

Members Turn Plumbing Leak Into Remarkable Remodel

From a burst plumbing pipe to a dazzling new kitchen, see how these Club members turned an alarming water leak into a remarkable remodel.

After arriving home from work one day and finding water dripping through the ceiling into their downstairs den, Annette and Jane did what most HOC members would do: they called the Club and asked for a plumber to be sent as soon as possible. But once it was

determined that most of the kitchen cabinets and counters would have to be dismantled to properly fix the problem, they eventually decided to use the setback as inspiration for creating their dream kitchen.

Sure, they could have had the pipe patched and the resulting damage repaired. After all, the house is only 10 years old. But after inspecting more of the plumbing and finding additional areas of concern, Annette and Jane decided it would be best to replace all the pipes in the house – and upgrade it from plastic to copper.

The same was true for the kitchen. They could have had the affected cabinets and counters removed, then reinstalled once all the plumbing work was complete. But for construction-grade cabinetry and low-cost tile countertops, that hardly seemed worth the time, expense and disruption.

“When it turned out we were going to have the whole kitchen torn out, we thought, ‘well, we may as well get something we like in return,’” says Annette. “

The designer, a friend at the shop where they purchased the new cabinets, helped them redesign the space. A HOC-authorized contractor brought those plans to life.

One of the biggest design changes called for removing a half-wall that separated the kitchen and dining room. The idea of taking away the only visual barrier left between guests and the goings-on in the kitchen made Jane a bit nervous initially, she says. But today, that totally open layout is

one of the things they like best about the space.

Another dramatic change called for transforming a poorly designed pantry space into an efficient work area for most of the major appliances. Where once there were only a couple of bi-fold doors covering narrow shelves, there now sits a double-wide refrigerator and a double oven – separated by a pull-out pantry shelving unit that holds almost as much as the entire pantry space did before.



The new CaesarStone counters not only look like real stone, they require virtually no maintenance – a key attribute for these busy professionals. Oversized pendant lights hang over a freestanding island work surface, providing ample light, and an attractive visual focal point. The solid-wood cabinetry blends perfectly with the newly refinished floors. Pull-out drawers, shelves and garbage receptacles make it easy to gain access to all that storage space without having to squat. And an oversized, arched, commercial-style faucet over the sink makes doing the dishes almost as much fun as the cooking itself.

Jane and Annette both love to cook, especially for big groups of friends. So when it came to choosing the new appliances, they figured Wolf and some of the other high-end brands would be their best option. But after doing some

careful comparison shopping, they found that General Electric's top line of appliances offered everything they could possibly want for far less cost.

With the project now completed, Jane and Annette are quick to give much of the credit for its success to their HOC-authorized general contractor. They wanted a contractor who was not only qualified and experienced, but also willing to guide and help problem-solve. Thanks to the Club, that's exactly what they got.

For help finding a remodeling contractor that matches your expectations, call the Club staff today.

Don't Wait Until Winter To Fix Your Leaky Basement

Members who had water in their basements last winter should address the causes now – saving both time and money by scheduling the work before the rainy season.

Summer is one of the best times of year to tackle a leaky basement problem. The work is easier when the soil surrounding the foundation is dry, and the contractors who specialize in water proofing are far less busy this time of year.

The bottom line: It'll probably take less time to fix the problem, and you may be able to save hundreds of dollars on the final bill.

The two signs of trouble

If water is entering your basement through the floor – either where the floor meets the wall or through cracks in the floor – that's a strong indication that the problem is a plugged footing drain.

The footing drain (also called a drain tile) is a drainage system that encircles your entire house. It gathers ground-water before it can build up against the foundation, then carries it off to either a sump pump or the city storm water sewer. When this footer drain becomes clogged, the groundwater backs up under the house and starts pushing through cracks in the basement floor.

If your floor is fine and the water is entering your basement through cracks in the foundation wall, that poses a more serious problem. Typically, this means so much water is pushing against the outside of the foundation that it's being forced through cracks in the wall before it can trickle down to the footing drain below.

Fixing a footing drain

If the footing drain is clogged, you could hire a contractor to repair or replace it. However, a far less expensive option is to abandon the failed section and reroute the groundwater that gathers inside to an internal drain system.

After determining where the footing drain has failed, a section of the basement floor is removed, a trench is dug and a new internal drainage system is installed. This system ties into a sump pump or sewer connection that removes the water from the area. After the trenching and drainage work is completed, the basement floor is restored to its original level with new cement.

Fixing a leaky wall

If the wall of your foundation is leaking, the only real

solution is to waterproof the exterior of it – which means the soil and any plants against that portion of the foundation will have to be dug up to expose the exterior of the wall, then moved back into place once the work is complete.

Take note: Applying waterproof sealers to the interior walls of the foundation may help alleviate some dampness, but this will not keep water from getting in. Stopping the water *before* it enters the foundation is key.

Address the source of the water, as well

In addition to the solutions outlined above, it's imperative that the source of the water be located and addressed, as well. Your HOC-authorized contractor can also help with these issues.

All downspouts should be clear of any debris, in good repair and extended at least five feet beyond your home's footprint. Downspouts that dump water near the leaky portion of the basement should be redirected to an entirely dif-

ferent part of the yard, if possible.

Pay special attention to maintaining driveway and stairwell drains, which tend to get lots of water during the rainy season and are easily clogged.

Also, the surrounding landscape should slope away from your house. Look for any opportunity to regrade the soil so that rainwater flows somewhere other than towards your house.

Any roof gutters that are overflowing or otherwise not performing should be repaired or replaced.

Depending on your particular situation, these less-costly solutions may provide real relief from your water problem. If your basement is unfinished, and you don't mind a little moisture during the rainy season, these fixes may be as far as you need to go. But if your basement is finished, or if you're concerned about build-ups of mold or mildew, you'll want to remedy the underlying problem (fix the footing drain or waterproof the exterior of the foundation wall).

