

HOME 2008

IMPROVEMENT

The Idyllwild Town Crier's guide to building and services in the Idyllwild area

Forest Lumber's colorful history

By Betty Bailey

The Tree Whisperer

By L.K. Johnson

Remodeling tips

By Eric Townsend



Jim Adams of Forest Lumber at the helm of one of the store's original table saws. Photo by Betty Bailey

*Plus: Tips for hiring a contractor • Guidelines for homeowner-builders
A directory of businesses and services to help you with home projects*

Forest Lumber's colorful history

The thriving lumber and hardware store has an ambiance of sawdust, nuts and nails that harks back to the 1940s.

BY BETTY BAILEY

Walking through the doors of Idyllwild's Forest Lumber is like stepping back in time. You're greeted like an old friend, by a familiar employee who is ready to point you in the right direction, explain the subtleties of a laser level or loan you the perfect tool to replace that hard-to-reach bolt under your bathroom sink. Unlike its big-city rivals with their prepackaged goods, Forest Lumber still does things the old-fashioned way.

"We have lots of things in bins," said store manager Jim Adams. "We have nail bins, so you can still buy two nails if you want."

The merchandise is state-of-the-art but, in the lumber building, you'll find a heavy, antique table saw and planer that were made in the 1940s at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard. They're still in use today and, when

the machines needed new parts a few years ago, Adams had no trouble finding replacements.

"We just called the manufacturer," said Adams. "There were just a few of these made back then and they know where each one is."

Forest Lumber has been an Idyllwild fixture since the 1940s. Back then it was a sawmill, located at the site that is now Camp Maranatha. Clarence Bischof was the owner. His son Kent, one of Clarence's five children, was just a boy.

"At that time, there were three sawmills on the Hill, including one in Mountain Center," said Kent Bischof.

In 1949, when government regulations demanded the mills cut back on production, Bischof's father shut down the mill and opened a lumberyard and hardware store.

See Forest Lumber, page 4



Forest Lumber's Jim Adams runs a board through the ancient saw in the saw shop. Although built in the middle part of the last century, Adams says he can still get parts for it.

PHOTO BY BETTY BAILEY

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The front page photo of Jim Adams of Forest Lumber ripping a board on the ancient table saw was taken by Betty Bailey.

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Forest Lumber

Continued from page 2

“My father just found a niche,” said Bischof. “He had the personality and was able to take care of business and get a lot of customers.”

In the early days, the hardware business was mostly a summertime venture.

“Even though my father kept the store open seven days a week, it was very lean in the wintertime,” said Bischof. “It wasn’t a full-time business like it is now. A lot of builders would start building their house in the summer and they’d close it in before November or December.”

In the 1950s, Clarence Bischof purchased a piece of land on Highway 243, across from Mt. San Jacinto State Park, which he used as storage. He also bought out his competitor, the San Jacinto Mountain Lumber Company, which was located down the street where Village Hardware sits now.

“My dad was getting most of the business so he bought out San Jacinto Mountain Lumber and moved into



See Forest Lumber, next page *The old saw and the antique planer (right) still put in a full day’s work at Forest Lumber.*

PHOTO BY BETTY BAILEY

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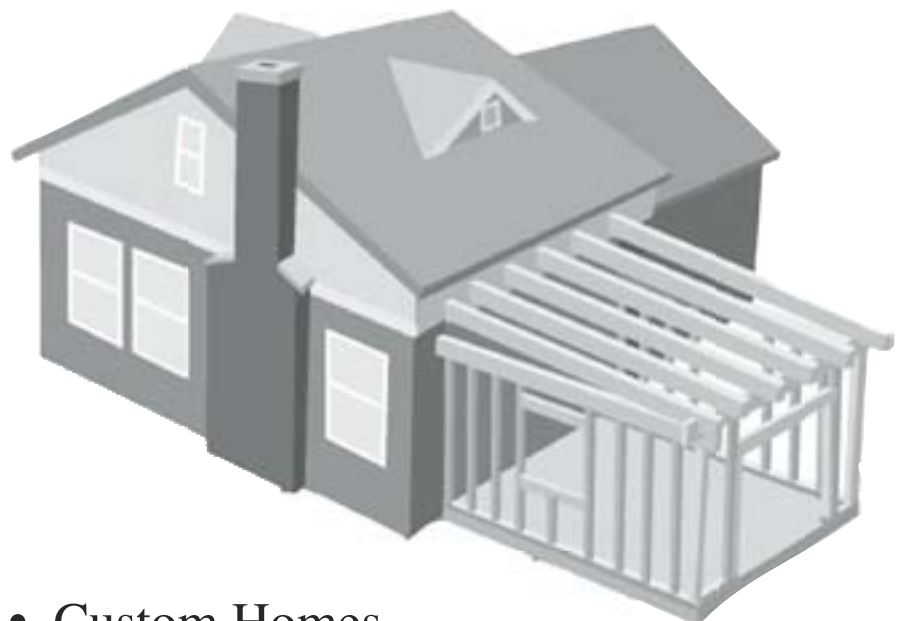
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Forest Lumber

Continued from previous page

town," said Bischof. "He was there from about 1957 until 1971."

