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A Richmond couple turn their DIY blog into a full-time job

By Terri Sapienza, Wednesday,
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To the decorating-obsessed among us, John and Sherry Petersik have a gig we dream about: They fix up their home, blog about it and get paid.

In the past weeks, they furnished and accessorized an empty guest room and adjoining bathroom, painted wooden ceiling beams in their living room, scored a pair of \$35 vintage chairs for their home office, fashioned a bedside table using a thrift store luggage rack, replaced a ceiling fan in their master bedroom with a paper pendant lamp and de-cluttered their carport.

As the writers of [Young House Love](#), an addictive home-improvement blog (www.younghouselove.com), the Petersiks chronicle the do-it-yourself decorating “adventures (and misadventures)” in their Richmond home. They’re not trained carpenters or interior designers. It’s the story they tell about their renovations that has made them successful.

Advertising on the 3¹/₂-year-old blog, and other editorial work, now generates enough income to support the entire Petersik family, which includes 10-month-old Clara and a feisty Chihuahua named Burger.

Since the start of Young House Love, John, 29, and Sherry, 28, have renovated their first home inside and out. Now they’re on to house No. 2 and are starting again, blogging about every wall they paint, nail they hammer and deal they find.

“We’re keeping a diary and sharing our life,” says Sherry. “It’s rewarding to get support for that. And it’s rewarding to know our little old diary is encouraging others to make their homes something they’re proud of, too.”

Their “little old diary” gets more than 3.5 million page views per month. Each post routinely garners about 250 reader comments (the highest, in response to a [Z Gallerie](#) gift card giveaway, was 11,691). At a recent count, the blog had more than 20,000 followers on [Facebook](#) and nearly 10,000 on [Twitter](#).

The blog's popularity has led the Petersiks to a book deal. They recently signed with Artisan/Workman to write a home-related book that is supposed to hit shelves in 2012.

Like many homeowners, the Petersiks are learning as they go. So what makes the masses clamor for their input and advice?

"First of all, they're adorable," says talk show host and designer [Nate Berkus](#). In the fall, the Petersiks appeared on "The Nate Berkus Show" as DIY experts and judges for a design challenge.

"Their delivery is particularly charming and endearing, and their information is delivered in a smart way," Berkus says.

"... I think Young House Love could easily transition into a TV program."

How they started

John and Sherry met in New York after college while working at the same advertising agency. But the more affordable lifestyle and the fact that John had grown up in Fairfax County, among other reasons, led them to Richmond. They bought a 1,300-square-foot brick ranch that was "really inexpensive, really small and in terrible shape," says Sherry, and got married.

Despite having zero home-improvement experience, they decided to renovate their kitchen. John suggested they blog about it. "I thought the kitchen would be a stressful project and a blog would help blow off steam," he says.

When they won the grand prize (\$5,000) for the "best home-improvement blog" in a contest only months after publishing their first post, they knew they were on to something.

A large part of the blog's appeal is that the Petersiks are so darn likable. They're the kind of people you meet and instantly want to invite to your next dinner party.

How they work

Young House Love is part personal diary and part resource for affordable furnishings, home-related tips, tutorials and easy DIY projects. From [buying a mattress](#) to [building a bathroom vanity](#), blog readers get a step-by-step account with pictures and a breakdown of every penny spent.

The Petersiks rarely set a budget when embarking on a project, abiding by their own frugal mantra: "as inexpensive as possible."

In their [previous home](#), for example, they gutted and renovated a bathroom, adding marble floors and floor-to-ceiling subway tile. With John doing most of the work himself, they spent about \$1,800. The average midrange bathroom renovation costs \$16,634, according to Remodeling magazine's 2010-11 [Cost vs. Value Report](#).

"We're save-aholics," says Sherry. "Spending a lot, even if we could, feels like a failure, a waste. If we were millionaires we'd probably do the same things and make the same material choices. We sold our last house on our own; that's the ultimate DIY."

How they live

One of the Petersiks is working on the blog at all times from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays. The other is on Clara duty because the couple doesn't have additional child care. They work weekends and vacations.

Decorating and DIYing is "the easy, fun part," says Sherry. "And probably only about 25 percent of the whole job."

"People think it's easy," says John, "that blogging is just throwing some thoughts together for a post and going about your day. But they forget the time it takes to do a project, photograph the project, edit and adjust the photos, write the posts, edit and double-check the information."

John and Sherry also answer about 200 reader questions daily, manage social media and sponsors, communicate with retailers to organize giveaways, and do their own Web coding and site programming.

Not that they're complaining. They're just telling it like it is, which is exactly what their fans expect.

During a recent tour of the Petersiks' home, Sherry pointed to a lump under the covers of the master bedroom bed. "Don't mind that," she said, "that's just Burger." Then, she casually motioned to a pile of clothes tossed on an armchair.

"And don't mind those, either," she said. "We're keeping it real."

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