



# HOLMES

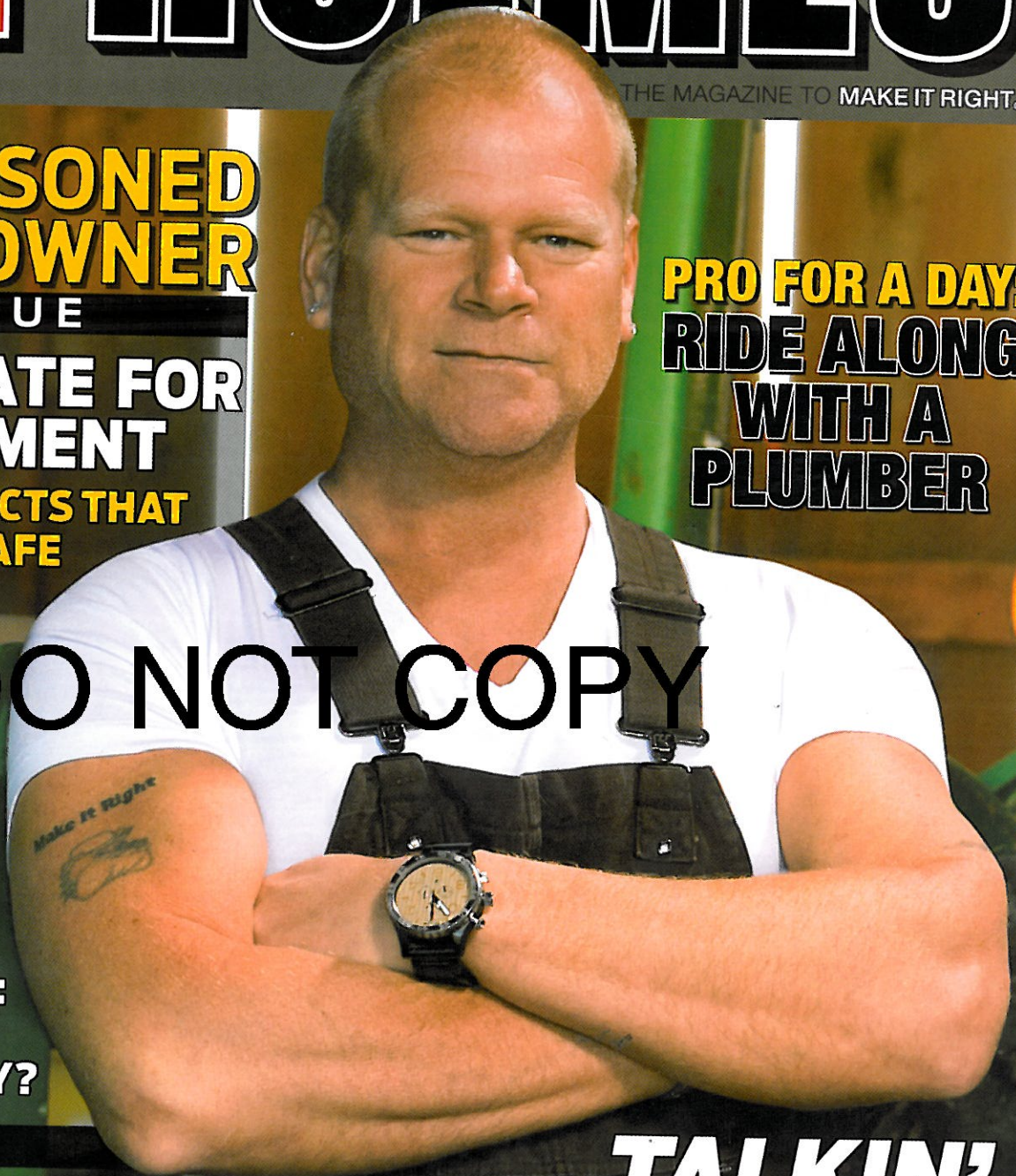
THE MAGAZINE TO MAKE IT RIGHT.

## THE SEASONED HOMEOWNER ISSUE

### RENOVATE FOR RETIREMENT

- ▶ PICK PRODUCTS THAT KEEP YOU SAFE
- ▶ GET YOUR GARAGE TO WORK HARDER!
- ▶ MAKE YOUR HOUSE ACCESSIBLE
- ▶ REVERSE MORTGAGES: TIME TO TAP YOUR EQUITY?

### PRO FOR A DAY: RIDE ALONG WITH A PLUMBER



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### ADD A HOME THEATER ...THAT'S WIRED FOR UPGR

### TALKIN' TRASH

# 10 STEPS TO HEALTHY HOUSE

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ISSUE 7

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Salmonella germs are responsible for an estimated 1.4 million illnesses each year in the U.S., according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

# LET'S CLEAN DO NOT COPY HOUSE

*Spotless  
looks  
may not  
tell the  
whole  
story*



**FACE IT:** Every house has some degree of mold and bacteria, no matter how clean it looks. While most people can safely coexist with a certain amount of these **pesky microorganisms**, "problems occur when there are too many of them," says Caroline Blazovsky, president of My Healthy Home, an indoor air-testing and mold-remediation company, based in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey. Learn ways to keep them from thriving.

