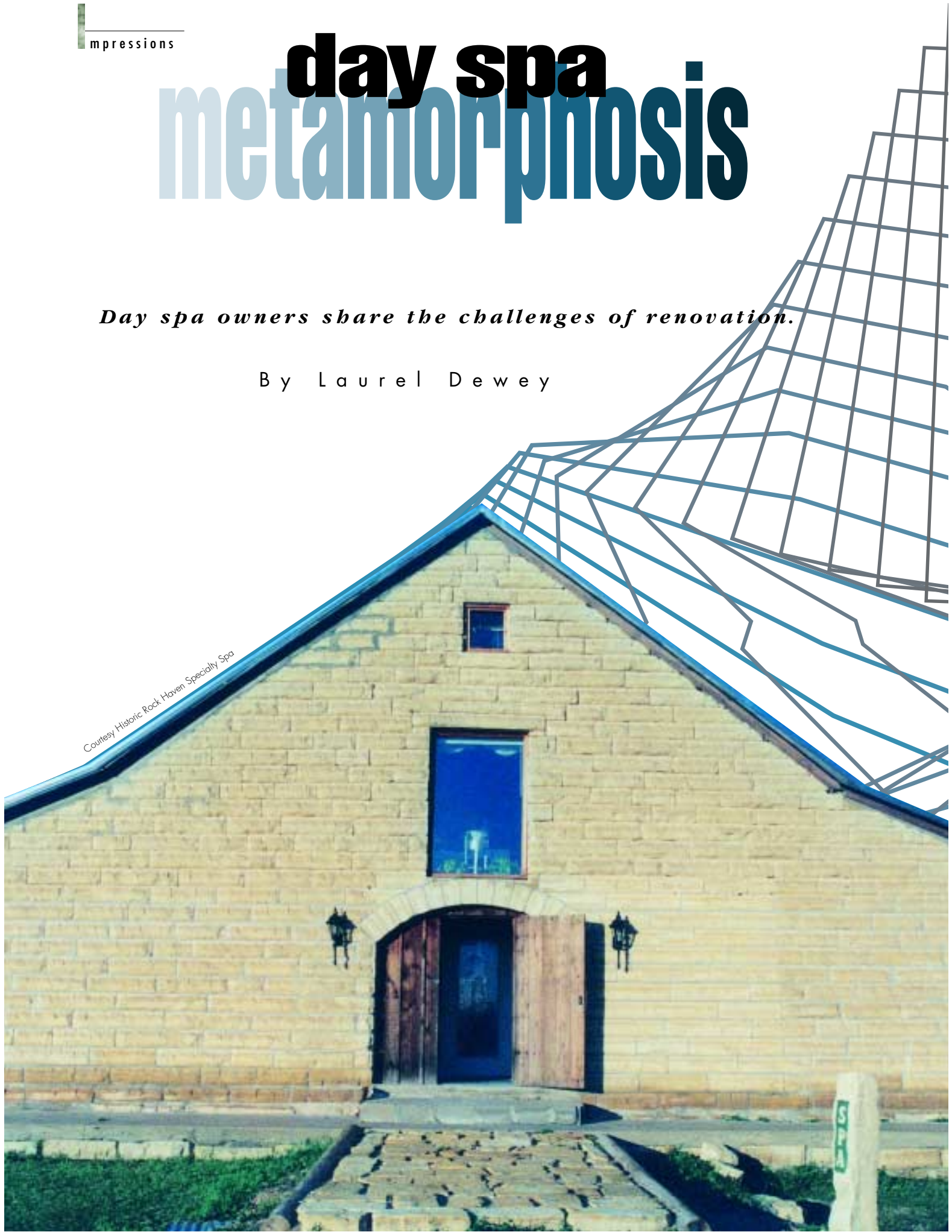


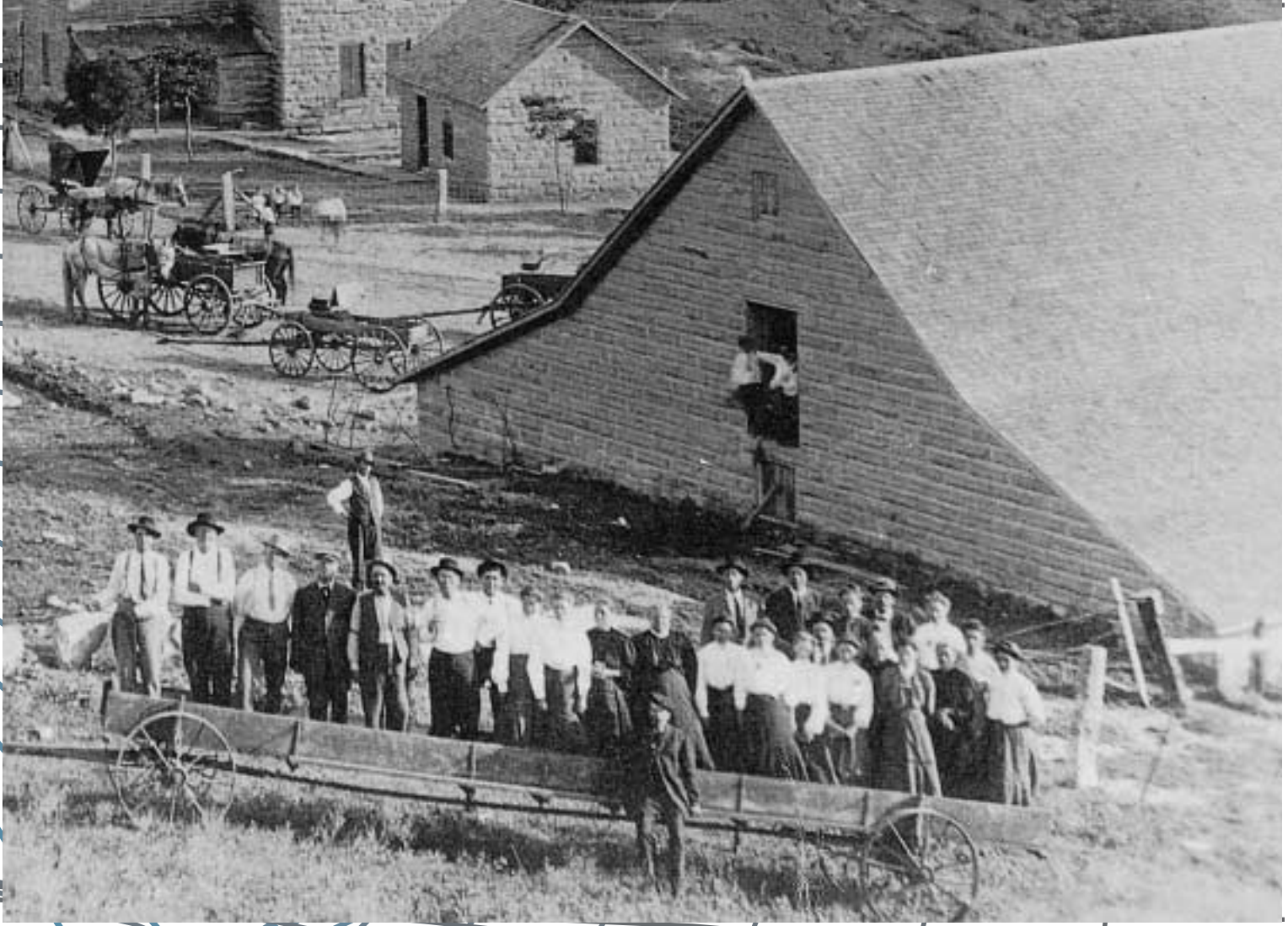
day spa metamorphosis

Day spa owners share the challenges of renovation.

By Laurel Dewey

Courtesy Historic Rock Haven Specialty Spa





The limestone barn pictured above in a photo from 1903 was transformed into the unique Rock Haven Day Spa (opposite).

As the day spa industry continues to reinvent itself, the desire for innovation and individuality comes to the forefront. Some day spa owners are passing up strip malls and storefronts in favor of more unusual structures. The allure and romance of renovating an old building offer rewards beyond simply completing a place of business, but the emotional, physical and financial resources that are required for such a project can be daunting.

Owner Dereama Allenbaugh kept the structure of the Rock Haven building as close to the original as possible while creating comfortable client space.



Courtesy Historic Rock Haven Specialty Spa

The three day spa owners profiled here were willing to tackle the challenge and are proud of the results. All note that the process of creating a day spa in an unusual space was one of the greatest learning experiences of their careers.

Rock Haven Specialty Spa & Salon.

Renovating the 100-year-old, two-story barn was the biggest challenge—a back-breaking job that seemed never-ending, according to Allenbaugh. The building had enjoyed a rollicking second life as a bar and concert hall that drew crowds of up to 6,000 people to hear bands such as Kansas, Baby, The Red Dog and The Holding Company. The bar closed in 1975, and the building became a storage unit five years later. By the time the Allenbaughs bought the barn in the winter of 1998, the structure was home to piles of junk furniture, car parts and old refrigerators. Allenbaugh's husband Dwight took load after load of debris to the dump in preparation for the real work.

