

Howdy Gang! – (Thanksgiving 2006 Letter)

Well it's around that time of year again, fall has fell and I'm hiding inside where it's warm! It has been raining cats and dogs the past couple of days, so I felt it was a good time to stay high and dry and put together a new update.

In the last letter I showed the progress I had made in the crawl space under the house, removing a teetering stack of blocks and replacing it with a solid beam set down 9 feet. The master bedroom renovation project, our garden and a continuation of the driveway expansion and renovation as far as it was completed at that time.

I closed last years letter with the driveway project still under construction, so I guess that is where I will start off this year.



As you can see, that crusher run doesn't work too well on these hills, washes out quite easily.

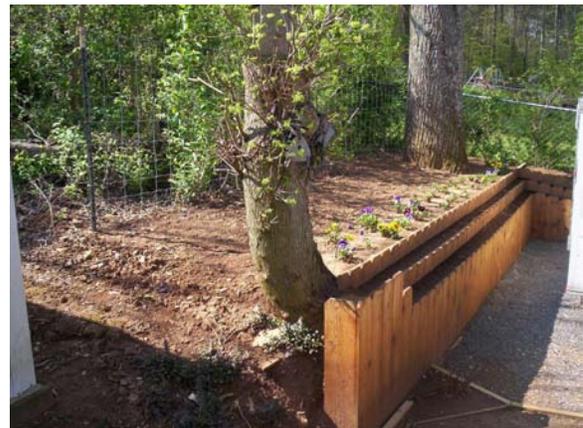
On the right of the driveway I began leveling the existing ground, in some areas it was quite a hill there already, much of it was removed as I leveled for the driveway.

To gain additional parking, I removed a long abandoned and covered with overgrowth, a buried trash heap. Found several antique bottles too!

This is the top of the driveway to the right of the garage. I made a fairly level parking area by excavating this area by hand.

To hold the dirt in place I built a tiered retaining wall of Woolmanized lumber then covered the construction lumber with decorative Cedar.

The tiers were made for the purpose of planting strawberries where the critters can't get to them.



This is how I handled the right side of the driveway and retaining wall project.

The neighbors fence is NOT on his property line, it was installed such as to clear some large trees in its path. The Woolmanized board visible behind the Cedar facing is only 10 inches inside of the property line at the top horizontal board. Down at the street end, the fence is on the property line.

In last years letter I had mentioned that a part of the master bedroom renovation project would include a new hall pantry as well as hide a very large cold air return ductwork box in the kitchen.



It's not a very good picture, and you'll have to excuse the mess.

The ductwork is to the left of the refrigerator and has a wire stand on top of it. It has a lace tablecloth over it to partially hide it.

The washer and dryer are to the left in the picture. A good amount of valuable storage space is wasted between the wall with the ductwork on it and the washing machine. My goal was to recover that lost space and make it useful.



These two pictures show the working area where the pantry will be placed. The new master bedroom door is in the right photo and the new pantry will be to the left of it. It took some mighty careful measurements to get everything to come out right and fit together.



To the left is a photo taken after the corner upper cabinet was removed, the washer and dryer moved down out of the way and the drywall removed. I'm not going to bore you with ton's of pictures like I did last year of each step taken to complete this job. Yay!

However, I did want you to notice the tight quarters I had to work in to get this project done also. Everything is tight around here!

As you can see in the photo on the right, the ductwork box was not installed square, made quite a challenge to frame it out.

I installed a Formica countertop as the base for the pantry on this the kitchen side. I also set back the drywall between the studs inside to gain an additional 3 inches of storage space inside this soon to be cabinet.



If you've ever done renovations where original partition walls are moved around, you know there is a heck of a lot of work dealing with the original floor and ceiling framing.



In the first picture you see the floor after the original sill plate was removed. The second and third pictures are the kitchen side drywalled and the hall pantry side drywalled respectively.

At this point we had to stop work in order to travel to Memphis for Jason's graduation from Law School and to move his belongings back home. He passed the BAR on the first try, YAY!



Upon our arrival back home, we discovered that work on the kitchen would be delayed even further. A severe thunderstorm knocked out a good section of our largest pecan tree.



Fortunately it did not hurt the new garage roof too much, but did a real number on our arbor.

Finally, after getting that mess cleaned up and the necessary repairs made, I could get back to working in the kitchen. I'm only going to show the final pictures after the job was completed.



The raised floor in the pantry is to prevent dust and debris from getting onto the bottom shelf!

Our next project was to have the driveway finished. Concrete down here is very expensive, so we decided to go with blacktop. A coarse layer was installed first and rolled then a finer topping mix was added over this. They did a pretty good job of getting it balanced for me too!
If you look close at the retaining wall, you'll see a very NICE crop of Strawberries up there!



On the left is a photo taken in October of last year of the fall decorations. I had raised some Indian Corn up in the planting area on the right side of the driveway.

Take note of the barren ditch also!
I had raised the front yard erosion up my first year down here and formed that nice straight edge at the top of the ditch. But it too settled in only a couple of years.
Well get back to the ditch later!

My next project is to convert the current living room (already partially emptied for the project) back into an office for Debi and guest bedroom.