Kent Bischof was the only one of Clarence's kids who stuck close to the store.

"I'm the only one who went into the business," he said. "The others went down their own avenues."

But in 1965, when Bischof was 26 years old, he learned his father had sold the family store.

"I guess he felt I didn't have enough experience," said Bischof. "I found out that he had sold the store when I went to work the next morning. I went to work for the person that bought it, William Bartlett."

Two years later, Bartlett sold the store to Ira and Dennis DeJarnette, from Missouri. In 1971, the new owners moved the business to its current location on Pine Crest Avenue. The old inventory barely made a dent in the new 8,000-square-foot space.

"With everything we had with that store in town, we only filled up about 30 percent," said Bischof.

"They moved the inventory from the Village Hardware location to here and it only took up four aisles," said Adams, who has been with Forest Lumber since 1982. "It wasn't full then, but it is now."

Bischof retired in 2002 but contin-



ued to work during the summer until three years ago. In the last 37 years, Forest Lumber has expanded its list of supplies. Now, along with paint and pipe, you can find hair dryers, coffee makers and pet supplies. And, in a town in which many businesses find it hard to get a foothold, Forest Lumber continues to thrive.

A familiar sight: The cars and trucks of both contractors and homeowners who frequent Forest Lumber. It's a place where you can find that screw, match that paint, and share a few laughs with the friendly employees. PHOTO BY BETTY BAILEY

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Remodeling dos and don'ts

If you're considering remodeling your home, read this article first.

BY ERIC TOWNSEND

When it comes to remodeling, the first question is: do we or don't we?

It could be that the cost to make the house you own into the home you envision is not worth the cost and inconvenience. In the current real estate market, lots of houses are for sale, prices are favorable, and you might just find the configuration you want and need at the right price. Spend some time with your real estate pro and see what's out there for sale.

If, after that, you're convinced it's the right thing to stay where you are and remodel, the next question is usually how much is it going to cost to get what you want.

Some contractors will give you a ballpark estimate for what you describe. Bear in mind that realistic, accurate numbers are only possible after you have a set of architectural plans that reflect the whole project and its complexities. A preliminary set of plans from the architect will enable the contractor to give you more accurate numbers.

If you have a contractor already, it is a good



Eric and Cher Townsend

idea to have him work with the architect and you to keep the plans in line with your budget and design targets. Some architects are real artists and can nudge the project right out of the ballpark with great, though expensive, ideas. If your budget and dreams are utilitarian, say so from the start. If you want to go first class, say so.

If you don't have a contractor or architect, finding them is the next step in the process. You need

to know their track record before you commit to anyone. Look at their previous projects and talk to their customers.





Call the license board and see if the license is current and how many complaints the guy has had and how long he's been around. The contractor who's doing the work himself is going to be the cheapest. The guy with the larger crew will probably get the project done faster. Set your priorities.

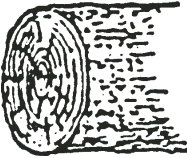
If budget is the number one consideration, get three bids. If quality and a smooth, untroubled project is top of the list, who you hire is more important than the price. People who have done multiple projects have learned that a cost-plus basis for billing leaves the contractor free to concentrate on getting the best-quality final project, rather than having to cut corners to meet a budget. You pretty much get what you pay for. Good luck on your project!

Eric Townsend has been a licensed remodeling contractor for 30 years, 22 of that in Idyllwild. His website is www.erictownsendconstruction.com

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Front row from left: Robyn Newton, Julia Adams, Carli M. Nicols, JoAnna Bloom and Tim Gilbert. Back from left: Bob Waltz, Aaron Puckett, Michael Schnalzer, Chris Darr. Not pictured: Jim Adams.





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California Contractors State License Board

What you should know before hiring a contractor ...

The following suggestions come from the Contractors State License Board (CSLB), part of the California Department of Consumer Affairs. The CSLB licenses and regulates contractors in 43 classifications. Currently, there are approximately 280,000 licensed contractors in the state.

