

BATHROOM REDECORATING & MURPHY'S LAW

by

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For years I have endeavored to parallel the scenarios of "This Old House" and "The New Yankee Workshop" with successful remodeling projects and a hobby of custom cabinetry. "Do-it-yourself" has always been my motto. Unfortunately "Murphy's Law" (whatever can go wrong will go wrong) finally caught up to me in a series of sad but comical events regarding my bathroom.

The story began when my wife Susan & I browsed through my favorite building supply store. I admired a nice mirrored oak medicine cabinet and mentioned our need for more storage space in the bathroom. We had four people living in the house at the time. Being handy & cheap, I could not bring myself to spend the money on a cabinet when I could custom build it better and for less. So I studied the store model and purchased the necessary stock to build the cabinet. As I work two jobs, my "to do" list is very long. The oak sat in my shop for two years.

Finally, when the spirit or spouse moved me, I built and hung the new cabinet. It turned out well, fitting wall to wall above the sink, with three hinged mirrors and a new light above. I admired my work. However, the natural oak of the new cabinet did not match the dark pine finish on the old door and draw fronts of the vanity below nor the dark pine interior trim. Being a home inspector, function was my concern, but Susan deftly pointed out that color coordination was the panacea for a happy marriage. So plans progressed with acquiescence to change the bathroom vanity and interior trim to natural oak, to re-wallpaper the room and to change my name to Murphy.

Well, I don't know how you feel about hanging wall paper, but to me it is as enjoyable as a root canal - what a way to spend a weekend! How happily I looked forward to the tedious chore of stripping off the old paper, preparing the walls and hanging new wallpaper. Oh boy, flower patterns. Personally, I'd rather be in a crawl space. Nearly another year went by at my computer.

Luckily, I thought, I was able to talk Susan into a plan to strip off the old paper and then paint & stencil. No problem now. The project should be a simple one I figured. After all, how hard could it be to strip off the wallpaper that I myself had expertly hung about fifteen years ago. Being an avid do-it-yourselfer, I remember anticipating the future removal of the paper. I had painted the original drywall, used sizing and pre-pasted paper. Having done all the correct preparation steps, the wallpaper removal should be a snap!

To finish the project, the next weekend I rented a steamer at the local hardware store with the intent of removing the bathroom wallpaper with ease. Mr. Murphy's steamer & I were good old friends. Mind you, we are a one bathroom house with four occupants so the occasional knock at the bathroom door was an anticipated but unavoidable interruption.

Having used a steamer successfully in the past, I anticipated that experience and patience would prevail over a little drudgery. However, that was not to be the case for "Murphy's Law" is a black cloud indeed. The wall paper, being of sound mind & body, decided it was very happy where it was and that a little steam was no enticement to disrobe. Not to be out done, I slowed down and allowed the steamer to linger in each location. My recipe called for a little extra steam and a little scraping with a wide blade. Finally the wall paper began coming off. But alas, not only was the wallpaper coming off, it was fused to strips of latex primer and much of

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the glue residue was left behind. In desperation, I added a little more steam and elbow grease intending to win the battle. All the wallpaper came off, but left behind was a big mess of peeling paint, glue residue, damaged drywall and a sad state of uneven Murphy affairs. So much for easy wallpaper removal. The walls were unsuitable for any desired finish.

Well, after failed efforts with lotions, potions and scrubbing, I dejectedly concluded that re-plastering the walls was the only viable solution that would prepare the surfaces for paint and stenciling - no problem for an avid do-it-yourselfer. Since the bathroom was not very large, I elected to use joint compound and successfully patched the walls to a fairly smooth consistency. Just a little sanding to go.

Now, as you probably know, drywall dust has a mind of it's own when it comes to making travel plans. It migrated happily into the linen closet, vanity draws, medicine cabinet and left unique murals on our one-piece fiberglass tub/shower unit and other fixtures. Susan was suitably impressed with the dust on her white linens and health & beauty aids. Oh well, just a little more cleaning and the marriage will be fine. I vacuumed and ate humble pie while Susan washed.

Next, I prime painted the walls and the redecorating was progressing well. Susan and I stood back and admired the fresh white walls and dark pine woodwork.

