



Sherry and John Petersik

# A marriage of blog and renovation

Sherry and John Petersik started the award-winning DIY blog *Young House Love* in 2007. Today, the blog gets more than 180,000 views a day and the Richmond, Va., couple's home improvement projects have landed them on the cover of *The Washington Post* and in *The New York Times*. Sherry spoke with writer **KATE PARHAM** about how they were able to turn their hobby into two full-time careers.

**Q: When did you and John meet? Tell us your love story.**

We worked together in New York City at an ad agency and he was this buttoned-up accountant guy, and I was the creative one. We secretly started dating and didn't tell anyone, but then we moved to Richmond and blew everyone's minds. Three weeks after we moved, John proposed.

**Q: What was the first DIY project you did together? Were you always crafty?**

We both have a creative streak

and, even in New York, we felt stifled by the white walls. We painted an album cover on John's wall. I remember he helped me hang a headboard that I made myself. We always knew our space would influence the way we felt when we came home. We both wanted to put our stamp on it.

**Q: I saw that you even DIYed your wedding!**

When you look at a wedding, there are all these expectations. We just said, "It's just a party, a celebration." That really calmed us down and made us think about what was really important. We just wanted a big party with warmth and fun. Like, we did a photo booth. That's more us than a dance floor.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PETERSIKS

**"We decided to redo the kitchen. John wanted to start a blog about it, but I thought it sounded dorky. He's so creative. He thought of it as a way to blow off steam, like a diary. By the second or third post, I was blogging, too. And I was the first to go full-time with it."**

**Q: Any tips for readers?**

Don't get overwhelmed and throw a very formal and elaborate wedding if it's not your style. We served really good food, it just wasn't fancy. But nobody left thinking it was cheap or thrown together. We added enough personal touches so people knew we really thought it through.

**Q: What was one of your favorite personal touches?**

We didn't want plastic plates and cups, so we made the decision to serve wine, sparkling drinks, and Italian sodas out of glass bottles. We got a local winery to save bottles for us and used those with mixed basil in the ice cubes. Everyone served themselves, using glasses from Ikea and thrift stores, which was cheaper than renting.

**Q: Okay, so you moved to Richmond, got married and then what? When did you start the blog?**

Well, we got married in July 2007 and when we got home from our honeymoon in Alaska, we were like, "What do we do now?" So, we decided to redo the kitchen. John wanted to start a blog about it, but I thought it sounded dorky. He's so creative. He thought of it as a way to blow off steam, like a diary. By the second or third post, I was blogging, too. And I was the first to go full time with it. It was great because we could send our



## Online DIY tips

Check out **Sherry and John's blog at [younghouselove.com](http://younghouselove.com) for step-by-step instructions for many DIY projects. See page 34 to see how they made a chandelier out of clothespins.**

family the URL, so we wouldn't bombard them with pics every day, and people who wanted to follow along could.

**Q: So, at first, you just posted kitchen renovation pictures?**

Well, we never imagined even one stranger would read about our kitchen. But then we started hearing from people. It was so weird, but it was nice to have a community of people encouraging you, offering advice. We're not people who started out with all this design experience. You can look back and see how we had no idea what we were doing. We love leaving that up. We're not masquerading as designers, so readers can see anything is possible.

**Q: How did you turn it into the major blog it is today?**

When you post something and you get crickets, you're like, "Aw, man." We wanted to raise awareness, so about four months after we started the blog, we entered this international contest in Canada about home improvement blogs. Readers' choice won \$1,000, so we tried to be that, and we weren't even close. But then we won the entire thing! That was a pivotal moment where we thought, "Maybe we're good at this." When we announced we won \$5,000 on the blog, I think seven people commented on it.

**Q: But did your readership spike after that?**

No. We've had amazing things happen, but your traffic just goes boop ... just a little. It's slow. But then in 2009 Apartment Therapy nominated us as best blog. We got fourth place out of six blogs. We were just in awe to be nominated. The next year, we got second place. Then last year, we won! Those moments blow our minds. Then we were on HGTV. ... That was huge. We got maybe 30 comments.

**Q: So what's your secret to success? Blogging is not a get rich quick scheme. There's nothing special**

about us. We just put a lot of time and work into it. I have 2,000 posts in our archives after five years. If you love it that much and do it that long, the same could happen for you, but it's never going to happen in a day.