Here are some tips from the CSLB for homeowners to consider when choosing a contractor.

Home Improvement Bill of Rights

The CSLB reminds you to exercise your rights and responsibilities when making home improvements. As a California consumer, you have the following rights when working with contractors:

- the right to hire only licensed contractors.
- the right to make a down payment of no more than 10 percent of the project price or \$1,000, whichever is less.
- the right to a written contract that is clear, and includes a payment schedule and completion date.

- You also have the responsibility to properly plan and manage your project.

Planning Your Project

Ask yourself: What do I want done?

Carefully plan exactly what you want done, what you want it to look like when finished and how much you have to spend.

California law requires new and remodeled buildings to meet or exceed certain energy efficiency standards. Aiming for optimal energy efficiency can have significant financial benefits, such as

- Rebates or low-interest loans from utility companies;
- Rebates from the manufacturers of energy-efficient products and appliances;
- Energy-efficient mortgages and other advantageous financing incentives from lending institutions.

For information, call the Energy Standards Hotline for the California Energy Commission call 1-800-772-3300 or visit www.energy.ca.gov/title24.

Do Your Home Improvement Homework:

Check the license ...

Before you sign anything, check the CSLB Web site, www.cslb.ca.gov, or call at 1-800-321-CSLB, to be sure the contractor is properly licensed in the class for the work to be performed, and the license is in good standing.

In California, anyone who contracts to perform work is valued at \$500 or more for materials and labor must hold a current, valid license from the CSLB in the specialty for which he or she is contracting.

Check the contractor's references ...

One of the best ways to select a licensed contrac-

See Contractors, next page



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Contractors

Continued from previous page

tor is to seek personal recommendations from friends or relatives who recently had similar projects completed and were satisfied with the job.

Make sure the contractor has workers' compensation and liability insurance coverage ...

Ask the contractor, verify on the Web site www.cslb.ca.gov, if the company is insured against claims covering workers' compensation, property damage and personal liability in case of accidents. Ask to see a copy of the certificate of insurance, or ask for the name of the contractor's insurance carrier and agency to verify that the contractor has the insurance.

Bonds

Some bonds are designed to protect you against substandard work that does not comply with local building codes. Bonds do not assure the financial or professional integrity or competency of a contractor. There are

- Contractor's license bonds — All contractors

are required to have a contractor's license bond of \$10,000.

- Contract bonds: A contract bond guarantees both job completion and payment of all labor and materials.

Bids

A bid is an offer to do work. It is advisable to get at least three written bids using identical plans and specifications so you can compare prices and contractors.

Please note: A license number on a bid or contract does not necessarily mean the license is valid. Although an unlicensed contractor may give you a low bid, the risks of possible financial and legal consequences you may face outweigh any benefits a lower bid may seem to offer.

The Contract

Don't sign anything until you understand and agree ...

- Although you might assume that a "contract" should look like a contract, anything you sign could be used by a contractor as authorization to go forward with your project. This means that any bid

you sign may become the contract. Do not sign anything until you completely understand what you are signing, and agree to all the terms.

Get it in writing ...

- One of the best ways to stop problems before the job begins is with your contract. The contract binds you and the contractor to the project. Since a written contract protects both you and the contractor, all agreements should be put in writing. It should include everything you have agreed upon. Get all oral promises in writing, and spell out exactly what the contractor will and will not do. If you intend to do some of the work yourself or hire another contractor to do it, this also should be written into the contract. Be as specific as possible.

- Your contract must include a Checklist for Homeowners that specifies how to check out your contractor and how to check out the contract.

- Never sign a blank or partially blank contract. Get a copy of the contract as soon as you sign it, and keep it for your records. Both you and the contractor are bound by everything set down in the contract, so read it carefully before you sign. Ask

See Contractors, next page

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Contractors

Continued from previous page

questions before you sign.

- Be sure the financial terms of the contract are clear.
- The contract should specify all materials to be used, such as the quality, quantity, weight, color, size or brand name as it may apply.

Three-day cancellation period ...

- The law requires a contractor to give you written notice of your right to cancel a contract within three business days of signing it, provided that it was solicited at someplace other than the contractor's place of business.

Warranties

Be sure to get any warranty offered by the contractor for labor and materials in writing. It should specify which parts of the work are covered and the duration of the warranty. You should also request any written warranties offered by the manufacturers of materials or appliances installed by the contractor.

