

# Hammer, Saw, Paint Brush and Nerve

By ELEANOR BAUR

"ELAINE, what have you done to this house?" I asked as I removed my hat and gloves. We were standing in the transformed guest room, but the glimpses I had had as we passed showed that the transformation had extended to the other rooms as well. "Behold the miracle wrought by saw, hammer, paint brush, nerve—and a husband," laughed Elaine, and together we toured the made-over rooms. "Anyone could do it."

I wish I could picture to you the gloomy, old, two-story country home as I had seen it last—roomy, drab and uncomfortable. Elaine had a habit of buying things that she liked regardless of the effect they might create when placed in a room with other objects bought in the same way. The result was a heterogenous mass of furnishings, some lovely, some useful and some both, but usually with the quality of unity missing.

The guest room in which we were standing had been actually transformed with the use of the right colors. "They were so neutral that I thought any color would work with them," said Elaine. She had used an unusual old walnut bed with a carved head and two-poster footpieces, an old carved chest, chairs and a dressing table with a mirror. On the bed she had used a red, black and white coverlet, and on the floor two braided rugs in the same colors. Pictures had been chosen at random.

"I never cared for the room," said Elaine; "it always seemed to push me out instead of holding out its arms in welcome. When Sue came home from college I asked her what was wrong."

"You're afraid of color, mother," Sue had said. "All the color that you have in the room is movable. Gray and white and walnut are impossible. Let's start all over." The result was surprising.

"That was our paint-brush room—this is our hammer, saw and a husband room," I was informed as Elaine led me from the guest room into the boys' room.

Here the walls were creamy tan, the woodwork ivory. The floor was covered with a linoleum-waxed rug, blocked out in striking five-inch blocks of black and cream. There was a black wicker chair (a one time dilapidated attic chair that had been wired, glued and painted, and now was a homey addition to the room), with a striped gingham pillow of orange, black, cream and a soft blue-green. The furniture in the room had been painted to match the grayed blue-green stripe.

The bed had been an oak bed in mission style, with perpendicular slats at the head and foot. A line of orange and black accentuated the blue-green. The dresser, fortunately, had a plain

squared front, but the mirror was oval, so they discarded it and hung a plain rectangular mirror which they found in the attic. The chest and mirror were painted to match the bed. At the foot of the bed was a chest, a product of husband's hammer and saw. It was of just the right height to make a comfortable seat and was painted black with a blue-green lining and covered with the gay striped pillows. The chest was fitted with two compartments, a shallow tray in which the freshly ironed shirts were kept, and a lower compartment in which winter underwear and new supplies were stored. A pair of book shelves that fitted on either side of a window were adorned with a pair of ship models—one a viking, the other a skipper—more of Sue's handicraft.

"Tom even attempted the wardrobe," Elaine said proudly, showing her husband's handiwork. It was of the modern chifferobe type, with two plain paneled doors (salvaged from a discarded cupboard) and fitted back of the door. Elaine had painted it blue-green like the bed. There was a rod on either side for suits and a shelf at the top and bottom for hats and shoes. It was not only decorative, but useful as well.

The curtains were of cream casement cloth and were fastened to the windows by little spring rods to prevent their blowing in the wind.

There were so many things they had done with hammer, saw and a little nerve. There was the upstairs sewing room that had been Sue's. "She's never home," said Elaine, "so we decided to make the room useful." It was a large room with a western exposure and the loveliest view from the built-out windows that I've ever seen.

"We had a Chinese pattern rug as the only possible floor covering, so we picked the colors from the rug," she explained. The walls matched a faded yellow-green background figure, the woodwork a cream that was almost a tan. There was a full length old walnut mirror that did double duty as a dressing table or a fitting mirror, a chest and a spooled walnut daybed upholstered in a tiny sprigged Chinese blue. A space on either side of the large window had slender painted book racks painted on the outside to match the woodwork and tinted the faintest of Chinese reds on the inside. The crowning touch of color was the pair of old Chinese red vases—one for either side. There were chairs, another painted chest used as a window seat as well as storage for pieces, and cushions everywhere. In one corner was a console sewing machine. A telephone extension had been added, and Elaine said she did most of her "living" in this one room.

"We ran out of money when we came to the hall, though we spent less

than \$50 all together, and couldn't afford a new hall runner," said Elaine, her hand on the door. "Can you imagine what that old red and green rug would do to everything up here? Altho it was cheap, I've hated it since the first day I got it. Now, before we go out, tell me, do you remember what was on the stair and hall floor?" I confessed I did not. I remembered a pleasing neutral cream and tan blur from which doors opened into colorful, vivid rooms. The hall was a blank. "That's just what I wanted," laughed Elaine. She opened the door and once more we were in the hall. The rug had been reversed and the wrong side was a dull tan background with a very indefinite all-over darker pattern. In the dim lights of the hall the effect was surprisingly pleasant.

"We've done nothing downstairs yet," said Elaine, "but we're gathering material, information and funds preparatory to an attack this fall. You know, anyone can transform a house into a liveable home. Don't you think we've done wonders upstairs?"

I confessed that she had—not only for the upstairs, but for herself as well. She had developed from the mouse-gray, colorless little creature who was so afraid of color into a vivid creature who could throw splashes of color together and express her own individuality—a matter of far greater importance even than the evolution of her lovely upstairs rooms.

If you can't sing as you go along life's road, don't help the thunder to growl and drown the other fellow's singing. In other words, don't be a solemn shadow in the light of love and life.

"Remember that when you are in the right you can afford to keep your temper, and when you are in the wrong you can't afford to lose it."—Benjamin Franklin.

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