

recycled house, this is it'

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When Robert and Belinda Sero tell you they've built their home from scratch, believe it.

"If ever there was a recycled house, this is it," Mrs. Sero said in an interview, as she and her husband described how they came to be homeowners.

The two have bought or torn down old buildings that nobody else wanted, scrounged garage and store sales, and driven a hard bargain with whoever would listen as they literally pieced together their home.

The house, situated on Sour Springs Road just inside the boundaries of the Six Nations Reserve, sits on a parcel of 50 acres of farmland owned by Mr. Sero's father, Norman.

It's not much to look at just yet, but the Seros are confident that when the remaining structural work is completed, and the house is fully furnished and decorated to their liking, they will have a comfortable, good-sized home for about one-third of the cost of building a brand new house of similar size and style.

Over the past couple of years, the Seros estimate they've spent about \$45,000 "building" their home. They expect it'll cost a further \$5,000 to \$7,000 to finish it off, and their insurance agent has indicated they'll have to insure it for about \$150,000 — the price they'd have to pay to replace it with a new home.

Adverse conditions

It's been a long, slow process, and the Seros have been forced to live under some pretty adverse conditions. But they're proud of their accomplishments and they hope others might be able to learn a thing or two from their experience.

Mrs. Sero explained that the couple lived in an apartment, but when they were given notice to vacate they decided they wanted to build a home.

"We didn't have much money to work with. . . so we had to improvise," said Mr. Sero, who works at a foundry in Brantford.

They started by buying a tiny house on Charing Cross Street for a mere \$2,500. They then spent \$4,000 to have the five-room, all-wood house transported to the lot on the reserve owned by the elder Mr. Sero.

That was in May of 1988, and for the next six weeks, the couple lived in the house which was

propped up on railroad ties, without benefit of hydro or running water.

Once the foundation was poured, the house was moved over and months of hard work followed.

Since the couple had decided they wanted a larger home than the one they had bought, the foundation actually measured 30 feet by 50 feet, whereas the house was only 20 feet by 30 feet.

In keeping with their intention to save money and make use of items no one else wanted, they built an addition along one side and across the back of the existing home using wood and even the nails from another abandoned house in Brantford. And this time they didn't even have to pay for the house.

"They told us we could have it as long as we were willing to tear it down ourselves," Mrs. Sero said, describing the 85-year-old, brick, two-storey house that was located beside the Harvey C. Smith Drug Store.

Accepted the deal

The Seros gladly accepted the deal and began dismantling the house.

From it they got most of the wood that was used in constructing the addition. They also salvaged a set of French doors and took up the hardwood floors board by board, which they intend to incorporate into their new home.

"We even sold the bricks from the house and made \$1,200," noted Mrs. Sero.

Other steps they've taken to build their home at rock-bottom cost include:

□ Buying drywall from a trailer manufacturer at a fraction of the cost of regular drywall. The pieces are smaller than sheets of standard drywall, meaning extra work to put it together, but that didn't concern the Seros.

□ Purchasing lighting and bathroom fixtures for less than 50 per cent of retail cost, by scrounging store sales.

□ Buying 22 panes of glass at a garage sale for only \$10. New, the glass would have cost about \$1,100. The Seros plan to use the glass in a large bay window across the front of the house.

□ Hiring a backhoe over the Christmas holidays at half-price.

□ Installing — temporarily — carpeting that was being ripped out of another house and was

destined for the garbage before the Seros laid claim to it.

"Whatever we could do cheaply, or to save money, or to find an angle, we did," said Mrs. Sero with a chuckle. "There's not very much new in this house. Even the nails are used. We pulled them out of the boards from the house we tore down, straightened them and used them again."

Of course another big saving is that they didn't need to hire a contractor or tradespeople.

Most of the construction work has been done by Mr. Sero's father, who is a carpenter. Remarkably, the elder Mr. Sero has done all this work at the ripe old age of 78.

And he's had help. In addition to the work done by his son on weeknights and weekends, Mr. Sero's friend, Lloyd Birdsell, who is 74, has also helped out immensely.

Throughout the construction, the Seros, who each have children from previous marriages but none of whom lives with them, have had to live in cramped, often dirty and somewhat uncomfortable conditions.

Moved around

They first lived in the front part of the house as the addition was constructed; now they're squeezed into a few small rooms at the back of the house while they work on the front.

"I think the hardest thing for me has been that I'm a really fussy person and I like to be clean and neat all the time," said Mrs. Sero. "So I was not a happy person when we started this."

"But you get used to it. Now it doesn't even bother me to be caked in dirt or mud at times."

The Seros haven't set themselves a target date for completing the house. "It depends on money," said Mr. Sero.

In addition to finishing the house, which will encompass 1,500 square feet of living space all on one level, the Seros are planning to build a garage and a barn — both with lumber, nails, etc. salvaged from other old buildings they've torn down.

Obtaining used materials to build a home hasn't been that difficult, said Mr. Sero.

"A lot of people are tearing down buildings and just throwing stuff out," he said. "A lot of that stuff can be reused. You just have to use your head and figure out how to do something with it."