

Merry Christmas 2003 from the Vautier Family



Hi Everybody

We hope that you have been as well as we have been, that is to say, very well. I don't know if I should hope that you all have had as many projects. Our lives have been eventful since last Christmas, but many of the events have been the result of our efforts to replicate the show, "This Old House".



The first picture above is Val watching TV. Can you guess what the second picture represents? A new children's game? A work of modern art? Hopscotch? The answer is: my efforts to verathane the hardwood floor without getting dog hairs, cat hairs, people hairs, fuzz, dirt, etc., stuck in the wet verathane. The floor you see above has about 15 coats of oil-based verathane on it. But, the first 14 don't really count.

Dominic said, about 2 months ago, "I'm going to re-finish the hardwood floors in our bedroom." I said, "Hmmm, OK honey, sounds good, but don't do it on my account, I'm happy." Then I drifted on to my own projects.

Dominic sanded the floors. I came home from work. I was shocked. "Dominic! These floors are beautiful! I had no idea that they were so beautiful!" The next day, the first coat of verathane went on. I came home from work. "Dominic! This floor is looking even better! It's so beautiful." The next day, the next coat of verathane went on. "Dominic! This floor is not a floor! It's a work of art!"

I started making plans to do other things to the room, now that the floor looked so beautiful, moving things out of the way, disturbing the fine sawdust that had accumulated in every nook and cranny. The third day, before I left for work, I said: "Dominic, that floor is so lovely. If you put on a third coat, make sure to clean up that sawdust you and I disturbed. I love the room! Bye!"

I came home from work. The third coat of verathane had been put on. In it was embedded jillions of tiny sawdust particles. "Dominic, what happened, how come these sawdust particles are in the verathane?" "I don't know, I thought I swept up pretty well, it looked OK to me." "Uh...how would we get them out, if we were to, uh, do so?"

Sand! And re-sand! But every time I re-sanded all the places where there was sawdust, or a dog hair, or (I admit it—one of our hairs), we would of course need a new coat. Dominic would painstakingly lay down a fine, thin coat of verathane, and then I would re-sand the fuzzy places. "How many coats will it take before you get all the fuzz out?" Dominic asked. "I'm not sure, but I'm getting close," I answered. "Maybe we need barriers for the debris that floats on the air."

We made strips out of old neon poster board, to cut down on the air currents near the floor. I taped up the sides of the room where there were drafts. Dominic and I wore caps when the paint was wet. We opened the French doors before painting, so the room would cool off, so the paint would be thicker on the brush. We put an electric heater in the room to warm it up, so the verathane would dry faster, and not be sticky for such a long time.

Things improved, but nowhere near as much as when I had my brainstorm. You lay the verathane on like syrup! The heck with a thin layer! If the layer is thick enough, little tiny pieces of debris must sink to the bottom, never to be seen again. That's a good thing! I don't want to see them! We ended up with a

surface that was smooth as glass. Success at last. After only 15 layers of finish paint. Dominic took the pictures so the glassy look would show up.

Now, of course, I want to repaint the walls of the room. What a perfect opportunity. And the ceiling, I want to reflect light. I have some ideas on how to light the room in an unconventional way, that will be inexpensive, low-maintenance, hopefully beautiful, and will maximize SPACE (the final luxury in our overpacked existences). All that is required is time and effort. So, meanwhile, Dominic and I continue to use Val's room, and Val has the guest room, and our lives are even more topsy-turvy than ever. But in a good cause!



How do you like the picture of the white truck? Am I correct in thinking that this is an unusual picture? The saga of the truck started out with a light-hearted plan to take a vacation. My sister Christine, who lives in Hamilton, Montana, said to us, "You should come visit me, maybe about August, the hottest part of the summer is winding down, there's no snow in the passes, and Montana is beautiful."

In August, we packed some duffle bags into our van, paid a family friend to house-sit, extracted promises from Fiona and Gabriel NOT to invite friends over in our absence, and Dominic and Val and I took off for Hamilton. It was wonderful! True, the first afternoon we were there it was 102 degrees, but there were so many things to see, mountain ranges to the west of us, mountain ranges to the south of us, nights that were utterly quiet, black skies that had more stars than I can remember ever having seen. And there was nothing to do but relax! I couldn't go to work, and I couldn't work on my projects, so I started to do something I hadn't done in a long time—I started cooking! Barefoot and cooking in a country kitchen, what peace.

