

Hi Neighbors!

I am Mark Tiddens, and Judy & I have lived here for 5 years. We love it! Before moving here, we lived in Solana Beach for 18 years, and originally came from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

I retired over a year ago and tackled a long list of projects to update and improve our home. I thought these might be of interest to you since our homes are the same age and construction (and the best improvements are noted as "Very nice!"). A handyman can do all of these things, and you could use this as a checklist by using the 50 or so brackets [] .

- 1) [] Already updated by the former owner – [] Our kitchen had been updated, and [] our floors were updated to vinyl tiles in the entryway, kitchen, dining room, den, and bathrooms. We have vinyl tiles and planks that look like wood, slate, and ceramic. New vinyl technology is attractive, durable, and warm. Very nice! [] And our carpets were okay.
- 2) [] Inside painting – Our house was recently painted inside, but the baseboards were scuffed up, perhaps from the move-out and move-in, so we painted all baseboards and it looked much better (prior to painting the baseboards, we filled cracks in the corners).
- 3) [] Fireplace hearth – We were able to use matching color caulking to fill cracks, but we will probably replace it all.
- 4) [] Spotlights – We put LED spotlights above some shelves and areas that displayed glass, ceramics, or art. Very nice!
- 5) [] We replaced all light bulbs in the house, and the yard, with LED's (saves electricity and changing light bulbs often). You can get LED's with "warmer" light rather than super bright white (although it still won't be as "warm" as old fashioned light bulbs).
- 6) [] We replaced all of the round door knobs with modern lever door knobs, [] replaced all of the water faucets, [] replaced all water valves connected to the sinks and toilets with modern half-turn valves (the old ones were hard to turn), and [] put two levels of hangers in the master bedroom closets. [] We also pulled all of the door hinge pins and applied a little grease so they stopped creaking.
- 7) Blinds and Security Doors – [] We have the original vertical blinds in the bedrooms, which are fine. Our living room has the vertical wooden panels of horizontal blinds at the slider and windows, which are fine. [] We also have security doors outside our front door and our two big sliders in the back. Maybe the security doors are over-kill in our safe community, but they do add some comfort, especially when you want to leave a door or two slightly open at night to get fresh air.
- 8) [] GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) electrical sockets – Should have in kitchen, bathrooms, and outside (only need one per area/circuit). Also, you should have [] a Radon gas detector (our just sits on a shelf), and [] a clamp on your fireplace damper (easy to install) if your fireplace has natural gas (in a gas fireplace, the damper has to stay slightly open to allow dangerous gases to escape the firebox in the case of a gas leak).
- 9) Bathrooms – [] We still have the original bathroom cabinets (although I've had to replace some sliding parts, which Home Depot has, and re-attached a couple of rails). [] We have changed the large tub in the master bath to a walk-in shower (very, very nice! – the best improvement in our home), and [] used the same new tile for the guest bathroom shower and the countertops of both bathrooms. On the walk-in shower in the master bath, we wanted no ridge, like some nice hotel rooms, but the floor must be designed for that (slanted below floor level), so we compromised with

them on a ridge only an inch higher than the shower floor (and a couple inches taller than the bathroom floor).

