



handsOn

A Newsletter of the
Boston Building Materials Co-op and
the Building Materials Resource Center

early winter 2002

House Painting for Dummies

By Jonathan Lyon

Having been a homeowner and member of the Board of Directors of the BBMC for four years, I became increasingly determined to do something myself for my house. Granted, I had replaced some storm windows, blown insulation into my attic, drilled holes for and installed soffit vents, and put in an attic fan which my friend wired up. But sometimes a homeowner with no practical knowledge and little skill has to do something significant, something that he can point to and say, "I did that!" Well, my house is small, a little box really. And it is the ugliest color I have ever seen. There's my project! I will paint my house. And I will do it right.

First I attended a BBMC workshop on exterior house painting, at which I resolved to stain my house. Following my teacher's recommendation, I rented a power washer from a local paint store. The power washer, which resembled a skeletal lawn mower without the long handle, made my house tingle with cleanliness. For the following two weeks I boasted to everyone I knew that I had washed my house and was planning to paint it. Everything was ready, right? Then my anxiety kicked in.

As a child I grew up fearing that if I touched something to fix it, it would break. Perhaps it is an unknown neurosis called fixophobia. So when I went to the paint store to select a stain, I couldn't decide. I was afraid to make such a weighty decision on my own. I did, however, buy a scraper, a ladder stabilizer, and some brushes. When I returned to the paint store the next week, I asked the salesperson how to scrape the paint off

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If These Wall Could Talk. . .

By Meg Perkins Ames

Two years ago, Marti Hector lived alone in a rented house in Mattapan. Today, she shares a single-family home in Dorchester with her handicapped son and the three grandchildren she is raising.

A lot has happened for Marti in two years. She was granted custody of her grandchildren and is now raising them. Her adult son suffered an accident in which he lost both legs. The house she rented in Mattapan went into foreclosure, forcing her to find a new place to live.

Then something wonderful happened. Marti's mother announced her intention to give the modest, single family home in Dorchester where



Marti Hector

she had been living to Marti, her son, and grandchildren. "I felt like my prayers had been answered," Marti recalls. "Even though I knew a lot needed to be done before we could move in, I felt so blessed."

Indeed, a lot needed to be done. Since Marti's mother had moved out two years earlier, leaving the house

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Co-Op News

Co-op Members FYI

In each of the past two years, the Co-op has paid roughly \$8,000 in credit card transaction fees.

We bring this to your attention so that you might consider, whenever possible, paying with cash or check when shopping at the Boston Building Materials Co-op.

We fully understand that credit cards have many benefits and we happily accept them — for whatever reason. However, since it is our collective goal to keep costs down, we thought you might like to know.

Popular with cat owners who are unhappy with the messy and environmentally unfriendly clay litters, **Feline Pine kitty litter** is made from recycled pine pellets. It doesn't track around the room, uses less material to do the job, is 100% compostable, and it smells good! Just \$8.90 for a 20 lb. bag.



Products to Help You Conserve Energy This Winter

By Don Malloy

The Co-op has a long, strong history in the field of energy conservation. As a result, we carry a large and ever expanding selection of weatherization products.

Bronze Weatherstripping.

This hard-to-find weatherstripping comes in rolls of 100' for \$42.50 and rolls of 7' for \$6.00.

Door Kits. The Co-op's own door kits are an excellent choice for keeping the heat in this winter. Just \$9.50 per kit.

Tyzall Interior Storm Windows. A inexpensive way to seal in your drafty windows without obscuring your view. Just \$6.00 apiece.

Tru-Channel Storm Window. The Co-op is proud to be one of the only retail businesses around to carry this excellent storm window by Harvey Industries. Starts at \$107.

Majesty Replacement Window. This energy-efficient, wood window is clad with maintenance-free white, almond, or bronze aluminum. Also by Harvey Industries. Starts at \$299.

