

*In the Same Boat with Mary Beth Weisenburger*

## THE HOME IMPROVEMENT COMPATIBILITY TEST

Here's a startling but true fact for you: Men and women are *different*. And sometimes, this can cause conflict!

I know this because I, a woman, have spent over twenty years being married to a man. We discovered our fundamental differences soon after we were married by undertaking various home improvement projects together. If you really want to find out if your marriage will survive, skip the sessions with highly-paid professionals. You and your potential partner should just grab some tools and spend two days tearing off old musty wallpaper in a half bathroom only slightly larger than a box of Velveeta Cheese, like my husband and I did as newlyweds. If you still like each other after 48 hours, and no one flung wallpaper paste at anyone else in the process, you're good to go.

The problem boils down to this: What one person in the marriage (namely the man) thinks is a simple and straightforward job usually requires much more discussion, analysis and general mulling over (according to the woman). For example, THIS is how my husband believes one should go about painting a kitchen (our most recent project):

1. Pick out paint
2. Buy Paint
3. Move stuff out of the kitchen
4. Paint
5. Move stuff back into the kitchen
6. Break out the cookies and milk and turn on The Golf Channel.

Ideally, all six of these steps should take place over the course of one day, so there will still be time left in the weekend to go golfing.

On the other hand (WAY on the other hand, possibly on the other FOOT), I, as the female in the partnership, decided the following very different steps had to be taken in order to accomplish the same task:

1. Watch hours and hours of home and garden television shows that depict everyone in the United States and half of Canada avidly re-painting, re-modeling and generally re-everything-ing their homes.
2. Become inspired and announce in an urgent tone of voice that it is necessary to re-paint the unacceptable eggshell-colored kitchen walls as soon as possible, despite anxious look on husband's face.
3. Ask girlfriends (who have also been watching hours and hours of home and garden shows) what colors they think are "in."
4. Tour girlfriends' homes to review their recent paint choices and do a lot of nodding and saying things like, "Oh, that gold hue REALLY warms up this room!" and "That ragging effect is STUNNING!" and other things you only say after watching hours and hours of home and garden shows.
5. Traipse to the paint store to spend two and a half hours perusing the millions of paint samples and then close eyes and randomly select three to take home for consideration.
6. Go home and tape the sample swatches to the kitchen wall and curse the fact that the swatches are the size of a postage stamp and I'm expected to radically change the room based on this

microscopic bit of information. Let the swatches dangle on the wall for several days out of pure spite.

7. Ask husband what color he likes. "Brown."
8. Call girlfriends and ask what color they like. "Macadamia."
9. Traipse back to the paint store and request a sample quart of paint in color girlfriends like.
10. Paint a four foot section of one wall with sample paint. Step back and gasp in horror.
11. Repeat steps 9 and 10. Three more times.
12. Stare at kitchen walls, which have turned into a psychedelic checkerboard of "Camelback," "Soba," and "Onionskin" colors, and consider doing something I'll regret with masking tape.
13. Buy masking tape.
14. Go back to paint store and *beg* nice lady to please just choose paint for me. "Mackintosh."
15. Buy many paint brushes so I don't have to actually clean any brushes during the painting process; and then buy some of those irresistibly cute pink and fuzzy miniature roller brush thingys.
16. Engage husband in the task of moving the stove and refrigerator out of the kitchen, which he must do without rolling his eyes in response to the purchase of cute fuzzy roller brush thingys.
17. Go to bed because it's 2:00 a.m. and I just now finished cleaning the gunk that was behind the stove and the refrigerator.
18. Move rest of stuff out of kitchen. Get into serious squabbles with husband over number of useless items on kitchen counters (like the canister set, which is purely decorative), who has to vacuum the 2 inch layer of dust on top of the cabinets, and why husband's opinion on color was even requested, if "Brown" was going to be summarily rejected anyway.
19. Threaten to use masking tape.
20. Hire painter.

As you see, once again we were able to calmly recognize our areas of conflict, come to a mature compromise (see step #20) and our marriage was saved, along with several rolls of masking tape. It may have taken three weeks of preparation, one actual day of painting and a month to put things back in place, but we are now the proud owners of a stunning, warmed-up kitchen and, *as a fabulous bonus*, we have added to our wealth of knowledge on gender differences.

Anyone need some cute pink and fuzzy roller brush thingys?