

# The Record Home

MARCH 5, 2011

## TRANSACTIONS



Find out how much this house in Lodi recently sold for. See Real Estate Transactions, pages 13-14.

## APARTMENT SHOWCASE

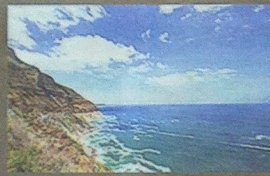


Dater Park Apartments in Hawthorne is one of several rental properties listed inside. See Apartment Showcase, page 11.

## THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

Audio/visual in the bathroom

PAGE 6



inside



**THE OLDER HOME**  
Contractors recall their most challenging projects.  
**4**



**SMART SHOPPER**  
Today's blenders are 'smooth' operators.  
**9**

- Seasonal **2**
- Ask the Builder **3**
- Calendar of Home Events **7**
- Control home odors **8**

# Contractors' most challenging projects

Unless it has been totally renovated — and much of its character sacrificed in the process — an older home is usually something of a fixer-upper. Homeowners and contractors expect this when they tackle repairs. Sometimes, though, they face special challenges.



THE OLDER Home

## Historic Rescues

Bud Schwartz, a businessman now in his 70s, has restored a succession of "antique" homes over the decades. His most labor-intensive project was a 1710 house in Franklin Lakes.

"I did everything there but the plumbing and electrical," he said. "I camped out for about four years. The first winter, I lived in a barn on the property and slept in my station wagon."

Most of the work, he admitted, involved bringing the house back to the way it had looked 300 years ago.

"It had beamed ceilings, but someone had put a plaster ceiling underneath," he recalled. "I had to pull down the plaster and clean the beams. I also had to make kitchen cabinets — at that time, you couldn't buy nice (period) ones."

In putting a couple of additions to the house, Schwartz took similar pains. For example, he spent six months seeking out 24-inch lumber to match the existing wainscoting.

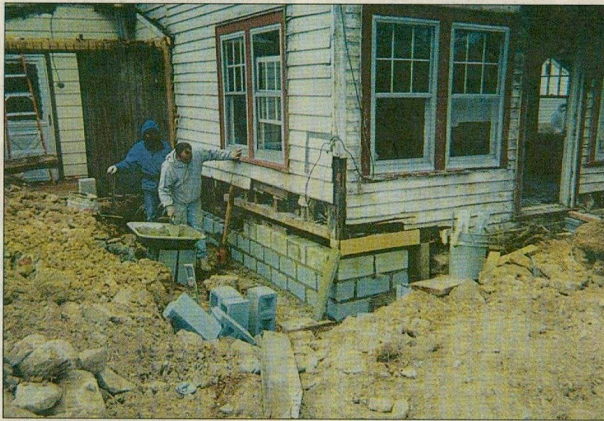
"I went to half-a-dozen lumber yards and asked them to call me when they found something," he said. He also reclaimed wood from demolished barns and chicken coops to match the original 16-inch floorboards.

A few years back, Schwartz also rescued the 1692 Ackerman-Naugle House in Ridgewood, after he read in *The Record*



PHOTO COURTESY OF VAN-GO CONTRACTING

Above, workers from Van-Go Contracting, Inc., dig a trench around the exterior of a 170-year-old farmhouse, which has been supported entirely by crumbling stone pillars. A main-level door hangs suspended above them. Below, the house is jacked up on temporary supports as the crew cements blocks into place to create a new, solid foundation.



## LOOK OUT BELOW!

Peter Georgoutsos of Van-Go Contracting, Inc., warns homeowners to watch out for these signs of failing joists or a crumbling foundation:

- Crowning floor — higher in the middle than along the perimeter
- Sagging floor — lower in the middle
- Floors noticeably lower on one side
- Baseboard gaps of 1 inch or more
- Serious gaps at tops of windows and doors
- Door and window trim not parallel to the jams
- Old plumbing pipes run through structural beams
- Lally columns (round steel vertical supports) in the middle of a basement — someone did a temporary fix.

that it faced possible demolition. That house, he says, already was in good shape and needed only minor updating.

Schwartz recently listed the historic house for sale with Terrie O'Connor Realtors, Saddle River. Meanwhile, his two grown sons are living there.

## Vanishing Walls

One Victorian home stands out in the memory of Tom Segrich Jr. of GTFM, LLC, Hackensack (gtfmbuild.com).

"Over the years, the plaster of the inside walls had continued to dry and took itself off the lathes," he said. "Finally, the only thing holding up the walls was the wallpaper!"

When this happens, he explained, "You have to gut the whole thing — and be careful, because the ceiling can fall right down. It requires a little more skill than just a regular demolition."

Once in a while, happily, something that looks like a potential crisis turns out to be a non-issue.

"We did a historic home from around 1800 in Stony Point (N.Y.)," Segrich says. See next page



PHOTO COURTESY OF VAN-GO CONTRACTING

Temporary beams support the framework of the old farmhouse as workers from Van-Go Contracting, Inc., construct the new foundation and basement walls.

#### From previous page

recalled. "When we took off the corner to put on an addition, there were axe-hewn timbers, dovetailed and pegged with wood. We had to ask an architect what to do, because we were afraid to compromise the integrity of the structure."

Luckily, the town building department concluded the house was very well built and gave GTFM the go-ahead.

"Today, because there's so much more regulation, it's more important to bring in professionals when you run into something unusual," Segrich said.

He did not take that approach, however, with the ghost rumored to inhabit the Stony Point house. "We heard it walking around upstairs," he said, with a laugh.

#### No Underpinnings

Nonexistent and crumbling foundations have provided much work over the years for Peter Georgoutsos of Van-Go General Contracting, Inc., Englewood Cliffs (van-go.gc.com).

One of his most memorable projects was a 170-year-old farmhouse.

"They were getting water in the basement, so they wanted to get rid of the old dirt floor and put in a French drain with sump pumps," he explained.

Unfortunately, the home's only support came from the original stone pillars, which were crumbling.

"If we have to rebuild (the foundation), we put up temporary shoring, with oversized beams and temporary walls, to support the framing above," Georgoutsos said. "You work from both inside and outside. You remove the stone gingerly until you get down to more stable earth, then pour a concrete footing."

He's seen other disasters waiting to happen when plumbers have cut through structural joints to run waste or supply lines.

"We'll see cast-iron pipes coming in at an angle, completely undermining the integrity of the beams they're going through," he said. "The entire house will start listing in the middle. We'll start work and realize this house is ready to implode."

Georgoutsos said the fix can involve straightening the house completely or just stabilizing it to the point where it's safe and livable.

"We've raised up a house using hydraulic screw jacks to straighten the framing, but then you'll get cracking of plaster walls and sometimes also tile walls or floors," he said. That kind of major structural work can cost a homeowner \$100,000-\$150,000.

"Most of the time, though, our goal is to stop the settling," he said. "If it's just two posts and a reinforced beam, in an unfinished basement, it would be \$10,000-\$15,000. (The house) may still be off by a few inches, but most people can live with some incongruity."

Which route to take, he added, might depend on a key question: "Has the house settled to the point where it's not going to settle anymore?"

"You can't stick your head in the sand," Georgoutsos advised. "If you have a problem, address it."

On the other hand, he said, it's unlikely that even a house with this kind of problem will collapse immediately, so the homeowners probably have time to figure out their strategy and finances — "You can save up and plan to address it in the future."