

INTRODUCTION

The Repair Book for the Rest of Us

IF YOU HAVE BUILT YOUR OWN TEN-BEDROOM MANSION WITH YOUR BARE HANDS, AND IF YOU WEAR A TOOL BELT TO BED INSTEAD OF PAJAMAS, THEN YOU MIGHT NOT CARE MUCH ABOUT WHAT I HAVE TO SAY IN RESPECT TO KEEPING A HOME IN GOOD REPAIR. THAT'S OK. THIS REPAIR BOOK IS FOR THE REST OF US: PEOPLE WHO WANT PRESENTABLE HOMES IN GOOD REPAIR—WITHOUT WORKING TOO HARD FOR IT.

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Yes, the title is *How to Cheat at Home Repair*, and you might well ask how you could possibly cheat at fixing things. Am I talking about skirting building codes, using chintzy materials, and slapdash techniques? Not at all. Building regulations protect us all, and none of us likes the look of careless work in our homes. Cheating at home repair means using ingenious shortcuts that will save you time, energy, and money—while getting the repair done properly. It means selecting the most durable furnishings and materials for your home so you have to make repairs less often. It means walking away from the myths, misconceptions, and counterproductive traditions that sap hours out of your home life. It means stocking your toolbox with simple-but-versatile tools so you're ready for any mishaps and breakdowns that homeownership throws at you. And it means knowing your limits—when to call in a professional rather than doing a sloppy repair yourself.

This book is jam-packed with sneaky tips and techniques that any homeowner or apartment-dweller can perform with the most common tools and materials. Many of these tips come from professional repair people themselves. I put this question to each of them: “When you arrive at a customer’s home, which are the jobs that cause you to shake your head and say to yourself, ‘They could have taken care of this themselves?’” With their replies in hand, I put together instructions for the simplest, anybody-can-do-it home repairs. Even more tips come from inspectors, architects, professional organizers, inventors, and regular folks with clever ideas. Now, the how-to-cheat movement is not confined to one continent, and discussing home repair gets tricky when you consider the differences in building techniques, measuring systems, tools, and product availability. Nevertheless, we’ve done our best to provide tips that can be understood and carried out by the broadest possible audience. That’s why you will find mention of both imperial and metric measurements, generic product names alongside specific brand names, and occasional instructions for finding supplies on the Internet.

And speaking of regular folks, now that you’re in the “how to cheat” fold, I invite you to join the growing throng of ingenious homeowners who submit their own sneaky ideas about home management for use in future books. Just drop me a note in care of Sterling Publishing, or submit tips electronically by visiting one of my websites, HowToCheatBooks.com or JeffBredenberg.com.

Please use common sense when you make repairs, follow the appropriate safety precautions, and don’t proceed with any repair you don’t fully understand. Hire your trusted professionals to deal with jobs that entail dangerous elements, such as live electricity and heights. As cheaters at home repair, we’re looking for sanity in our home lives—not the added stress, expense, and time loss that come with injuries.

And resist the pressure to be a super do-it-yourselfer. Sure, it’s easy to admire the people who have gone through the specialized training and licensing required to do professional-level building, plumbing, electrical work, and such. You may gawk dreamily as a television personality remodels a kitchen in twenty-five minutes. And some corner of your heart may envy Toolbelt Tom who lives down the block, the DIY freak who buys every power tool in the local home center. But, in reality, you don’t want to be them—you chose a different career path, and life is hectic enough without trying to pack a second one into your schedule. You have your own priorities, ones that preserve your sanity: A presentable home, efficient ways to get repairs done, time for your family, and a hassle-free lifestyle. Ah, that’s the cheatin’ life!