- 10) Fast hot water – Our house was re-plumbed through the attic because a pipe under the concrete slab broke. It took a long time to get hot water in the bathrooms. There is an easy and ingenious solution: You install a small re-circulating pump above your water tank, and install some simple valves under your sinks that are furthest from the water tank. The pump has a timer that you can set to turn it on and off when want fast hot water. When the pump is on, it circulates the hot water out to your sinks and showers, and back through the cold water lines to the hot water tank. When you open a spigot in your house, the simple valves under the furthest sinks close and allow the hot and cold water to flow normally. Our re-circulating pump cost about \$200: Watts Hot Water Recirculating System with Built-In Timer.
- 11) Earthquake straps – I don't think there will ever be a destructive earthquake in San Marcos (the last major one in San Diego was over 250 years ago, and you have to live almost on top of a fault, or at least within a few miles of it, to experience destruction). However, I'm afraid a large enough "shaker" might topple tall furniture, so we installed straps on them. There are straps that use Velcro, so easy to disconnect, and are not visible if you can move the cabinet out from the wall to install them, or you can just use eye bolts and picture frame hanging wire (need 2 per cabinet, screwed into separate wall studs). The straps or wire should be a little loose to allow some movement. Other things you can do is use museum jelly under taller breakable things so they don't tip over, and put child-proof or earthquake latches on cabinet doors that you don't want to open, if there is earthquake shaking.
- 12) Whole house fan – We haven't installed one yet, but it would probably save some air conditioning cost to get the house cooled down in the evening before and while going to bed. One option: Quiet Cool ES-3100, 3,068 CFM, 1,500 ft, \$872.
- 13) Hot water tank – If you don't have a pan under your hot water tank (and/or there is no strap around it connected to the wall), it is probably an old tank that should be replaced. If you can, run the drain pipes from the pressure valve on top, and from the tray, to a drain or through an outside wall to drain outside, rather than flood your garage or wherever your tank is. Our tank is in the garage, near a wall shared with the spare bedroom. The tank burst and flooded through the wall into the spare bedroom because it did not have a pan underneath it with its drain going either to a drain or outside. Note: Do not call the 800 number on the big sticker that might be on your water tank or that you received in the mail. They are a scam and very aggressive (unfortunately, I contacted them). We used Quick Water Heater at (619) 663-4328 – cost \$1,895 including reserve pressure tank. They seemed to do a good job.
- 14) Garage – We added four bright LED lights in the ceiling, and one in the attic. Very nice! We also cleaned/etched the garage floor, then used a gray epoxy paint on the floor and the concrete on the sides. It looks great, but you need to put something such as adhesive-backed tiles where the car tires rest because tires are hot and lift the paint. Actually, if I did it over again, I might just paint all of the side concrete and use adhesive tiles for the whole main garage floor (after cleaning/etching it so the tiles will adhere best), which would cost about \$300. And of course we added shelves, cabinets, and a garden tool pegboard (there were already cabinets and a work bench on one side).
- 15) A couple more garage things:
 - a. Our garage had a couple of low vents in the base concrete wall, but no air outlet, so we added vents to the top of our garage door so the warm air can exit, pull in cooler air through the low vents, and keep the garage cooler in the summer (which prevents heat damage to things in the garage).

- b. [] It is easy to replace the rubber seal that is on the bottom of your garage door. You stop the garage door about halfway up, where it is easy to access the ends of the old rubber seal, pull/slide the old one off from one end, and pull/slide the new one on from one end. Cut the length scissors after installing so the rubber seal fills the gaps between the ends of the garage door and the walls to cut down on insects and animals getting into the garage.
- 16) Attic openings – We have pull-down stairs to our attic in the hallway to access the heater/air conditioner in the attic. We also put an access to the attic in the garage. We found there was room in the garage attic (and a high ceiling) to [] install a 6 x 8 foot floor (using left-over shelving wood) for storage. Note that, at least in our house, the garage attic is open through to the house attic. The firewalls (double wallboard) are the inside and garage ceilings, and the wall between the garage and the house. If you install stairs to either attic area [], they must be “fire break” stairs, such as this one: <https://www.homedepot.com/p/Fakro-LWF-8-ft-10-ft-22-5-in-x-54-in-Fire-Rated-Insulated-Wood-Attic-Ladder-with-300-lb-Maximum-Load-Capacity-869718/300026752> - \$645.
- 17) [] Windows – The original windows are not so great, and I understand that many neighbors found them leaking and have replaced them. Except for one small window, all of our windows face north or east, so perhaps they haven’t experienced as much degradation (although they are very “caulked up” with clear caulking).
- 18) [] Outside wall paint - Mark Anthony recommended Andy at New Horizons, (858) 775-9403. He was reasonable and excellent! For our house about \$3,500.
- 19) [] Outside watering – All outside watering should be changed from spraying to dripping. Spraying discolors and degrades stucco walls, and wastes water.
- 20) [] Flashing between properties – This flashing needs to be maintained. Ours in the “uphill neighbor’s” yard had corroded in some places at least halfway back (from the landscaping spray over the years), and there were weeds growing up into the flashing, perhaps even pushing it up slightly.

This flashing sits on top of the corner of a concrete block wall an inch or so back under the flashing, with a bead of sealant between the top front corner of the concrete wall and the flashing. The space behind the sealant is open to the inside wall and insulation of the house. So, if this flashing has been pushed up at all anytime over the past years, the seal may be broken, which could allow water, insects, animals, and weeds to grow up under the flashing and into your wall. Actually, it looked to me like the sealing is so old and dry that it might not be sealing anymore. It is not easy, maybe not possible, to pull up the flashing while it is in place and re-seal it. But maybe it is possible to push enough sealant up under the flashing overhang (maybe using expanding sealant).

The flashing should be repaired or replaced where needed. I replaced one long section with new flashing, and I repaired smaller bad sections using an adhesive and rubber backed roll of aluminum that I doubled under the edge. When replacing or repairing the flashing, make sure you run a new thick bead of sealant along the top corner of the concrete block wall so the flashing seals against it.

