

To DIY or Not to DIY

When you need more than YouTube to get the job done *By Sarah Lockwood*



one was hurt. It must have happened while we were gone. It crashed into the glass coffee table; it was a mess. I cleaned it up the best I could.”

My initial relief turns to embarrassment as I walk into the sunroom and look up at the wires hanging from a hole. Someone could have been hurt. Apparently, the existing light mount I’d used wasn’t attached to a rafter like the one in my bedroom. The fan had been hanging from beadboard, with nothing solid to anchor it. It was just a matter of time before it came down.

Fortunately, I had my coffee table’s twin in the attic, and I could replace the glass piece for the fan. But my pride was still cracked. Wondering how to get back on the (saw)horse, I consult the local DIY experts at Young House Love (younghouselove.com). (Cue nervous fan-girl giggles.)

Young House Love’s Sherry Petersik suggests a complete pivot. For example, she says, if your DIY fail is ceiling-fan-and-electrical-related, try an easy bathroom makeover, with paint and a new shower curtain. “Then you build your confidence and momentum again,” she says. “Enough of those little wins, and you’re right back to where you were before the disaster.”

So where is the line between doing it yourself and calling an expert?

“I think the line is always moving, depending on how much experience you’ve amassed,” Petersik says, citing YouTube, family (thanks, Dad) and friends as good resources to learn more about a project and gauge your comfort level.

Do your research, ask for help and be prepared to call an expert if you get in over your head.

“Your ceiling fan falling is terrible, but it didn’t burn your house down,” Petersik reassures me. “We always say, don’t DIY it — unless you have serious experience — with major electrical, major plumbing and major structural. If it can flood your house, if it can burn down your house or make your house collapse, go with the expert.”

Maybe I’ll call in reinforcements before taking a sledgehammer to that kitchen wall I’ve dreamt of demolishing. At least I’ve got my confidence back.

IN MY FIRST THREE YEARS of home ownership, I’ve learned a lot of new skills. Together, my dad and I have completed more projects than I can count: replacing outlets, laying flooring, installing a backsplash (with additional grouting help from Mom) and installing custom cabinetry in my kitchen (OK, that was all him).

And while I still ask for his help with many projects, I have gained the trust-your-power-tools-and-YouTube-it confidence to complete other tasks on my own.

Even so, there are times I’ve gone too far. A ceiling fan was the finishing touch on a complete overhaul of my sunroom, and I didn’t want to wait until Dad’s next available day for help. So I carefully read the instruction manual and got to work. After a full afternoon assembling and installing the ceiling fan I had purchased online, I put my feet up in my newly breezy sunroom and fired off an exultant text to my dad.

Flash-forward a few weeks: I arrive home from work, and my boyfriend meets me in the driveway, blocking my entrance to the back of the house.

“Before you go inside, I need to tell you something,” he says.

My stomach flips, and I clench my jaw, ready to hear the worst.

“The ceiling fan fell,” he blurts. “No



↑ The scene of the DIY disaster, reconstructed



ABOUT THE AUTHOR Sarah Lockwood, Richmond magazine’s multimedia art director, also enjoys writing and reporting. At any given time, residue of either chocolate, dog slobber or hot glue can be found on her person.