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DO IT YOURSELF® Spring 2005



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DIY

A man and a woman are lying on their stomachs on a large pile of various fabric samples and swatches. The man, on the left, is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and black pants, and is smiling at the camera. The woman, on the right, is wearing a bright pink long-sleeved shirt and a patterned skirt, and is laughing with her head tilted back. A small, scruffy Yorkshire terrier dog is lying between them, partially covered by the fabric. The background is filled with more fabric samples, some hanging and some stacked, creating a cluttered but creative environment.

While clearing out their home office, designer Kristan Cunningham and fiancé Scott Jarrell—along with their Yorkshire terrier Floyd—collapse on a pile of fabric samples Kristan has been collecting for future decorating projects. "Scott hates the clutter of the office," Kristan says. "I want to make the place so appealing he'll come down to hang out. I'll get a TV and video games if I have to!"

PART 3: HOME OFFICE IMPROVEMENT

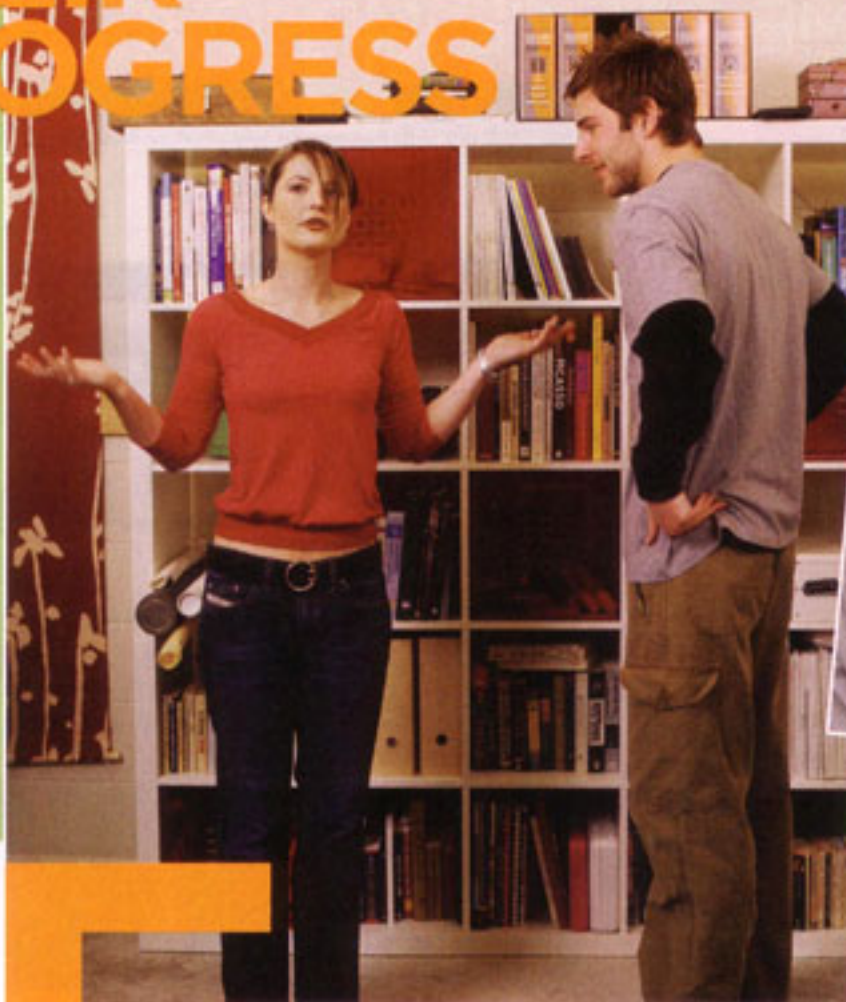


Style

THE IDEA OF LEAVING WORK AT THE OFFICE IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR KRISTAN CUNNINGHAM, DESIGNER AND HOST OF HGTV'S POPULAR *DESIGN ON A DIME* TELEVISION PROGRAM. MOST OF KRISTAN'S WORK INVOLVES AT LEAST SOME TIME IN HER HOME OFFICE, WHERE SHE DRAFTS, SORTS, PLOTS, PLANS, CRAFTS, AND BUILDS STYLE SOLUTIONS FOR THE HOMES FEATURED ON THE SHOW. IF SHE'S NOT CAREFUL, WORK PROJECTS CAN END UP SPILLING INTO THE LIVING ROOM, KITCHEN, AND GARAGE OF THE HOME SHE AND FIANCE SCOTT JARRELL ARE REMODELING. IN THE THIRD INSTALLMENT OF OUR SERIES, *DO IT YOURSELF*® CHECKS IN ON KRISTAN AND SCOTT TO SEE HOW THEY MADE A HOME OFFICE THAT REALLY WORKS.

