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GUIDE



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Camouflaging our goofs

We did not experience a typical Iowa winter — if there is such a thing anymore. I know many of you are just fine with that. I, on the other hand, appreciate being snowed in, at least on the weekends, as it forces me to work on the seemingly endless list of home improvement projects that don't seem to be diminishing on their own.



I am proud to say I chipped away at a few of them over the past few months. Did I complete them? No, but I am making progress. The good news is that summer isn't here yet and I still have time to wrap up a few of my projects.

Some of you may have the good fortune of being married to a person who you can work on home improvement projects with. I love my wife dearly, and I enjoy working together with her on various tasks. She, on the other hand, doesn't seem to enjoy working with me on them as much. As such, I lost my helper. I did, though, have a daughter home on college break who likes to roll up her sleeves and work with her dad. We had some fun doing it, too. Is our work flawless? Not exactly. But we have become quite good at camouflaging our goofs.

I will continue to work on my projects until I can actually get some of them completely finished. And if I don't? Well, fortunately, I have a great list of contractors in the pages of this home improvement guide who I know can bail me out — and I won't have to camouflage their work.

Thanks for reading. ■

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COVER: Jess Gjerde and her family moved into the home where her father had lived and made renovations to fit the needs of the family of five. Photo by Todd Rullestad



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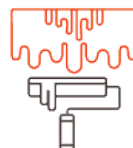


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Good bones provide a solid foundation for home improvement project

Couple encounters a few hiccups during the process.

BEFORE



When Dan Riedel and Kristin Jensen Riedel were looking for a home, the couple had a few requirements: They wanted a fixer-upper with a solid foundation and plenty of space to host parties, among other things. The West Des Moines home the couple decided on was built in 1968 and came with its own history as a bonus.

The house was owned by Ione Genevieve Shadduck, an educator, women's rights activist and attorney in Des Moines. She lived in the house until she was 98 years old. Shadduck is in the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame for her accomplishments. A telling of her story would require a feature of its own, but her work in the advancement of women's rights in the area is well documented.

"She just had a really good presence, and you can feel it in this house. Finding her obituary was the coolest thing because she talked about her life experiences, time with friends and family, and experiencing nature," Kristin says.

Dan and Kristin appreciated the history of the home, which reportedly hosted Michelle Obama at one point, and for its ability to be upgraded without sacrificing its charm.

"We were looking for a fixer-upper with solid bones and something that hasn't been touched a whole lot, as far as recent renovations. We didn't want to have to go through and fix up newer stuff that we didn't really like. We just

AFTER



When Dan Riedel and Kristin Jensen Riedel found out they were expecting a baby, they had to kick their home improvement project into high gear. They managed to finish the nursery only a week before their son was born. Photo by Cyote Williams

wanted a blank slate to go through and take care of everything," Dan says.

Kristin agrees.

"One thing we realized is we wanted to flip a house, but we needed something that was still move-in ready."

Dan and Kristin decided to tackle the upstairs first. The popcorn ceilings were the first thing to go. When dealing with renovating an older home, there were more problems than they initially thought.

"It was a lot of drywall work, painting walls,

just a lot of interior stuff, updating the finishes. In one bedroom, we had to replace a window because the original was leaking, which turned into reframing an exterior wall and then partially new siding from there. The bathroom needed redoing, and then it was leaking into our kitchen," Dan says.

The two teamed up to make their home improvement dreams a reality. Kristin has a lot of ideas and visions while Dan, who has extensive experience in construction and construction management, helps make them a reality.

"The design side for me has been fun. I have a

BEFORE



Wood floors and muted wall colors turned the outdated bedroom into a cozier, modern space.

Pinterest board with over 1,000 pins on it, to save things there and then look through and say, OK, for each room, what is the stuff I like? What is the design that I'm going for? We have been learning, room by room, to make sure that they still tie in together," Kristin says.

Luckily for the two, Kristin has a keen eye for the style they are looking for.

"She has a ton of design ideas, and she has really good taste. So, luckily, there's not a whole lot of clashing that happens. I've gone rogue a few

AFTER



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times, where I buy a light fixture and she'd be like, 'What is that?' I say, 'I thought it'd be nice.' And she's like, 'No. Look at how it would look in here.' I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, you're right,'” Dan says.

Dan says they used different types of wood for the finishes and trims between the upstairs and downstairs but wanted to make sure the look still felt cohesive.

“We went with a birch hardwood upstairs, and we're doing a red oak downstairs. To transition the two different wood textures, for our stair handrails, we went with oak, but the treads are birch. It's a small detail that a lot of people wouldn't necessarily think anything of, but something that I thought I would try,” Dan says.

