



Home Life



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Gradual Metamorphosis



At Home with **Eros Greatti**

Two weeks ago, while shopping in Alexis Nihon Plaza, a self-described fan stopped me to ask for tips on repairing some of the wood finishes in her Westmount home.

I offered to visit her to see what had to be done and determine the appropriate advice. What I found turned out to be a job of restoration, rather than repair. Oak was the wood in question and the best finishes for oak celebrate its grain. Many great oak finishes begin with a ground color made with dye, typically a yellow or reddish brown. It is best to apply the dye liberally to bare wood, then blot up any excess with a clean rag. Avoid strong col-

ors or problems with lap marks by thinning the dye 50%; you can go for a darker look with a second or third application. A great tip is to mist the wood with water before putting on a water based dye, my choice of preference, as the damp wood takes the stain more evenly than dry wood. A good shellac sealer brings the dyed wood to life. This process also creates a barrier that prevents dyes or stains from bleeding into the next layer of finish. Be careful with pre-mixed shellac, some cans use the words "finish and sealer"; just make sure it's a wax-free formula.

In the same way that the experts produce a sample for approval, before tackling the job, so should you, if you decide to go ahead and get crafty yourself. Making samples gives you the opportunity to work on a recipe until you get the look you are aiming for, or at least one you are happy with.

The key to a great finish is proper sand-



ing; you should use a 220 grit and scuff-sand with 280- or 320-grit paper between coats of shellac and varnish. Sanding removes dust nibs and roughs the surface, ever so gently for the next coat to take hold. A glaze layer emphasizes oak's beautiful strong grain and a final protective topcoat adds depth and durability. If the job is properly done, your oak will look stunning!

You can try to do all this yourself or, as I always suggest, you can hire an expert who can put his or her years of experience at your service. Not that you couldn't do it, but after getting acquainted with the process, I think you'll realize exactly what a onerous task you'd be undertaking.

I asked my contractor, Philippe Brais, to transform some old mahogany bookshelves I had at home and recycle them into a new 14 feet ladder for my office-studio-atelier. He sanded the final ladder and left the wood unfinished, just so that I could take my time in deciding a proper finish for it. To be very honest, I am in love with the soft silky-smooth texture of the unfinished wood and have decided, against his advice, at least for now, to leave it as is. In fact, I am enjoying experimenting with the new materials and techniques used in the gradual metamorphosis of my office. It is an enriching, educative experience.

Whether renovating or designing from scratch, consider how well your wood surfaces will support your daily routine in order to make the right choices of wood types and finishes. As always, your best bet is to consult someone with experience.

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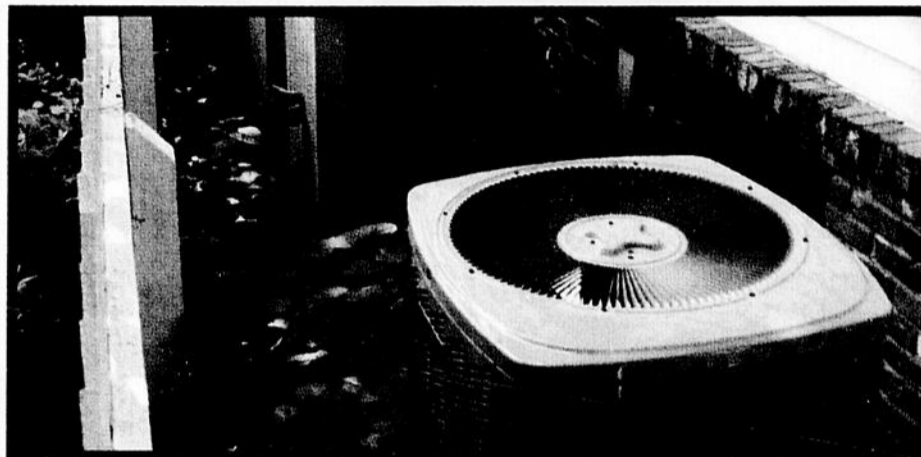


Getting your ventilation system cleaned

The cleaning of your ventilation air ducts will make for cleaner and healthier air in your home. Not only does it improve the quality of the air you breathe, it also protects the health of your family.

Dirty ventilation systems are a potential fire hazard. Furthermore, cleaning the ducts is a preventative measure that will improve the performance of your heating, air conditioning or air/heat exchanger systems. Improved performance also means lower energy bills. Cleaning your air ducts will prolong the life span of your heating and cooling system and all of its parts. A good cleaning will also eliminate odours emanating from your air ducts.

When your ventilation system is dirty, it runs the risk of becoming a breeding ground for all types of mushrooms, molds, pollen, bacteria and other allergens. Although most are invisible to the naked



eye, these particles have the potential of harming your health. Furthermore, by creating an imbalance in your air circulation, they can increase your energy costs.

Dusty air ducts can harbour harmful particles. Every time your heating or air exchanger system starts up, these damaging particles are projected into the air you breathe. Like many people, you and your

family members may experience allergic reactions to what is in these particles.

If your air ducts are not properly maintained, the bad air they produce could end up making you sick. Typical symptoms might include rashes, sneezing, congestion, runny nose, respiratory problems, eye and skin irritation, headaches, and fatigue, to name just a few. There is also a

possibility that micro-organisms floating in the air may cause damage to your bronchial tubes and lungs, not to mention the fact that they can also exacerbate ailments in people who are already sensitive or susceptible to respiratory infections.



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Beware of blocked gutters

A house involves a lot of work as far as maintenance is concerned and every season brings its own round of chores. The fall is the obvious time to clean out the gutters in order for rainwater to drain efficiently.

First of all, always bear in mind that blocked or poorly maintained guttering can damage your house and herein lays the importance of cleaning them properly. An overflowing gutter can lead to cracks in walls and found

ations as well as discolouration of the walls of your home.

This chore does not have to be complicated. To start with, you will need a good pair of gloves. This will make it easier to remove all the dirt, leaves, particles of metal, etc., you may find. Of course, a good ladder is essential for reaching the guttering as well as a small gardening tool to help you to dislodge any awkward scraps. At the worst, you can always use a drain auger

(plumbing snake) if everything is totally stuck. In order to work efficiently, attach a garbage bag to your ladder for all the junk you retrieve. And lastly, a small jet of water from a hose will finish your cleaning job nicely.

It's very important to do this work when fall arrives but, if you want to make it even less complicated, the installation of wire meshing or a cover for the gutter will save you a lot of time and effort.

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