By CYNTHIA PEARSON. PHOTOGRAPHER: MICHAEL GARLAND. STYLIST: ROBIN TUCKER. ILLUSTRATOR: KENNETH BATELMAN.

ABOUT THEIR PROGRESS



LEFT: Homeowners Kristan and Scott prepare to clear out bookcases that hold Kristan's design resources. **ABOVE:** Kristan evaluates fabric samples that she's been saving for possible *Design on a Dime* projects.

For Kristan Cunningham, a hardworking home office is a necessity. Not only does she spend dozens of hours a week planning projects for the HGTV program *Design on a Dime*, but she also films a portion of each episode—along with teammates Spencer Anderson and Dave Scheinkopf—in the space. These demands call for an exceptionally efficient, stylish home office.

Kristan and fiancé Scott Jarrell's home office was originally an entry-level 15×14-foot potting studio. "Our house is built into a hill. Everyone enters on this level and walks past this room, then heads on up to the main living space," Kristan says. Thirteen-foot ceilings impart a spacious feel to the room, but cinder-block walls with no windows gave it a utilitarian feel. Aggregate floors—concrete set with pebbles—were attractive but not practical. "My stool wouldn't roll on it!" Kristan says.

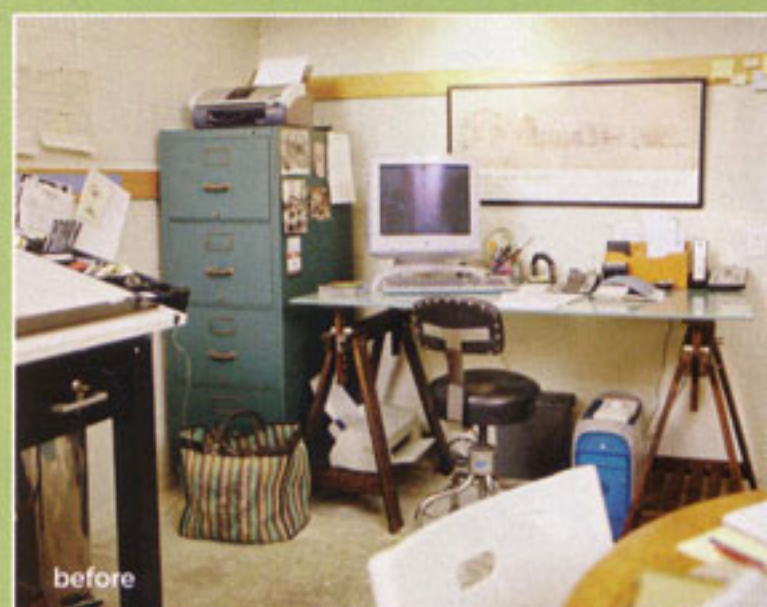
Kristan wanted to create a space that organizes all her work materials, while also providing a conferencelike space suitable for shooting segments of the show. Additionally, because Kristan spends so much time working at home, she wanted to make the space attractive and inviting so that Scott would feel comfortable sharing the space with her. "I'll buy video games for this room if I have to," Kristan says.

