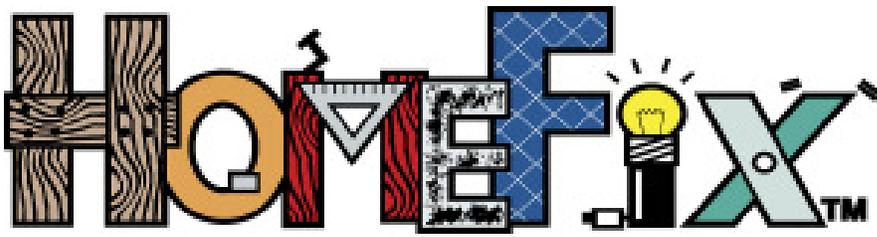


The



Issue #9
May 2010

Club!

An Elite Club Open To Anyone Interested In Making Their Homes Better And Having More Fun Doing It

Good Intentions- Wrong Wood by Joe Prin



A few weeks back, I was called in to rebuild a deck that had failed. Failed is not the right word. This thing disintegrated!

The deck was built technically right with the right size timbers and dimensional lumber for the substructure, however, Fir was used rather than redwood or treated lumber. In many places the bottom the joists were in direct contact with the soil. This on it's own was a problem in the making. But there was more.

The deck design incorporated a skirt that went from the walking surface to the ground. This reduced airflow and trapped even more moisture. But there is more.

The other issue was that the composite decking was installed with zero gap between the boards. So, over time, the combination of ground moisture, gutter run off, rain, snow and humidity all started eating away at the structure and in just a few years after construction, the deck fell apart. Areas of it were sagging, water was pooling on the surface, and the walking surface was falling apart. Time for a rebuild.

The homeowners liked the footprint of the original size and wanted to maintain the same look that they first had. We calculated the costs and they said to get it done. We did make a few changes though. This time around, we elevated the deck a few inches above where it was the first time. This got the lumber off the ground. I also used redwood for all of the substructure. And, in the process of building the frame, we figured out a better way to build the bench supports, the connection to the house was simplified and improved, and the center joint and decking direction change was enhanced. We also connected the downspout for the gutters to a drain tube and ran it out into the yard and a pit. As you can see by the photo above, the tear out was a lot of dirty work. And I am please to say, I did not have to do it! This homeowner had her family help out and when I showed up 99% of it all was gone and ready for me to get to work.

The first day, myself and two others were able to get the new frame built.

Continued....



Day two we were able to install most of the new decking and on day three we finished up the deck. Day four we installed the new "Floating" skirt, and built the new benches. We also framed in a hole in the deck and recessed the huge potted bushes into the deck rather than setting the pot on the deck. This will allow for drainage and will not create a sag in the deck or stains from the pot.

Now for the most critical thing to remember if you are building your own deck. You MUST provide at least 1/4" gap between the boards for drainage and for expansion and contraction. Composite decking while very good, must be installed so that it can breathe. It has to dry out. As I mentioned earlier, with the deck now elevated a bit, in fact it is now flush with the door sill instead of stepping down a few inches, the skirt having a gap to the lawn, and the boards having the proper gap between them, this structure should last many, many years.



You would want to do the same thing for a redwood deck. Ventilation is critical in all areas of our homes, and the back yard living areas are no exception. In fact it is even more important here. Of note, the textured and stained patio area was also added in as a replacement to a cracked slab that was there before. I like the combination of different materials to add interest and create a different walking feel as you pass from one zone to another.

HomeFix Radio Show Updates....

With Summer now starting, officially, I have been asked if I will be subjecting you the listener to replays of previously aired shows. Replays we call them, not reruns. Radio vs. TV I guess. This happens a lot in local radio programming as the host or hosts take off for summer vacations or holidays. Well, I am pleased to tell you that as far as I can tell, there will be none of this on the HomeFix Show!

A couple of reasons. First, The HomeFix Show is only on Saturdays. Some daily shows can't do this because of ... well... Being on the air more. My long vacations start when I go off the air on Saturday and end when I get back and go on the air the following Saturday.

