

Couple's waiting game is part of the process

Tearing down the house

IPSWICH — Mathew and Sarah Cummings are building a new home for themselves on the lot behind the three-family home they own in Ipswich. We're following them on their journey, with stories of the frustrations and successes every home builder experiences.



DREAM HOUSE
Part 4: Marking time

We've talked to Mat, an architect who had the chance to design the home of his dreams, and Sarah, whose sense of practicality has kept the project grounded. Last month, we looked at the paper trail of permits and ap-

provals that make up the figurative foundation of any building project.

Things are moving slowly but surely forward. Sarah continues demolishing the portion of the old house that will become part of the new one, and the framer who will build the walls, floors and ceiling had his first look at the construction site last week.

Wednesday, Nov. 3, we'll be back to see how final demolition went and how the couple is preparing for new construction.

BY STEVE LANDWEHR
STAFF WRITER

IPSWICH — Sarah Cummings' serene smile proves little things mean a lot.

For four weeks, there's been little progress on the house she and her husband, Mat, are building behind their three-family home on Central Street. It will be at least another four weeks before the framing

crew arrives to begin putting walls together. Patience is the order of the day, and that's fine with Sarah.

The two hulking piles of dirt that cast a shadow over her back yard — and psyche — all summer are gone. For Sarah, that one small step is a giant leap forward.

"Waiting is fine," she says with a grin. "I really wanted that mud pile out of there."

Sarah readily admits she doesn't

quite rise to the level of "neat freak," but she has a strong sense of order that those mounds of dirt violated daily. Now they're just a memory, partly used to back-fill around the foundation, partly trucked away, to Mat's consternation.

"We paid several hundred dollars to haul away three truckloads of loam, and next spring we'll have to pay to have loam trucked back in," he says.

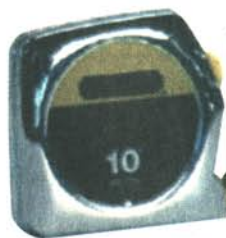
That's the way it is with a lot of projects, Mat says. Dirt is never where you need it, when you need it.

Mat, an architect who designed the couple's dream home, admits that even he had grown weary with the mess in the yard. After the footings for the house were poured, rain or the high water table on the lot meant there was usually a pool of

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MEASURING PROGRESS

The Cummingses begin making their dream a reality. Here are the project highlights so far.



September 2000:
Mat and Sarah Cummings buy three-family home in Ipswich.

Fall 2002: Couple buys single-family home on lot behind theirs.

June 2004:
Secured building permits from town of Ipswich and signed construction loan.

July 2004:
Demolition of old home begins; excavation for new one in progress.

September 2004:
Foundation poured; backyard dirt piles disappear.

Throughout 2003: Mat Cummings works on design of new home.

August 2004:
Footings poured for new home.

HOUSE: Couple's waiting game is part of the dream home process

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water in the open pits surrounding them.

"It seemed like we were standing in mud and water up to here almost every day," he says, pointing to his knees. The water had to be pumped out in case the crew setting the forms for the foundation showed up. Now that daily ordeal is over.

"At least we have a good foundation, and nobody can take it away from us," Mat says.

Odds and ends

Sarah, a school teacher in Lynn, has been demolishing most of the interior of the old house the couple is razing to make way for their new one. Since she went back to work a month ago, she's had to find time for that on week-

ends or after school. And as long as the dirt piles were standing, there was no room in the yard for a Dumpster. Inside the old house, piles of lath and plaster and plumbing and electrical fixtures cover the floors. In the living room, which will become a small sitting room in the new house, a sheet of faux-brick vinyl stands bowed against the wall.

A trash container will arrive soon, and Sarah can get rid of the accumulated debris, then begin removing the clapboards and finally, the roof.

Sarah is a little nervous about that last project. Mat's father, a heavy equipment operator, was going to take the roof off with a machine but decided he'd likely destroy the entire house.

Mat has suggested Sarah use a saw to cut away the roof be-

tween each of the rafters, which Sarah is reluctant to do.

"I don't want to do anything where something could fall on my head," she tells Mat. In the end, the couple hopes to have the assistance of family and friends for the final stage of demolition.

The recent completion of a project on the adjacent three-family home where the Cummingses have been living has also taken a weight off Sarah's shoulders. De-leading was completed, and there are once again tenants in the second- and third-floor rooms. It was tough going without that income this summer, but all in all, things worked out for the best, Sarah says.

"It was better to have the house and the parking lot empty while we were deleading," she says.

Penciled in

The couple is marking time because Tim Reynolds, the framer who is the only man Mat will use for his house, is tied up on another large house also designed by Mat.

Reynolds stopped by last week to look at the plans and walk around the foundation, getting his bearings.

Mat is one of a dwindling number of architects who still churn out drawings by hand rather than by computer-aided drafting programs. Reynolds says Mat is a stickler for the tiniest details in his plans and he's come to appreciate that as a builder.

"All his drawings are like this, not just his own house," Reynolds says as he leafs through the thick sheaf of construction plans and elevations.

Reynolds says it's especially useful to have the interior views of the finished rooms Mat provides.

"It's helpful to see what it's going to look like," he says.

Reynolds tells Mat and Sarah his crew should be starting work in about a month, and they discuss where to store lumber once it starts arriving and where to set up power tools during construction. They agree that at least at first, the slab for the garage floor will probably suit both purposes.

Walking through the rooms of the old house, the young couple and the framer envision the resurrection that's about to come.

"It's going to be quite a transformation," Reynolds says.

"All we have to do now is build it," Mat replies.