To put their plans in action, Kristan and Scott lined two adjacent walls with inexpensive, ready-to-assemble office cabinets. "These cabinets pretty much swallow anything I

toss their way," Kristan says. She uses plastic bins to corral cans of paint, adhesive, small items, and things that could potentially leak. Kristan arranged the stock cabinet components to reach 8 feet up the walls with a 38-inch counter-height line that leads the eye to the same-height work surface she and Scott created from a stretch of cream-color laminated fiberboard mounted on tubular steel legs. Her freestanding drafting table is at the same height for additional continuity.

All the stools are on casters and fit at any of the work surfaces. Now when Scott takes care of the couple's finances and needs Kristan's input, a shove of his stool to wherever she is working is all it takes for a quick conference. "I prefer stools and counter height to chairs and desk height," Kristan explains. "On a stool, I'm relaxed and nearly standing so it's easy to come and go from the surface. In a chair, I'm settled in, and all that getting up and sitting down takes more effort!"

Finally, the pièce de résistance is Kristan's take on the standard bulletin board—a bright orange 8×8-foot wall behind her drafting table. The expansive surface is composed of 2×4-foot pieces of fiberboard, each topped with cork and tightly wrapped in felt. The pieces are mounted in two rows of four on the wall with industrial adhesive, creating an elongated grid effect similar to the pattern of wall stone installed in the home's bathrooms (see *Do It Yourself®*, Winter 2004).



LEFT: Before the remodeling, the office was functional but lacked adequate storage and soft elements to make a comfortable workspace. **ABOVE:** For her work area, Kristan needed more easy-to-access storage coordinated for a polished look.

A LOOK THAT SUITS HER WORK STYLE

While you may not be an interior designer like Kristan Cunningham—who also uses her hardworking office as a shoot location for portions of *Design on a Dime* episodes—you may do all or part of your work at home. Or you may desire a space to be creative: writing, wrapping presents, crafting, quilting, or making art. Figure out how you work and what will help you, then you can fine-tune it all to look good. Get inspired with some advice from Kristan.

The importance of focus. "I need to be able to focus on one job—even though I'm usually preparing two or three projects at any given time," Kristan explains. "All the fabrics and accessories live in my office until they appear on the show. When a 'shabby chic' project gets mixed up with a 'retro' project, my head starts to explode! Our focus was to make lots of versatile space behind doors to store everything that's not being worked on at that moment. For that moment,

I need big spaces on which to lay things out—that's where the conference table, counter, drafting table, and even the floor come in." And then when it's time to work on another project, Kristan simply shoves Project One's pieces into the cabinets and rolls out Project Two.

The bigger picture. Kristan is a visual person who needs to see all her design options in front of her before she makes final decisions. Key to her process are two big piles. "In choosing the elements for a project, I overshop. I come home with sheet sets and fabric samples and curtain panels and then start editing. One wrong fabric can throw me completely, but switching out another might mean the first discard comes back into play. I need lots of clean space around the piles so I can spread out photos, samples, and the like. Having everything around me nudges me to dig a little deeper for even better design solutions."

"YOU CAN'T SEE THIS SPACE FROM ANY OTHER
LITTLE MORE LIVELY AND TRENDY THAN SPACES



Kristan's planning segments with *Design on a Dime* teammates Spencer Anderson and Dave Scheinkopf are shot in this conference area. The functional space is also where she does her sewing for the show. The table is an antique Kristan and Scott have owned for some time; the Eames chairs were picked up for a song at a prop sale.

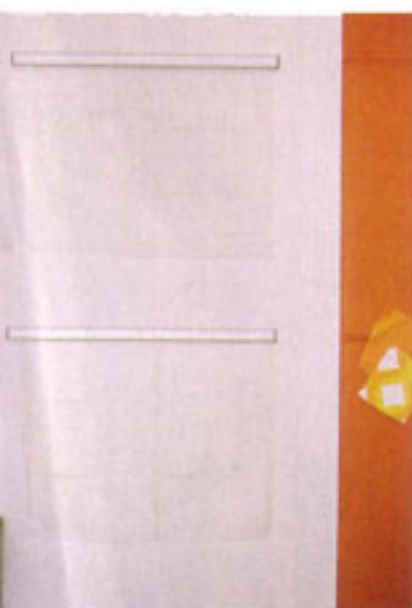
ROOM IN THE HOUSE, SO ITS LOOK COULD BE A
ON THE OTHER LEVELS.” —homeowner and designer Kristan Cunningham