Scheduling the Work

Your contract should specify an approximate starting date and completion date for your project. For example, the contract should read, "Begin approximately April 20 and end approximately April 30," not, "Complete the job in 10 days." This eliminates the possibility that the contractor will take 10 days to finish the job but spread them out over the span of a year. External factors such as the weather or supply availability might cause delays.

Scheduling the Payments

Make sure the payment schedule is based on the contractor's performance. Never let your payments get ahead of the contractor's work and make sure the contract provides for a "retention" — a percentage of each payment or of the total job, ordinarily 10 percent, which you retain until the job is completed.

Inconveniences

In most cases you will be living in your home while work is being done on it. You should be aware of the many inconveniences that may occur. Before work begins, ask your contractor what inconveniences will

occur, then plan for them.

Keep a Job File

You should keep a file of all papers relating to your project. It should include 1) the contract and any change orders, 2) plans and specifications, 3) bills and invoices, 4) canceled checks, 5) lien releases from subcontractors and material suppliers, 6) letters, notes, and correspondence with your contractor, and 7) pictures of the job in progress.

It is also a good idea to keep a record of each subcontractor who works on your project, the work performed, and length of time on the job.

During Construction

A word of warning ...

Anyone who talks you into being your own general contractor, or "owner/builder," may be doing you no favor. "Owner/builder" describes a situation in which the homeowner becomes the general contractor. As an owner/builder, you assume responsibility for the overall job, which may include state and federal taxes, workers' compensation, building permits and other legal liabilities.

See Contractors, next page



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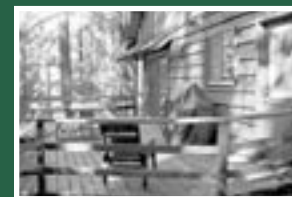


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Contractors

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Legal considerations, liens ...

For a large remodeling job that involves many subcontractors and a substantial financial commitment, you should protect yourself from liens against your home in the event the contractor does not pay subcontractors or suppliers.

Preliminary lien notices ...

Shortly after your job commences, you will probably receive preliminary lien notices from subcontractors and material suppliers. Don't panic! This does not mean that a lien has been filed against your property. The law requires you to be furnished with these notices to alert you that those persons have worked on or have supplied materials for your job and expect to be paid. Those persons may have what are called mechanic's lien rights.

Mechanic's liens ...

The law provides that those who furnish labor or materials to your home can record a "Claim of Lien" or "Mechanic's Lien" against your home if

they are not paid. Even if you have paid your general contractor in accordance with the contract, if he or she fails to pay any subcontractor or materials supplier who performed work or supplied materials in connection with your project, you still run the risk of having a mechanic's lien filed against your home.

Avoiding Complaints and Problems

Some warning signs of possible trouble ahead ...

- You can't verify the name, address and telephone number or credentials of the contractor, or verify that the contractor is licensed, insured and/or bonded when required.
- The contractor gives you a toll-free phone number and a post office box as his or her address.
- The salesperson tries to pressure you into signing a contract by using scare tactics, intimidation or threats. (Remember, you usually have three days to cancel a contract.)
- The company or salesperson says your home will be used for advertising purposes, and that you will be given a special, low price.
- The contractor tells you this is a special price

available only if you sign the contract today.

- The contractor doesn't comply with your request for references, or the references have reservations.
- You are asked to pay for the entire job in advance, or to pay cash to a salesperson instead of writing a check or money order to the company itself.
- You are asked to sign a completion certificate for the job by appeal, threat or trick, before the job is properly completed.

Finally ...

For more information about contractors, license status, disciplinary actions against contractors, and the CSLB, check its Web site, www.cslb.ca.gov, or call the CSLB's automated phone-response system: 1-800-321-CSLB (2752).

CSLB's automated phone response system is another source for information, forms, publications and services.

The Department of Consumer Affairs' mission is to promote and protect the interests of California consumers. Check its Web site at www.dca.ca.gov.

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Riverside County Building & Safety Department

A homeowner's guide to submitting building plans, and understanding building plans and building inspections

Editor's note: This text is reprinted excerpts from the Riverside County Building & Safety Department's brochure, "A Homeowner's Guide to Submitting Building Plans, Understanding Building Plans, and Building Inspections."

At right: An example of a thorough site plan drawing submitted with building plans to the Riverside County Building and Safety Department.

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Basic information for homeowners wishing to design and/or build a home or add an addition to an existing one is available at www.tlma.co.riverside.ca.us/building/exowner.html or by calling the Riverside County Building and Safety Department at (951) 955-1800.