Don't wait until winter

Thankfully, there's a solution to just about any leaky basement problem. Waiting for it to solve itself, however, is not something we recommend. The signs of water-damage may disappear during the dry summer months, but the water will return once it starts raining again.

Rather than wait for the water to reappear this winter – and crossing your fingers that it doesn't do any more damage – call the Club and ask for a HOC-authorized waterproofing contractor to evaluate your problem area(s) and offer some suggestions.



Off-season Heating Fixes Save Members Big Money

If you're interested in saving money on next year's heating bill, now is the time to take action. In the off-season, many of the materials cost less, and HOC-authorized contractors have greater availability. Learn some of the fixes likely to impact your heating bill the most.

Newspapers and magazines were brimming with energy-saving tips this winter. Problem is, many of those recommendations won't save you much money. Keeping your curtains open on hot days, and insulating your light switch covers are swell ideas, but the impact on your heating bill next December probably won't be noticeable.

If you're interested in saving some serious money on your energy bills, have a look at the recommendations below. Each could save you hundreds of dollars every year.

Repair heating ductwork (savings potential: 60%)

Closing the heat registers in unused rooms is a good energy conservation idea. But do you realize how much heat you could be losing through the ductwork?

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, homes with forced-air heating systems can lose as much as 60 percent of their heat through un-insulated, damaged or loose ductwork. That means more than half of your heat could be lost before it even reaches the register!

Many homeowners mistakenly use duct tape to try and repair their heating ductwork. While extremely sticky and aptly named, this silvery tape fails quickly and is no longer recommended. The Department of Energy now recommends that only "qualified professionals using the most appropriate materials" perform duct insulation and repair work.

Add insulation (savings potential: 25%)

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, only 20 percent of homes built before 1980 are properly insulated. Does your house fit into that category? If so, you could be eligible for a big savings. The Southern California Energy Company estimates you could save up to 25% on your heating costs by adding insulation to your attic and walls (or upgrading what's there now).

Replace windows (savings potential: 25%)

Ensuring a tight fit around your windows is a good thing. However, the real problem for most homes is the glass itself. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, almost half of all homes in the U.S. feature windows with single-pane glass. And for those homes, a whopping 10 to 25 percent of all heat is lost straight through the glass.

Yes, replacing all your old windows with insulated, double-pane versions is an expensive proposition. But there's little that will impact your energy savings more. Plus, these new window designs are easy to keep clean and much better at blocking out neighborhood noise.

If money's tight, consider replacing just some of your windows now and waiting until later to replace the rest. Focus your efforts on the rooms you use most often.

Replace furnace (savings potential: 15%)

Is your gas furnace worth keeping another winter? Only a HOC-authorized contractor can tell you for sure. But generally, if it's more than 10 years old, or if repairs will cost more than half of what buying and installing a new one would, you're better off replacing it.

Energy Star qualified oil and gas furnaces have annual fuel utilization efficiency (AFUE) ratings of between 83 and 90 percent, or higher, making them up to 15 percent more efficient than standard models.

Programmable thermostat (savings potential: 15%)

If you're not someone who takes the time to turn the thermostat down when you go to bed or leave the house, installing a programmable thermostat can save you another 10 to 15 percent on your annual heating bill. You simply program the thermostat to switch off at night (or when no one is home during the day) and turn on again just before people awaken or start returning home.

Service heating system (savings potential: 10%)

Annual tune-ups on your heat pump, oil or gas furnace can cut six to ten percent off the cost of your heating bill. It's a small savings, but with the cost of all heating fuels expected to rise again next winter, the sooner you have your furnace tuned-up, the greater your chances of off-setting those increases.

A golden opportunity

Spring is finally here, and it's getting sunny and warm again. But you'll kick yourself next December if you don't use this opportunity to invest in some of the energy conservation measures mentioned above. Once the cold weather and high winds come roaring back into town next fall, heating contractors will be busy again, your options may be more limited, and there's a chance the cost of materials may spike to keep up with the demand.

HOC-authorized contractors are happy to spend time educating you about your options at this time of year. Just call the Club to arrange a meeting.



Why Contractor Costs Are Rising

Just a few years ago, the cost for a plumber to unclog a drain used to average somewhere between \$55 and \$65. Now it's typically closer to \$170.

You won't find service providers making the trip to your home for free anymore, either. "Show-up" charges are now the norm.

The three driving forces behind these changes are rising fuel and material costs, increases in workers' wages, and our ever-worsening traffic situation.

We've all experienced some pocketbook pain at the gas pump lately. For service providers, however, the rising gas prices are especially hurtful. Traveling in heavily laden trucks through stop-and-go traffic morning, noon and night requires regular fill-ups.

To palette the higher fuel costs – as well as dramatic increases in the prices for supplies, rent and other overhead expenses – contractors are having to increase their rates.

Labor is one area where you might think costs are shrinking in this soft economy. But it's just not true. The demand for skilled labor in the Puget Sound area is still very strong, which means firms have to continue paying competitive wages to attract and retain the best workers.

To help offset these cost increases, consider having work done during the contractor's slow season.

Summer Checklist

- Spray plants and trees.
- Weed garden and add mulch to flower beds.
- Treat lawn with fertilizer.
- Clean and inspect all gutters.
- Inspect and repair window and door screens.
- Service heat pump.
- Clean burners in oil furnace.
- Make fence and gate repairs.
- Inspect and repair chimneys.
- Refinish hardwood floors.
- Inspect and repair patios, pathways and sidewalks.
- Paint weathered exterior areas.
- Repair or replace roof if shingles badly worn.