

A Story a Week ...

... from woodblock printmaker David Bull

Rusting Away

It has now been more than six years since I moved into my 'new' home in Ome, here in the western suburbs of Tokyo. I put 'new' in quotes to indicate that although this building is new to me, it wasn't newly built for me; I purchased an existing house. It was built about five or six years before I bought it, so I guess it is now about 12 years old.

This is the first time that I have ever owned any property; previous to this I had always rented accommodation. Renting vs buying is quite a big decision of course, and there are many points to consider when making this choice. When you rent, the money you pay each month is 'gone' forever, but when buying a place with a mortgage, the money you pay to the bank is really just being transferred from your right-side pocket to your left-side pocket (except for the amount you pay in interest). I think of my house as a kind of 'savings account'.

Offsetting this though, is the very large question of maintenance on the building and property. If you are renting, and the roof starts to leak, you either get it fixed by the landlord, or you just move somewhere else. But if it is your own property, it is your problem.

Why is David talking about this now, has his roof started to leak already? No no ... not yet anyway! I suppose that day will come, but hopefully it is still quite a long way away!

But other than the question of fixing problems after they occur, there is the big question of preventive maintenance - of spending money taking care of things before they break down. We all know this is the most sensible way to manage things, either with our own health, or our own home, but how much is reasonable, and how much is a waste?

The question of painting is a good example. My home is one of a group of three houses side by side. They were all built at the same time, so should - in theory - need about the same maintenance at the same rate. I myself think that my roof is OK, and the condition of the outside walls is just fine, but both of my neighbours have already repainted their exterior, and one of them has redone his roof. And these buildings are only 12 years old!

Now this was their choice to make, and is none of my business, but the problem for me is that - of course - my building is starting to look 'old' when seen next to their bright and shiny paint jobs! My standard of what is an acceptable condition is different from theirs, and as I suppose that most of the community shares their view, rather than mine, most people must be thinking of my house as 'run down'.

Now I don't really mind about being 'run down', but 'fall down' is a different story, and I am now faced with this situation. Not the house itself, but the long long metal staircase that runs from street level down to the river bank. It is starting to get rusty, and if it isn't re-painted soon it will become dangerous. First the rust has to be removed, then a primer coat applied, and then paint. It will be a hugely expensive job, something I can't afford at all, but the longer I wait, the more expensive the repair work is going to be.

Well, I knew what I was getting into when I bought the house, I just hoped that I wouldn't be getting 'into it' quite so soon!

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