So I stripped off all the mop boards, window & door casings, draw fronts & styles etc., and gathered oak stock to trim out the bathroom for the second time. Now cabinetry has always been a hobby so the task of making a new vanity with raised panels once again was looked upon as a labor of love. I was actually looking forward to the task as I have a complete workshop. Remember Murphy's Law! I was part way into the project when I became preoccupied while using the table saw. Luckily, I did not loose any fingers but did suffer a bad cut across the back of three fingers using a 1/8" carbide blade. Ten stitches and one tetanus shot later placed the bathroom project on hold for another month.

After my fingers healed, I was able to complete the new light oak cabinetry & trim making the bathroom look like a million bucks. We admired the new look. But what about that old ceramic tile floor, we can't just leave it. Some of the tiles have hairline cracks - maybe we can patch it. Well, after fifteen years, changing tile patterns and dye lots make obtaining matching materials an impossibility. I knew that I could strip the entire floor and re-tile it, but the thought of having to sand away old mastic cement was not for me. Time to weigh the options again. Susan had a preference for vinyl but I did not as I see it curling all the time in bathrooms I have inspected. So, we went off to the showrooms with the intent of selecting a vinyl surface for the bathroom floor.

While brainstorming options with the salesman, I discussed the fact that the toilet in our one bathroom house would have to be removed while new vinyl was installed - not a very convenient state of affairs. Discussion of other options lead us to carpeting. Wall to wall carpeting could easily be cut around the toilet and the salesman assured me that covering the old ceramic floor was an every day event. One hour later, Susan selected a carpet that would require two weeks to order - no problem. We left a deposit and made an appointment for installation on President's Day as we both had the day off. Things were looking rosy once again.

Finally the new carpet day arrived and I removed doors, draws, cabinet fronts etc., in preparation for the installers 9 AM appointment. Nervously, I stepped out of the way and let someone else lay hands on the avid do-it-yourselfer's home. The two men banged away installing tack strips and the new wall to wall carpeting. Their speed and quality of workmanship was impressive. Susan & I were very pleased. We paid the balance and off they went. The bathroom looked like a million bucks!

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A few minutes later, Susan made a necessary closer inspection and called to me. "Hey Bob, why is the carpet wet all around the toilet?" My heart sunk as Murphy's Law and I went in to investigate. Sure enough, My worst fears were realized. Apparently the carpet installers had accidentally bumped the toilet with a hammer while laying the tack strips and had caused a hairline crack in the bowl. Water was actively leaking (not functional) and wetting the new carpet. Now what do we do?

After shutting off the water, I immediately called the carpet company and explained the problem. Fortunately, they accepted responsibility for the accident and apologized, but meanwhile we needed a functional bathroom. We agreed that the only option was to find a plumber at once and replace the broken toilet. The carpet company asked to be kept informed and promised to take care of expenses.

Now remember, it was a holiday. Many telephone calls later, I did find a plumber who could come late that afternoon. I described my fifteen year old toilet brand & color with the plumber, named Murphy, and he recited the law. Murphy's law states that the new color will not perfectly match the other older bathroom fixtures. Furthermore, Murphy's law states that the base of the new low flush toilet will not match the shape of the old toilet and the nicely cut wall to wall carpeting. Can you guess the rest?

I told the plumber that we only had one bathroom and that a working toilet was the first priority - please come as soon as possible. Well, Susan & I gave up our day of vacation plans and waited for the plumber to arrive. Did you know that our neighbors have a nice looking working bathroom?

The plumber arrived and installed the new oval base toilet with the ease of a professional (functional again). You would be amazed what a talented plumber can do to notch & hack away a carpet with a rectangular hole. His creativity with a utility knife surpassed notching a joist with a sawzall.

We called the Humble Carpet Company and spoke to the owner Mr. Murphy to lean about the law. He said, "yes they will take care of things and install a new carpet, but Murphy's law states that it will take another two weeks to order it". The saga continues.

Two weeks later, the carpet company called. "Could they come Friday morning to install the new carpet?" No, I said, my wife and I are both working, but someone should be here after 2:30 PM. He said that he would have to rearrange the schedule but it could be done.

To close, the Humble Carpet Co. lost it's shirt. We now have a new toilet and a second new carpet in our redecorated bathroom. We are happy home owners again and I did not have to hang wallpaper. As I look at the scar on my finger I am reminded that what can go wrong will go wrong. I'm am thinking of installing a horse shoe above the bathroom door, but with my luck it will probably fall on my head.

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