understand so many things they want to do in it -

like their choice of tools, size of the project, time they will put in, and lots of other choices they will want to make.

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