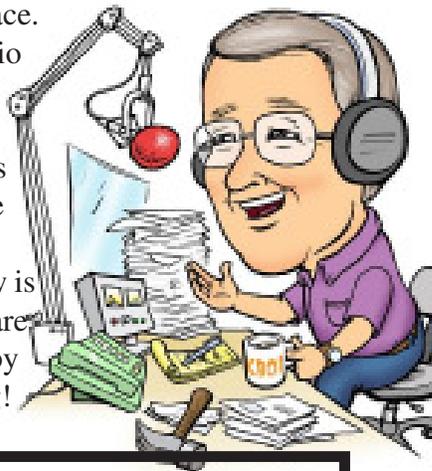
I do have a trip planned for this Summer, and I am looking forward to it greatly. A few days off will be good for mind, body and spirit. When? I guess you will have to keep listening and see if you can tell when I get back. Perhaps I will be speaking with a better tan.

New and fresh shows have always been important to me and I feel that there is value to you the listener if you can count on LIVE programs when you listen. Not only that, but there is so much to talk about!

On another note... I have been asked if there is a way for people to sit in on the studio audience and watch the show taking place.

No there is not. The studio is not set up for guests other than the few you hear in the show. There is not as much room in there as you might think.

Although, when The show is out live on location, you are always welcome to drop by and see what is happening!



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WINNERS!

Pierce Park Greens has been, and looks to continue providing The HomeFix Show with passes for rounds of golf at their course! These are awarded randomly to callers on the show as opportunities pop up. This nice Boise golf course is located on Pierce Park Road, imagine that, between Hill Road and State Street. It is a 9 hole course and is very family friendly and a great place to bring your kids. It is a Par 3 course and a great place to sneak off to for that quick "Business Meeting". Greens Fees are less than \$10! Now under new management by the folks at Divots! Be listening to win!

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The Independent Newspaper Column

by Joe Prin for May, 2010



“If we can not do something about this dust, I am going to go crazy!” Is what she said to me. “I have to dust this house a lot more than what I think is normal.”

What spurred this comment was me asking as I finished up a small project... “Is there anything else I can help with?”

My customer took me into her walk in closet and showed me a fine layer of white dust on the shelves and her hanging clothes. She said that this was a weekly event. I asked about the furnace and the filters. Were they changed lately? I was told that in fact they do clean the filters quite often. I wanted to look at them and then I saw it. The Honeywell Electronic Air Cleaner.

These air cleaners are installed upstream from the furnace blower and as return air comes through the system, the electronic cleaner “zaps” the dust and cleans it. But here is the issue we are finding with these. After talking to my friends at the Filter Factory Outlet Store (658-1146), I learned about “clean dirt”.

These electronic cleaners do not do much for filtration. The electrocuted dirt while rendered inert and organics sterilized, allow particles to pass through the system and therefore showing up as the fine white dust in the house. Just look at the system. There is a mesh filter, much like a grease trap filter in your range hood or microwave, and then a finned cartridge like a radiator. You can see right through these! Of course particulates will blow right on through. The analogy was told to me (by Stanley Johnson at Heating Equipment Company 459-2212) as if you had a magnetized wall and threw ball bearings right at it. Sure they would stick. However, set your toss up parallel to the wall and the bearings will pass right on by when thrown. Some might curve over and stick, but not nearly all of them.

There is a simple cure to this and here it is. We will add filtration to the system and abandon the electronic cleaning. The electronic unit is switched off and unplugged. The front cover is removed and the cartridges pulled out. The mesh grills are pulled out. The space they filled measures 20x25x 4.25. A standard pleated Merv 11 filter is available in this size and is made just for this situation. The filter is slid in where the cartridges were and the cover snapped back in place. Now the system will be filtering the air and the dust problem will go away.

There are several other types of filters available. Some with higher Merv ratings, some with anti-microbial and bacteria capabilities. You will have to discuss your specific needs with the filter supplier. Cost? About \$35 per filter and you would want to change these every 3 to 6 months. The Filter Factory Outlet Store will even deliver to your door so you can't forget to change them on time.

My customer is very happy with the results. A complete duct cleaning should also be part of the conversion as that dust is throughout the duct-work and should be removed. For most homes this will cost \$300 to \$400. Was it worth it? This lady sure thinks so. Glad I could help.

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Condenser coil cleaning- What does a condenser coil do?



5

The purpose of the condensing unit, (outdoor portion of an air conditioning system,) is to reject heat that was removed from the interior space. The factors having the greatest impact on the efficiency of this effort are: The difference between the outdoor temperature and the coil temperature. And, the amount of coil surface area available for heat transfer to take place. Once the unit is installed there is little that can be done to reduce the temperature surrounding the unit. There is something that can be done however to insure the maximum amount of surface area available for heat transfer to take place.

