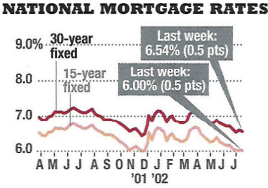


**BRENDEL PATTERSON  
IN FRIDAY  
REAL ESTATE**

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**MORTGAGE MONITOR**  
Compare rates from local lenders.  
**PAGE 13H.**

**CREATING SPACES**  
Grosse Pointe empty-nesters redo kitchen to accommodate new lifestyle. **PAGE 1J.**

# REAL ESTATE

**PHASE 9**

**DRYWALL, TRIM AND PAINT HIDE THE MECHANICS AND COZY UP THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE CHRONICLES HOME**

**THE HOUSE CHRONICLES**

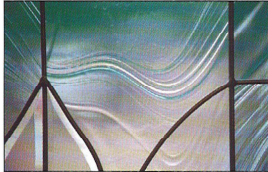
## DETAILS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

**LEFT:** Jeff McDaniel, left, Preston West and Brian Little tap drywall into place in the House Chronicles home. They can finish hanging the drywall in three days, but taping and smoothing will make the job last two weeks.

**BELOW:** The leaded glass of the home's front door.



SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

### Early inspection gives the buyer a fascinating look

By JUDY ROSE  
FREE PRESS REAL ESTATE WRITER

If you buy any new house, you can take a final walk-through inspection just before you take possession. But some builders, maybe half, offer an earlier tour — the rough walk-through — before the walls are insulated and drywalled.

At this showing, you can stand inside the bare 2-by-4 framing and see the guts of your wiring, your plumbing, your heating and cooling ducts.

This is a very fun time to see a house if you have any curiosity about how one is put together. In future years as you pass by smooth walls, you can recall all that's behind them.

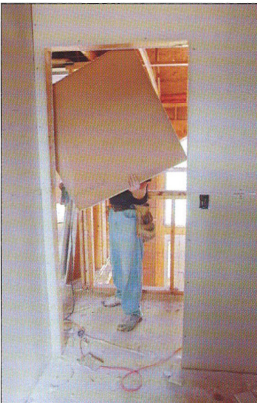
This early inspection also is an opportunity to make sure your mechanical parts — plugs and switches for example — are installed where you want them.

RDK Homes always offers its buyers a rough tour before the walls are closed up. We took one with Don Cottrell, supervisor of field construction.

Some buyers come up with a lot of questions, he says. For example:

- Why are those holes cut through the basement joists?

To create a path for the water and



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

**Jeff McDaniel positions some drywall. Installing it seems easy, but pros know it's hard to do a good job.**

#### JUDY ROSE REAL ESTATE WRITER



When the plumbers, electricians, heating installers and insulation crew finish their work, the maze of mechanical work they leave makes you keenly aware your new house is a machine.

Now is the moment your house turns an important corner. One day it's a rough-edged machine. In the next three weeks the mechanical systems will disappear behind drywall. Then these raw walls will be patched, smoothed, painted and their rough edges covered with wood trim until, for the first time, this new construction really looks like a home inside.

That's happening now in the House Chronicles, the 12-part series that has Free Press readers following RDK Homes while that company builds a 2,600-square-foot colonial in Van Buren Township.

Trim — the decorative strips of wood that edge so much of the house interior — is a key ingredient in the

transformation, notes project manager Matt Kime, youngest son in the Kime family, owners of RDK Homes.

"Trim is really what takes it from a rough house to a finished house."

**Drywall and wet work**

But first comes putting up the drywall, possibly the most underestimated job in building a house. Installing drywall it is one of the first tasks ambitious do-it-yourselfers think they can manage, but they should think twice. Installing drywall is hard to do at all and very hard to do well.

"I hang it, but I don't do my own taping," says 19-year-old Preston West, who leads the crew of three from R & V Drywall in Wayne. "I'm not good enough yet."

Cigarette constantly dangling from his mouth, West quickly measures walls in the House Chronicles home and barks out numbers to two helpers slicing drywall sheets to fit.

"They'll hang all the drywall in about three days, but taping, beading, mudding, sanding, remudding and resanding will make the job last two weeks."

Please see HOUSE, Page 13H

Please see SEE, Page 13H

**THE PROJECT SO FAR:**

Most recently Free Press readers watched as the three key systems were installed in the House Chronicles home — the heating, plumbing and electrical service.

We began by picking the floor plan and options for this house being built in Van Buren Township. Then readers of our spring-summer series watched while RDK Homes dug and poured the basement, built the frame then sheathed it with bricks, siding and shingles. Find those stories online at [www.freep.com/realestate/chronicles.htm](http://www.freep.com/realestate/chronicles.htm)

Today in Phase 9, we turn a corner toward finishing the inside with drywall, paint and trim. Here is a recap:

**HOUSE:** A 2,600-square-foot colonial with living, dining and family rooms, kitchen, nook, three bedrooms, 2½ baths and an open upstairs loft.

