

Home ownership requires a certain handiness

by MARK PAVILONS

It's been said that if your man isn't handsome, he better be handy!

Our species has succeeded and evolved, largely because we have hands, fingers and a decent-sized brain. We can conceptualize, design, build and create.

It remains our strength over our fellow mammals on this planet. Imagine if our simian cousins could build structures and tools? That's definitely a new Planet of the Apes movie to be sure.

Louis Nizer once said that a ?man who works with his hands is a laborer; a man who works with his hands and his brain is a craftsman; but a man who works with his hands and his brain and his heart is an artist.?

I envy those who are skilled handymen, who can pretty much fix or create anything with the tools at hand.

Maybe my fondness for the Mr. Fix-its came from watching Bob the Builder or Handy Manny with my kids when they were young.

Our forefathers, out of necessity, were natural handymen and women.

My dad could make a bench from a tree stump, a shelf from a scrap piece of plywood. He even made a walking stick out of a tree branch, one thing we have kept all these years. Some of his creations were a bit wonky, but that's okay.

For him, it was a matter of encountering a problem or challenge, and finding a solution.

There was no ?calling someone? or asking for help. It was simply putting nose to grindstone and figuring it out. He used a lot of wood, nails and duct tape!

But his simple upbringing in Latvia filled him with common sense and a strong work ethic. Those two things, along with a bit of smarts, results in what Nizer called a ?craftsman.?

Again, I?envy those who can grab ?the right tool for the right job,??and turn their attention to the problem at hand.

My father-in-law, a retired foreman with Otis Elevators, worked in many downtown buildings and even helped install the elevators on the CN?Tower.

His stories are legendary. I?remember his tale of the crews working so late, they stayed on an unfinished floor of the Tower's pod. They had to fasten themselves to anchors in the cement so they didn't roll off the edge in their sleep!

His photos of the Toronto skyline and lightning storms high above the city are amazing.

He, too, is a ?craftsman,? and my wife and I?still call upon his expertise from time to time.

A friend of mine has done everything from home renovations to creating ponds, play structures, fences, etc.

I?think it's great to know someone like that, but I?imagine they almost always get called upon to ?pitch in??and help out a friend or family member.

Admittedly, due to my lack of handiness, I'm inclined to turn to the pros, or friends and relatives. What can I say, I'm inherently cheap!

Recently, we had an issue with the furnace at home. I noticed water leaking from beneath it, creeping along the cement floor in the basement. I turned to the Internet for an explanation and discovered it was a plugged condenser hose. Online material said it was a relatively easy fix, and not to leave it too long or you risk damaging the furnace.

So, a call to a Nobleton business led George Lucas to my basement, and within a matter minutes, the problem was solved. I tend to look local and found George through the King's Chamber of Commerce.

I find that in certain instances furnaces, plumbing, electrical it's best to turn to experts. I really don't want to electrocute myself or others and really don't need a new pond or lake in my house.

We added a basement bathroom in our house, and called on our nephew to complete the task. It turned out quite well and the finishes my wife selected are amazing.

Surprisingly, this small reno ate up a little more than \$5,000.

I've always been a fan of those home renovation shows on HGTV, especially the Property Brothers. It's really interesting to see how such extravagant transformations take place and the work involved. It's also eye-opening, in terms of cost.

A typical kitchen reno can run upwards of \$50,000 and a main floor gut and upgrade, well into the six figures. One can always dream.

Most homeowners know there's always something to do, or there are always upgrades, repairs and improvements that need to be done to maintain our abodes.

We had the shingles replaced this summer and guys did a great job. Boy, did they work hard in the heat for a full day.

Sure, I would have loved to spend the thousands upon thousands of dollars on a holiday, but alas, such is the burden of home ownership.

We have frequent backups of our kitchen sink, and some home remedies have staved off trouble. One of my son's friends came over to snake the line and this was successful. Some tradespeople charge several hundred dollars for this.

Did I mention that I was cheap?

In a family affair, we assembled a 10x10 aluminum pergola in our back yard. Other than a few upside down pieces and using the wrong screws, it was a huge success. I was surprised it took so long and can understand why people charge hundreds of dollars to do the job.

I remember helping my dad work on his 1973 Oldsmobile the engine bay could comfortably fit 2-3 people! Today's cars are much too complicated for the average non-handy male.

I get the satisfaction at the end of a job well done. I imagine it's similar to finishing a painting or wooden bowl.

To all the craftsmen and women and artists out there, thank you!