Decorative Steel Security Storm Door. This high quality door by Homeguard Industries is different from the more common aluminum doors. It's made of painted steel, not aluminum. It comes in many different styles. And its locking knobset and deadbolt make it the only storm door that we have seen with a high level of security. Prices vary.

High Temperature Fiberglass Pipe Insulation. Great for insulating pipes in hot water and steam heating systems. Call for pricing.

Programmable Thermostat. This popular item allows homeowners to program their thermostat to keep heating costs down. From \$53.

Stop by and have a look at our displays of these products. As always, our experienced staff is available for measuring tips, pricing, and technical information.

Holiday Gift Ideas

Homeowner Gift Bags

Here is a holiday idea from the Co-op for both veteran and new homeowners. Our heavy duty canvas bags and our 25' tape measures, both with the BBMC logo, have always made popular and useful gifts during the holidays. This year, we have combined the bag and tape measure with a few additional items to simplify your shopping.

Included in the Gift Bag is a tape measure, two pairs of work gloves, an emergency flashlight (batteries included), and a multi-bit screwdriver. All for \$29.00.

Co-op Membership Gift Certificates

Another holiday gift idea is our new Gift Certificate, good for a one-year membership to the Co-op. Membership benefits include discounts on store merchandise, workshops and more.

A GIFT OF HOME IMPROVEMENT

Number _____
Purchase date _____

for _____



100 Terrace Street
Roxbury, MA 02120
phone 617.442.2262
fax 617.427.2491
web www.bbmc.com

A one-year gift membership to the **Boston Building Materials Co-op** has been generously provided to you by _____

Must be activated within six months of purchase date.

A Primer on Kitchen Cabinets

by Linda Lesyna

For those of you shopping for kitchen cabinets, here is some basic information that will help you to make informed choices.

Cabinets are made two different ways: face frame and frameless.

Face frame cabinets have a solid wood facing (usually 3/4" x 1 1/2") surrounding the door and drawer openings. This facing is applied to the cabinet box (or carcass), which is made of either particleboard or plywood panels. These panels vary in thickness from 3/8" to 1/2", depending on the manufacturer and quality. With face frame cabinets there is a choice of inset, full overlay or partial overlay doors, giving

the cabinet a more traditional look than frameless.

Frameless cabinets, also called European or 32mm, have no facings and always use full overlay doors and drawers. The box is 1/2" to 3/4" thick, made of particleboard or plywood, and joined by dowels and glue. Because there is no face frame protruding into the box opening, access to cabinet interiors is unrestricted and drawers will be 1" wider than face frame cabinets.

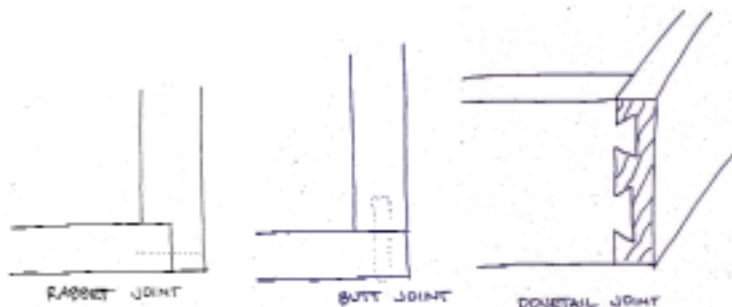
A good quality cabinet made in either style will perform equally well. Be sure to compare the thickness of shelving and box parts. The Co-op recommends shelving that is at least 5/8" thick in either plywood or particleboard. The box construction we recommend for face frame cabinets is a minimum of 3/8" sides, bottoms, and backs. For frameless, we recommend at least 5/8".

Drawers are also made in various ways. Drawers take a lot of wear and tear and thus it is worth investing in the best quality you can afford. A solid hardwood drawer with dovetail joints and a plywood



Partial overlay cabinet doors. These can only be used on face frame cabinets, giving them a more traditional look.

bottom is the best option available. The next best option would be solid wood with a



In drawer construction, while rabbit or butt joints are good options, dovetail joints are the strongest.

rabbit or butt joint (see drawings above). Least desirable is stapled particleboard.

