

Learning from the masters



Home ownership is expensive.

I don't need to tell actual home owners this, but to you renters out there longing for a home of your own, it bears repeating.

I rented for 11 blissful years in a small condo on the 4th floor of a 5-story building. I had an out-of-state landlord, but he was cool and any repairs were basically my responsibility and deducted from my next rent check. Send the receipts, but no questions asked. Very cool.

When I finally got my own home, it was a proud and special day. The house was a foreclosure, but the bank had to refurbish it due to some (apparently) destructive previous owners. Moving in, the place was as if brand new.

Years went by, as well as a few hurricanes (most not so direct and one smack dead on), ultimately I sank a substantial amount of money (equal to more than 50% of the original purchase price) into remodeling the interior and replacing appliances.

That was over eight years ago and now, once again, the cost of home ownership begins its locust-like return to plague me.

It's not all downbeat, though. Over time I have recognized that some of the repairs and replacements can be delayed or forestalled entirely by carefully watching the service people doing their work and engaging them in conversation.

Contrary to some people's belief, most tradesmen are only too happy to chat with you while they are working. Many of them also offer suggestions on how to avoid costly service calls.

During those various calls, I've come to understand what falls within my capabilities and what makes sense for me to dial for professional help.

Never being much of a do-it-yourselfer, I keep my "fix it" jobs to rudimentary, based on tips and tricks I've gleaned from the service people doing the work.

From a helpless, call for anything guy I'm now able to work on basic bathroom fixtures, install toilet tank equipment, clean A/C coils, replace locks and bolts and handle simple carpentry repairs.

I'm happy to leave more complex work to the experts, both from a comfort level and my own contribution to keeping the economy healthy, but I'm quite pleased with the many small tricks I've learned from the masters over the years.