Dan, who works in construction management, says his background has helped them plan out the varying expenses of their home improvement projects.

“Materials nowadays are very expensive. It's an expensive process. Even gallons of paint are just

absurd now... Prior to my professional career, I built houses and renovated pretty much everything I possibly could, and the process overall has always interested me. So, it's been a lifelong journey to this point, and we were ready to take it on,” Dan says.

Aside from the popcorn ceilings, leaks and drywall issues the couple encountered, there was another bump along the road that made home improvement a little more difficult. Kristin became pregnant. The two had to fast-track the process in the nursery and make sure they were extra careful with ventilation while Kristin was carrying their baby.

“I couldn't go into the rooms. I wasn't really any help, because I couldn't be inhaling those things. Paint fumes, sanding dust. It did put a little bit of fire under us, which was nice. Dan says, ‘These are big, open areas that the baby is going to be in. We have to get this done before he's here. And I think we got the nursery done a week before he was born,’” Kristin says.

“I think he was in the NICU, and I was putting the trim on,” Dan adds.

Kristin and Dan want the next family who lives in the house to see the time and effort they put into the fixes and renovations, while also appreciating the style.

“We were trying to be mindful with what we like, but then also realizing what the next owner wants and to be able to give them the opportunity to make the changes they would like. That's the biggest thing, so just a nice overall product for the next person,” Dan says.

“I think about when we were looking at houses and each style is a person's own thing. I want people to look at pictures of our house someday and be like, ‘Wow, that's different, that's cool,’” Kristin says.

The most important piece of advice the couple has for those looking to tackle their own home improvement is to be patient and to be OK with the chaos.

“Slow down, take your time. You don't have to take it all on at once. Really, my only regret with the project so far was biting off a little bit more than I could chew at one time. It can get

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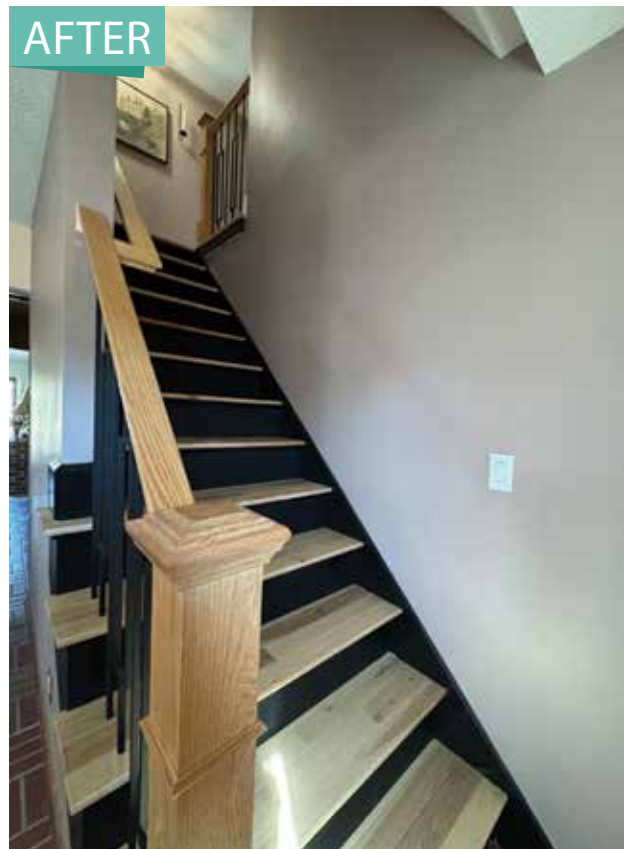
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overwhelming when you're trying to work a full-time job, and then a baby happens. Just take your time and don't get frustrated. Watch YouTube videos. Enjoy yourself. The end product is satisfying," Dan says.

Kristin added, "Be OK with living in a construction zone for a while. His tools have to go somewhere, the wood has to go somewhere. Not everything being perfect is a hard part for me, but also a good realization of not taking on too much so you have spaces that still feel like yours."

Next up for the couple? Renovating the kitchen. How does Dan feel about that?

"I'm terrified." ■



When remodeling the stairs, Dan Riedel used two types of wood to create a bridge between the upstairs and downstairs design elements.



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Making it their own

Gjerdes update father’s home for their family of five.



BEFORE



AFTER

Changes to Gjerdes’ kitchen made it brighter and more functional.

Jess Gjerde and her family have lived in their home for three years now, but the house has been part of her life for longer than that.

“The house was owned by my dad prior to that,” she says. “He purchased it as a new build in 2010. When he passed away 3.5 years ago, my husband and I decided we wanted to keep the home in our family and moved in.”

They set about making the house their own. They wanted to make updates and add features to make it more functional for the family of five.

