

## New home, old insecurities

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By Beth Teitell, Globe Correspondent | April 29, 2010

The saleslady from the closet-system company and I were mere minutes into our interview about my hanging and folded needs, when, perhaps sensing I was not truly a closet-system person, she turned mocking.

"How much space do you need for long hanging?" she asked. My husband and I just bought a new home and, on the advice of experts, had decided to explore our closet options.

To me, the words "long hanging" conjured the throng of garments that have been long hanging — unworn — in my closet. But that wasn't what she meant.

"Long hanging," she repeated, moving in for the kill, "you know, for your ball gowns."

My new closet, I realized with some shame, was leading a more exciting life than I did.

It's my own fault, of course. An adult who needs to stifle a laugh when asked about evening wear has no business even talking to a closet-system person. And I wouldn't have been, but as my husband and I considered remodeling and decorating options, one message was drilled into us: Make sure your choices will appeal to future buyers. Never mind that we had not even moved in yet. It was the preferences of these opinionated people — who'd be living here in 10 or 20 years — that must be honored.

And if there's one thing future buyers like, it's closet systems.

And good appliances.

Sadly, shopping for those also revealed shortcomings in my lifestyle. "You'll probably want a double oven," the oven salesman said, explaining that it would allow me to cook a roast while also making biscuits. Without getting too specific about my menu repertoire, let's just say that a double phone line — to call the pizza place and the sushi restaurant simultaneously — would be of more use.

Here's another lesson my house has taught me: I suffer from a very limited vocabulary. Plinths, lentils, volutes — who knew? I've lived among them for years, in ignorance. That last word — volute — came up when we were doing repair work on the staircase, and the contractor asked if we were ready to "commit to a volute."

You can look it up, but the best definition comes from my husband. "Why don't they call it by its real name," he asked, "the curly part at the bottom of the staircase?"

It's not just the house that's eroding my self-esteem. The local businesses are doing it, too. Although our new place is directly across the street from the condo we'd lived in for 10 years, we've started getting "welcome to the neighborhood" fliers and discount coupons from the very establishments I've been frequenting for a decade. Whole Foods, my dry cleaner, restaurants. What was I before, chopped liver?

If there's any good news, it's that my insecurities aren't all that unusual. Gary Rogers, past president of the Massachusetts Association of Realtors, said buyers frequently become intimidated by the lifestyle of the home's previous owner.

"You can feel like a foreigner in the house," he said. One of the biggest sources of angst, he added, is when the house has a Jacuzzi the new owner doesn't want. "They have this guilt trip — why aren't they cool and hip? In the movies it sounds like this glamorous thing. But what are you going to do with it?"

Seeking an ego boost, I got in touch with a renovation coach — yes, it's a real position — Martha Huntley of Room for Change, LLC. (When a renovation coach puts you on the couch, you can bet it's a nice one.)

Huntley's advice: Ignore the pressure. "The whole industry is geared to making you want things — to buy, buy, buy!" she said. "But if we just look for it, there's so much charm and beauty in what we already have."

It was good counsel. I'd take it once I finished shopping for ball gowns. ■