

Venting gets rid of unwanted gasses

Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—I'm not venting this week.

Venting provides a means for noxious somethings to escape confinement.

It's in fashion these days, given the prevalence of noxious somethings.

When you vent displeasure, you're releasing it either directly at another person or into the ambient vapors where it does no harm and might even do *you* some good.

I'm mostly a vent-into-the-vapors guy. That's why I write a weekly column. I'm as fashionable as the next dinosaur who hates cell phones.

I've been thinking about venting, because we are having our downstairs hardwood floors sanded and finished with four coats of oil-based polyurethane.

I've been intending to get this done for 30 years. Projects like this should never be undertaken until they have fully ripened, particularly in concept.

(Mainly, I didn't want to move the furniture and empty all the bookshelves.)

Almost everything in our farmhouse is paneled wood—floors, walls and ceilings. Red oak and chestnut were felled on the farm 100 years ago, then milled into 9-foot-long, 3¼-inch-wide, tongue-and-groove boards.

In the early 60s, the preceding owners decided to climb higher on the social ladder by upgrading the living room. They covered the original floor with store-bought, short-strip oak and concealed the original oak ceiling behind sheetrock.

I've been nursing this particular grievance for three decades. I wouldn't call this venting; I'd call it nursing.

When we bought the farm, the oak wall paneling in the living room was painted turquoise. One upstairs bedroom was bright lavender; another pink. Other rooms, fortunately, had been spared this brush with paint and survived in their original varnish.

The second thing I did after moving in -- the first was replacing the light bulbs that had vanished between final walk-through and possession -- was to strip these rooms of their Disneyesque colors.

I vented the chemical fumes from the stripper gel out the windows along with all the gassy comments I made as I scraped and scraped and scraped. If you're looking for someone to blame for poisoning our air, it's me.

For years, I sneered silently -- which, admittedly, is a wussy kind of vent -- against the living-room's sheetrock ceiling and 2¼-inch-wide, off-the-shelf flooring. Underneath each remuddled "improvement" lay the original wood, now irreparably disfigured by nails.

I'm sure that I'm not the only homeowner who sends up a few choice "best wishes" to his predecessors.

I also had to stew over the prospect of junking the "improvements." The job was more work than I wanted to take on, because it would require ripping out and then replacing the original damaged ceiling and floor boards. This would open the living room to our crawlspace dirt for a couple of weeks with nothing but joists to dance on, which would tax even my legendary balletic agility. Rather than go there, I shoed my grumbles into the vapors.

I did, however, capture a small satisfaction by shoe-scraping the finish off the fancy floor. Several generations of Yellow Labs helped by gouging it with their toenails.

The "distressed" look the dogs and I achieved is now both desirable and pricey.

It is so organic that Martha Stewart asked whether she could market my technique though a branded shoe line with gritty soles. She said my "shoe-activated distressing process raised DIY floor revitalization to a level of green purity that only she could appreciate." I told her the dogs helped a lot. "Rent them out by the day," she advised.

The resident Alpha female to whom I'm affixed declined to help us unfinish the living-room floor. I didn't make a marital issue of it.

She finally put her foot down. "Refinish the living-room floor like a normal human being or else," she said.

In distressed-looking husbands like me, such threats are not taken as vents. I'm not venting, mind you.

Venting has taken on another meaning in recent years with the rise of Oprah and the fall of western civilization.

Venting is now a process where one person talks at another person who is expected to listen attentively and support whatever position is advanced.

There is the ventor, the one who vents, and the ventee, who, like me, gets it in the ear—which, I hasten to add, is not a vent, just an anatomically correct description.

In my experience, women do this type of venting more than men. But I admit that my sample size is small. Instead of venting, men, generally, open a few windows when their fumes build up or watch a rerun of last night's game.

Television opinionators vent a lot. MSNBC's Chris Matthews routinely directs a question to a guest that he then answers before asking his guest to confirm the answer that he's just provided. He is not alone.

Duelling venting is the preferred format on ideology-driven talk shows. Everyone shouts at the same time; no one listens. (I've always learned more from listening than talking, but that's an anti-venting vent that I will skip for now.) These shows should hire a couple of professional listeners to maintain the appearance of talk as discussion.

My work as a ventee is below average, even for husbands and fathers. I'm just not sufficiently passive. When a problem is presented, I'm trained to figure ways to solve it. Ventors consider this the biggest no-no of all.

I blame my failure on the SAT-educational complex, which fed me problem after problem to puzzle out, and the subsequent purchase of a four-year liberal arts education from Oberlin College. I can't shed this straitjacket. By now, it's skin-tight.

Kim Jong-un -- the North Korean video gamer and wannabe hoopy -- is also venting. "Pay attention to me," he's shouting. "Give me a dog biscuit, and maybe I'll stop barking."

The danger in making yourself a problem is that someone might eventually solve it.

Any venting that you suspect lurks between the lines above should be blamed on Martha Stewart's volatile organic compounds and the vast right-wing conspiracy that has produced Bill Clinton, Al Sharpton and cell phones.

I'm not venting; I'm just saying.

All of my vents this week are dedicated to refinishing me.

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