The next step was to painstakingly remove the decomposing limestone mortar found between the more than 2,000 blocks in the aging structure. The job had to be done by hand. Hiring out the project would have cost Allenbaugh a fortune, so she found a 74-year-old master stone mason who agreed to help and teach her the technique. The two dug out the old limestone mortar with crowbars and replaced it with a modern mortar mix—a heavy, dirty process that took the pair eight months to complete. “It was like sweeping your garage with a toothbrush,” says Allenbaugh.

Plumbing turned out to be the most expensive part of the renovation. Allenbaugh had a well dug and hired a local dowsing to “witch” for water. The water source was located several hundred feet from the barn, underneath layers of solid limestone bedrock. Backhoes were brought in to remove the bedrock and plumbers had to dig through 24 inches of solid limestone to install the pipes.

Because of the age of the structure,

HISTORIC ROCK HAVEN SPECIALTY SPA & SALON, HAYS, KANSAS

A few people thought Dereama Allenbaugh was crazy when she shared her plans to turn a broken-down limestone barn into an exclusive day spa. The barn is located in the middle of a lonely countryside, 9 miles south of the small town of Hays, Kansas (population 20,000), on a limestone road. The driveway that leads to the 5,000-square-foot barn is a quarter-mile long. Horses graze in surrounding fields of wildflowers and cedars. Except for the soft pealing of church bells from the nearby tiny town of Schoenshen, silence fills the air.

A location that could have worked against Allenbaugh has proven to be a tremendous asset to her business. Clients come from as far as 100 miles away to experience the natural beauty, interesting rock formations and personalized service at the Historic

HISTORIC ROCK HAVEN SPECIALTY SPA & SALON, HAYS, KANSAS

Date of original construction: 1898

Spa's previous incarnation:

Originally a barn, then a bar/concert hall and a storage facility

Year structure became a spa: 1998

Time it took to remodel: 9 months

Approximate cost: \$130,000, plus an additional \$60,000 to purchase the barn

Most costly part of remodeling:

Plumbing



Courtesy Innovations

The only portion of the structures that became Innovations Day Spa that was saved was the barn roof.



INNOVATIONS DAY SPA & WELLNESS CENTER, MERRIMACK, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Date of original construction:

Mid-1970s

Spa's previous incarnation:

Small house and 20-year-old barn

Year structure became a spa: 1998

Time it took to remodel: 14 months

Approximate cost: \$622,841 for remodeling and land purchase

Most costly part of remodel:

Electrical wiring, plumbing, heating and air conditioning

Allenbaugh uncovered some interesting artifacts during remodeling. She found fossils embedded in the site's limestone—millions of years ago, the property was underwater, home to sharks and prehistoric ocean crea-

tures. More current items from the 19th century were also found, including Civil War shell casings, ammunition and a cannon ball believed to be left from maneuvers by general George Custer's troops in the late 1860s.

Since the barn qualifies as a historic building, Allenbaugh did her best to retain much of the original structure. She kept the original hardwood floors and the rope handrailing on the staircase that leads to the second floor. The vent for the hay drop also remains, although it's now covered by a stained-glass window from an old London church. She had the barn's original ceiling and huge rafters reinforced to hold the insulation and sheet rock.

The hard work has paid off, according to Allenbaugh. "There's a tremendous healing energy that seems to emanate from the limestone," she says. "People feel it the minute they walk through the front door—they feel at peace. The most common comment from clients is that they want to live here."

Allenbaugh advises other owners considering a project like this to have an exact vision before you start. "I jumped in with both feet," she says. "The work was hard and sometimes overwhelming. You have to be willing to take a hands-on role and oversee everything."

INNOVATIONS DAY SPA & WELLNESS CENTER, MERRIMACK, NEW HAMPSHIRE

"It was a nice house if you enjoy living in a tent," says Ed Potenza of the residential structure that used to stand where his day spa and wellness center now sit. The house is long gone, and the only part of the adjacent barn that was saved was the roof, which was lifted onto posts while the walls were demolished. The new "barn" structure now houses the salon, while an adjoining traditional Colonial-style building is where clients enjoy a range of spa services.

When Potenza found the site, he felt it was the perfect location for his business and hoped to start on the project immediately. A series of delays stalled construction, but the finished day spa was worth the effort.

The first delay was caused by neighbors in the surrounding upscale community who objected to having a commercial business on their quiet street. "They were concerned that the spa wouldn't blend in with the residential landscape and about the amount of traffic the spa would generate," says Potenza. The spa owner assured the zoning board that the spa would keep the New England architectural flavor and look "as if it belonged in the neighborhood and someone lived there." He took photographs of a similar day spa in Massachusetts so the board would have a better

“Don’t take anything for granted. Think of every question and every potential problem. Write them out and get the answers before you put down any money.”