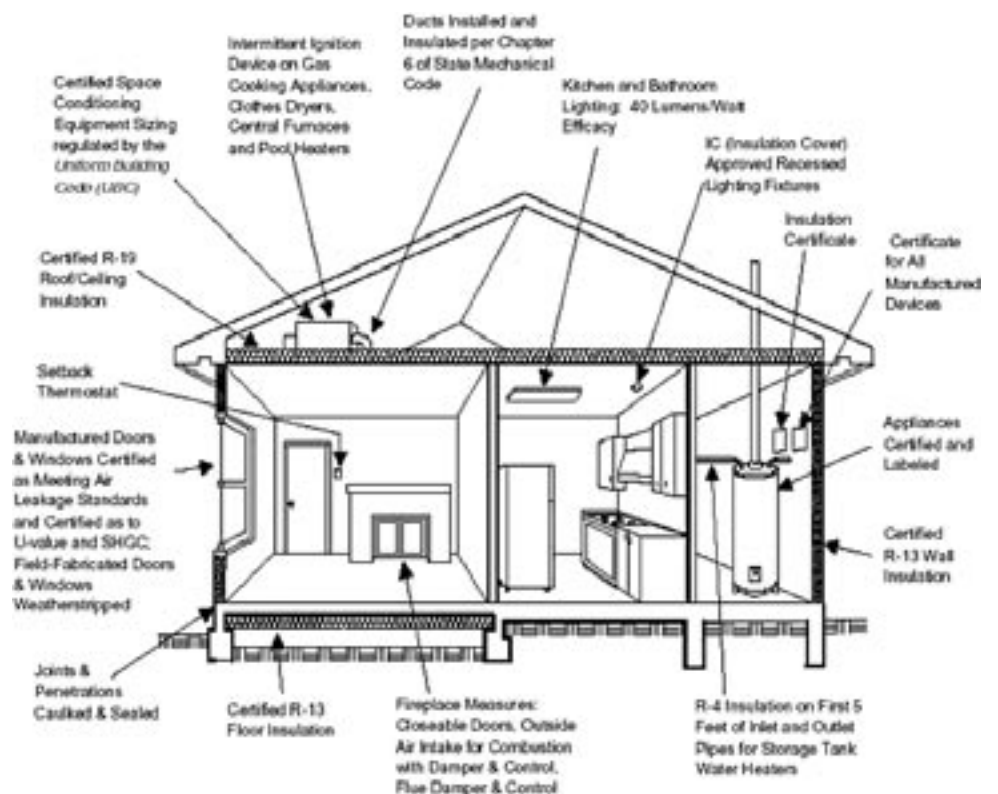
Most construction work requires a permit and additional inspections to help assure that unsafe conditions are not created. There are certain exceptions to the rule.

The key to obtaining a permit with the shortest delays and the least

amount of frustration lies in the proper preparation of plans. Plan preparation should show specifically what is to be done, where on your property it is to be done and how the project will be constructed. An accurate drawing is the only practical way of creating mutual understanding and expectations between you, the Building and Safety office staff and the field inspector.

If you are concerned that your project or plan may not be approved, preliminary information can be ob-

See Plans, next page





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Plans

Continued from previous page

tained at any county Building and Safety Department office counter during plan preparation.

Inspections

• During construction of your project, the majority of contacts with the Building and Safety staff will be when they visit your property. County building regulations require that certain inspections be made prior to covering that portion of construction, for example, a framing inspection before drywall is applied. On typical residential construction, this means you must request inspections at certain stages of the project before proceeding.

Suggestions for submitting building plans to Riverside County:

- Ask for a preliminary review of what you propose before developing working drawings.
- Plan carefully. Make sure plans are complete and clearly indicate what you are going to do, where you are going to do it and how you propose to do it.



- If you do not have basic design or construction skills, consider getting help from professionals.
- Call for inspections ahead of time and recheck your work before the inspector arrives, thereby avoiding callbacks, or additional cost based on the deposit-based fee method.
- Coordinate final inspection with Planning, Transportation and fire departments, and with the serving utilities.

If you need guidance or have questions regarding your projects, contact the Riverside County Building and Safety Department.

Plan requirements to be submitted along with site plan:

- *Floor plan.* Show all door and window sizes and location. Label the use and show dimensions of all rooms.
- *Foundation plan*
- *Floor framing plan* (for multiple-story buildings)
- *Roof framing plan*
- *Electrical plans.* Measure location, switch, outlet and light locations.
- *Structural calculations.* Two sets of wet stamped

and signed structural calculations and truss calculations (if required).

- *Energy calculations.* Two sets of energy calculations.