There are also "metabox" drawers available in frameless cabinets. These have enamel-coated steel drawer sides that also act as the drawer glide. They typically have a 1/2" thick particleboard bottom and back.

Drawer glides come in different options also. Most drawer glides will hold up to 100 pounds and have a lifetime warranty. Drawers on standard 24" deep base cabinets are typically 20" deep but only extend 15" beyond

the cabinet front. A full extension glide pulls the drawer out completely beyond the cabinet front. Full extension glides are particularly useful on deep pot and pan drawers. Most moderate and high quality cabinets use undermount rather than side mount glides. Under-mount glides are invisible when the drawer is open and they allow for a wider

(but shallower) drawer than side mount glides. Tandem style under-mount drawer glides are the smoothest and quietest drawer glides. They are available in both standard and full extension.

Options, quality, and prices for kitchen cabinets are vast. Don't hesitate to call or email with your questions or to set up an appointment to discuss your project in greater detail.

Linda Lesyna has been the Retail Manager and Kitchen Specialist at the Co-op for 17 years. She may be reached at 617.442.2262 or linda@bbmc.com.



Frameless cabinets, left vs. face frame cabinets, right. Frameless cabinets always use full overlay doors; whereas with face frame cabinets there is a choice of inset, full overlay or partial overlay doors.

A Purple What?

Yep. You guessed it. A purple bidet.

You wouldn't believe what we get in here at the Building Materials Resource Center. In addition to the drop dead gorgeous kitchens, windows, doors, sinks, tile, and ever so much more, we also get some pretty crazy stuff.

Like an antique organ that really works. A real-crystal chandelier in its own custom-made wooden box. An outdoor child's play set, complete with swings and a slide. Café-style wrought iron tables and chairs — 100 in all — brand new, in their boxes. A wood-burning stove. A six-person hot tub. A doghouse.

We may call ourselves a *building materials* re-use center. But sometimes I wonder. . .

— mpa

BMRC's Winter Hours

Winter hours at the BMRC went into effect on October 22. They are:

Mon 10:30am – 4:30pm
Tue 9:00am – 6:00pm
Wed 9:00am – 4:30pm
Thu 9:00am – 6:00pm
Fri 9:00am – 4:30pm
Sat 9:00am – 3:00pm
Sun CLOSED

Free Firewood and Woodchips!

Arborway Tree Care in Jamaica Plain has free green, unsplit firewood for anyone who would like it. Delivery is free or it can be picked up at their yard. Free woodchips for mulching your garden or landscape are also available.

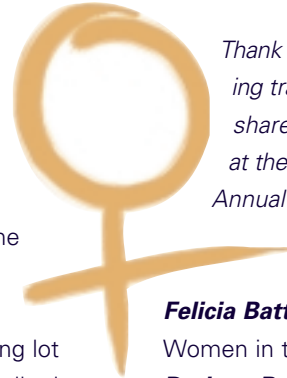
For more information, call Arborway Tree Care at 617.522.6071.



BMRC News

BMRC's Third Annual Women's Night A Success!

The BMRC's Third Annual Women's Night took place on Wednesday, September 25th. Eight women in the building and related trades set up tables in our parking lot that evening and talked with the more than 50 women who came with their questions about basic and not-so-basic home repair and improvement. Everyone enjoyed a hot meal and many mothers were grateful for the free childcare. Our thanks go out to Citizens Bank for funding the event and to the more than fifty women who participated.



Thank you to the following tradeswomen who shared their knowledge at the BMRC's Third Annual Women's Night:

Felicia Battley, Trainer, Women in the Building Trades
Darlene Bostick, Home Mortgage Specialist, Citizens Bank
Linda Lesyna, Kitchen, Window and Door Specialist, Boston Building Materials Co-op
Bridget McGuinness, Environmental Consultant and Home Inspector, Corrosion Check, Inc.
Becky Pierce, Carpenter
Peg Preble, Master Electrician
Barbara Taggart, Master Plumber
Karla Tomlinson, Pest Management Specialist, Aardvark Solutions, Inc.

