

June 30, 2005

HOME ECONOMICS  
By KARA SWISHER



## Homespun Expertise on the Web

Blogs Offer Advice, Ideas  
On Household Projects;  
Drawers in the Stairs  
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It used to be that whenever you wanted to learn anything about home renovations or repairs you had to haul home giant encyclopedia-size books that were so hefty that you probably could use them to reinforce your foundation.

Thankfully the digital revolution has given homeowners an increasing range of resources. While most used to offer top-down advice, a plethora of excellent, easy-to-find material can be found among the increasing number of Web logs, or blogs, focused on home issues. These days, I find myself turning to blogs more and more for relevant and useful advice, especially since my family has decided to do another major renovation of our Victorian home in San Francisco.

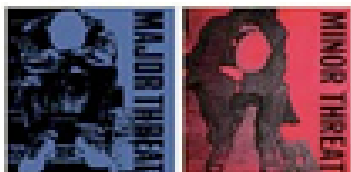
### Drawers in the stairs! Jason Jun 27

Remember I stumbled on this great little book called *Small-Space Storage Solutions for Cluttered Living*. It's chock full of really creative solutions for small spaces. It's mind opening in many directions, however, one thing really blew me away:



### Nike's major lift Matt Jun 27

There's a glaring similarity between the poster for Nike's "Major Threat" (see Cover Four (page 16)) and a 1998 album cover from (Stewart's) *Major Threat*.



Blogs often yield amazing ideas that home magazines never seem to have,

There is a lot of good information to be found among blogs -- from the idea of putting drawers into the risers of stairs, to how to best paint an old radiator. I recently found an excellent listing of decent places nationwide to shop for architectural salvage.

But, as with a lot of stuff on the Web, finding what you need from blogs takes some work. This is due, in part, to the nature of blogs, which are online diaries typically written by a single passionate person on almost any topic and often provide comment from readers and links to other blogs and Web sites. They have become one of the fast-growing forms of online communication recently, with the numbers in the U.S. surpassing 10 million, according to companies tracking them. Like other categories, the number

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### ABOUT KARA SWISHER

Kara Swisher's obsession with home renovation began after reading "Martha Stewart's New Old House: Restoration, Renovation, Decoration, Landscaping." The classic over-the-top tome on a demented remodel of an ancient farmhouse by Ms. Stewart, who remains the patron saint of renovation, inspired Kara's own renovation of her 19th century Victorian home in San Francisco in 1999. The project came soon after she fell in love with an antique glass doorknob at a real-estate open house. Deep interest in antiques

such as putting drawers in your stair risers.

From like other categories, the number and quality of house blogs is growing.

house. Deep interest in stainless steel appliances, concrete countertops and paint samples soon followed.

My own search has focused on those aimed at older houses or interesting design notions, but you can use blog-searching tools like Feedster ([www.feedster.com](http://www.feedster.com)<sup>1</sup>) and Technorati ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)<sup>2</sup>) to find blogs on a variety of home maintenance and renovation issues. The great thing about blogs is that you can ride the links within each -- a key element of the medium -- endlessly to find out what you like. To get started, consider a few blogs where I like to hang out, where the writing is crisp, the intelligence apparent and the advice a godsend:

House in Progress ([www.houseinprogress.net](http://www.houseinprogress.net)<sup>3</sup>) is perhaps my favorite blog these days for the sheer dedication its creators, Jeanne and Aaron, have in chronicling the obsessive renovation of a 1914 Craftsman-style bungalow in the Chicago area. Follow their project tracker (the laundry chute is 65% done!), and their musings on back-porch columns. Especially helpful are mini-reviews of products and links to interesting ideas, as well as an extensive roll of other blogs.

In her spare time, Kara is a technology writer in The Wall Street Journal's San Francisco bureau. She also is author of two books on the rise and fall of America Online. The first, "aol.com: How Steve Case Beat Bill Gates, Nailed the Netheads and Made Millions in the War for the Web," published in July 1998. The sequel, "There Must Be a Pony in Here Somewhere: The AOL Time Warner Debacle and the Quest for a Digital Future," was released in 2003.

In addition, Kara and Wall Street Journal "Personal Technology" columnist Walter Mossberg are the producers of a major annual Dow Jones conference on the digital future called D: All Things Digital. Kara can be reached at [homeeconomics@wsj.com](mailto:homeeconomics@wsj.com)<sup>17</sup>.

Jeanne and Aaron have also started Houseblogs.net ([www.houseblogs.net](http://www.houseblogs.net)<sup>4</sup>), an online gathering place where do-it-yourselfers write real-time diaries about their money pits. There are more than 70 blogs nationwide to consider, many of them I enjoy following.



You think your renovation is tough? Try fixing the mistakes of your ancestors from the 1700s.

I particularly like one on a renovation of a Victorian in Richmond, Va. Postings have covered issues such as tin roofs and painting ceilings. I continue to covet the lovely wide porch ([www.lestercat.net/house\\_03](http://www.lestercat.net/house_03)<sup>5</sup>). I also adore a blog from Lancaster, Va., a graphically stunning site on the slow restoration of an historic home called Enon Hall ([www.enonhall.com](http://www.enonhall.com)<sup>6</sup>), owned by one family from 1762 to 1939 and now back in its hands. The before photo gallery alone is worth a look.

Not all blogs are about singular labors of love. I always enjoy Hewn and Hammered ([www.hewnandhammered.com](http://www.hewnandhammered.com)<sup>7</sup>), which focuses on Prairie, Craftsman and Mission home styles. It has useful references to products, as well as great pictures of all sorts of items and links to several interesting related sites.

Another similar effort is Signal vs. Noise ([www.37signals.com/svn](http://www.37signals.com/svn)<sup>8</sup>), which is a group effort with several contributors from all over the U.S. and even Denmark. While the site creators are trying to sell several useful pieces of project management and information software, the site has a wide range of interests in the design area from that great info about those understair drawers to license plate and taxi design.

Of the more traditionally designed Web sites, which mostly publish articles and post info with less interactivity than blogs, is one linked to the television behemoth, "This Old House" ([www.thisoldhouse.com](http://www.thisoldhouse.com)<sup>9</sup>). The site continues to be a terrific free repository of homeowner know-how,

with videos, calculators and other tools. Another site called The Old House Web ([www.oldhouseweb.com](http://www.oldhouseweb.com)<sup>10</sup>) is a wonderful online resource dedicated to telling stories of old-house enthusiasts with great how-tos and reference listings.

And CNET, the giant tech Web site, just launched a site called Digital Home DIY (<http://digitalhome.cnet.com><sup>11</sup>) to help you figure out how to deal with adding gadgetry to the home. The site sorts projects by room and is easy to navigate. While it is still thin on content (lots about living rooms but little on other rooms), it still is likely to be helpful over time on topics such as how to network digital video recorders. Community forums, links to prices and reviews and local reference guides also are a nice touch.

Write to Kara Swisher at [kara.swisher@wsj.com](mailto:kara.swisher@wsj.com)<sup>12</sup>

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