For the design of a complete home, it is advisable to arrange with a professional architect or building designer for preparation of the plans. Certain State of California requirements are extremely complex and typically beyond the capabilities of the average homeowner. These state requirements alone make obtaining professional help advisable.

Frequently used telephone numbers:

Riverside Administration

- (All area codes are 951)
- Building & Safety*, 955-1800
 - Planning*, 955-3200
 - Transportation*, 955-6790
 - Idyllwild Fire Department, 659-2153
 - Pine Cove Fire, 659-2732
 - Garner Valley Fire, 659-5353
 - Fern Valley Water District, 659-2200
 - Idyllwild Water District, 659-2143
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Home improvement Q & A

Some answers to oft-asked home questions

Pipe down!

Q: After using the shower, bath sinks and kitchen sink, there's a noise in our plumbing that sounds like a ship's foghorn off in the distance. (Operating the dishwasher or flushing the toilets doesn't seem to cause the noise.) The hum starts about 20 seconds after the water is shut off and it can be stopped by re-opening the faucet. If we don't stop the noise with the faucets, the hum goes away, then returns for about six seconds, goes away, returns, and so on, for three to five cycles before quitting.

Cold-water usage in the faucets and sinks doesn't cause the noise. It doesn't seem to be affected by outside temperature or time of day, and sometimes the noise just stops for days! For that reason we're reluctant to call a plumber for fear that we couldn't reproduce the symptoms. Any insights or recommendations will be greatly appreciated!

A: I suspect that a faulty valve somewhere in the water supply system is causing the foghorn sound. This is not an uncommon occurrence, and often happens when a valve's washer needs replacing.

The trick, of course, is to locate the correct valve. From your description, the cold-water supply isn't affected. Appliances that are susceptible to valve washer deterioration, including the toilets and dishwasher, aren't having any troubles. This means the problem is located somewhere along the hot-water supply.

If you're very lucky, the problem may be easy to correct. Check the supply valve that leads from the water heater to the hot-water pipes. If the valve isn't open all the way, open it and see if the increased water pressure stops the foghorn sound. If it doesn't, you'll need to isolate the exact trouble spot.

Starting at the faucet farthest down the supply line, shut off the hot water valve that leads to it. Then go to the next faucet and turn on the hot water, shut it off and listen for the humming sound. Repeat this at each faucet in the house, making note of when and where you hear the sound and at which faucet you no longer hear it. Ideally, the last valve you hear the foghorn sound from is the valve that needs to be repaired.

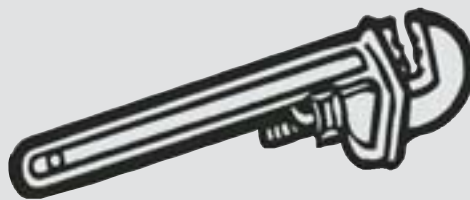
Shut off the water supply to that valve, disassemble and replace the washers. Reassemble, turn the water back on, and test the system.

Depending on the age of your home, it's a good idea to visually inspect all the shut-off valves for leaks or deterioration. Repairing visible damage as soon as possible will save a lot of trouble in the future.

Sweaty house is no laughing matter

Q: Our three-year-old, 3,000-square-foot house is sweating on the inside. The windows, the sheet-rock walls and some of the ceilings are dripping moisture. We are temporarily controlling this with a dehumidifier. We would like to know if there is a more effective or permanent way to control this problem.

HOME TIP: Foghorn-type noises in pipes are most often heard after flushing a toilet or when the dishwasher is on. Damaged or deteriorated valve washers are common culprits.



It is a wood-frame house with vinyl siding and 1/2-inch Styrofoam under the vinyl. The overhang is trimmed with soffits in which every other piece is vented. The roof is asphalt shingles with a continuous vent across the top. Inside the walls are 3-1/2 inches of R19 insulation, and the attic has 6 inches of R30 insulation. If you have any suggestions we could use, we would appreciate it.

A: First, it's great that you've taken emergency measures so quickly to control the high humidity levels inside the house. Left unchecked, all that moisture in the walls and ceiling can lead to a serious mold problem. Second, finding the source (or sources) of the humidity and resolving the problem is a priority, and one you most likely need professional help with.

Humidity is constantly generated inside houses from a number of sources: daily showers, laundry and cooking, for example. In fact, a family of four can generate 5 pounds of water vapor in the home each day! All that moisture has to go somewhere, and if it can't exit the house, it will condense and drip down the ceiling, walls and windows.

To resolve this problem, you need to re-check the insulation and venting in the attic and along the roof, as well as the wall insulation, to ensure that vapor barriers were installed correctly. And, if you have a basement or crawlspace under the home, check to see if foundation vents were properly installed.