In the early afternoon of the second day, Val and I took the van into "town" to get some videos for that evening. The cell phone rang. It was Gabriel:

Gabriel: "Mom, don't you guys ever answer your cell phone, I've been trying to get hold of you for the past 24 hours!"

Me: "Huh?"

Gabriel: "Okay, never mind, I've got something to tell you, but first, are you sitting down? I have to know if you're sitting down, because you always freak out over everything. So, are you sitting down?"

Me: "For heaven's sakes, I'm sitting in the van, but what are you talking about, why should I be sitting down? Ohmygod, is it Fiona? Is Fiona OK? Gabriel, quick, tell me, is Fiona OK? Is Fiona OK? Is Fiona—"

Gabriel: "Mom, it's nothing to do with Fiona—or me. We're all OK. But I seriously have to tell you something, and you can't freak out on me like you usually---"

Me: "I am not freaking out! Would you please not scare me?!! What's happened? If it's not you and Fiona, what -- ? Was there an earthquake? Are you sure everybody is OK? Just stop this! Stop scaring me and tell me!"

Gabriel: "Are you sitting down?"

Me: (shouting) "Yes, I'm sitting down, what happened?!!!"

Gabriel: "There's a truck stuck in the side of our house."

Me: "Oh my God, is that all? How could you scare me so bad when it's nothing but a truck stuck in the side of the house?"

Gabriel: "Mom, you don't understand, it knocked out the whole corner of the house. The second floor is hanging out into space with nothing to support it. We don't know if it's going to fall down or not!"

Me: (practically bored) "OK, we'll have to come home right away and fix it. Don't walk anywhere near those bedrooms. Don't worry. It just has to be fixed. We'll leave as soon as we get packed. We should be home before morning."

Gabriel: "OK, but you guys should answer your cell phone once in a while. By the way, the whole neighborhood was there. It happened at 2 o'clock in the morning. There were about 5 cop cars, and..."

We skipped the video store, went home, I told Dominic, I pulled whatever was in the oven out (end of cooking idyll), we threw our stuff in the van, drove all night, got home at 0400 hours, saw what you see in the picture. No one was hurt. The driver was an 18-year-old that Gabriel and Fiona grew up with and went to middle school and high school with. He lost control of the car going around the blind curve to our house, the anti-lock brakes locked, and his car practically flew into the side of our house.

He had his seat belt on, wasn't hurt, jumped out of the car, ran past a few startled people who had come out of their houses, barricaded himself in his house and the Bellevue police spent an hour talking him out. He finally came out, and with a practical posse behind him, came over to our house and admitted responsibility and apologized, said he had insurance. Everything turned out fine, I hope he drives slower from now on; he could have died. The incident made quite an impression on him, he's scheduled to go into the Navy in April, but he does have some charges pending against him. I suspect he'll be swabbing decks near Iraq before the charges hit the docket.

Dominic is re-tiling the basement, put a new bathroom in, repainted the house after the construction company fixed it, refinished the part of the house where we had more French doors put in, fixed lots of car problems, How does anyone ever get the idea that people who are retired have time on their hands?



I'm still working at Boeing; we're all on the edge of our seats wondering who will get laid off next. The company does have a great new airplane in the works, if they will only BUILD it. Fiona is still working at Blockbuster; Gabriel is scheduled to graduate from high school in January. Val has the heaviest social life of anyone in the family, alternately loves and hates school (it's so boring!). He's learning French, he and I ask each other in French, "Est-ce que je puis aller a WC?" ("Is it OK if I go to the restroom?") What I have mentioned in these notes are the most conventional of the high and low spots our lives have hit in the past year.

There's plenty more going on around here. (Where does Gabriel live now? What happened with his old roommate? Who fired 10 shots from an AK-47 in the middle of the night two blocks from our house, and why? Which of Gabriel's middle-school guy friends is expecting a baby in March? Who got a knife pulled on him in downtown Renton at 10:00 at night? Who got audited by the IRS? Who fell and broke her hip?) But you know what? There are some other questions:

Which family is full of people who have had no health problems in the last year? Which family has teenagers that are growing about 5 years in maturity for every year that goes by? Which family is lucky in the love that they have for each other and the wonderful people that they know and have known? And which family has a brand-new foundation on one side of their house? We do! May you all be as lucky, and happy. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