**“ALTHOUGH SOMEDAY I MAY TIRE OF
ROBIN’S EGG BLUE AND ORANGE,
I DON’T SEE IT HAPPENING ANYTIME SOON.”**

—Kristan Cunningham



ABOVE LEFT: Kristan chose a mix of open shelving and components with doors from a line of ready-to-assemble office cabinets to hold her design materials and tools. “Open and door-fronted pieces are much cheaper than those with drawers,” she says. “They’re also more versatile.” Pretty stuff goes on the open shelves. Behind the doors, see-through tubs organize glues, paints, and cutting devices, much like drawers but with more flexibility. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Scott’s work area is an L-shape counter that lines up with the cabinets and stretches around the corner. Bright orange bill sorters and organizers add pops of color, as do the robin’s egg blue magnetic memo boards and paperweights, and the spunky orange-ball clock (a reproduction of George Nelson’s design). **LEFT:** Kristan uses check-minder strips to hang her floor plans within view of her desk without putting holes in them. Look for similar strips at restaurant-supply stores; they’re used in restaurant kitchens to post meal orders. **OPPOSITE LEFT:** Kristan’s drafting table bellies up to her massive orange felt-covered tackboard, which holds clusters of notes, clippings, and samples. It’s a bold focal point that works hard, too. The rolling cart (called a taboret) and side-mounted organizer keep design tools close at hand; a waste can holds T-squares and rulers. **OPPOSITE RIGHT:** An inexpensive refrigerator and open cabinet topped with countertop and coffeemaker compose a snack spot in the office corner. The snack center helps separate work and home life because now Kristan and her design team don’t need to hike upstairs to the kitchen for refreshments.

PROJECT SPONSORS: BRAZILIAN WALNUT HARDWOOD FLOORING—LUMBER LIQUIDATORS. WOOD AND PLASTIC LAMINATES—FORMICA. DIMMERS, SWITCHES—LUTRON.
FOR PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS, SEE RESOURCES ON PAGE 102.

Read Kristan’s entire remodeling journal online at www.bhg.com/sipDIYcunninghamjournal.



MAKING CHOICES

Remodeling projects are a series of complex choices. As Kristan Cunningham and Scott Jarrell can attest, these choices require research, compromise, and humor.

HARDWOOD FLOORS FROM A SAVVY SOURCE. Kristan and Scott purchased Brazilian walnut hardwood flooring for their office from Lumber Liquidators, a savvy source if you have more taste than budget. Lumber Liquidators buys odd lots of hardwood and other flooring and then sells these materials to the public at a considerable savings—up to half off standard prices. The catch? You need to be open-minded in terms of selection. Tell store personnel how much flooring you need; your first, second, and third choices; and your priorities (wood variety, plank width, and so on). They then tell you what is on hand. "If you dream of a specific exotic wood, you may not get that particular variety," Kristan says, "but you usually get something nifty with a similar look that you wouldn't otherwise be able to afford." Lumber Liquidators has stores in many U.S. states and can consult with you over the phone, 800/356-6746, or online at www.lumberliquidators.com.

DOING DRYWALL. Drywalling the two walls not lined with cabinets improved the space in several ways. "We added more electrical outlets; not possible to do unconcealed with the concrete walls," Kristan says. "The drywall keeps sound from bouncing around, which is key when you tape a TV show here. And finally, the drywall adds a greater sense of finished space so that you aren't so aware that you're in a basement." Some exposed cinder block remains "for a bit of texture and so that you don't forget that you're in a basement" she says.

THE LIGHT APPROACH. Kristan and Scott lit their windowless office with recessed halogen can lights in the 13-foot ceiling; three for each wall, all controlled by a single dimmer switch. "We installed can lights in the ceiling far enough from the wall that they can illuminate the space in front of the cabinets," Kristan says. For task work, she uses a "bright, obnoxious" flexible-arm drafting lamp that can be pulled close or pushed away. The couple installed a fixed-length globe pendant over the conference table, anchoring the area.

