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## Are We Done Yet? The Five Stages of Remodeling

By Ken Ryerson



Ken and Linda Ryerson Photo Andy Scheck

We thought it would never end, but here we are, back in our house after only six months. Our contractor promised we'd be in by mid-December, and he made good. He even pushed up the date by two weeks to save us another month's rent on the apartment that we had been living in.

I was in heaven knowing that we were moving back home and leaving behind the stress-filled months that we had been enduring. No more urgent decisions about cabinet knobs or what length to order the hanging ceiling fixture, no more worrying about the budget and whether to replace the garage door when our old one worked perfectly well (the answer for that one was no).

The euphoria lasted all of 24 hours. That's how long it took for my daughter to drag a large box of toys and books from the garage through the kitchen, dining room, living room, and hall to her bedroom at the far end of the house. That box left a telltale scratch running the entire length of our beautiful brand new hardwood floors.

And it was another 48 hours before I realized that I was premature in assuming that those days of endless decision-making and even more endless shopping were over. Now we suddenly needed rugs for every room to protect those new wood floors, new bedroom furniture to replace what the movers broke, new living room furniture to replace the hand-me-downs from my parents that I had insisted on discarding to avoid paying storage fees for - the list seemed to grow by

the hour as we settled in.

Right now it seems the work will never end. Furniture to buy, boxes to unpack, window coverings to choose, not to mention new landscaping. How ironic that the beautiful new wall of windows in our family room now gives a lovely view on to the dead and torn-up back yard that was an inevitable result of the construction.

Apparently I'm not alone in feeling frustration after returning to a newly remodeled home. It takes time to adapt to the new space, to finish and furnish it, to incorporate it into your life. During this time it's not uncommon to be ambivalent about the whole renovation process. You've spent many months and much money on your house, the construction is complete and you've moved back in, and you're still not done.

But temporary frustration is just another stage of the emotional process associated with home renovation. Like other emotional processes, this one seems to have five steps:

1. Dreaming-when you plan your remodel and think how nice the new spaces will be.

2. Anxiety-when contractors demolish your house and pocketbook, and you must make countless snap decisions about things you know little about such as light fixtures and shades of white.

3. Euphoria-when you get to move back into your new dream house. This phase may not last very long.

4. Ambivalence-when you realize the work yet to be done to remake your house into your home, and set about it.

5. Satisfaction-when you find out it was worthwhile in the end. It may take a few months to reach this stage.

I've not reached Stage 5 yet, but for inspiration I look to Mark and Paula Ito. They heavily remodeled their old house in 2005, and they suffered too once they moved back in. There was still so much to do, indoors and out. "Even when you're done, unless you complete everything, you're not really done," Paula said.

But by 2006 the Itos were thrilled with how their project turned out. Their old kitchen, for example, was isolated and limited their ability to entertain. The new kitchen is larger and opens right into the family room. The first Thanksgiving after renovation the Itos hosted 18 people. "The flow and the ability for everybody to be near each other, near where the cooking was and still watching the football game-it was great," Paula reports.

For me, I'm getting there. Life is slowly returning back to normal. Not every spare minute is spent directly on remodel-related activities. I got a chance to read a book over the holidays and played Wii with the kids.

Equally important, I can see that in the end it will be worth it. While there's work yet to do, my family and I now have a home that will be an oasis from the cares and stresses of the world. It's a sanctuary, which is important because your house is where you spend the majority of your time. For us, no more fights from the kids on why their room isn't clean because my son neglected to do his share. They now have their own rooms and, yes, my daughter's room does stay tidy without her little brother to throw things around. I can feel the serenity and peace descending on me even now. But wait-what's that noise? Is that the sound of another metal toy dragging across the new wood floor?

The Ryerson's remodeled their house in 2008.

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