**PRICE:** Base \$267,900, options \$21,225, total \$289,125.

**LOCATION:** Van Buren Township. Walden Woods subdivision, Tyler Road between Belleville Road and Morton-Taylor Road.

- Phase 9. Today**  
**THE INSIDE SKIN**  
The drywall, the paint, the trim.
- Phase 10. July 21**  
**THE INSTALLATIONS**  
Choosing cabinets, countertops, floors and fixtures.
- Phase 11.**  
**THE SURROUNDINGS**  
Landscape, hardscape, patios and decks.
- Phase 12.**  
**THE FINALE**  
The walkthrough, the closing, the warranty, the keys.

**TIP:**  
**Think about your trim**

Should your interior wood trim be painted or stained? Suit yourself, but for resale value, painted trim is more popular today, at least in a new house. That's especially true on the west side; on the east side stained trim has more fans, but it's still used less frequently. Stained trim is popular among some fans of faux Victorian style.

If you want to dress up the house a little, add a handsome wood frame around the fireplace or crown molding around the top of your kitchen cabinets. This is something a handy person could do after the purchase.



# HOUSE | Drywall gives interior shape

From Page 1H

When it's done, the weight of the drywall can shift the house frame a bit, says Kime. That's why exterior siding is installed after the drywall is installed.

The installer's skill at taping joints is critical to the job, West says. "Taping is where you pretty much make everything right."

So is skill at beading — adding the plastic edge that sheaths every corner, then mudding over it with thin plaster.

When West's crew finishes, other crews from R & V will add a thin layer of joint compound — called mud in the trades — to the joints, then lay seam tape into the wet mud.

They'll continue to add thin coats of mud, wait for it to dry, sand it down, then repeat until three or four sanded coats connect the drywall seamlessly.

In cold or muggy weather, this joint compound dries more slowly. Even in warm weather, the crew may try to speed drying time by running the furnace.

The house buyer has very few decisions to make in the area of drywall. If your builder offers it, you could opt for a curved bull-nose bead on the corners of your walls, rather than standard straight edges.

The best thing you can do about drywall is choose a builder who uses a high-quality subcontractor. You'd have to judge this from the model home or by contacting former customers.

"The drywall contractor is very, very important to the purchaser," says Greg Kime, the Kime family's oldest son and RDK Homes' sales manager.

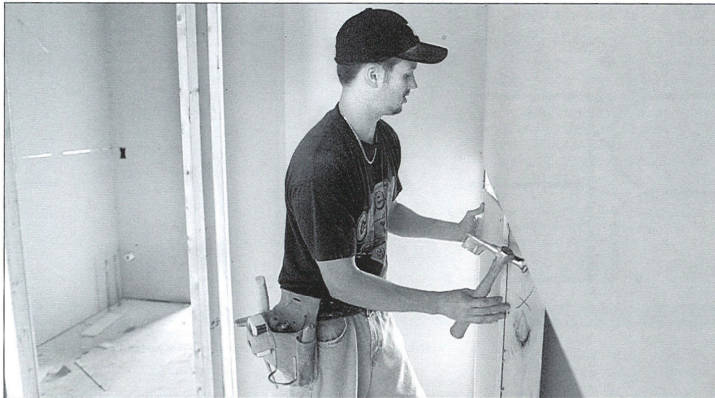
"The customer — the first thing they are going to see is the walls and the paint job," he says. "If that work isn't good quality, they're going to let you know."

## Colorful oil and latex

Unlike drywall, there's a lot about paint a new home buyer should know. For starters:

■ Though a decorated model might have colored walls, you probably have to take the white or off-white paint that's your builder's standard. That's because you *will* have nail heads that pop out from the wall as your house settles, and any decent builder will come back later to fix them. The builder does not want to try to match paint he had no control over.

■ It's common in handsome model homes to have cream colored walls accented by bright white woodwork. Almost always this is an upgrade. At the base price, your paint will be one color. If your builder does offer two-tone paint in the basic house, give the company credit for throwing in an



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

Jeff McDaniel installs drywall in the House Chronicles home. After the drywall is finished, the painters will start working.

extra.

■ When you're still comparison shopping, find out what each builder gives as the basic paint job. It could be different from the model you see. Least desirable is using the same flat paint on walls, doors and woodwork. This looks like what it is — cheap.

■ The typical subdivision house will come with the walls and woodwork the same light color, but the finish different — flat paint on the walls, semigloss on the woodwork and doors.