A house with a great street location, visibility and price prompted owner Anthony Pawlowski to create Details salon and spa.

idea of his proposal, and guaranteed the residents that he would include enough parking spaces on his property to keep cars off the street. In the end, Potenza won out and was issued four variances.

Because he was locating his day spa in a residential area, Potenza assumed that he would be able to use the town sewage system, water and utilities without a problem. Due to the amount of energy and water his day spa would use on a daily basis, however, he had to obtain special permission from the zoning board. Potenza also wanted a particular construction company to build his spa, but the builder was involved on another project, causing another six-week delay in construction.

Additional expenses seemed to crop up at every turn. When digging finally began for the foundation of the two-

devoted to a combination of electrical wiring, plumbing, heating and air conditioning that included two air exchange systems—one for the spa and one for the salon. The total cost of these four items came to a whopping \$167,500!

Potenza uncovered several fascinating items during the foundation digging, including a cannon ball, a railroad tie and a huge boulder 10 feet tall and 10 feet across. The boulder has since been split into three sections, with two pieces serving as permanent conversation pieces on the property.

For all the aggravation and expense, Potenza says he would do it all over again. “It was an education and a challenge,” he says. “I met so many nice people who are now personal friends—I golf with some of the carpenters, and one of the plumbers and his family have come to my lake home.”

Potenza advises other day spa owners to thoroughly research a site and anticipate complications before they become a problem. “Don’t take anything for granted,” he says. “Think of every question and every potential problem. Write them out and get the answers before you put down any money.”

DETAILS, ROCKY RIVER, OHIO

When Anthony Pawlowski first drove by the old house in a suburb of Cleveland that became Details, he immediately saw the possibilities. The street location had excellent visibility, the price was in his range and the idea of owning the building and land instead of renting was attractive. He had tossed around the idea of opening his own day spa as he worked at his salon just one block south—he wanted to give his clients everything under

story structure, Potenza discovered that the foundation would be below the high-water line—meaning a potential for flooding of the basement during rainy weather. Potenza had to invest an additional \$5,000 for special foundation drains.

The greatest expense was



Courtesy Details



Courtesy: Details

The downstairs salon at Details was open during three weeks of construction.

DETAILS, ROCKY RIVER, OHIO

Date of original construction:

Early 1950s

Spa's previous incarnation:

Two-story private home, hair salon

Year structure became a spa: 1997

Time it took to remodel: Two months for the structure, six months for the steam room

Approximate cost: \$35,000

for remodeling

Most costly part of remodel:

Retail area

one roof. So Pawlowski and his wife, Diane, bought the house.

They owned the house for a year before beginning renovation, giving Pawlowski the luxury of time to do research and find reliable contractors. "They're worth their weight in gold," he notes. "We were able to visit each contractor's projects and inspect their work before deciding on the ones we wanted."

The project had its share of obstacles. The two-story house and basement totaled only 1,800 square feet, so Pawlowski's challenge was to effectively use every inch of space. The first floor houses the retail products and hair services, while the top floor is devoted to spa treatments.

Fortunately, the top floor had previously housed a hair salon, so the plumbing was already partially completed. Pawlowski ripped out the old counters to make room for the facial area, steam room, massage room, hair removal area, pedicure corner and bathroom—all in a tight 529 square feet.

To allow more downstairs room for retail, Pawlowski removed the front porch, added 200 square feet and built a

grand entrance at a cost of \$20,000, the most expensive portion of the remodeling. During the three weeks of downstairs construction, the day spa was open for business. "The whole front of our salon was gone at one point in November," says Pawlowski. "We kept warm by moving a lot and insulating the front as best we could with plastic and portable heaters." Pawlowski admits that the sound of pounding hammers often felt like being "in a battlefield" but that most clients supported the remodeling effort. He lost only one client during construction who has since returned.

Pawlowski saved money by doing much of the work himself. Employees pitched in as well, putting up studs and painting. The most difficult part of construction was installing the steam room. It took six months to coordinate with the electrician, the plumber and the company hired to make the cultured marble. "Everything was custom and had to fit into a house that really wasn't designed to hold a steam room," he explains. "The plumbing and electricity had to be rerouted around the existing chimney."

To ensure silence in the spa area, Pawlowski encased the upstairs in thick insulation. Aside from a few problems, he feels that the renovation went smoothly. He notes that remodeling an old building is always a work in progress. The most current project is removing the 1970s wallpaper from the bathroom, "although," he jokes, "maybe we should leave it and tell clients it's part of a 'retro' look." ♣

Laurel Dewey is a Colorado-based freelance writer and author of the book *The Humorous Herbalist*.