

## Home improvement ... The ultimate test of a marriage

By **ELAINE MOYLE**  
Toronto Sun

Despite the stresses associated with home renovations, most Canadian couples say it's an activity that unites rather than divides them.

That was the finding of The Building Box/Leger Marketing Survey that polled couples classified as "renovation consumers." The results were provided exclusively to The Toronto Sun.

While 17.2% of couples said home improvements brought them "closer together," just 9.4% said the work created "conjugal conflict."

Jean-Marc Leger, president of Leger Marketing, notes a few interesting regional disparities. For instance, more couples in British Columbia (23.6%) see renovations as a togetherness issue compared with Ontario couples (14.6%). Men and young people, he adds, tend to regard home projects as relationship enhancers.

Sylvain Toutant, vice-president of marketing and development for The Building Box, says busy working couples seize home improvements as a productive, shared activity. Survey findings indicate 46% of couples visit renovation centres together.

Alberta and Don Williams say planning and shopping for the major overhaul of their Markham century home was the fun part. However, a few conflicts emerged when they rolled up their sleeves and got down to work.

"Alberta's got great decorating taste and it usually works," says Don, a newspaper home delivery distributor. "But we have different priorities. She wants to get things done right away, while I tend to work in fits and starts."

Disagreements tend to flare around "the smaller decisions," such as the placement of light switches and fixtures.

"We tend to work better when we tackle separate tasks," says Alberta, a software logistics coordinator. "When we moved into the neighbourhood, we were told by neighbours that home renovations are the true test of a marriage."

Despite the smattering of problems that inevitably arise when couples tackle home renovations,



Teamwork ... Alberta and Don Williams have successfully navigated the marriage minefield of renovations.

-- Greig Reekie, SUN

Don believes they've passed the test with flying colours.

"The problems haven't disrupted the marriage -- in fact, in some ways, they've enhanced it," he says.



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Marketing manager Susan Chan, who recently purchased and renovated a home with her husband Jack, agrees.

"It's a stressful time," she admits. "But at the end of the day, you have to remember that there's a marriage involved."

Chan's experience reinforced the need to compromise "regardless of how much you disagree on colours and style," she says. It's a challenge that, when successfully navigated, is bound to benefit any relationship.

Registered marriage and family therapist Marilyn Belleghem urges couples to set "realistic expectations" geared to budgets and mechanical abilities. "Always plan for 85 additional trips to the hardware store," she adds, laughing.

Couples entrenched in rigid traditional roles are more likely to encounter discord as opposed to those who practise "a partnership of peers."

Other tips?

- ▶ Be sure the renovation is enhancing the equity you have in your home.
- ▶ Extensive planning will more likely produce something that meets your needs.
- ▶ Don't compare what you've got to anybody else.
- ▶ Women, don't expect your spouse to be able to repair drywall or remove a toilet "just because he's a guy."

Sandy Shiner, "a marriage repair specialist," urges couples to engage a sense of humour when they're inhaling piles of sawdust and tripping over stacks of lumber.

"The unexpected always happens," she says. "The stress of living in a mess tends to get taken out in the relationship -- that's another danger spot.

"The main thing is for people to get their pride out of the way and avoid power struggles."

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