



Living An Adventure In Remodeling

By Pablo Raul

The decision to do a major addition and remodel instead of moving is always an adventure. Many factors must be considered when weighing the pros and cons of undertaking the expensive and arduous endeavor of renovating the place where you live. Experiences vary, but universal truths do exist in Remodelania.

In an effort to examine the process in a very personal way, Northwest Renovation found a couple in the middle of a major remodel and asked them to provide insight on the project. Since the project is less than half way done, we will rejoin them in a later issue to find out how the job is progressing. Let's hope that their experiences will benefit others who are considering remodeling.

Zach and Beth Collins own a small home in the Westmoreland neighborhood that is perfectly adequate for a young couple. But the thought of raising children in a 900 square foot bungalow set them to considering their options. After pricing larger homes in similar locations, they wondered if it was reasonable to add about a 1,000 square feet to their existing residence. "We looked at other homes and when we compared the price for what we could get, we decided it made sense just to add on. Plus, we love our neighborhood," Zach said.

They based their decision on what remodelers were telling them it would cost per square foot if they were to do a large two-story addition. "Most guys told us initially it would run about a hundred to one hundred twenty-five dollars per square foot," he said. When they discussed the project with more specific ideas in mind, they were told that the square foot price didn't include all they wanted. They wanted large front porches on both levels and a remodel of major portions of the existing structure to accommodate the new stairs to the second floor and other necessary changes.

Their original wish list included three more bedrooms, a sitting room, a second bath upstairs with a clawfoot tub, a larger dining area, and a new main-floor bathroom. They also found out they would have to redo the existing stairs to the basement in order to make the whole project come together in a logical fashion. Zach observed that a few of these costs came as a surprise, "We didn't realize that some of these things would have to change at first, so that has added to the overall cost."

Still, Zach said that they penciled out the options and after comparing home values in their neighborhood, they felt they could actually make money if they sold the newly remodeled home once it was completed to their specifications. After checking on financing they realized they were ready to get serious. Zach commented, "We felt we could make about fifty thousand dollars if we just turned around and sold it."



Beth and Zachs 900 sq ft bungalow before the remodel started.



De-construction started with the removal of the roof.



With the roof completely removed next phase second story begins.



Main rafters starting to take shape, new street level porch header in place.

They sketched some of their ideas out including a front elevation that is similar to a house down the street. “That is my favorite house ever,” Beth said. “I look at it every time I go by it.” They wanted their remodeled home to be a style that fit in with their classic Portland neighborhood. Such areas have established styles and traditions, and navigating the expectations of neighbors can be tricky.

Selecting a contractor was a delicate matter as well. They checked out a book on how to choose a good builder. They interviewed many contractors and had five come out to look at the house. From that they narrowed the field to two of them that they felt comfortable with. One of them was strictly a builder and didn’t offer design services, while the other was a design/build firm and could handle the whole project from start to finish. “We felt that if we had to hire an architect, it would be more expensive. It would cost us five thousand up front. And then if we wanted to make any changes we’d probably have to pay a consultation fee,” Beth said.

In addition, the design/build firm had a lot of experience working with homeowners who wanted to do some of the work themselves; something they found was not always the case. “Some of the guys we met wanted to do all the work and didn’t want the owner to help.” After checking with the Contractors Board, calling references, and going to see some of the jobs, they decided to go with the design/build firm, Skandia Remodeling, owned by Paul Olson. “We liked the fact that Paul could do the design. It was like one-stop-shopping, and after seeing his work, we were confident he could produce a remodel that looked good.”

The project is now well under way, and when asked what is the best part so far, Zach commented, “We like working with Skandia Remodeling because we have made quite a few design changes so far, and since they do the design themselves, this has been very easy.” He added, “One reason for the changes was, while we were doing the design, we found out Beth was pregnant, and we wanted to get the job done before the baby came. This meant we had to get started right away before the rains hit, so Paul rushed the plans through the city and got the permits within a month. He called this ‘fast tracking.’ Once we started the framing, we could visualize the space better, and we came up with new ideas. So far, it has been easy for the Skandia team to make the revisions. This has been a real bonus in working with a design/build company from our perspective.”

Now that the second floor is up and the roof is on, the house is starting to take shape. It blends in nicely with the neighborhood and the exterior finish materials will be selected to retain the feel of the bungalow style. Zach says of the experience so far, “Every time we come home it is so much fun. The other night I drove right by the house because I didn’t recognize it!”

We will rejoin Zach and Beth in their trek through Remodelania in the next issue. If you’re like me, you probably feel like you’re in the middle of a reality show. Don’t tell Zach and Beth though.



With most of the roof rafters in place we can now start to see the roof line.



View of the new small addition at the back of the house. On the first floor a bath and extension to the dining room, on the second floor a sitting room off the master bedroom.



With the new roof installed, and exterior framing of the second story done, you can now see how the second story porch will be integrated into the design.