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## Having a BLAST!

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Log Home Cleaning

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## Having a "Blast!"

### Journal of a Log Home Cleaning

by Beth Borrego

**E**arlier this spring, our office received a call from a homeowner in Bethany Beach, DE, who was looking for a company to restore his log home. After speaking with the owner and reviewing the photos, we realized this was the same home we had driven out to visit one year earlier at the request of another potential buyer. We knew then that this project would be no small task. The home appeared to have been neglected for at least ten years from what we could tell during our visit. The deck was literally rotting off of the home, and there was evidence of powder post beetle infestation. Since then, the new owner had replaced the rotting decks with Ipe, a Brazilian hardwood native to South America.

Rod Rodriguez, President of See Dirt Run! Inc., put together a proposal outlining our plan to cob blast the home and submitted it to the new owner. Rod's experience with wood began back when he worked in a lumber mill, pulling wood off of a conveyor belt, sorting it for





grade, and banding it for shipment. Rod also worked for a cabinet manufacturing company as an assembler working his way up to the position of foreman. His duties included overseeing production and quality control. During his tenure, he was introduced to the art of wood staining and finishing and adopted wood finishing as a hobby aside from the work that he did. Rod was fascinated as he learned about the properties of various species of wood and the way wood acts and reacts even after being milled. Little did he know that this introduction to wood as a building material would act as the foundation of a future wood restoration business by the name of See Dirt Run! Inc.

What follows below is a daily journal of our company's experiences during this restoration project. The log home has six steps to the restoration process; the garage has five steps to its process, and neither of these processes includes masking, tarping, set-up, tear-down, clean-up, loading, or unloading. But before I give you all the blow by blow, I just want to mention that the guy named "Murphy" shows up when you least expect him to, or want him to, and that planning ahead as much as possible just might keep him from complicating your next project.

#### *Thursday 6/1/06*

We're preparing to depart. The last few weeks have been filled with project planning and ordering supplies and equipment. The beach house is rented, the ordered supplies and equipment are in, the rental equipment has been arranged, and we have multiple plans of attack should any unforeseen circumstances arise. We have backup equipment, spare parts, and extra supplies on our packing list. I even went so far as to print lists of the locations of area grocery stores, banks, and of course hardware and rental stores should the need arise. I do believe we are ready to have a real 'blast.'

#### *Saturday 6/3/06*

We leave today! Everything surrounding our arrival has to take place today. The supplies and our cob blasting pot have to be dropped off at the job site, the rental equipment has to be delivered, and the trailer containing one and a half tons of cob media and the rented cob blast pot are being delivered as well. We've rented a 35-foot lift and two compressors to run the two blast pots with. We also need to check in at the rental house and buy groceries for the week. Our team arrived in Delaware to pouring rain and unloaded the supplies under a covered area. Local forecasts are predicting a week of rain. I guess we'll see. The accommodations are great, and everyone is very excited about the project. Tom and Barbara Vogel from ACR Products delivered the corn cob media and the rented cob blasting pot and are staying until tomorrow. Tom wants to make sure all of our equipment is working well before he and Barbara leave to head back home. The local rental company we got the 35-foot lift and two compressors from has been calling me to give us weather updates.

#### *Sunday 6/4/06*

What a beautiful day! Sun, clear blue skies and perfect weather! We arrived on site at 8:00 A.M. and began setting up. One blast pot was up and running with no problems, the other needed a different connection for the compressor's hose. Tom went out and got a connector and re-plumbed the compressor hose to accommodate the connection on the blast pot. Once both blast pots were operational, Tom and Barbara left for home. The cob blasting is under way and going wonderfully so far. It looks great and the owner is thrilled! The results are dramatic and

BEFORE • AFTER





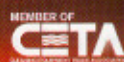


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instantaneous. The wood is immediately ready for the next step.

While the blast pots are in use, it is very important to wear a respirator, goggles, and ear plugs. You don't want to inhale all that cob grit and dust all day long. We also discovered a large bees' nest three stories up on the back of the home. There were hundreds and hundreds of bees swarming by the hive and you could hear the buzz from ten feet away in the lift. After spraying three cans of wasp killer from the lift three stories up, we called in a professional exterminator. He'll be out this afternoon.

#### **Monday 6/5/06**

Today, it's overcast and there is a 30% chance of rain all day, and local forecasters still predict rain all week. We arrived at the job site and it started to rain. Due to the weather, we decided today was the best day to do the necessary chemical stripping on the cedar garage's exterior and the attached porch both outside and inside. These areas were stripped with a sodium hydroxide based product and neutralized with a blend of citric and oxalic acids. Despite the rain, it was a productive day. As we are working, we need to also be careful of the brand new Ipe decking that is on both the house and the garage. These decks were recently installed and are too new to be sealed due to the species of wood. We suggested to the owner that he wait a year before having them serviced.