BY JOSEPH PROVEY

It's hard to stay ahead of all the conditions that promote an overgrowth of mold and bacteria. So, your best bet is to focus on the most troublesome spots and keep the sheer number of germs low.

Even rooms that sparkle can hold real health-risks, deep down in their nooks and crannies. Mold overgrowth—especially when its reproductive spores are disturbed and inhaled—triggers respiratory ailments such as hay fever, nasal allergies and asthma, as well as rashes and eczema when it touches the skin. And, if ingested, high concentrations of toxic bacteria can cause abdominal cramping, diarrhea and fever.

One smart way to fight these problems is to monitor and discourage excess moisture and humidity, which feed mold in the usual damp areas, such as basements and bathrooms, but also wherever moisture can enter from outside, such as through exterior flashing and caulking.

Beyond that, bacteria and mold can spring up on nearly anything, given the right conditions—even on materials chemically treated to resist them. So, educate yourself specifically about the following 10 hot spots. Then roll up your sleeves and deal with them before they become problems only an abatement company can solve.

## [HOUSEHOLD GERMS]



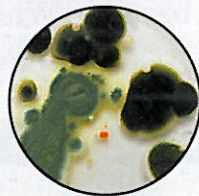
salmonella



giardia



E. coli



mold

# [10 THINGS] TO

## [PROBLEM 1]

### CRUMBLING CAULKING AND GROUT

Caulking and grout keep moisture from seeping into critical joints that must remain watertight (e.g., where countertops and backsplashes meet, between tiles and around faucets and drains). If you notice cracks, crumbling or holes, these barriers are no longer doing their jobs.

**THE FIX** Have a professional regrout while the job is small. He or she should know to remove the old grout so that a new seal isn't compromised. "Grout isn't waterproof. All large seams, like those around your tub, should be filled with silicone-based bathroom caulking," says Tara Valley, owner of Moldinspections.ca, a residential mold detection and removal company based in Toronto.

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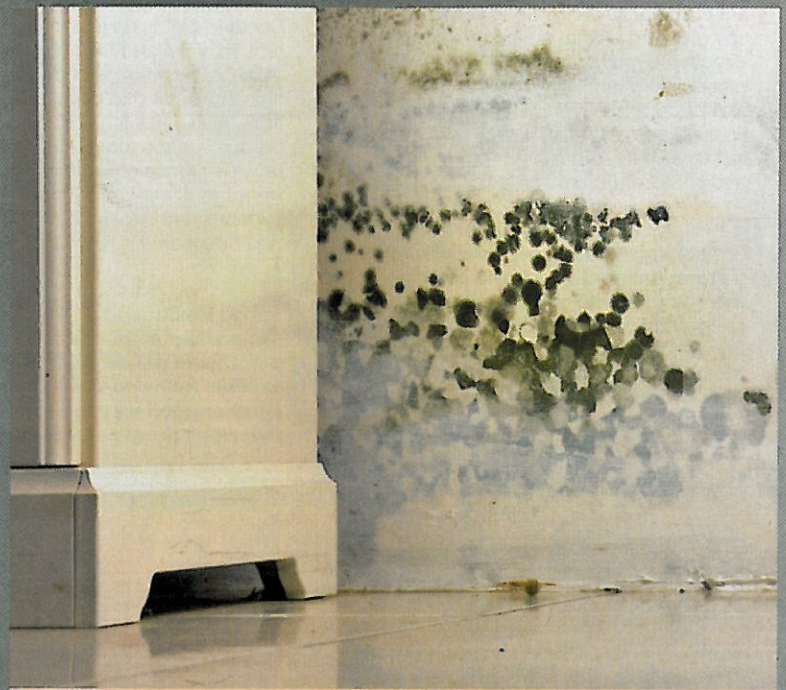
# FIX RIGHT NOW

## [PROBLEM 2]

### SURFACE MOLD

If you see a mold outbreak that's smaller than 10 square feet (.9 square meters), you can usually handle the cleanup yourself. Just put on rubber gloves, a disposable dust mask and safety goggles, before you scrub it off any washable surface, using a dish-soap-and-water solution. But larger areas will require a mold-abatement specialist's expertise. "These companies will contain the spores to prevent cross-contamination and protect your HVAC system. Plus, they know the steps to sufficiently dry up wet areas and properly dispose of mold-ridden objects, all while using the right protective gear," Valley says. Note: If you see only a bit of mold but feel sick, you should also call in a professional. Perhaps it's a bigger problem than you think.

**THE FIX** Always run the exhaust fan when taking a shower and for 30 minutes after. If you don't own one, have one installed. After showering, it also helps to wipe up excess water and draw the shower curtain closed so it dries, thoroughly.



## [PROBLEM 3]

### MUSTY CLOSETS

Don't dismiss that smell as dirty socks. This can be another sign of mold growth.

