

Hit the Deck

... continued from page D1



Richard Houghton demonstrates his nifty Groove Cleaner that he builds himself in his garage.

"I love this thing," Houghton said, picking it up and turning it in his hand like a fine gem. "It works great."

Bill Snider at Moraga Hardware and Lumber is the first one to carry prototypes, although they haven't decided how much to price them for. "That's my wife's job," Houghton said. "She owns the company."



For more than 40 years Houghton has helped people fix, build and maintain their decks. It's really not that tough, he said. His checklist:

- Make sure the debris is out between the grooves.
- Sand them down when they get rough. Water can collect in the cracks, freeze, or start to do its rotting thing.
- Pound the nails flush with the surface first.
- Sweep or blow the decks if wet material has fallen.
- Seal, seal, seal with a good sealant.
- Inspect above and below for rot and weak spots.
- And sometimes, he admits, you just have to replace them.

Houghton said homeowners can typically expect to spend between \$25 and \$35 per square foot for full all-out replacement or deck additions. Unfortunately, he said, California this year passed a 1 percent surcharge on cut lumber, and even if the owner decided to go with composite materials for the decking itself, the under-story still has to be constructed with wood, adding to the final cost.

Houghton didn't use to like the composite materials, called Trex. The first generations of the material were simply made of shredded plastic bottles, made into pellets, and melted together. "But they found that water could get into the spaces between the pellets and when it froze, the stuff fell apart," he said.

Not good. Now the company is on its sixth generation. "It does last longer than redwood," he said, "but most people really love the warm look of redwood."

Houghton runs Fine Line Renovations at decksbyfineline.com.



Houghton inspects the under-story of a deck for dry rot.

Photos Chris Lavin