I got permission from the next door neighbor to fix or replace the flashing and to [] replace their landscaping sprayers along the wall of our house with drippers so water wouldn’t degrade the flashing or the stucco.

- 21) Outside water drains and sewer drain accesses – There are outside water drains along the flashing between the properties that is mentioned above. These drains really need to be clear so that water from sprinklers, drippers, and rain doesn’t pool and find a way into the wall of the neighboring “downhill” home. The outside drain lines go all the way from the street curb to the back of the

properties. However, many drains might have been covered up over the years, and most of the drains that you can find are probably clogged. [] It costs about \$400 for a 2-hour minimum to get a drain company to clear/jet the drain pipes via the curb outlets and clear the drains. We did the outside water drain lines and drains on both sides of our property. The drains along our outside wall in the uphill neighbor's yard were indeed blocked (and we had experienced some moisture and mold on the inside of the wall in our closet). As long as they are jetting the outside water drains, [] have them jet the sewer drains. The main sewer line access is in front of the house (two accesses, one for the pipe to the house, and one for the pipe to the street), plus there is a smaller access outside the kitchen (which really needed cleaned out).

- 22) Roof notes (should you power wash the roof, and replace concrete vent pipe boots with metal?) – Mark Anthony advised that 1) We probably shouldn't power wash the roof tiles because they have a coating on them that power washing might remove, making the tiles porous and leak-prone. 2) He said we probably don't want to replace the vent pipe boots unless there is a problem (no use in risking causing a problem). 3) If we do start having problems with leaks, the roof can be replaced, including two layers of new barrier material (currently there is only one layer of old material). Mark's contact information is: Mark Anthony Construction & Roofing - 760-803-7534 – does roof replacement.
- 23) [] Roof tiles – We had a lot of them that had slipped down a few inches over the years. I lifted or removed them, put a strong adhesive where they touched the roof or other tiles, and put them back in place. I also glued broken tiles back together, swept the roof, and applied anti-fungal spray to the sections that had a lot of mildew.
- 24) Gutters – [] Ours were a third full of dirt and rainwater was over-running them in places. [] Also, many of the nails were loose, most of which needed to be replaced by nails a couple of inches longer. [] I also found two places where rainwater would pour off the side of the roof: One was over the pedestrian garage door, which was affecting the stucco and rotting both the door and the door frame. The other place was over the air conditioner. I used some 3-inch metal channel as a gutter hidden under the "side tiles" and running just under the top edge of the stucco, including some sealant there, and connected this gutter to the larger gutter. [] Then I used stucco and wood filler to fix the stucco and the door frame, and screwed & glued a cover for the bottom couple of feet of the door that was rotted.
- 25) [] Landscaping rock – Ours was pretty full of dirt, so a lot of weeds. We took all the rock and old barrier out, put down two layers of new barrier (one layer seems to still grow some weeds), and washed & seined the old rock (I picked up a couple of laborers from the Home Depot parking lot to do the work): We made a seine about 3 x 3 feet out of 2x4's and half-inch square metal screen, which we would dump a couple of shovel loads of rock into, washing it so all of the dirt/sand and smaller rock went through and piled below. This got rid of all of the dirt/sand and small rock that weeds grown in, and we made the rock layer as thin as possible (only as thick as needed to not see the barrier layer) so that there is minimal rock for weeds to grow in, weeds that do grow in the large rock nuggets either die from heat exposure or are easy to remove, and it is easy to move the rock aside when desired. I also have an outdoor vacuum/blower that I use to vacuum the rock twice a year.
- 26) Extras: [] In our master bathroom we have a towel warmer (nice, dry, warm towels in the morning after a timer turns it on an hour before we get up and turns it off a couple hours later). Ours was about \$700: Runtal model TW12-24.
[] We also have a "bidet" (actually, if it is not built into the toilet it is called a "washlet", which sits on top of the toilet (replaces the lid)). It's very nice to have (and is an option if there is a toilet paper shortage). Ours was about \$500: TOTO A200.

