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Subtle Problem, Big Impact

We own a home in Dallas and one in Los Angeles, which my son is currently “renting.” (Anyone who’s had a kid between 21 and 25 knows that “renting” is to renting, as “crab meat” is to crab meat.)

Anyway, over the years I’ve needed to hire a number of remodelers, and the experience has often been bad. There was the company that installed our shower tile directly on top of drywall with no effort made at waterproofing. Another firm wouldn’t show up to start the job, and after four days of promises, I had to let them go.

We’ve all heard horror stories. But there’s another problem I’ve experienced with remodeling companies that I think is more troubling. It’s a subtler issue and harder to combat.

My new job involves working from home, and I need to build dedicated office space. Yesterday I had a remodeler come by to give a bid. The issue—so nuanced that it’s hard to even describe—started right away.

After walking in the door, the saleswoman and project manager stood for a moment, looking curiously around the living room of our 1920s duplex. The space is unique, and to my eye, quite lovely. So, why did I feel so self-conscious as they wordlessly scanned our home?

“Let’s go outside, and I’ll show you where I want the office built,” I finally said.

Once there, I warned them that there might be dog poop in the yard, but rather than watching their step, neither of them would enter the lawn area, electing instead to question me from the driveway as I stood alone on the grass.

“What kind of siding do you want?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“This whole duplex is yours?” the man asked. “Why don’t you live in the upstairs unit?”

“Umm ... my husband doesn’t like to climb the stairs,” I replied.

“Why don’t you just build an addition? Why a detached office?”

I couldn’t answer. They weren’t seeing or hearing me. I want a clean, bright space that’s completely my own. I want windows facing the house since that’s the direction that gets sun, and this white winter sky gives me the blues. I’ve dreamed about the little stone path, the pitch of the roofline, maybe a skylight.



Technically, this firm did nothing wrong, but I would never hire them.

“You’re going to have to move your electrical panel,” the man said.

“Oh,” I answered.

“Do you want a toilet?”

They asked for a copy of my plat, but I lied and said I didn’t know where it was. They handed me a fancy brochure and left.

Technically, this firm did nothing wrong, but I would never hire them. They weren’t there to learn about my needs, not really. Instead, the only goal seemed to be adding another job to the roster. This mindset is hard to address because it’s an empathy issue. I believe companies would be better served by training staff to think about a sales call from the customer’s perspective rather than just their own. If they listened to homeowners in a careful, attentive way, they might increase their closing ratio.

Shortly after they left, I called a high-end prefab shed company. The rep was amazing, asking insightful questions, listening to my answers, and speaking with true enthusiasm about ways to customize the product. Now all I need is someone to install it. **PR**

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