

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 08 Issue 19 Wednesday, November 19, 2014



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Hit the Deck

Regular maintenance can prolong the lives of outdoor spaces

By Chris Lavin



Richard Houghton is a tall man with a big smile and an unusual passion.

“I could talk decks all day,” Houghton said with surprising enthusiasm for the subject. “And all night. You’ll have to shut me up.”

Houghton has sanded, repaired or otherwise built from scratch more than 3,000 decks in the area, probably 2,000 of them in Lamorinda.

“Now is the time, before we get too much rain,” he said. “You’ve got to get the debris out from between the grooves or you’re going to hold the moisture in there, and it’s going to rot a lot sooner than it otherwise would.”

And that takes time, and regularity. Decks can be such a pain sometimes that not everyone is a fan.

“I hate decks,” said Gloria Lenhart of Lafayette. “I did have decks and hated them, but I don’t have one now. Here’s the problem with decks: They are maintenance nightmares which require regular sanding, sealing and repairing. I once lived in a house with three decks and every year we sanded down and re-sealed one of them. A never-ending task. In this house I have a concrete patio. All you have to do is sweep it off occasionally, and really you don’t even have to do that!”

Houghton understands this sentiment and sees it in his customers. So he came up with a solution: On one of his jobs he found a woman using a nifty tool that she had ordered from Sunset magazine – a deck flosser. So Houghton tracked down the tool and bought a couple of them. Over the years, they didn’t hold up so well, but the inventor didn’t want anything to do with them. So he just told Houghton: “You can have it. You make ‘em.”

So with his usual enthusiasm Houghton got to work. He set up a workshop in his garage (with a retinal scanner to get in and security cameras galore), improved on the design, applied for a patent, and now he’s in distribution mode. (He turned out to be fibbing about the retinal scanner and cameras.)

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Jack Champlin of Lafayette repaired his deck so that his family would have a dining area while the kitchen was being renovated. Photo Chris Lavin