



Examiner/Gordon Stone

David Cook works on his yet-to-be-completed dream house in San Anselmo

The adventurous build-it-yourselfers

By Bradley Inman

SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

(First of Two Parts)

UNTIL I met a few rugged individualists who toiled for thousands of hours building their own homes, I thought owner builder housing was simply a practical way to make economic sense out of an off-the-wall housing market.

Boy, was I naive.

Now I put people who have built their own houses on a pedestal right up there with the folks who climb mountains or sail around the world.

Adventurous types, they

know what they want, don't know exactly what their handiwork will look like when it's complete, and have the necessary patience to endure an ominous and labor-intensive job that would zap the life out of a normal person.

"It's like throwing yourself into a pool of icy cold water each morning and forcing yourself to take a swim," says owner builder Don Rose, who with his wife Christina is near completion of their 3,000-square-foot home in the Alamo area of Contra Costa County.

While the rest of us groan about such complex tasks as qualifying for a loan or giving

directions to the moving van, owner builders take raw land and two or three years out of their life to stage a complex production feat.

"We gave up socializing and everything like that—the house became our life," says Rose, who built his house on one-third of an acre on a spot where a fixer upper was originally located. "Once we realized it wasn't worth saving, we tore down the house and started from scratch."

Unlike the barn-raising days, building your own home today isn't a collective neighborhood experience. Who's got time to help even a best friend build a house? Most of us are too busy

working to pay for our own.

Indeed, the owner builder spends countless hours alone scraping, molding, hammering, chiseling, fitting, measuring, lathing, sanding, and sawing.

Add that to the time spent pondering, thinking, rethinking, reasoning, and figuring out and the rest of the day is gobbled up.

I found that owner builders have some other behavioral quirks. For example, they don't ordinarily have answering machines. Why? Because they don't need one; they are always at home—always at home working on their house, that is. They are

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