Look at other venting in the home, including dryer vents and stove exhaust fans (which should always be vented outside, not into the attic). If there are no exhaust fans in the bathroom, kitchen or laundry room, install them. Even small measures can make a difference, such as covering fish tanks and emptying radiator or refrigerator water pans frequently. If your home has a lot of plants clustered together, move them so a few feet of space exists

See Home improvement Q&A, next page



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Home improvement Q&A

Continued from previous page

between each. If you have a fireplace, open the damper in winter to allow a free exchange of air. And, until the problem is resolved, keep running your dehumidifier and open two or three windows in the house — just a crack — to allow more moisture to escape.

Since your home is only three years old and the excess moisture presents a serious mold risk, resolving the problem and repairing any damage may be covered by warranty or insurance. Review options with your insurance representative.

Some jobs best left to a professional

Q: As a new homeowner, I'm interested in fixing as many things myself as possible. Are there some items that I would be better served by calling a professional to fix?

A: Base your decision on whether to call in a professional on both the level of your home-repair skill and the time

available to handle a repair. Some items are also more dangerous or dirty than usual — like electrical or plumbing repairs. If at any time you feel a repair can't be done in a timely or safe manner, call in a professional.

Almost without exception, some large-scale jobs should be left entirely to repair and maintenance pros. These include major repairs (like replacing a roof or siding) and installation of gas appliances. Most homeowners also hire contractors for grimy, time-consuming jobs like cleaning the drain-waste-vent stack and other large drains, cleaning the chimney and emptying the septic tank. Pest control and removal also are best left to the pros.

There are still quite a few items to take care of around the house, and they will take plenty of time to complete on your own. Here are just a few:

- Minor plumbing problems — like plugged drains, clogged toilets and leaky faucets.
- Painting and wallpapering, patching drywall holes and covering blemishes.
- Patching carpet, dealing with squeaky floorboards, replacing underlayment, and installing tile, laminate or vinyl flooring.
- Installing small appliances, like garbage disposals.

• Maintaining the furnace and air conditioner, dishwasher, clothes washer and dryer, electronics and yard-care equipment.

• Repairing or refinishing furniture.

These are, of course, in addition to the regular tasks of cleaning house, mowing the lawn, feeding pets and so on.

Completing the above items yourself can save quite a bit of money, and you'll get a feeling of pride and ownership that hiring a contractor can't give you. However, always be aware of just how much you can really do. If you don't feel confident doing a repair or installation, or the amount of time needed to complete a job stresses you out, go ahead and hire a professional.

Top ten tips to lower home energy costs

If You ...	You Can Save ...
• Weather-strip and caulk doors and windows	10-20 percent
• Lower thermostat setting during winter	3 percent per degree
• Change incandescent lightbulb to compact fluorescent bulb	Up to 75 percent per bulb
• Lower water heater from 140 to 120 degrees	10-15 percent
• Close vents in unused rooms	3 percent per room
• Use microwave instead of regular oven	40 percent or more
• Lower thermostat from 58 to 55 degrees during winter vacations	10-20 percent
• Replace 15-year-old refrigerator	40 percent or more
• Install programmable thermostat, set at 58 degrees 10 hours a day during winter	10-20 percent
• Service heating system/ clean filters monthly	10-15 percent

Unless otherwise noted, the range of savings estimates is for one year, based on 2001 average utility coststs. Source: Edison Electric Institute www.eei.org

Ask the Expert

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REMODELING ON A BUDGET

If you're interested in making changes, but can't afford big ones, these are some tips on remodeling on a budget.

Fresh Paint: A fresh coat of paint and a new color can give a room a whole new look. When choosing a paint color, keep in mind the mood you want to create and the room size. Dark, warm colors will make a room feel cozy, but smaller. Light colors will make a room feel larger and cooler.

Accessories: Updating or changing accessories gives a newer look to a room. Sometimes just moving things around gives a feeling of energy to a room. You can move wall pictures and group like ones, or put away some of your accessories so others stand out. A few new throw pillows on a sofa can give a fresh feeling.

Furniture: Rearranging furniture can give a room a new look by creating space around the furniture. Keep in mind that open space can make a room feel larger.

Lighting: Lighting can make a huge statement in an otherwise dark room. Focus on not only general lighting, but also task lighting and accent lighting. Both types are easily affordable. Accent lighting can be achieved by using rope lighting above or below cabinetry, for example.

Last but not least, don't forget needed repairs. Broken tiles or damaged walls, for example, can be an eyesore.

