



# Sheetrock & Shellac: A Thinking Person's Guide to the Art and Science of Home Improvement

*David Owen*

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**In a world of extreme makeovers, this book is a thoughtful, adventure-filled, witty look at what the space we live in says about us, the pleasures of home renovation projects great and small, and how home renovation can change our lives.**

Few things define us as powerfully as the place where we live. The size and location of a house may reveal basic facts about our financial or social status, but it is the personal touches -- a paint color or a homemade desk -- that reflect our aspirations, our tastes, our secret desires.

In *Sheetrock & Shellac*, David Owen recounts his renovation and home construction projects in small-town Connecticut -- from catching the home improvement bug while watching workmen replacing a leaky roof to his first tentative foray into DIY (successfully building an enclosure for a bathroom radiator that had "turned into a sort of low-tech factory for converting splattered urine into odor and dust"). As his skill grows, so does his confidence: replacing a broken light switch turns into wiring an entire room, making bookcases is followed by building an office. Some of the more overly imaginative projects -- for instance, an ambition to install sinks and hot and cold faucets in all the rooms of the house -- never come to fruition but are amusingly recounted for other intrepid home designers.

Owen's two-hundred-year-old farmhouse provides numerous occasions for home improvement projects, and layers (literally) of fascination. Owen quickly learns the hard way when to tackle a project himself and when to turn for help. But soon he's so comfortable with the undertaking that he decides to take the big leap from renovation to building a completely new home from the ground up. In this case, Owen decides to build a weekend cabin a mere six miles away from his home. From a discourse on kitchen countertop materials to the complete history of concrete, to a near-disastrous mishap with a tree, a newly constructed roof, and an overzealous chainsaw, Owen's journey through home designing and building proves both enthrallingly educating and hilariously detailed.

*New Yorker* writer Owen's engaging narrative, filled with a wealth of practical information, hands-on tips, and canny insights, explores the ways in which the human processes of construction and renovation leave all the parties transformed. More than a simple how-to, *Sheetrock & Shellac* is a why-to, a wellspring of savvy advice and encouragement for anyone who has ever contemplated changing their surroundings and changing their life.

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