The biggest change was adding an addition to the side of the house for a walk-in pantry off the kitchen and expanding the laundry/mudroom space. The couple wanted each of the children to continue to have their own rooms, so they gave up part of the living room space in the basement to add a fourth bedroom.



Jess Gjerde and her family moved into the home where her father had lived and made renovations to fit the needs of the family of five. Photo by Todd Rullestad



BEFORE



AFTER

The fireplace in the Gjerde home was turned into a focal point.

On top of those projects, they installed new flooring throughout the home, painted every interior wall and ceiling, changed the kitchen island, painted existing cupboards, installed new countertops, added a new backsplash in the kitchen, updated the fireplace, put new light fixtures throughout the house, added

decorative beams to the ceiling in the main living area, and also painted the exterior of the home.

“We pretty much updated the entire home and couldn’t be happier with how it turned out,” Gjerde says.

BEFORE



The Gjerdes gave the exterior of their home a facelift.

AFTER



When it came to choosing a look and finishes, Gjerde says they gathered input from family and friends and also did a lot of browsing on Pinterest.

“Looking through others’ remodels for inspiration is helpful,” she says, adding that their contractor was helpful in “making sure our selections were going to work well in our space, be within our budget, and also fit within the look we were going for.

“I have a hard time envisioning the final product, so having someone with that

knowledge and expertise during the whole process was extremely helpful,” Gjerde adds. “We are thrilled with the result. It’s really hard to list just one favorite, but I think it would have to be our kitchen with pantry addition. I just love it. We spend a lot of time at our large kitchen island.”

Although the Gjerdes have made a lot of updates, they still have plans to eventually replace the deck and possibly add an entertainment/storage shed in the backyard.

Gjerde’s advice for those thinking about

updating their spaces is to use an experienced contractor, ask for quotes, and remember that cheaper isn’t always better.

“I would choose quality work for an appropriate price any day over cut corners and low-quality work to save some money,” she says. “Ask for references and check out photos of their past work. Set a budget, but also try to leave some wiggle room for anything unexpected that may come up. Make your list of what you need and want done, in order of priority, and work down your list as your budget allows.” ■

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The perfect custom closet

Vuong added organization and efficiency to her storage.

Deciding what home improvement projects one wants to tackle can be based on a variety of reasons. When Nga Vuong decided to update her closets, it was for practical reasons.

“I decided to redo my closets because I wanted a more organized and efficient space that fit my lifestyle,” she says. “Over time, I realized that my old closets weren’t making the best use of the space and felt cluttered.”

It took time before Nga decided to take action.

“I had been thinking about this home improvement project for quite a while, probably for over a year,” she says. “Every time I struggled to find something in my

cluttered closet or felt frustrated with how disorganized things were, it crossed my mind. But it wasn’t until recently that I decided to take the leap. Once I committed to the idea, I was excited to finally turn those thoughts into reality, and I’m so glad I did. It’s made a big difference in how I enjoy and use the space every day.”

She enlisted a company that specializes in custom closets to provide the design.

“I wanted a design that not only looked great but also made it easier to store and access everything I needed,” she says. “I decided on the new design after thinking about what would truly make my daily life easier. I wanted a solution that was both stylish and functional, with custom features



Nga Vuong decided to update her closet to provide better use of the space.

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tailored to my specific needs, like adjustable shelving and dedicated compartments for shoes and accessories. The renovation has completely transformed how I use the space and has brought a sense of order and satisfaction to my daily routine.”

She said the company understood her vision.

“They offered creative suggestions that elevated the project beyond what I initially imagined,” she says. “Their expertise and commitment to delivering a flawless result made them the perfect choice for this renovation.”

Nga was impressed with how smoothly the process went.

“The team was very professional and kept everything on track, so it actually took about the same amount of time as I expected,” she says. “They kept me informed throughout, and the careful planning and communication made it easy to manage. Overall, it was a positive experience that stayed within the timeline, and seeing the final result made it all worth it.”

The organization her new closet provides made this home improvement project worth it for Nga.

“It’s amazing how everything has a specific place now, from shoes and accessories to seasonal clothing,” she says. “I especially love the adjustable shelving, which makes it so much easier to keep everything tidy and accessible. It’s a perfect blend of style and functionality, and it brings a sense of calm and order every time I walk into the closet.”



After customizing her closet, Nga Vuong can better organize her clothing and accessories.

Finally, for those looking to do their own home improvement project, Nga has advice.

“Take the time to really think about how you use the space and what your priorities are,” she says. “Make a list of the features that are most important to you, and don’t be afraid to invest in quality where it counts. Also, do your research when choosing a contractor or company — find someone who listens to your vision and has a strong track record of delivering results. Lastly, stay flexible. There might be small changes along the way, but trust the process and keep the end goal in mind. With the right planning and team, you’ll be thrilled with the results.” ■

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Much-needed updates

Schroders take home from 1970s vibe to modern.