KRISTAN'S REMODELING JOURNAL

June 28

Our master bedroom loft is very near livable, though we're not living in it yet. Our new bed is from an Italian manufacturer, and the lead time is what it is. Having the loft finished but not being able to sleep in it yet is kind of like telling a kid that Santa has come, all the presents are waiting downstairs, and you can go look at them—but no opening! So sleeping in the loft again is going to be very gratifying—like we've just conquered a dragon!

In the meantime, seeing the floors finished upstairs makes us so eager to get going downstairs. They've given the room a formal, dressed-up attitude that we always felt the house lacked. The original carpet was comfortable to live with, but we entertain a lot and prefer a more polished overall look. Now with light bouncing off the walnut floors, the place seems to say, *I'm special*. (I know this because I was having a conversation with the floors just the other day....)

June 30

Eureka! We're moving on! Our project leader, Romas, and his crew have begun the tedious process of removing the old laminate on the cabinet face frames and putting down the new glossy creamy white material for the kitchen and downstairs guest bathroom. We know what the finished product will look like as we've installed the new materials in the loft already, but I think the difference it will make on the main floor is huge.

July 3

The new face frames are moving along—slowly but surely. This process is even more labor-intensive than we'd realized. The existing face frames must be heated with a blow-dryer-type thing, peeled away piece by piece, and then the material left underneath is sanded and prepped for the new laminate. Then new strips are cut from Formica sheets, contact-cemented in place, and finally the overlapping edges are sanded. Overshooting the strips by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch insures that we're never short by a hair and leaving submaterial exposed.

Unfortunately, we need to shift our focus for a few weeks. There are only a few opportunities during the duration of the remodel in which the necessary tradespeople are available. Plus, we have to juggle *Design on a Dime's* shooting schedule with the office remodel because we film the design meeting segment of the show in our home office. We had always planned on redoing the office further down the road, but with the garage taken over with materials and shoot days getting scheduled, I need a place to work and store all my show stuff.

July 6

Scott and I have cleared out my office and stacked everything in the storage room. I'm surprised at how sad this portion of the remodel is making me feel—partially because I'm parting with all my favorite stuff for a while, but also because this room is my haven. We left my drafting table set up, but we've already started demolition, and I'm finding it hard to go down and sit in that dirtiness and actually work.

As for my stuff, I'm sure I can live without some of my tools and resource books for a while, too. It's just knowing that I can't get to all of it; I think I'm having separation anxiety. What if the inspiration necessary to design the next *Design on a Dime* lies in an old magazine at the bottom of a pile on the storage room floor?

July 10

The office is moving right along. We only have three weeks allotted for it. (We shot a design meeting the day before the demolition began and have one scheduled for the day after



completion.) This room is pretty straightforward: The walls are cinder block, and the floor an unfinished aggregate. The plan is to drop the ceiling by a foot to accommodate new recessed fixtures, install new wood floors, and drywall two sides of the room. The other two exterior walls are up against the hillside (it's a basement room) and cannot be drywalled. These two exterior walls will always need to be monitored for moisture, especially during rainy season, and placing drywall on them could cause mold.

My design had to work around this issue. I've always envisioned a sort of library corner back there, with cabinets going from floor to ceiling; something warm and encompassing to place the antique table in as a little conference area. My design was further complicated by the fact that custom cabinetry was going to be way too expensive and take far too long to fabricate given the amount of storage I envisioned. So I started looking at modern kitchen cabinets, hoping to find prefab units that I could stack over and over side by side to create something very modular. Additionally, we need to attach the units to 3-inch ledgers, which are attached directly to the wall. (This creates an air pocket between the wall and the cabinetry, eliminating the possibility of the cabinets being damaged by moisture.) Going all the way to the ceiling would mean we couldn't monitor the backs once they're screwed in place.