■ The paint job is above average if the builder uses some oil-base paint as well as latex. Logically, this would be on the woodwork and doors, where a good, oil-base paint can look very fine. This is more common in upscale custom homes, but occasionally it's found in subdivision homes.

RDK Homes emphasized good drywall and paint and our House Chronicles home is getting a very nice finish. The paint is Sherwin-Williams — flat latex paint for the walls, semigloss for the woodwork and doors. Better yet, all the semigloss paint is oil-base.

That's the only way Matthew C. Kettle will paint. "It's the way I was raised in the old school," he says.

"It's a little more work and a little more money, but the quality is a lot better. You can't always just think about cutting corners."

Kettle has owned Mack Painting in Wayne for 30 years and works only with relatives or long-time close friends. "So everyone really knows what to do."

Even though the drywall crews have sanded three or four times already, Kettle's paint crews will patch and sand at least twice more — before the undercoat, then again before the finish coat. In a subdivision house, they only

spray or roll paint, he says. "We don't use a brush."

Once painting is finished, the carpet is installed and the house gets a final cleaning. Then Kettle sends back his top touch-up team.

"I have a female crew that comes in and does all my final touch-ups," he says. "I feel — everybody seems to feel — the girls are better on the final details."

## Deep trim adds a rich look

It's easy to take trim for granted when you're buying a new house, but it's a big part of the interior appearance. Like paint, trim is something to look at when you comparison shop. As with paint, be sure you understand what trim comes with your builder's basic package. Often a decorated model home has extra.

If you like the look of extra crown molding, chair rails, taller-than-usual floor molding and wider-than-usual door molding, you can get them by buying extra trim packages. For example, in the House Chronicles house, we could have spent \$400 in the dining room for crown molding at the ceiling, a chair rail around the wall and squares made of mitered molding applied below the chair rail.

Or you could shop for one of the few builders who regularly use more. Pulte Homes, for example, gives substantially more wood trim than is typical for the price.

If you're a little handy and short of cash now, molding is something you can add later.

Our House Chronicles house has trim that's typical for its high-\$200,000 price range. The foyer and staircase will get a handsome visual accent with wood-trimmed stairs and wood-spindled railings that go up the stairs and surround

the open loft.

The floor trim is a step up from basic moldings, with an extra contour routed into the wood. The doors are the six-panel contour, not flat. The trim around the many windows seems especially nice. Windowsills are at least 6 inches deep.

Carpenter Joseph Roose of J.T. Roose Trim Contractors in Plymouth, says a lot of the character in a house comes from three locations — the staircases, the kitchen cabinets and the fireplace frame and mantle. Besides the showy staircase, our House Chronicles home comes with a handsome wood-framed fireplace and mantle.

Roose is one of the few old-time carpenters who can build the railing for a curved staircase, an option on these RDK Homes for \$5,500.

"It's complicated," he says. "You actually bend it in place." The carpenter uses "bending stock," a special glued and laminated wood that can be bent to follow the shape of the staircase.

At the House Chronicles home we didn't take the curved staircase, but you can see one at RDK's model home in Walden Woods. It's in Van Buren Township, on Tyler Road, just north of I-94, between Belleville Road and Morton-Taylor Road. Model hours are 1-6 daily. Closed Thursdays.

Now our house has walls, a beautiful paint job and trim. Come back to the House Chronicles series next week as we close in on completion and see how our upgrades worked out. We watch as workers install kitchen cabinets and appliances, ceramic floors, plumbing fixtures and carpet.

Contact JUDY ROSE at 313-222-6614 or rose@freepress.com.

## SEE | Home inspections open eyes

From Page 1H

power lines. The house is engineered to handle these penetrations. And they're on the list of things the building inspector must check.

■ What are all those openings and pipes in the basement floor?

They include the floor drain, a pipe that will become a vent for the plumbing and a backflow preventer for the sewer line.

At a rough walk-through, buyers can see the systems at the stage when they go through inspections. At this point inspectors go over the frame construction, the electrical work, the plumbing and the heating system.

Some buyers walk through quietly and stare, Cottrell says. Some have many questions. Some measure for their blinds at this point.

Nearly all notice the big lines of foam sealant around every opening — the Nelson Energy Seal. "Everybody like the energy seal," he says. "They always look at that."

As you look at the systems, you can start to picture living here — the hot and cold water pipes that come out of the basement mark where your kitchen sink will be installed under the window.

There's the impossibly complex gaggle of electric wires, all leading from one destination, like the microwave, to a switch in the main electrical box in the basement. How does the electrician keep that straight?

RDK owner Bob Kime and Cottrell started rough walk-throughs years ago.

"It makes the home owners a lot more comfortable," Cottrell says. "It's a good check and balance on us too."