Ask This Old House Wants You

Ask This Old House, a new program that airs on WGBH-TV in Boston, is looking for urban homeowners who would like to have their questions about basic and not-so-basic home repair answered on the show. Send your written questions to Ask This Old House, c/o Ask This Old House Magazine, 1185 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036.



Ask This Old House airs
Thursdays on Channel 44
and Sundays on Channel 2.
Check your TV guide for times.

Fix Your Own Windows and Screens

The Co-op offers a free Window and Screen Repair Clinic every first and third Saturday of the month. The Clinic takes place in our fully equipped shop. Bring your broken windows and/or screens and learn how

to repair them yourself. You pay for materials only. Call 617.442.2262 for dates and times.

Workshop Schedule on the Web

Don't forget to check our websites for the most recent workshop schedule. Either one will work — www.bbmc.com or www.bostonbmrc.org.

Grants Received Jan. 1 – June 30, 2002

The staff and board of the Building Materials Resource Center is grateful to the funders who supported our work in the first half of 2002:

- EarthShare of New England
- Gant Family Foundation
- Charles & Sara Goldberg
- Charitable Lead Trust
- Roy A. Hunt Foundation

Fuel Assistance Programs Fuel Up for Winter

If you are fearful of high heat bills this winter, here are three fuel assistance programs that may be able to help:

- **Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program:** Starting in December, Citizens Energy can help with a delivery of half-price heating oil. Call 1.877.JOE.4.OIL (1.877.563.4645) to find out how you can participate.
- **NSTAR Fuel Assistance Program:** If you are low-income, you may qualify for fuel assistance of up to \$900.00. Call ABCD at 617.357.6012 and ask for information about the NSTAR Fuel Assistance Program.
- **Good Neighbor Energy Fund:** This program offers discounts on fuel for income-eligible individuals and families.

For details about the program and income guidelines, call the Salvation Army toll free at 1.800.334.3047. Ask for information about the Good Neighbor Energy Fund.

- **Mass Energy Consumer Alliance:** Mass Energy has two money saving programs for homeowners who heat with oil: (1) a Voucher Program for income-eligible homeowners to use for the purchase of weatherization and energy efficient products, redeemable at the Boston Building Materials Co-op and the Energy Federation; and (2) a bulk oil purchasing program that makes reduced cost oil available to all Mass Energy members, regardless of income. Membership at Mass Energy is \$10.00/year. You can reach them at 617.524.3950.

those crinkly, crepe-like shingles. “They’re called shakes,” he informed me, and then asked what was on my house. Hmm, I hadn’t thought of that. I had to go home and see.

A week later, I returned to the store with a piece of shingle — shake, that is — and watched as he peeled a long, thin strip of rubbery mustard-colored substance. “It’s latex paint,” he declared. No longer would I be staining the house. “How do you scrape latex paint off shakes?” I demanded. “You use a wire brush,” he replied flatly. With such disconcerting news, I decided to think things over a while longer, which turned into about nine months.

In April of 2002, I began planning for the summer’s painting project. I gathered wire brushes, plastic containers, paint thinner, drop cloths, and anything else I might need. My wife and I chose a color we both liked and bought two cans of paint. This time, phobia or not, I was determined. I only had to wait for the weather to be right. Do you remember the weather last spring? It was arctic — colder in March and April than in January or February. In May and June it rained practically non-stop and, on those few days when the sun did appear, it was fiercely cold. Finally, a beautiful Saturday came in

June followed by a warm Sunday. But I had graduations to attend. It wasn’t until mid-June that I made any progress with my wire brushes. Given my phobia, I began all work in the back of the house to minimize visibility of a screw-up.

