

BY KYLE DIAMOND



Honey Bee Rescue

A few years ago, during an initial walk-through for an exterior restoration project, we encountered a large colony of bees nesting in the home's gable-end wall. Wild honey bees were flying in and out of a gap between the stone chimney and abutting vertical trim (1). Infrared imaging taken from outside the house revealed the nest's rough size and location, which was behind the chimney in the vicinity of the second-floor framing (2). The homeowners informed us that the three-story neo-colonial had been rebuilt between a couple of older stone chimneys (on either end of the house) some 30 years ago. We could see that the chimney was pulling slightly away from the wall and that the previous builder did a so-so job scribing the vertical trim to the stone and sealing the joint. This combination allowed the bees easy access into the wall cavity.

For our (and the bees') safety, the hive had to be removed before work could begin. The homeowners hired a beekeeper to capture the bees alive and remove the colony's suspected honey-laden wax comb from the walls; we were on hand to open up the walls as needed. With the beekeeper's help, our guys suited up for action. He furnished protective clothing and helped close off potential bee infiltration points, such as the wrists, waist, and ankles, with tape.

We began by removing the vertical trim covering the bees' entry point (3). This allowed the beekeeper to use his bee vacuum to safely gobble up large amounts of bees. Then, we cut back some of the existing siding and sheathing in an effort to access the nest's wax comb, but hit a road block. Apparently, when the house was rebuilt, the builder made the first-floor ceiling higher and drywalled over an old fireplace located at the old second-floor elevation (the firebox ended up falling between the two floors in the new house). The bees apparently built their nest inside this old firebox, which was inaccessible from the exterior.

We moved inside and cut out a 3-foot-square hole in the interior wall at the approximate location where we had been working outside (4). We found the bulk of the bees thriving in the abandoned firebox. The beekeeper vacuumed up the remaining bees and removed the honeycomb (5). He took the bees (and about five gallons of honey) and relocated the hive. To prevent bees from returning and keep mice and insects from being attracted to the site, we cleaned the masonry with hot water and bleach to remove any residual honey. Our crew closed up the firebox and repaired the wall, and our painter made it look as good as new. With the relocation successfully completed, we moved on to complete the exterior repairs.

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Photos: Kyle Diamond