**THE FIX** As in the bathroom, the solution is to improve ventilation. Having louvered closet doors installed is a long-term solution. In the meantime, clean the closet floor and walls with a damp rag dipped in baking soda and prop open the doors. Or plug in a portable, compressed air-dryer that helps remove moisture in the air by circulating it through a filter impregnated with crystalized silica-gel desiccant.

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## [PROBLEM 4]

### DANK ATTIC AIR

When the vapor barrier between the attic and the rest of the house has leaks, warm air rises into your attic. And when attic ventilation is poor, humidity builds up, causing mold to grow on—and eventually damage—the wood framing, insulation, drywall and paint finishes.

**THE FIX** Have all air leaks sealed, especially around pipe and duct penetrations, and insulate well. Open the gable vents and clear your soffit vents of any obstructions. If an attic-vent opening is too small, you could ask your contractor to add soffit and ridge vents. The International Residential Code (IRC) calls for a total ventilating area that's at least 1/150 square feet of the area of the space ventilated, for most situations.



## TESTING, TESTING...

**Sensitive to mold?** Discover where it's hiding out: Test the air in your home with the Examinair kit ([examinair.net](http://examinair.net); \$400). Take your samples and mail them to a lab indicated in the kit. Then, a healthy home expert can help you decipher the results and recommend remediation techniques.



**[PROBLEM 5]****BAD FLASHING**

Screwed-in strips of rubber or sheet-metal flashing, along with roof shingles and siding, are supposed to direct water away from chimneys, vent stacks, dormers, skylights, windows and doors. "If exterior flashing doesn't lie flush against a seam, water seeps in," says Valley. This can breed mold and cause structural damage.

**THE FIX** Pay attention to whether flashing is intact, especially after a storm. Inspect where the garage meets the house, windowsills join siding and roof lines dip into valleys. If the flashing and screws look loose, call a roofing contractor to repair them immediately—and be sure he uses materials best suited to your roof and climate.

**[PROBLEM 6]****CONTAMINATED COUNTERTOPS**

Bacteria builds up in seams around sinks and faucet mounts, at backsplash joints and inside tiny abrasions that develop over time. Also, if it's left unsealed, a porous surface (concrete, marble) provides fertile ground for bacteria. Nonporous materials (quartz, solid surfacing and stainless steel) are less hospitable.

**THE FIX** Wash your countertops frequently. NSF International, The Public Health and Safety Company, a nonprofit that provides third-party assessments, recommends cleaning counters with hot, soapy water before and after food preparation. Dousing them with distilled white vinegar, followed by a generous spritz of undiluted hydrogen peroxide, is another good way to disinfect food-prep areas—just test first to be sure this won't damage the finish.

**[PROBLEM 7]****DIRTY CUTTING BOARDS**

Cutting boards, in constant contact with sharp instruments and raw foods, develop deep scars where bacteria can thrive. Though NSF recommends using nonporous (i.e., plastic) boards, not everyone is a fan. A study conducted at the University of California at Davis Food Safety Laboratory suggests that wood actually decreases bacterial contamination. Nevertheless, the jury is still out.

**DO**

**THE FIX** Scrub both plastic and wood boards with hot, soapy water after each use. Top plastic boards once they're rough and badly scarred. Resurface wooden boards with a thickness planer, or sand them down with progressively finer-grit paper. Replace a wood cutting board once it cracks or separates.

**NOT****COPY****[PROBLEM 9]****LEAKY PLUMBING**

The smallest leaks can cause big mold outbreaks. Under-sink drain-traps, shutoff valves and toilets are common sites for trouble. If the base of a vanity cabinet is saturated or warped, a compression joint may have loosened. Or you could have a clog that results in standing water in the pipe.

**THE FIX** Consult a good plumber and he'll tighten the large slip-joint nuts that keep drains clog-free. Stop leaky shutoff valves by backing one off slightly or gently turning it clockwise, if it's open too wide. Otherwise, call your plumber for a replacement. And if you see water leaking out from underneath a toilet, smell sewer gas, or if flooring around a toilet feels spongy, the wax ring sealing the toilet to the floor drain is broken. A plumber must disassemble the toilet to replace the seal, and will likely have to repair the damaged subfloor.

**[PROBLEM 8]****PET ACCIDENTS**

Sure, Fluffy's a joy. But if one of her accidents goes unnoticed, it poses a health risk. To prevent airborne, inhaled transmission of harmful bacteria such as E. coli and giardia, you should pay immediate attention to soiled areas.

**THE FIX** Put a sprayer pump onto a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and spray the soiled area. Allow peroxide to sit for several minutes, to disinfect. Let it air-dry. If you suspect a serious pest, and not the family pet (droppings are usually a clear sign), call a pest-control specialist, as it's unhealthy for you to try cleaning up after wild critters who may carry disease.

**FUNKY KITCHEN SPONGES AND DISH TOWELS**

Sponges and dish towels can be bacteria-rich: Both are constantly moist and covered with food remnants. Running them through a washing machine isn't enough to get them clean.

**THE FIX** Disinfect a sponge by boiling it for five minutes, or microwave it on high, while wet, for one minute. Swap out dirty dish towels every two days, and hang them to dry when not in use.

**[PROBLEM 10]**