Then came July. Do you remember July? It was tropical — hot and humid, steamy and sweltering. August, too. On the few mild days, I scraped, peeled, and primed. In fact, I became quite expert at scraping paint off shakes with a wire brush and even developed style in my brush strokes. Primer notwithstanding, a drop of actual paint has yet to touch my walls. And there is plenty of wall yet to be scraped in the back of the house. I resigned myself to await the fall with its cooler temperatures.

Well, autumn is here. The days are short and the weather is still not cooperating. It’s supposed to rain all weekend. If I can finish a single topcoat in the back before winter, I’ll be ecstatic. Still, I keep having this nagging thought, something about the Red Sox and what the fans say every year. . .

Jonathan Lyon has been a member of the BBMC since 1997 and served on the Board of Directors from 1997 to 2002.

vacant, the water had been shut off and the house was considered “uninhabitable.” The age of the structure along with the more recent conditions of vacancy — weather, vandalism, lack of maintenance — left the interior in a general state of disrepair. (The exterior was, thankfully, in good shape.)

Despite these roadblocks, Marti was determined.

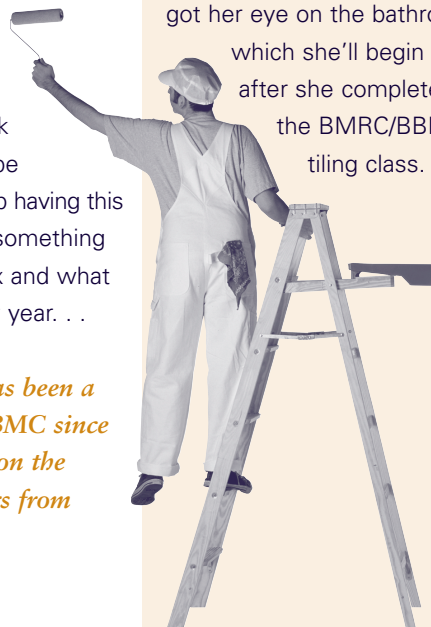
She worked with Boston Water & Sewer to get the water turned back on. She gathered friends, colleagues, and professionals to gut the interior and put it back together again. She insulated the walls and closed them in. She updated the wiring and plumbing, hung sheetrock, installed new windows. The kitchen and bath were completely re-done and modifications were made for her wheelchair-bound son. Now she’s got her eye on the bathroom, which she’ll begin right after she completes the BMRC/BBMC tiling class.

Marti purchased most of the home improvement materials she needed from the Building Materials Resource Center. A full kitchen set, complete with double sink, countertops, and appliances. A sink, bathtub, and tile for the bathroom. Windows and insulation for greater heat retention. Doors for greater security. A furnace. All for less than half of what she would have paid at a regular home supply store. “What I love about this place is that I can get the materials I need on my tight budget and the help I need to learn how to use them!”

The process of restoring the house to “inhabitable” began more than a year-and-a-half ago. Today, after a lot of hard work, Marti and her grandchildren and son are in the house.

“The Building Materials Resource Center has been a blessing in achieving my dream,” Marti wrote in a letter to the BMRC. “I believe that every house has a life story,” she went on. “Thanks to the BMRC, we are putting the life story back into my mother’s house.”

Marti Hector is a homeowner and BMRC customer living in Dorchester.



Are your real estate taxes too high?

A step-by-step guide to real estate tax abatement

by John Leek

Editor's note: This article is about the author's experience with real estate tax abatement in the City of Boston. If you live outside Boston, you should check with your town's Real Estate Tax Assessing Department as their tax abatement procedures may differ.

My experience with tax abatement began when I received a tax bill way in excess of what I expected. My first reaction to the tax bill was shock. How could it be possible that my home, a Roxbury triple-decker abandoned and boarded up 20 years ago, be assessed for over \$960,000? I knew immediately upon receiving this bill that I would request a tax abatement. In sharing my experience with the tax abatement process, I hope to help others who might face similar situations. Following are the steps I took and that you, too, can take to make the case for lowering your real estate tax.