Call now for consultation.

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The Tree Whisperer

Ernie Alé hears a great deal when he listens to the trees. BY L.K. JOHNSON

We've heard of "The Horse Whisperer" and "The Dog Whisperer," but very few of us have heard of The Tree Whisperer. Ernie Alé, 45, a resident of Idyllwild for 15 years and a rock climber here for 30 years, whispers to the trees. Not only that, Alé says the trees whisper back, if you take the time to listen.

Listening and observing what happens in our forest is the most important issue, according to Alé, if we are to save, recover and sustain our green friends.

Some of his ideas are particularly interesting to the homeowner with trees on his property, especially Alé's ideas regarding forest abatement.

Alé has had a special relationship with the forest all his life. As a kid, he would gather dead wood from the forest floor and build tree houses, some of them three stories high. As he did, he realized the benefits of recycling the dead wood.

He also began to sense the need of the trees for someone to speak for them and teach the rest of us how to maintain a healthy forest.

As a side note, he developed construction skills, and as an adult he worked for a long time as a contractor in Newport Beach.

His current purpose and ultimate goal is to identify and utilize the dead and dying wood that would otherwise be ground up and dumped, to make furniture or buildings, or to use as fuel.

As an arborist, he has taught a vast number of people who are directly connected with the management of trees on their property, and those who manage forests for governmental agencies.

As an example of the waste that can be recovered, he points out that a dead manzanita bush, whose branches take on all kinds of weird and interesting shapes, can be used for unique furniture, as well as long and hot-burning firewood. Alé designs and builds this type of furniture as an opportunity to express his talent for creating art from something that would otherwise be wasted.

He says when a manzanita dies, just prior to its death, the energy stored in the tree flows back into the ground, nourishing and preparing it for new life to grow and flourish. By careful pruning of trees we can give the earth a returned benefit that would not be there had



Ernie Alé

the tree simply been left to die. He says people need to be more concerned with the earth if it, and we, are to survive.

While clearing the forest floor of tree and plant debris is a vital undertaking, it is only a short-term remedy. The canopy of the forest needs to be lifted, and the only way to do that is to prune the lower branches of the trees to a level of 15 to 20 feet. The system we now use must be repeated every five years or so to keep the forest floor clear. A pruning system would eliminate the need to clear the floor, and keep the trees healthy so that their branches would not be shed continually in an effort for the trees to stay strong and healthy.

Many environmentalists are available to do this type of pruning, and once done, it wouldn't be needed again for 20 years or more.

Alé says we need better management of the funds provided for our present system. Money spent for helicopters to lift downed trees from the forest should be used to recover the lumber from the forest and recycle it into viable projects. He says county supervisors and state legislators are excellent starting points for letter campaigns to bring this issue to light.

Forests also provide homes for wildlife, another factor in a healthy ecological balance. Golden eagles use the Twin Pines and Poppet Flat area to build their nests and raise their young.

These birds serve a vital function in the lower areas of the San Jacinto mountain range. Much of their prey are small rodents, which devour plant life. However, only a few of these magnificent birds exist.

Mistletoe is another enemy of the tree. We see huge clumps of the plant hanging in dead trees that the plant has killed. The mistletoe saps the life from the tree as the plant flourishes. When mistletoe sheds its leaves or berries, it excretes tiny spots of sticky substances that ensure its attachment to another healthy host tree.

Mistletoe has many uses, including several that are medicinal. Alé suggests harvesting this plant before it kills its host, and marketing it would be a good way to keep the forest healthy.

When Alé owned his contracting business, Naked Edge Lumber Co., he harvested sustainable wood that would otherwise have been used for burning fuel, or ground up

into chips. His idea of recycling the wood made sense to him and others who used his system. The pruning system he wishes forest managers would undertake is best done in the fall and early winter months; September through January. Cutting one or two courses of branches from the trees will result in raising the canopy of the forest. By doing so, the forest may remain unharmed and sustain itself if a fire were to burn along the floor of the forest.

The Tree Whisperer looks forward to a future in which mankind and governmental management will agree on tending the forest much as a farmer or curator.

Trees produce oxygen and clean the air of carbon dioxide. These two benefits alone are reason enough to use greater care in maintaining our forest.

Next time you're out walking or hiking in the forest, give a whisper to the trees and tell them you appreciate their existence. Chances are you may hear an answer of thanks, if you listen well enough.

In addition to whispering to trees, Ernie Alé regularly plays classical music on his guitar at Café Aroma. He also can be reached at his Web site, www.thetreewhisperer.org

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