

buying a house

After 35 years, I now rest my head in a bed in a house that we own — well, we have about 29 years and 11 months until we own it, but you know what I mean.

On June 13 we went to a non-descript office park in Leawood, Kan., signed and initialed an endless sheaf of official-looking documents, and then, miraculously they handed us the keys. Unfortunately, there are nearly as many different keys to the house as there were documents to ink. Obviously, there needs to be a talented locksmith in my future.

I also envision a chimney guy, a plumber, an electrician, a tile wizard, a new lawnmower for a sprawling yard and more trips to the hardware store than I will care to count. The costs add up, but now I feel as if I am putting all that money into an extremely long-term savings account that helps my family.

That's the thought that kept me going as I stripped two layers of wallpaper from my baby Quinn's room, the bottom layer apparently stuck up with crazy, super-duper adhesive when the house was built in the late 1950s. That's the thought that kept me going as I repeatedly drilled my hand with a hammer, trying to pry up tackboard from an ugly carpet that covered gorgeous hardwoods. And that's the thought that will make clean the gutters in the fall

IT'S ONE OF LIFE'S GREAT POSSESSIONS, SO SAYS THE WRITING ON THE AVOCADO-COLORED WALLPAPER

BY MARK LUCE

and keep the garage in order, sort of.

Of course, the ideas and plans — a Zen garden, an extra bedroom in the basement, shelving throughout the garage and a hideaway fortress of solitude/office way back in the utility room — will always outstrip the budget, but it's that idea of working toward something bigger than the day to day that brings such satisfaction to all the efforts.

If you have never bought a home before, my advice is simple. First, do your research on real-estate agents and neighborhoods and lenders. Look at as many houses as you can, which will quickly let you know what you don't want. Don't be afraid to be firm with any party that you deal with, for it's you who is paying the money and acquiring the property, not anyone else. And lastly, try to look past the decorating schemes of the current owner to see what you could make it.

Many had already been scared off by



wallpaper I called "Acid Grandma," our avocado kitchen and not knowing what the hardwoods looked like under that carpet. Luckily, Jennifer and I saw a well-built, very large home with a big yard in a nice neighborhood just two miles from my job (not 40, as before). Yes, the whole house needs work and updating from its Grandma décor, but now, dear friends, it is ours and when I feel the weight of opening a real front door, I can't help but smile.

Be prepared, though, for the flip side of "This is mine." On our first day in the house, the air conditioner shot craps at about 5 p.m. on a scorching day. It got fixed (a fuse), and strangely, there was a part of me that was nearly downright happy to pay Donny, the AC tech who came out on a Sunday. Our air conditioner now works and cools our house. Finally, we are home.

Mark Luce now lives in Kansas City with his wife Jennifer and their two children, Miles and Quinn. His next project is to get the wallpaper out of the kids' bathroom. He will finish sometime in 2007.

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