

# Rebuilding the bones of Pettygrove Place

After a year's worth of work to fix extensive dry rot damage, a Portland building can now shed its image as a poster child for construction defects

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When A Cut Above Construction began rebuilding the Pettygrove Place condominiums in Northwest Portland last year, it deemed the building the worst case of dry rot the company had ever seen.

The company attributes the damage to faulty construction. Six years earlier, for example, the original builder had installed the windows inside-out with no protective flashing to prevent the Oregon rain from leaking around the frames and behind the stucco exterior.

The building soaked up water like a sponge. A video filmed before renovation began shows an inspector reaching into the wall to pull out blown-in foam insulation and, with a squeeze of his fist, wringing out the water.

Seven years of moisture had caused the building's frame to become so warped and black with mold "it almost looked like fire damage," Bob Miller, a project manager with A Cut Above, said.

Now with its fresh cedar hardy plank and stone exterior, it's hard to believe Pettygrove Place was once rotting from the inside out.

A Cut Above this week will complete a year-long renovation of the condo's eight units, stripping the building down to its drywall and replacing the windows, framing, supporting beams, insulation and



Dan Carter/DJC

Bob Miller, left, and Clark Zeller, project managers with A Cut Above Construction in Portland describe the moisture damage at Pettygrove Place condominiums as the worst they'd seen. The company, which specializes in home exteriors, has found a niche renovating buildings involved in construction defect claims.

damaged interior fixtures.

The company was called in to repair the damage after the building's developer, Milwaukie-based CCD Development, and general contractor settled a lawsuit brought by the homeowner's association

in 2006. A Cut Above, which specializes in home exteriors, has found a niche in cleaning up the mess left by construction defect litigation cases.

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“Pettygrove Place was a good example of construction gone wrong,” said Tobi Crooks, CEO of Independent Building Inspections, who was hired by the homeowner’s association to assess the damage.

Moisture damage had caused the building to sink up to two inches and it was in danger of collapsing. It needed to be shored up on all four floors to replace the dry rot, Crooks said.

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— TOBI CROOKS  
*Independent Building Inspections*

The kind of extensive damage at Pettygrove Place is “fairly normal” in buildings involved in defect cases, said Dean Aldrich, an attorney with Ball Janik, the firm that represented CCD Development in the 2006 lawsuit. He’s seen wood supporting studs turn to pulp the consistency of oatmeal and once watched an inspector pull a 2-foot mushroom from inside a wall, he said.

“Particularly with stucco, water gets trapped, and if can’t get out, it’s going to fester and rot things out,” Aldrich said.

Companies like A Cut Above must replace all of that rotted wood and soggy insulation and rebuild the wall frames from bottom to top while the old drywall stays in place, a task akin to replacing the bones in a body without disturbing the skin.

At Pettygrove Place, the company peeled off the stucco exterior, gutted the insulating foam and then a crew of 10 carpenters worked 50 hours a week for more than two months to replace the framing, said Clark Zeller, who heads A Cut Above’s commercial division.



Dan Carter/DJC

*A Cut Above Construction expects to complete renovations on Pettygrove Place in Northwest Portland this week. The company says the seven-year-old building suffered extensive dry rot as a result of faulty construction.*

The company also had to address problems with the building’s supporting beams. No matter how thick they are, those beams aren’t immune to water damage. Even an inch of rot means the builder must replace the entire length of a beam. But unlike new construction, in which overhead beams are lifted by a crane and set into a building without a roof, reconstruction involves lifting the new beams into place by hand.

It took Cut Above two days to install two new beams at the Pettygrove condos,

working perpendicular to the structure with 4 feet of room.

In all, the company completed about \$1 million of work that could have been avoided if the place had been built correctly the first time, Zeller said. The company is now doing a similar renovation on three other Portland buildings.

“Some condo developers are learning,” he said. “But I drive around and see well-known companies not doing things the way we would do them.”