My solution to the above-mentioned problems has come down to one tidy system: modular office cabinetry from Ikea, capable of being stacked up to 7 feet high with lots of readily available components to choose from. Now, I just have to tweak the design that I started with based on the sizes available. Working within a finished room size, this gets a little tricky. The components have to be combined in such a way that the overall width adds up to my wall size and creates the look of a custom wall of built-ins. The good news is that I can buy myself an inch or two by adjusting the ledger depth. So back to the drawing board I go!

July 18

I finally have the office cabinetry ordered. After a few setbacks, the end result is going to be better than what I was aiming for initially. A band of cabinetry with doors will make up the bottom portion, open cabinetry through the middle, and a final door-clad band at the top. This gives me usable concealed storage space and open space for resource books and decorative items. Open storage is key for filming design meetings in the office because the space needs to be a little more decorative.

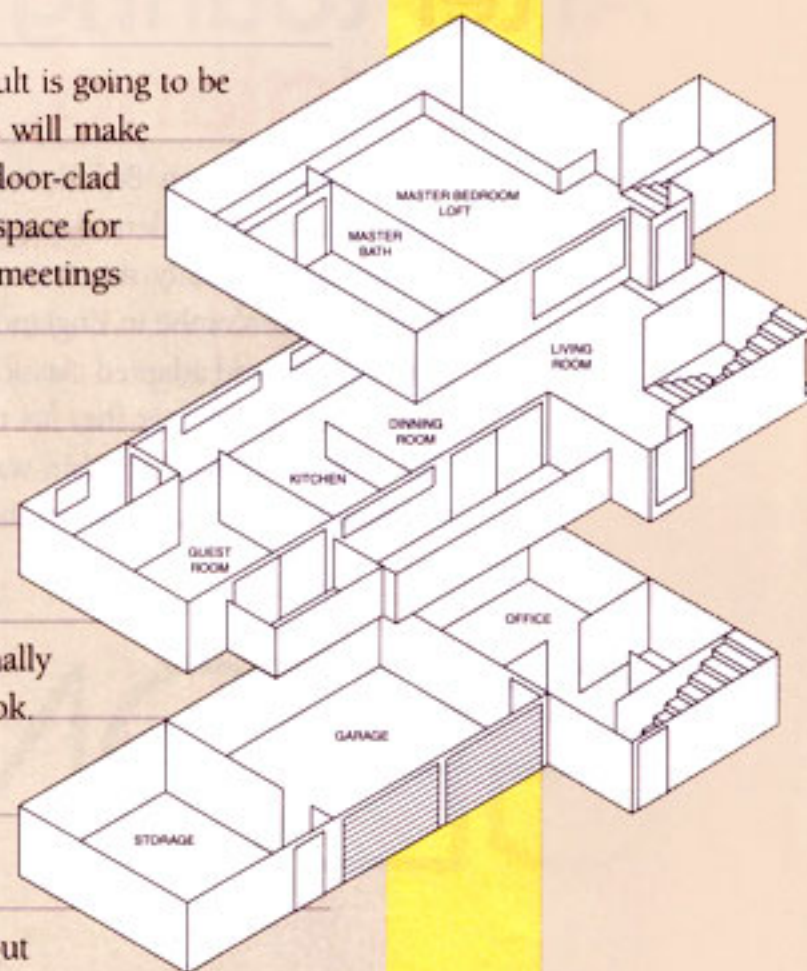
July 25

Now that the office is looking more pulled together, Romas and his guys, Vincente and Adolph, are starting to tackle some of the finish carpentry upstairs again. Installation of baseboards has started in the loft as well as finishing the pocket doors. The baseboards wound up being a design detail that took Romas and me forever to decide upon. The house was originally baseboardless, and I didn't want to add a fussy detail and ruin the clean look.

We talked about a small shoe-molding detail—just enough to cover the space between the hardwood and the drywall, which is necessary in case of expansion. This seemed too small in scale. So after much discussion and stalling, I decided on $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch medium-density fiberboard, ripped into 4-inch-high lengths with a slightly eased edge. This creates a clean line, without looking too chunky and clunky. The 4-inch height also means that it will die seamlessly into all of the cabinetry toe-kicks. We're going to paint the baseboards, and going with MDF keeps the cost down and makes it readily available—two concepts that I'm crazy about!



