

Changing times change perspectives on an unfinished house

BY CHRISTINA AMMON

Halfway through painting this image of my house in Ruch, Oregon, I found myself reluctant to finish it. Not out of laziness or lack of inspiration, but simply because I like the way it looked half-done: the unexpected patches of color, the black-and-white swaths of suspense for what will come next.

I once heard a building proverb: Man finishes house; man dies. It felt cryptic at first, but the meaning has now ripened in my mind. Although the goal of home projects is to eventually relax and enjoy the finished product, there is something to the day-to-day process of working on one's house that is enlivening. And there is a certain death in finishing.

This was on my mind this summer as I pursued the classic-pandemic project of renovating my house. I've added French doors, repainted walls, and installed a new tin roof. I've moved ahead on firming up the garden fence, covering the side deck, and planting more bulbs in the yard. I've done all of this despite several misgivings about sinking money into this place—after all, it's a 45-year-old mobile home whose value will always depreciate. Money put into it is money lost, at least from an investment standpoint.

My reluctance has recently been layered by a second concern: What if it all burns down? With nearly 3,000

structures in the nearby towns of Phoenix and Talent in ashes, it's hard not to wonder if it will eventually happen to my house, too, nestled as it is in flammable oak savannah habitat.

And lastly, I often look around and wonder: Are the real estate values in the valley going to go up, or down? Will the hemp boom help, or harm? What about the August smoke? The flourishing wineries? The California migration? The pandemic? I continually calculate my financial prospects. Will it all lead to my prosperity—or my ruin?

And yet lately I'm arriving at a new perspective on my house. I used to think I loved it because I was a paraglider pilot and the nearby mountain—Woodrat—is a world-class flying destination. Then, I thought I loved it because of all the friends who came to visit. Finally, during lockdown, when there were no gliders in the sky or friends dropping by, I realized I loved this place for itself—for the roses that grow wild over its rails, for the old granddaddy oak, for the crooked porch and breezy rooms.

Even in the loneliness of the pandemic, I felt connected to the friends who have left their mark: Dave, who laid the kitchen tiles; Jane, who made the counter-tops; Wendy, who hammered the porch together; Richard, who set the light posts; and Tim, who spent a whole



A work in progress. Illustration: Christina Ammon.

afternoon with me adjusting the screen door to achieve the perfect summertime slam. And then there are the artworks of many friends that cover the walls.

Maybe when you finally fall in love with a place, you begin to try to guess what is going to happen next or calculate whether your investment is going to pay off or not. At some point, the love is about something that is not connected to real estate gyrations or even the materiality of the place. It's knit into the fabric of memories and friendships—things that cannot burn down in a fire or plummet when the real estate market falls.

As fires burn all around me, I'm reminded that it is all precarious. While I invest in making the house better,

I also tell myself to love this place more lightly. I've meditated at length on the possibilities—seen in my mind the timber frame alight and purlins collapsing. I've seen the wild roses wither to ash and rehearsed what I'd take with me (the dog, the guitar, and the Impressionist painting) and mourned what I'd leave (everything else). It's a possibility worth preparing for. But until that happens, I've settled on this: to quit seeing my land as a piece of real estate and commit to seeing it as home. I plan to stay and to keep on "finishing" it, even though someday it all may just burn to the ground.

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Williams Creek Restoration Project completed

BY KEVIN SWEENEY

The Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council (APWC) has completed instream construction work to restore Williams Creek, a key tributary to the Applegate River.

The project removed a push-up dam on the creek, replaced it with a new irrigation water intake system, and rebuilt the rough channel of a more natural stream.

This new system benefits irrigators, who no longer must rebuild a push-up dam every spring—they'll simply turn a wheel to open the headgate next spring, when irrigation water is needed—and replaces an open ditch channel with a pipeline, reducing water loss to evaporation and seepage.

The new system also benefits fish and wildlife. The restored flow allows easier access to upstream spawning and rearing habitat for Coho, Chinook, steelhead, and Pacific lamprey.

"This is another project with multiple winners," said Janelle Dunlevy, APWC's

Executive Director. "This happens more often than you think. A project intended to help irrigators can often also help salmon. And something that helps fish populations can often be made to help irrigators. We find out what's possible when we start talking.

"We used local labor and, where feasible, local materials," said Dunlevy. "We like spending as much of our grant money as possible here in the Applegate. That was particularly important to us this year with the economic hardship."

Williams Creek now follows a more natural path. The site still has a wide

area of exposed gravel, a remnant of the annual pursuit of material for the push-up dam. APWC is projecting that this area will revegetate naturally over the course of the next several years, but the group will also plant seedlings along the creek this winter and spring.

were open. Approvals took much longer than usual. They found remote ways to help vendors and funders visualize the project when in-person meetings were infeasible. They lost essential equipment to theft.

"Given how strange and difficult 2020 has been, we feel good bringing a bit of restoration to the Applegate," said Dunlevy. "The country may be divided politically, but right here we're finding ways to meet, talk, and get things done."

There are hundreds of small dams and other diversions on creeks and streams throughout the Rogue River basin. Last winter,

APWC helped facilitate an online survey of residents along local creeks and found that these impacts were not well understood.

"Success stories like the one here on Williams Creek help us tell this story in a positive way. These local creeks really are key to more robust fish runs," said Julie Cymore, APWC Fish Passage Program Manager. "Those runs are a big part of our culture, and they can also play a role in boosting our economy. That's why getting these creeks in better shape means so much."

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This view shows the push-up dam in place. Gravel would be piled into the creek each spring, raising the water level to reach the height of the irrigation ditch. Photo: APWC.



This shows the project site during construction. The dam has been removed and the irrigation headgate has been installed. The bare area on the right shows where gravel has been dug each year to build the pushup dam. This area will revegetate slowly over time. Photo: APWC.

Biologists typically remove fish from the stretch of river where they are working by shocking the water, stunning the fish so they can easily be netted and moved upstream. With lamprey, pulses of lower levels of electricity essentially tickle the ammocetes out of the mud. In a stretch of creek that was roughly 100 feet, the team was surprised to find more than 500 Pacific lamprey ammocetes. (At the ammocete stage of its life cycle, lamprey live for several years as filter feeding larva in the mud of freshwater streams.)

APWC showed persistence in finishing the restoration on time. They completed the permitting process during shelter-in-place, collecting forms and signatures when few offices

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