

Patience:

The Key to a Successful Home Improvement

by Blythe Thimsen
photos courtesy of Muzzy Mansion Bed & Breakfast



Muzzy Family 1880



The second owner of the house, Patrick Shine, purchased the home in 1903.

Muzzy Mansion, ca.1889

STEVEN SANFORD AND Mike Schultz each have a key to the front door of the 1889 Queen Anne Victorian mansion on Spokane's north side, which they own and operate as Muzzy Mansion Bed & Breakfast. When it came to renovating the home though, those keys were not the keys to their success; the key to successfully completing their project was patience, something anyone taking on a home improvement or remodel project

needs to have in ample supply.

"We had no idea of how big an undertaking it would be," says Mike of the project that began in 2007 and led to the house being listed on the Spokane historic register. "One thing always led to another. Nothing is level, nothing is plumb and there are always surprises in the process. I don't think we truly appreciated the project until we started seeing things get done. It wasn't until last summer that we started to see [the results]. Before, we saw what the space could be, not what it is."

Envisioning what the space could be is part of what helped Sanford and Schultz transform the home from the chopped-up five-unit apartment building they found, into the beautifully restored historic mansion. Despite the rough condition in which they found it, they knew this house was a diamond in the rough.

"We were looking, and we saw this house and looked up and it sang to us like a choir," says Mike of the first time they laid eyes on the house. They found the house in December 2006 and closed on it in January 2007. The day after the house closed they started moving the tenants out. "We did that because we had to find out what was going on with the spaces all at once," says Mike. At that point they were still thinking it would be an investment property and would be maintained as apartments.

After learning more about the history of the house, though, and the people who had built it and lived there over the years, Steven and Mike shifted their focus. "That's what turned our interest from investment to historical; we felt a sense of stewardship to the house and the community," says Mike.

Restoring the house to its previous condition required the aforementioned patience, along with a huge amount of sweat equity, as Mike and Steven did nearly 90 percent of the work themselves. "We had to learn as we went along," says Mike. "We learned to enjoy the journey as much as the end result. That was the biggest lesson for us." While they tackled much

Muzzy Mansion



With the inside completed, Steven and Mike will next turn their attention to the exterior of the home, working to maintain the historic authenticity.

of the project themselves, Mike says that “some of it had to be outsourced.” This included plumbing and electrical among other things. They were lucky though; because the building had been converted into commercial property, as apartments, the plumbing and electrical had been recently updated. The work they had to do in this area was very minor compared to the challenge it could have been.

Both men had worked on homes before, although never of a historical design. “Once in my life have I had a move-in ready home,” says Steven, who has had his fair share of fixer-uppers. He was able to tackle those projects in part thanks to the lessons he learned from his family. Growing up on a farm in Bellingham, Steven’s father was always working on construction, so he knew the basics. “My grandfather flipped rentals before it was popular to do,” he adds.

“Two things always come to mind,” says Steven offering his best advice to those who are in the midst of a home improvement or home remodel project. “You have to be patient with the process and take breaks and get away.”

It is important to get away, because there are always plenty of frustrations

that will arise in any home improvement project. “The feeling like nothing was getting done; things weren’t getting done fast enough,” was one of Mike’s greatest frustrations.

“It is overwhelming, constantly having to live like nomads in the house,” adds Steven, of having to move your living quarters from room to room, in order to accommodate renovations that impact every room of the house.

Nomadic lifestyle aside, one thing did make Steven and Mike’s experience easier: the majority of the work they did was cosmetic, rather than invasive construction. “Cosmetic takes a long time in an old house though,” warns Steven, who says it was still a daunting and time consuming task. “Stopping was basically rare.”

Cosmetic changes and updates for a historical home required a lot of research and hunting for pieces that were appropriate for the time period. That meant that in addition to scouring the Internet for hardware and decorative pieces, Steven and Mike were on a first name basis with local retailers and antique store-owners. “It was huge for us to keep as much as possible local,” says Steven. “We love to give back to local people.”

With their project nearly finished—there are still a few areas in the home in which they continue to toil – Muzzy Mansion Bed & Breakfast is officially open, with guests from Great Britain, France, across the U.S. and a surprising number from right here in Spokane; people who are looking for a chance to get away in their own city. With a refurbished mansion for a bed and breakfast, they are able to offer diverse rooms to “a broad and demanding market,” says Steven. “People come here because of what it is,” he says of the home’s historic nature. The renovations they lovingly made on the home are part of what makes it such a draw.

“We are stewards of this house. If we are patient, it comes back,” says Steven of the home’s historic beauty. “You get what you give. We are finally starting to get; we’ve been giving for a long time.”

Three years is exactly how long they have spent working on the inside. Now they are ready to start on the outside. As they tackle that part of the project, though, they will no doubt keep in mind Mike’s best bit of advice: “Be patient with the process,” he says. That is after all, the key to a successful project!

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Another trend to watch is tankless hot water heaters. One local customer’s hot water bill is roughly \$40/month and that is for a kitchen with two sinks, two dishwashers, two large bathrooms with soaker tubs and showers, and teenagers!!

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