#### **Tuesday 6/6/06**

Today, Charlie Arnold, owner of Arnold Powerwash joined us at the job site. We contacted Charlie to see if he and his crew would be interested in working along side us and learning about log restoration. I didn't really need to twist his arm too much. Rod and I met Charlie a few years back at a PWNA boot camp in Virginia when he sat for the Wood Certification.

The weather is still not great. Rain is forecasted, but we're running both cob pots and blasting as long as the

weather allows, and we're also sealing the garage, using a wet application sealer. Rain set in around one P.M. so we had to stop blasting, but the garage is finished. Take that, Murphy!

#### **Wednesday 6/7/06**

Due to morning rain, we delayed work until 10 A.M. today. The rain held off allowing for a very productive day. We began by masking all of the windows, fixtures, and outlets, so that we would be able to apply the borate, blast primer and sealers without getting anything on them. Tarps were moved as needed to cover the Ipe decking and plants. The cob blasting continued all day, and we also applied borate to all of the blasted areas except one upper spot which we'll get tomorrow. The borate product we're using is effective against wood boring beetles and termites and also kills the types of fungi that are responsible for rot and decay. This

choice was made based upon the conditions present on the logs upon our inspection the year before.

Both blast pots did clog several times today due to the humidity. Have I mentioned yet that wet cob smells a bit like manure? It's also as bad as sand, in that it gets everywhere, including places you don't expect it to. We ran out of cob media around 5 P.M. with not too much left on the house to be done. After some discussion, we decided to finish the remaining area via chemical stripping in the morning. It pays to have a back up plan, and bring your chemicals with you! No score for Murphy this time either.

#### **Thursday 6/8/06**

Off to a great start! We're chemical stripping the two small remaining areas of the home. Today we're applying an after blasting primer to the areas that have already had the borate treatment applied to them. This is

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to allow for better coverage of the sealer we'll be using. The weather is supposed to hold until this afternoon.

Thankfully, the weather held all day for us. We were able to apply the blast primer and even began to apply the two coats of sealer on the home. The home will also be getting a glossy top coat, for a total of three coats. We were able to apply the sealer to two sides of the home and all of the high areas are sealed. All that remains on those sides is the top coat of gloss. This afternoon we took a look at our inventory and decided we would need to order more sealer and more of the top coat gloss. It should be here tomorrow in time to finish the home. (Sorry Murphy) The wood we chemically stripped today on the home is drying beautifully, and it looks like a nice match next to the blasted wood.

#### *Friday 6/9/06*

Today, we'll apply the top coat gloss to the two high sides to finish them, and we'll begin peeling the

plastic off of the finished sides. Unwrapping the finished home is always fun, and it's no surprise the owners love to peek out of windows as soon as they are able.

Borate and the after blast primer will go onto the other two sides of the home that were stripped yesterday, and hopefully, we'll begin to apply the sealer as well. The fuel truck came this morning to refuel the two compressors so we can return them full. It was \$4.27 per gallon less expensive to have a fuel truck refuel on site than it was to return them empty and get charged by the rental company. The additional sealer we ordered yesterday showed up around 3 P.M. It's always important to have a supplier lined up as close to where you are working as possible, to avoid down time or delays.

#### *Saturday 6/10/06*

There is one solid day of work left. Today, we work until we are done. Two sides still need sealer and the top coat of gloss. Rod also has repair work

up by the top of the chimney to do, to replace a piece of wood and seal the area where birds have been getting in. He'll also go around the home and add a bead of energy seal in areas that need it.

Murphy (remember that guy called Murphy?) showed up on the job today. The HVLP sprayer we were using to apply the sealer with developed a leak in the pump. This was a brand new pump too. The airless was already being used to apply the top coat gloss. So, yours truly spent the day catching sealer in a stain tray, and recycling it back to the pail every couple of minutes. The flow was about as fast as two coffee makers continually running. I had two trays, and replaced one with the other to keep us spraying. I did this all day long so we could continue to work. We had just enough sealer to finish the job thanks to ordering in the extra.

We've finished the job, and the owner is absolutely thrilled. The house looks fabulous. Tonight, we celebrate a job well done and relax. Tomorrow, we clean the rental house, pack up, and head home for a well deserved day off. There are some folks who deserve a great big thank you. First off, we want to thank our guys, the See Dirt Run! team, for all of their hard work, dedication to excellence, and for maintaining a positive spirit during a challenging week. You guys rock! We also want to thank Tom and Barbara Vogel from ACR Products for staying over Saturday night to make sure the blast pots were both functional on day one. Tom's on-the-spot assistance with the plumbing issue was a tremendous help to us, he knew exactly what needed to be done and did it. A big high five and thanks go out to Charlie Arnold of Arnold Powerwashing and his crew, who spent a few days having a real "blast" with us and rode the waves of challenge right along side us. And of course, we want to thank the owner, for allowing us the opportunity to restore his beautiful home. It was truly a pleasure to work on your log home. We sincerely hope you enjoy it!

Beth Borrego is Vice President of See Dirt Run! Inc. in Germantown, MD. *cr*

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