Is a dirty coil that big of a problem?

Unlike the evaporator coil, the condenser coil is exposed to unfiltered outdoor air—so it suffers much greater degradation due to dirt. The fan inside the condenser coil pulls air through the fins, and as a result, also pulls dirt and debris with it. Dust, leaves, grass clippings, pet hair, and anything else that collects on the fins will block airflow and reduce the unit's efficiency. A dirty coil reduces the cooling ability of the air blowing across the condenser coils. If the condensing temperature is raised from 95° Fahrenheit (F) to 105°F as a result, then cooling capacity will be cut by 7 percent and increase power consumption by 10 percent, with a net compressor efficiency reduction of 16 percent.

My condenser coil doesn't look dirty

External visual inspection will not tell you if the coil is clean because spaces between fins turn to improve fin to air heat transfer. To determine how dirty the condenser would require measurement, cleaning, and re-measurement. As cleaning is step 2, it is less expensive to just clean the coil.

Cleaning the coils

The easiest and most thorough way to clean a condenser coil is to have an HVAC company clean it for you. Knowing how this maintenance should be performed will help insure that you are paying to have the job done correctly. The best tool for task is a power washer that feeds cleaning solution into a high-pressure water flow. **IMPORTANT:** Power washing, if done improperly (for instance, using the wrong spray angle or excessive pressure), can damage coils by bending the fins—or even breaking them off if the coil is old. The task isn't very complicated, but it should be done only by people trained in the proper use of the necessary equipment

The unit should be cleaned from the inside out. This will require removing the fan from the top of the unit. The reason for this is that larger pieces of debris may become even further lodged in the fins if forced inward from the outside. Cleaning from the inside out also insures that person cleaning the coil will be able to clearly tell when the water being used to clean between the fins is free of debris.

CAUTION: Although it is recommended that this cleaning should be done by a professional, it is not impossible to clean the unit yourself. For homeowner or professional: Always begin by shutting off the electrical power before proceeding with the cleaning.

Learn more about Easy Upgrades at: www.idahopower.com/easyupgrades

5

Usually in this space.....

Here is where I often feature the gaffs and screw ups of anonymous people from things sent to me or what I find on the Internet. However, in this case what I found was in my own home.

Back story: A little over a year ago we moved into our new "old" house. It was originally built around 1974. Five months after we moved in, my wife Vicki asked me what I just cooked in the microwave. I replied in that usual male response not answering her question but rather determining if I am in trouble for something. "Why?" I asked.

She then replied "Because there is water on the glass inside. Did you spill something?" As if I have never cleaned up after my messes. Jeez, track paint on the rug once, and you are branded for life!

"To now answer your question, realizing that I am not in danger of losing a body part, No, I did not spill anything in the microwave. In fact, I have not used it in more than 36 hours. So there."

But she quickly pointed out that although removing myself from the chain of accountability, there was still water in the microwave. I suspected a greater issue.

This microwave is an over the range type, under a cabinet that is under a built down soffit (More on that on the next page). It vents up, and then over and out the wall of the kitchen. Above the kitchen on the second floor is our master bath. THE MASTER BATH... WATER... AH HA!

So I know roughly where the issue may be rooted. Now to get specific. We will be remodeling the kitchen soon, so pulling some soffit and drywall is not a problem. I opened the area up to find the pipes and sure enough, found the problem. A leak in a drain pipe was running over the range hood duct, down the side, into the vent compartment of the microwave and in through the top sheet-metal. YEAH BABY! 1500 Watts and Water in the same place! WOO HOO!

Then the more horrifying discovery. It was not a hole in the pipe. It was not a nail, screw, or inserted object of any kind. It was not a stress crack, or a defective piece of pipe. This was the fine work of a previous "Trades Professional" that most likely installed the microwave (again more on that later) and installed the vent adapter.

From what Detective Joe can tell, the vent boot was too big for the cabinet so the box had to be

clearanced a bit to fit. This appears to have been done with a reciprocating saw and at least an 8" blade as the pipe was CUT THROUGH for about a 1" gash.

Realizing his or her mistake, the ever talented and resourceful installer figured the best thing to do was to repair the gash... With Duct Tape. Yes, Duct Tape. Silver tool box on a roll, 200 mile an hour tape, the Handymans Best Friend.

