

## Feeling the Heat


I DON'T MEAN TO BE A LIAR. But my pants are so on fire I can't even talk about it.

I was tending to the window boxes when our nosy neighbor came out. After the good-mornings she cut to the quick: "I haven't seen the contractor lately. It must be going well with your remodel." Sounded innocent, but I knew her game, and I wasn't playing. "Yup," I said, "things have pretty much wound down."

What I didn't say was, wound down like a bum watch with hands showing a minute to midnight. In October, in 1929, right before the Great Depression. Truth be told, things are not at all well back at the ranch. Been more than a month since we've seen the crew. In dark moments, I imagine the older guys had been at our place so long they hit retirement; on happier days, I dream the younger ones are just on spring break. I can only hope they come back from Cancun soon because we've got a few more weeks of work before I can say things are truly well without my trousers bursting into flames.

There's one exception to the no-shows, though, and that's our cabinetmaker, Rob Wilson. Rob makes me smile. He'll shuffle up with his rescued dog, Ranger, and, in well-considered words, suggest a change to a part of the job that isn't even his—the stain color for the floor, a hallway light fixture, an alternative to the sink we'd been set on for two years—and right away you know you must take his advice. After showing a sample of the finish for the cabinets that we all agreed was beautiful, he quietly went back to his shop to create a dozen more samples. Rob can't settle for good when you can have great, which is what our cabinets have turned out to be. He's a rare and wonderful man, dedicated to a craft in a fashion you rarely see anymore.

I hope when you tackle a big project you'll be lucky enough to have someone like Rob help you out. In the meantime, we at *This Old House* will fill in from afar. This month, that means our best advice on five projects that'll boost your quality of life without busting your budget: a top-shelf paint job for kitchen cabinets, soapstone countertops you can put in yourself, a new bath vanity and medicine cabinet, a more welcoming front entry, and, my favorite, a built-in barbecue. Try just one, or do them all. They might challenge your DIY skills, but you won't regret the finished products—and about that, I ain't lyin'. Don't even smell smoke...



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The editor with cabinetmaker Rob Wilson. He won't have plumbing for months, but he's got sweet kitchen storage.

**Upgrading your house can challenge your patience—and your DIY skills—but you won't regret the finished product.**