It was 2021, but Mike and Linda Schroeder felt like they were living in a home that could have been the set for “That 70s Show.” The two bathrooms needed refreshing, and the kitchen was outdated.

“It had honey-oak cabinets, laminate flooring, formica countertops and a big box light with two large fluorescent tube lights,” Mike described.

In addition to looking outdated, everything was showing the wear and tear that a family of five can inflict over the course of many years.

“We gutted the whole kitchen from floor to ceiling, keeping the windows with honey-oak trim,” Mike says.

“We kept the same footprint,” Linda adds. “We could have knocked out the wall between the kitchen/family room and the front living room, but we liked the separation it gave us. The pocket door is handy because it lets us close the two rooms off from each other.”

To help Mike and Linda visualize the project, the designers created a detailed drawing of the final look. There was only one problem: It was black and white.

“I have to visualize it,” Linda says, “so I took out my colored pencils and filled it in myself.”

Besides a significant change in color, new cabinets were also a much-needed upgrade. Pull out shelves provided easier access to items in the back and more drawers offered pantry storage. Linda was also able to install a cabinet with glass doors and built-in back lighting.

“I always wanted that,” she says.

The Schroeders replaced the kitchen lighting with a series of well-placed can lights built into the ceiling.

“Now I don’t hit my head on the light that used to hang over the kitchen table,” Mike laughs.

AFTER



Mike and Linda Schroeder gutted their kitchen to remove the honey-oak cabinets, laminate flooring, formica countertops and fluorescent box light and create a modern and colorful kitchen which included the cabinets with glass doors and backlighting Linda wanted.

BEFORE



For the countertops, they chose a white manufactured quartz. Linda complemented the countertops with a navy blue tile backsplash. Highlighting the backsplash and countertops are dimmable LED rope lights installed under

the cabinets. The couple likes the softness of this lighting, especially in the evenings after all of the kitchen work is done for the day, Linda says.



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Mike and Linda Schroeder transformed their home from its 1970s look to modern and chic.

AFTER



New countertops, sinks, flooring, paint and lighting modernized the Schroeders' master bath.

BEFORE



The Schroeders didn't stop with the kitchen. They also made significant updates to the main floor bathroom and the master bathroom. They chose the same cabinets as the kitchen, removed wallpaper, repainted, and installed new countertops and backsplashes.

Mike says the time and expense of the remodel was worth it.

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AFTER



BEFORE



The Schroeders' updated master bath includes a new, more functional shower.

"We really love this neighborhood, and we're not planning on moving any time soon, so let's do the work now and enjoy it for ourselves," he says.

"I'm not leaving this house until I can't crawl up the steps," Linda jokes. "Now it's all updated and looks much more modern." ■

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Maurer created a cozy bar and entertainment area in his basement.



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When Andy Maurer finished his basement, he created a rec room with a bar. Photo by Jackie Wilson

When Andy Maurer moved into his home in West Des Moines, the 22-year-old house didn't have a finished basement. The floor was a concrete slab, and walls had not been drywalled.

"It had a cold, grungy feel to it," he recalls.

He decided to seek the advice of a contractor on refinishing the basement. He taped areas off to indicate where he wanted walls for a rec room and various features, including a bar.

"I was going to have a poured concrete bar, but it was too expensive," he recalls. "I got two butcher block sections, which saved money. We put a laminate coat over it, which looks great."

Under the bar are electrical outlets with USB ports. Next to the bar is a rec room, with a big-screen TV and a comfy sectional. He and his girlfriend enjoy hosting parties.

“We have a good time down here. It’s a nice cozy nook for movies,” he says.

Another feature he wanted was a sauna. Since he used his health club’s sauna frequently, he thought having one at home would be ideal. He ordered the sauna online and, when it arrived, it barely fit in the newly finished bathroom.

“I really enjoy the sauna,” he says. “There’s lots of health benefits. It’s a great way to decompress in the winter.”

He added a storage closet and enclosed the utility room. Since moving in, he’s added a walk-out patio, completed landscaping and done other projects.



Andy Maurer wanted his finished basement to provide a space for entertaining and watching television.
Photo by Jackie Wilson

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Andy Maurer included a sauna in his finished basement space. Photo by Jackie Wilson

Andy chose to live in West Des Moines since he graduated from Valley High School. After graduating from the University of Iowa, he lived in Chicago before returning to West Des Moines, where his parents and family still live.

Next on his to-do list is putting a deck on the back of his home.

“There’s always something to do,” he says. ■

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