The pipe was wrapped and all was well for that moment in time. In fact it lasted I'd guess a good couple of years.

So, knowing that the pipes you see in the photo are going to be moved in about 6 months anyway, I figured a temporary fix, all be it a much better one that the previous "permanent" repair, was in order.

The pipe was sanded and cleaned and the incision detailed up. I mixed up some 5 Minute Epoxy and packed it into the slot. When still sticky, I pressed in a strip of fiberglass mesh and covered it with another layer of epoxy.

The drain has been stress tested and is trouble free, for now. It just needs to hold for 6 months! I am documenting this repair here to prove to the next guy, that if I get hit by a bus and this remodel never happens, that I never did mean for this "fix" to be a forever repair.

This example is why on the job, us contractor types open walls and ceilings a little at a time. We need to see what is going on where we are working and then proceed with the appropriate caution.

Duct Tape... Can you believe it!??

6



Right.....



Wrong!



On the previous page, I relayed to you the water in the microwave story. Within the same project the above was also found. If you have ever installed a under cabinet, over range microwave, you know of the metal plate that is attached to the wall that the microwave hangs on. There are recommended placements for the fasteners, and if that is not directly into a wall stud, then you are to use toggle bolts. As I pulled down the sheetrock on the wall behind the cabinets and microwave, yes the same area as the plumbing solution was found, I was rewarded with this bit of attention to detail also. The two toggle bolts on the left were inserted and had secured properly. The two on the other side were as seen in the photo on the right. Yeah, they are basically worthless. Pretty much the same as my opinion of the installer who put them in.

Joe's Quick Tips...



If you have to go into your attic, do it in the morning before it gets too hot. Temperatures in attics can reach 125 in the summer and while you might be in there for only a few minutes, it can do damage to you. If you think it is too hot, it probably is.

Along the same lines, you should not walk on a asphalt shingle roof of any kind in the heat of the day. Shingles soften up in the heat and can tear loose or the granules will scrub off and either way, you might be in for a wild ride!

If your washing machine is taking a long time to fill, it could have plugged up filter screens. In the fill hoses at the back of the washer, where they attach, there should be cone screens. These get clogged with sand and debris and can make filling the washer take longer than need be. One person told me that by cleaning the screens, the wash cycle was shortened by 8 minutes!

7

Paint thinner is a great all purpose solvent and can be used for much more than just cleaning up paint brushes. I use it for cleaning up any stains, scuffs, oil spills, grease, and gick that I run into in my workshop. I also use it for cleaning up parts and pieces as well as the occasional paint brush. But here is the tip... Don't throw it out after using it. Transfer the dirty thinner to another jug and let it sit. The impurities will settle to the bottom and with a bit of careful pouring, you can use the top part again and again. It does not loose its solvent power.

Next time you need to buy a garden hose, treat yourself to quality. Buy a 3/4" commercial quality hose. These rubber hoses are pretty much indestructible and have heavy metal ends. They roll up nice and treated with care, will last 20 to 30 years easily. They are not cheap, but where 3 other vinyl 5/8" hoses would come and go, these are a better value. Expect to pay about \$60 for a 50' hose.

Check out www.joeprin.com Today!

AHH AHHH AHHH AHHH CHOOOO!



This is a photo (Duh) of a run of cold air return ducting through the center of a two-story house. The duct is under the second floor and boxed in with sheetrock as it passes through the living areas. Yup, one of those obnoxious soffits that we all know about or have lived in a house with them. As I was tearing out some of this ducting I found this section in particular somewhat interesting in a weird HomeFix guy kind of way.

The bottom of the sheetmetal if you can see in the photo is covered with about 1/4 of an inch of tightly packed, fine dust. You can also see it clinging to the seams on the top joint.

With indoor air quality becoming a bigger issue for people with Asthma or allergies, we often think about getting rid of carpet and switching to "shinny" furniture to reduce dust in the house. With what I see in this particular duct, here is a definite improvement waiting to be made. **CLEAN YOUR DUCT WORK!**

This home had the ducts cleaned.... uhh.... it was in 19never! Built in about 1974, this is many years of accumulation. This is not the worst I have seen, but it is typical of many homes.

Should you choose to have this professionally done, make sure the people don't show up with Shop-vacs and feather dusters. They should have a very big, and very noisy suction truck with big dirt pulling power.



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