When the home was originally built, before the bathroom was installed in later years, this room was the master bedroom.

When the indoor bathroom was installed, a room addition was added on that became the living room, later converted to the master bedroom and this room then became a living room.



The new master bedroom (because it's now the largest room) is the door on the left next to the currently brown bathroom sliding door. In the far right edge of the picture, you can see the door that leads to the front covered porch. The wall in the center with pictures and switches must be removed to make way for the new bedroom door, so it will be directly across from the master bedroom door.



I'm only going to show a couple of the steps involved.

This photo is only to show the amount of wires in this wall, there are two just barely visible at floor level as well.



That sill plate needs to be removed and will cause the same opening to under the house as did the sill plate when doing the hall pantry closet.

Below left, closet framing in. Right, gutted, framed and insulated.



I included the picture to the left only to show the rough textured ceiling that will be completely replastered, as was the ceiling in the master bedroom.

The electric was installed, then the drywall went up.

Note that the ceiling has its first coat of plaster also.

Nearly done!



Some of the features of this particular guest bedroom besides the multiple electrical outlets are an abundance of telephone and cable outlets so a desk can be placed almost anywhere in the room.

It boasts twin closets, just like in the master bedroom and my garage office (one can never have too much storage space), and in the hall a what-not shelf area to place dust catchers.



This is a view from the den looking toward the bathroom and new bedroom. See original photo above for comparison.

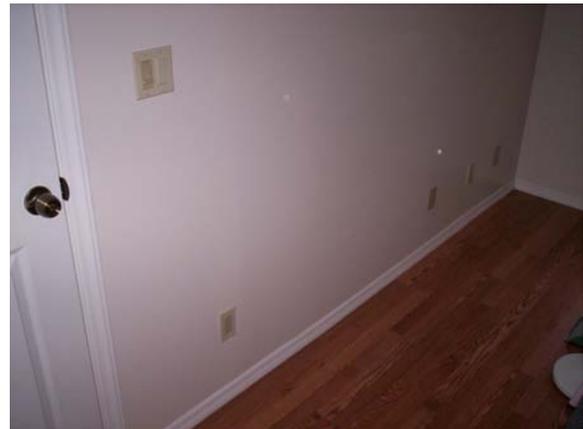
The new what-not area is closest to you, the bedroom door is not yet installed in this photo.

Debi, don't touch that joint compound, it's still wet!



We've come a long way so far.

The closet hardware is in, the entry door installed, and the new floor is finished.



The final coats of paint, door hardware, trim, switches, receptacles, cover plates, blinds, etc.

By golly, I believe it's finally finished!



Nice Fan! Matches the one in the Master Bedroom too!



One very tired but very happy lady!

Your new room!





Note to self: Open Blinds
BEFORE Opening Window!
My Office Window visitor.

See! I told you they were
STRAWBERRIES!!!!



Don't know why they call them Tulips when they have SIX?

I put this photo here mainly for the view of the ditch.

I'll bet I can keep it from eroding so much.
Can Too!
Cannot!
Yeppers, I bet I can!

Let's Dig a Hole!

Then fill it back up again!

Your in the Army NOW!



Stick in a Board of Directors for good measure!

Till in some Telemarketers, I mean Manure!



They both STINK to high heaven!

A nice row of low growing Gold Tipped Arborvitae! A nice straight edge along the grass and cover with Cedar mulch and I think the problem is licked!



But that's only Phase One of making the ditch where it don't ever have to be mowed again!



Phase Two has a long long ways to go before it will be done.

My plans include a narrow creek like effect with various evergreen plants on both sides.

Toward reaching this ultimate goal I first built a retaining wall around the water meter lid.



Then I have to deal with a watershed pipe that runs under the street to the other side.

Don't want my bushes washing over to the neighbors, that's for sure, hi hi.....



I do want the fill dirt to stay up level with the top of the retaining wall board when all is said and done.

But for now I'm just trying to get the ditch in a more workable condition, and keep the area under the bushes from eroding away.

It's a whole lot more work than what it looks like!



This is the area where the drainage pipe runs under the street.

I can't move the pipe, although I did shorten it a tad by breaking away some of the upper surface so it became top draining. This allowed me a little more leeway as far as working in the ditch.

I chose cheap plastic stone looking blocks over the real thing, because they will soon be covered with evergreens anyhow. I leveled and trued them up as I compacted the very clothes staining orange Tennessee clay up under them.

After sizing up the situation and making a few more measurements, I decided it would be more beneficial to add a second tier of these plastic blocks over the first and set back about the width of $\frac{1}{2}$ block so the long mounting pins would make the whole affair more rigid. Kids love to climb on anything and everything around here.



This photo was taken the day the plants were planted into the tiered retaining wall! I've driven over the blocks with the riding mower and they stayed right in place.

Next I drilled $\frac{3}{4}$ inch holes through the retaining wall and into the dirt behind it. Then filled the holes with black potting soil. And finally added some small plants.



A couple of more focal points were added and the upper half of the ditch was planted with Variegated Ivy. Now that part just has to grow up and fill in.

I'm working on other things also, but for now, I'll just say:
To be continued next year!

Happy Thanksgiving – Merry Christmas – Happy New Year!