

"BUILDING AN ADDITION"

Bernie Wexler

Some experiences apparently make one an expert in the opinion of others. Putting an addition on one's house must be such an experience; so last year I became qualified to write this article! The following statements and suggestions are based on our experiences in doing an addition under our own very particular set of circumstances.

Once we had decided to investigate putting on an addition, we discussed it with friends and neighbors how had already done so. We got ideas on what we might want as well as the names of recommended contractors. We also heard "horror stories" and the problems and pitfalls faced by others. A major construction job is, after all, a complicated undertaking and things can go wrong. Having an idea of potential problems is useful for avoiding them or, at least, for being prepared to handle them. These discussions also helped me determine how much of the work I might want to do myself, what was possible or practical to attempt.

We already had an architect and he soon produced some sample designs. After a few iterations, we settled on our design and the plans were produced. Our architect wrote up a contract and, armed with copies of it along with our plans, we solicited bids from several contractors. Since I had decided to do several construction tasks myself, these were spelled out in the contract. Areas of responsibility were delineated as best we could.

After we selected our contractor, construction began and proceeded fairly smoothly, albeit with some delays which we knew were not uncommon. We realized that having an architect was an advantage in several ways, one of which was that he acted as advisor and mediator during construction. Questions and problems are virtually inevitable; our architect filtered our questions and mediated resulting problems. We consider the addition to be the work of a team: the architect, the contractor, and us. We are all very satisfied with the final result.

Based on suggestions we had received from our architect and others, we did the electrical wiring, painting, floor tiling, and the "finish plumbing." In particular, we felt that it would be cost-effective to keep some trades completely off the job, the electrician and painter, while doing those jobs in which I felt most competent. Of course, by taking on those jobs, I also took on the responsibility for their timely and successful completion! I did find that these tasks proved more difficult and more time-consuming than I had imagined.

Painting is the easiest to do for most homeowners but it is very labor intensive. We are still not quite finished! While the "finish plumbing," which is the installation of plumbing fixtures, is also not a difficult task, it is not obvious to me that it was a cost-effective job for us to do. The plumber had been on the work-site to run the pipes and the time it would have taken him to install the fixtures would probably not have been great.

Laying tile or slate and running all the electrical wiring required more skill and I had consulted extensively with some knowledgeable friends as well as with the supply houses in addition to doing a lot of reading. Putting down the tile and slate was hard labor but the end results were

very satisfying. Doing all the electrical work was the most time-consuming, taking twice as long as anticipated. It was also the job that had to be done within a limited time frame since it affected the construction schedule. It required a lot of study to work out the layout and for me to be confident enough to do the work. I found that following the code requirements was very reassuring. Doing the wiring not only saved us money, it also enabled me to indulge some whims with respect to the lighting.

Overall, I think that while these jobs can be done by the homeowner, anyone who wants to do them needs to think them through carefully and make sure that he has enough time - multiply by two - to get them done. A sympathetic contractor is also very helpful.

I'll be very happy to talk about our experience in detail with interested Foresters.

NEIGHBORS' TIPS

Wallpapering — it is difficult to cut paper close to cabinets, door and window trims, etc. With a paint matching the background of the paper, paint those areas so that if you do not match perfectly, it will not show bare wall. The trick may camouflage the flaw entirely.

Easing up a job — keep an old candle near your screws and when you need to use a screw, coat it with the wax of the candle by rubbing the screw against the candle. This will ease it into place when you use it. Also, candle wax or hard soap run along the stops in a double-hung window or on drawer glides will make it easier to move the window up and down or the drawer in/out.