For the office, we scored these vintage classroom maps of the world on eBay—\$40 for five!



August 2

Eddie has removed all of the kitchen doors and drawers to begin the fabrication of new ones. And guess who doesn't miss the original lavender laminate one bit? This girl.

Obviously the look right now is one of pure clutter: Everything that lives in those cabinets is now in the living room. Nothing makes you realize that you should clear out last year's Thanksgiving stuffing boxes like having it all on display. This also means that we need to order appliances soon, or Scott and I will hold up the installation of the doors and drawers.

August 8

Romas and his crew are still hammering away at all the small but enormously important stuff. It's amazing how the small details start to make you feel like you're really getting somewhere.

I know that I've said this in the past, but I can't stress enough how important a good foreman is on a remodeling project. Romas is always more than game to explore options that may not be the easiest, but are either more effective aesthetically or more cost-efficient—all of which ensures that Scott and I are happy homeowners. Vincente and Adolph are the first people I see in the morning—to their dismay, I'm sure—and if Scott and I have to share our home and coffee time with someone every morning, then we could do much worse than these smiling faces. And best of all, I feel that these guys do everything the way they would in their own homes. That's the most you can hope for as a homeowner. (Even if it's because I bribe them with soda and hamburgers!)

August 15

Exterior painting has started. Boy, this part isn't going to be fun. The stucco is sucking up paint, and the result is quite patchy. This is one of those nights where Scott and I say to each other, "Stop looking around, stop trying to create solutions. Let's just go out to dinner and not look at it anymore."

Note to self: Food is necessary to live. Life doesn't revolve around stucco.

September 2

We're working on the floors again, with Scott and me working on the weekends and the guys keeping up the pace on weekdays. The carpet is being ripped up in sections as we go, so there's never really a day that we get to say, "Wow, look at these beautiful, fully installed floors." But each new day, there's a larger, more gratifying section of glossy walnut, and this is of course when the floors start telling me again how special they are....

September 5

The *Design on a Dime* production schedule has been hectic, but fortunately, our production assistant, Kelly, helps keep things under control by returning items and shopping for the show. Since I've run out of room in my car and at home to store all the stuff for the show, Kelly now has her SUV full with curtains, pillows, and so on, while mine is full of the same. We meet in parking lots during the day so that we can exchange stuff and keep shopping and moving forward for the upcoming shows.

Adding to the stress, my teammates on the show are busy with their own remodeling projects. Spencer just purchased his first home, and Dave is restoring an investment property. They're both doing almost all the work themselves. It's the *Design on a Dime* way!

Through it all, Scott has been able to get phone calls and e-mails done in the morning at work. For the most part, he's been able to schedule his hours around being at the house when he needs to. I think the best advice that Scott and I could give is to be aware of what you're getting yourself into with a remodeling project, and make sure that your life will work around it. And if all else fails, hope to goodness that all the people in your life will help get you through it!

September 8

Appliances have arrived, are being installed, and—oops!—there's a teeny-weeny problem. The oven, although it's made by the same manufacturer as the original unit, is sitting out too far. Although I reviewed the dimensions of the new oven before ordering, I hadn't pulled out the existing unit and didn't realize that the original model accommodated the downdraft, with the vent sitting flush with the countertop. The new one is only $\frac{3}{4}$ inch off and works with a downdraft as well, but we kept the old one and its placement made all the difference. The obvious solution would be to move the downdraft back into the cabinet box a hair. Although there's room to do this, the stone countertops are already sitting in the kitchen, cutouts in place, ready to be installed. This would mean purchasing a new slab and refabricating the entire countertop. So no way!

After much frustration, Steve, Romas, Scott, and I came up with a truly beautiful solution. The bump-out difference to be addressed is $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, and that just happens to be the thickness of our doors and drawers. Romas fabricated and installed a faux door and drawer around the oven and, voilà! The detail is just so cool and the new oven fits in seamlessly. Whew! Another design problem solved.