



Karen Anderson

Do-it-yourself projects are bound to fail when your house realizes what's happening

Like most homeowners, Club Columnist Karen Anderson would like to be a more hands-on caretaker, but sometimes things seem to be conspiring against her.

So-called “smart homes” are all the rage today. I have not only a smart home, but a downright devious one.

Every time the Scholarly Gentleman and I sit down to discuss our home improvement projects the house listens in. Then it drafts its own plans to prevent us from getting anything done. The house doesn't see any need for improvement. It thinks it's fine just the way it is.

“We've got to put shelving in the garage,” I say, pushing a magazine article about “quick and easy” garage shelving across the table to the Scholarly Gentleman.

“Of course,” he says, and keeps reading his book.

Undaunted, I outline our weekend project step by step. Undaunted, he keeps reading, which he can do while at the same time nodding genially.

“We'll start by running out to the store to look at the shelving systems,” I say. Now I've got his attention. The book closes. He stands up.

Now our devious house leaps into action.

“Have you seen my phone?” the Scholarly Gentleman asks me. I call him, and the ringing leads us to ... the top of the refrigerator. How did this phone get up there? Phone firmly in hand, he heads for the door.

“Wait!” I yell. “Have you seen my car keys? I thought left them right here on the sofa.” But the sofa is empty. Now the search is on. I start tearing the house apart. The Scholarly Gentleman makes sounds like he's tearing the house apart though I suspect he's reading his book again. Twenty minutes later he spots my keys. On the sofa.

“How did they get there?” By now, we're both exhausted. I look at the clock. The Scholarly Gentleman looks longingly at his book.

“It's too late to go to the store, anyway,” I admit with a sigh. Deep in the basement, the furnace kicks in, making a

sound like a big cat, purring. Round One to the house.

I'm still determined to get that shelving installed. We agree we'll get up bright and early the next morning and head to the store. We even turn in a bit early.

“Did you hear that?” It's 3 a.m. and there's a strange clicking sound, halfway between a drip and a clanking. I get up and check the furnace. “Nothing,” I report as I crawl back into bed.

Now the clicking, clanking sound has a “swooshing” sound added to it. And it's louder. “Your turn,” I mumble.

The Scholarly Gentleman gets up. He checks doors and windows and even the toilets before coming back to bed. Now the clicking, dripping, clanking and swooshing have been joined by a really annoying high-pitched buzzing.

“The refrigerator!” I yell, completely awake. I dash down to the kitchen but fail to catch it in the act. I lug in a ladder and check all the smoke detectors, accidentally hitting the “alarm test” button, which launches a nearby cat into the air.

Eventually I throw myself back into bed, not completely accidentally waking up the Scholarly Gentleman. “Can't find it,” I snap.

“Grumpf,” he responds. It's now 4 a.m., and suddenly we realize that the house is utterly silent. Well, of course it is. The house has accomplished its objective: exhausting us.

When the alarm goes off the next morning, we're too bleary to hit “Snooze.” We try to sleep in, but end up getting up, drinking too much coffee, and skulking around the house avoiding each other. Collaborating on a shelf-assembly project would not only imperil our

relationship, it would surely doom the shelf.

Was that a chuckle I heard, or just the dishwasher gurgling? Round Two to the house.

I consider a painting project but recall my last painting failure. The label on the paint can distinctly said “Lovely Lemon” but the house somehow changed the color to “Appalling Avocado” while the paint was drying. Rather than risk painting the laundry room with what might turn out to be spar varnish, I go upstairs and bake chocolate chip cookies.

The furnace gives off a deep sigh of relief. OK, you win, I think, and I toss a handful of warm cookie crumbs into the cold air return.