**Q: That's amazing! And we hear you've got a book coming out, too?**

Yep! The tentative title is *Young House Love, 251 Ways to Show Your Home Some Love*. It will feel a lot like the blog. It's not this big heavy decorating tome. It's very light and fun and covers DIY projects from the very broad to very specific. It should hit Amazon pre-order this summer.

**Q: What have been some of the highlights on YHL?**

Lately, we've been doing fun stuff with lighting. We made a chandelier out of clothespins. And we did a light in our office that we love. It was one of those builder brass chandeliers with six arms. We sprayed it indigo, put a big drum shade on it. It looks really high end to us.

**Q: What have been some of the reader favorites?**

We did a stencil in our office that people went crazy about, I think for the sheer volume of time ... It took me 14 hours. I worked 3 hours at a time and had a claw hand by the end. But people love following along, and they get excited with you. Everyone is so excited to see us put our cork floors in the kitchen. It's great. People are invested in our house.

**Q: Any DIY tricks of the trade you can share with us?**

We love to take common, inexpensive materials and make something that looks more expensive than the sum of its parts, like the clothespin chandelier. We still go into DIY with a cautiously optimistic attitude. Always thinking, "This might work, we're hoping it will work" kind of thing. There's no false bravado.





# Letting the light in

**WHO SAYS LAUNDRY ROOMS HAVE TO** be dark and utilitarian? Add a shot of light and style with this clever clothespin chandelier from Young House Love bloggers **SHERRY AND JOHN PETERSIK**. When the couple started looking for a light fixture for the space, they realized they already had everything they needed—starting with plenty of clothespins. A few hours of labor and a dash of ingenuity later, they had a new chandelier that transformed their drab laundry room. Here's how they pulled off this DIY makeover.



## 1. Gather supplies

We used a light kit from Ikea, a ceiling canopy, part of a roll of wire fencing (also called hardware cloth), white high-gloss spray paint, 22-gauge wire, gloves, wire cutters, and clothespins (we used 320). **Tip:** When it comes to lampshades made from flammable materials (like paper, fabric, or—say—clothespins), keep the materials well away from the bulb and give the heat plenty of room to escape (ideally, around the top and bottom of the shade). You can also use cooler-burning bulbs, like CFLs or LEDs.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PETERSIKS

## 2. Install the light kit

With the power turned off to the entire house (can't be too careful), we installed the ceiling canopy and light kit with the help of an electrician friend. We adjusted the cord to the desired height, taking into account the height of the chandelier.



## 3. Construct the frame

Since we wanted our shade to be about 10 inches tall when completed, we cut the strip of wire fencing to a height of 9.5 inches to allow for the clothespins to dangle a little bit below the bottom of the frame. We then used craft store wire to bind the fencing to itself to create a loop. We secured the wire fencing in a way that created an



even number of squares around the top. That way, when we were arranging our clothespins, we didn't have to worry about having a seam in the pattern. Next, we spray painted the frame a glossy white to match the ceiling canopy. Since some metal fencing contains traces of lead, we layered on several coats to create a seal.



## 4. Clip on the clothespins

Then it was time to play with clothespins. We used 320 medium-sized clothespins (eight bags) and played around with a few different arrangements until we landed on one that we liked. The pattern we ended up with creates an interesting zigzag effect that allows the most amount of light to shine through the openings.



## 5. Hang the chandelier

We screwed in three heavy-duty ceiling hooks paired with heavy-duty anchors. Then we used more of the 22-gauge wire to attach the chandelier to the hooks so that it hung just right. We spray painted the hooks and the wire white to minimize visibility against the white ceiling.



## 6. Finishing touches

We debated spray painting the chandelier white or staining or dyeing the wood pins, but in the end we actually really liked the *au naturel* look because it makes it more obvious that it's a light made of clothespins, which we think is part of the fun. We also liked the sunny yellowy-tan tone the light creates, which complements the walls.

**RESOURCES** Clothespins: \$16, craft store; ceiling hooks: \$1, Home Depot; wire fencing: \$8, Lowe's; Hemma light kit: \$4, Ikea; ceiling canopy: \$5, Lowe's; 22-gauge wire: \$3, craft store; spray paint: \$5, Home Depot.

**\$42**