

COLUMN FOR AUGUST 14, 2004.

HEADLINE; HOMEOWNER ELECTRICAL WORK

Q; I am thinking of building an addition to our house and I would like to do all the work myself. Can a homeowner do this and if I decide to hire an electrician what guarantee do I have he uses competent people?

A: I will start to answer this question with a direct statement, unless you are “very” competent in home wiring I recommend you hire a licensed electrician to do your work. I rarely see homeowner installed wiring in basement recreation rooms or any other work for that matter done to code and you can bet they have no permit either. Some of the work is downright “scary”

The fully licensed electrical contractor today is governed by a very strict set of rules. They must apply for their own permits. Larger contractors can now do this on-line; an electrician must be the one applying for the permit. Electricians cannot work for you; they must get their own permits. They are not permitted to hire workers that are not licensed or apprentices that are not registered and working under a licensed electrician. Master electricians are a cut above the average, they can certify and inspect their own work and sign off the final inspection. These electricians generally guard their licences very closely; this master’s license reduces the paperwork considerably and practically eliminates the waiting for an inspection time by the Electrical Safety Authority. The Electrical Safety Authority does do spot checks on Master Electricians though and if there are problems this level of licence can be lifted.

Your electrician is responsible to ensure that everything he uses is certified for use in Ontario. If he gets his work inspected he has to arrange a time for this to be done and everything must stay open for the inspector to see before covering with drywall or trim. He is also required to stay within his license, if there is a specialty installation and he does not have this license, he is supposed to tell you so and then most electricians will have one with a special license come in for this work. Generally though this is commercial work where a controls license is needed for example.

If you feel competent enough to do your own wiring you can do the work, however there are a few things you should know. Technically speaking, any change in wiring requires a permit. Right down to something as simple as adding the wiring to a dryer for example. You must get your permit before any work is started. You should understand that the Inspector only issues the permit and you are now fully responsible for the work. You must do your own layouts, you must do all the work yourself, family members can help but you are ultimately responsible and you are limited to working on your own home. You cannot do the wiring on a home that you intend to rent and if you are selling the home the same thing applies. Once you have got your rough-in ready you will have to call the Electrical Inspector to review the work. Do not cover anything up, he can and will likely require that you expose everything for his inspection. I can remember a couple of instance in my former life where we framed in the home and then the owner planned to do the wiring, plumbing and drywall and then have us back to do the finish trim work. I heard later that the inspector refused to pass the work and the owner had to get a licensed electrician to correct the work, you can bet this was expensive! If there are areas that are not right, listen to the inspector and make the corrections. He is there to make sure you are doing the job safely and to code. When you have had your rough-in inspections done and the final inspection is now required, make sure all the fixtures are certified CSA or UL with the Canadian marking present. All switches, fixtures and lights should be completely installed; all covers on and then call for the last inspection. A final inspection is just that, everything should be done and operational. One final note if you plan to do your own work, buy a copy of the Ontario Book #1; Electrical Code Simplified for Residential Wiring. This is an excellent book for anyone planning to do any wiring in his home. Makes a great quick reference book while you are doing the electrical work too. The last time I saw them on the bookshelf they were about \$12.00. Most of the lumberyards and home centres generally carry them.

There is a certain pride in building your own home or addition and the majority of the work can be done by the homeowner if you have respectable skills in construction. Stay within your limitations and if you don't know, ask!

Now the answer to last weeks "Trivia about Homes" question. The answer is A) a space left in the concrete wall for the end of a supporting beam. Now this week's question. What is a mudsill? Is it A) A type of Adobe window sill B) a method of forming a clay base before a building is built, common used in the southern states C) a timber laid directly on the ground as a foundation for a building D) A type of mould used for bricks. The answer in next week's column!

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