



Sheetrock & Shellac: A Thinking Person's Guide to the Art and Science of Home Improvement

David Owen

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In a world of extreme makeovers, this book is a thoughtful, adventure-filled, witty look at what the space we live in says about us, the pleasures of home renovation projects great and small, and how home renovation can change our lives.

Few things define us as powerfully as the place where we live. The size and location of a house may reveal basic facts about our financial or social status, but it is the personal touches -- a paint color or a homemade desk -- that reflect our aspirations, our tastes, our secret desires.

In *Sheetrock & Shellac*, David Owen recounts his renovation and home construction projects in small-town Connecticut -- from catching the home improvement bug while watching workmen replacing a leaky roof to his first tentative foray into DIY (successfully building an enclosure for a bathroom radiator that had "turned into a sort of low-tech factory for converting splattered urine into odor and dust"). As his skill grows, so does his confidence: replacing a broken light switch turns into wiring an entire room, making bookcases is followed by building an office. Some of the more overly imaginative projects -- for instance, an ambition to install sinks and hot and cold faucets in all the rooms of the house -- never come to fruition but are amusingly recounted for other intrepid home designers.

Owen's two-hundred-year-old farmhouse provides numerous occasions for home improvement projects, and layers (literally) of fascination. Owen quickly learns the hard way when to tackle a project himself and when to turn for help. But soon he's so comfortable with the undertaking that he decides to take the big leap from renovation to building a completely new home from the ground up. In this case, Owen decides to build a weekend cabin a mere six miles away from his home. From a discourse on kitchen countertop materials to the complete history of concrete, to a near-disastrous mishap with a tree, a newly constructed roof, and an overzealous chainsaw, Owen's journey through home designing and building proves both enthrallingly educating and hilariously detailed.

New Yorker writer Owen's engaging narrative, filled with a wealth of practical information, hands-on tips, and canny insights, explores the ways in which the human processes of construction and renovation leave all the parties transformed. More than a simple how-to, *Sheetrock & Shellac* is a why-to, a wellspring of savvy advice and encouragement for anyone who has ever contemplated changing their surroundings and changing their life.

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