A homeowner's annual real estate tax is determined by her or his city or town's Assessing Department. Tax abatement is a reduction of this tax. To obtain a real estate tax abatement you must present the reason(s) why you believe the assessed value of your property is too high.

The first and most important step in the tax abatement process in Boston is to fill out a four-page application, copies of which may be picked up at the Assessing Department at Boston City Hall. One part of the application requests the reason(s) you are filing for the abatement.

For example, "Not reflective of fair market value on 1/1/2002." If you check this reason, you will be asked to provide information on three home sales that occurred in the last two years to support your claim. Another reason might be "Not in line with comparable assessments," in which case

you would be required to provide value data for three similar properties.

The Assessing Department has several dozen binders containing information you may use in filling out this part of the application. The binders are open to the public. You may even use their copy machine.

There is one set of binders for condominiums and another for non-condominiums, both arranged by ward and then by street. In my case, I made a comparison of my property with other triple-deckers and condominiums in my neighborhood.

Assistance Center that can help answer your property tax questions. The Center and the Abatement Office are both located at City Hall. Information on taxes is also available on line at www.city-ofboston.gov/assessing. Keep in mind that you must pay the present tax bill before your Tax Abatement application will be considered.

If, after all is said and done, you are not satisfied with the response you receive from your Tax Abatement application, there is an appeal process. Appeals must be filed with the Appellate Tax Board of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts within three months of the date of the decision.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS:

City of Boston Treasury Department, Office of Abatement & Refunds	617.635.3728
City of Boston, Taxpayer Referral and Assistance Center	617.635.4287
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Appellate Tax Board	617.727.3100

Real estate companies might also be willing to provide you with sales data for your area. The Boston Globe is another good resource — every week they list property sales by neighborhood.

In Boston, the deadline for filing Tax Abatement applications is January 31. Boston has a Taxpayer Referral and

John Leek has been a member of the Boston Building Materials Co-op for more than 15 years. He has also served on the Board of Directors since 1998, where he is now president. By the way, John's request for a tax abatement was granted.



handsOn

HandsOn is the semi-annual newsletter of the Boston Building Materials Co-op and Building Materials Resource Center.

The Boston Building Materials Co-op is a member-controlled not-for-profit building materials retailer and technical assistance provider. Founded in 1978, we specialize in cabinets, counters, windows, and doors. We offer a range of affordable homeowner support services, including in-home consults, educational workshops, a Tradesperson Referral File, a lending library, and a Saturday morning window and screen repair clinic. You don't have to be a member to shop at the Co-op, though members get product discounts and other benefits. *If you are not sure of your membership status, give us a call to check!*

Contact the BBMC at:

100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120
phone 617.442.2262 • **fax** 617.427.2491
email info@bbmc.com • **web** www.bbmc.com

The Building Materials Resource Center is the nonprofit spin-off of the Boston Building Materials Co-op. Founded in 1993, the BMRC is a building materials re-use project. We accept donations of good quality new and used building materials and distribute them, for a very modest fee, to income-eligible homeowners and nonprofits. Many of the homeowner support services of the Co-op — in-home consults, workshops, window shop — are available to BMRC customers for a reduced price. *To find out if you are eligible to shop at the BMRC, call us at the number below.*

Contact the BMRC at:

100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120
phone 617.442.8917 • **fax** 617.427.2491
email info@bbmc.com
web www.bostonbmrc.org

The Building Materials Resource Center is a nonprofit building materials re-use project. Your tax deductible gift will help us divert perfectly good building materials from landfills and deliver them into the hands of needy homeowners and nonprofits.

Yes, I would like to make a contribution to the Building Materials Resource Center. Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of:

\$200 \$150 \$100 \$75 \$50 \$35

Name _____

Address _____

Please mail your check to: **Building Materials Resource Center**
100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120
Thank you!

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