27) More extras:

- a. [] Free TV - We have an antenna in the attic that points south (toward Mount Soledad in La Jolla and Mount San Miguel in National City where the TV transmitters are (free, real HDTV rather than the cable compressed HDTV). Mount Soledad has ABC, CBS, and many other channels. Mount San Miguel has NBC, PBS, and any other channels. Most HOA's do not allow TV antennas on the roofs). I ran the antenna cable to our main TV (it's an optional input). We don't get the stations from Mount Soledad too well (NBC, PBS, and many others), so we still have cable TV, but you might be happy with what you get and cancel cable TV (because you can also get all TV shows and movies from the Internet by casting the website from your phone, tablet, or PC to your TV – or by using the Internet apps on your TV). It's also nice to watch TV when the cable TV is down. A good antenna: Winegard HD7694P (\$55, 45 miles, length 65" (5' 5"), width 35", vertical height: 13"). I just put it on a short length of antenna pole pipe and clamped the pole to studs in the attic.
- b. [] Stereo connections throughout the house - I used the land-line telephone connections throughout the house to connect stereo music to speakers in every room (you can drill holes in the existing plates for the stereo connectors, or you can buy new plates with stereo connectors). I also put the video output of our TV on two of the connections, so anything on the main TV can be watched in the other rooms. There are 3 sets of telephone wires, so one set can be use for left stereo, one set for right stereo, and one set for composite TV. I actually left the telephone connectors in the plates, and connected to the wires, so a telephone land-line could still be used rather than using the wires for stereo and video...

28) [] Back wall – Done 7/15/20 - Our back wall was the backside of tan concrete block (the “nice textured side” faces Rancho Santa Fel). We were considering either having the wall stucco'd or, perhaps nicer, covered with stone.

Stone veneer can vary from \$6 to \$9 per square foot (\$1,440), compared to natural stone siding costing \$15.00 to \$30.00 per square foot (for our 160 sq ft, \$2,400 to \$4,800).

One option:

<https://www.lowes.com/pl/Stone-veneer-Stone-veneer-accessories-Siding-stone-veneer-Building-supplies/4294781308>

4' x 40' = 160 sq. ft / 3 sq ft/panel = 53 x \$40 = \$2,120 (\$13.25/sq ft).

Lowe's: \$66/4.9 sq ft = \$2,155

We went with this option:

<https://www.lowes.com/pd/Elida-Ceramica-Natural-Ledgewood-Stone-13-in-x-25-in-Matte-Porcelain-Wood-Look-Wall-Tile/1001031578>

Elida Ceramica Natural Ledgewood Stone 13-in x 25-in Matte Porcelain Wood Look Wall Tile
Item #1351402 Model #LW0319302

Purchase Price: \$8.98 (\$3.91/sq ft x 160 sq ft = \$625)

Covers 2.30 square feet (160 sq ft / 2.3 = 70 pcs x \$8.98 = \$670)

24.88-in W x 13.33-in L x 9.5mm thick individual tile covers 2.3-sq ft

Length: 40 feet = 480 / 24.88 = 19.3 tiles across

Height: 4 pcs = 53 inches. Wall is 46 inches so need to cut 7 inches from the bottom (or sink bottom row)

So, need 20 tiles across x 4 pcs high = 80 pcs x \$9 = \$720

MAPEI Large Tile and Stone 50-lb White Powder Thinset/Medium Bed Mortar - \$31

<https://www.lowes.com/pd/MAPEI-Large-Tile-and-Stone-50-lb-White-Powder-Thinset-Medium-Bed-Mortar/3743785>

Item #12591 Model #11350136 – Need about 4 50-lb sacks \$15 each.

Excellent for porcelain, ceramic and most natural stone tiles with one or more sides greater than 15-in

Non-sag formula is the ideal solution for installation of large tiles on walls

Non-slump formula of this medium bed mortar is designed to bond and support large tile

MAPEI 2-Gallon White Liquid Latex Mortar Additive Mortar

Item #13956 Model #30757136 – Need 4 jugs at \$20 each

Grout: MAPEI® sanded or unsanded 14 Biscuit (lighter) or 39 Ivory grout (darker) – We went with sanded Hayseed.

Uncoupling membrane option (didn't do it):

Schluter Systems Ditra 54-sq ft Orange Plastic Waterproofing Tile Membrane

Item #379129 Model #DITRA5M – Need 2 rolls x 87

Uncoupling membranes designed for ceramic and stone tile installations provide waterproofing and help prevent cracking. Uncoupling membranes absorb any substrate movement, and eliminate the transfer of that stress to the tile layer, which helps to prevent loose or cracked tiles.

MAPEI Uncoupling Membrane 50-lb Gray Powder Thinset/Medium Bed Mortar

Item #576086 Model #10152L – Need about 4 50-lb sacks \$15 each.

Use as a medium-bed or thin-set mortar for installing tile and select natural stone on floors and walls

If you have any questions or comments, you can e-mail me at mark.tiddens@gmail.com.

Best Regards,

Mark