

CASE STUDY

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For Rent: Above-Floor Plumbing System Transforms Wholesaler's Family Room into Studio Apartment

May Supply president Larry Fanella knew from the start that he would install in his uniquely situated home the same above-floor grinding technology he sells as a Saniflo distributor. This decision saved him \$2,000 along with time and the hassle of a more complicated installation.

BY JOHN O'REILLY

HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA (JANUARY 2015) — Situated in a steep hill overlooking the city of Harrisonburg, Virginia, Larry Fanella's three-story home is a prime piece of real estate. "It gives you a beautiful view of the city," says Fanella, president of May Supply Company, an independent plumbing supply and water treatment distributor to plumbing contractors and home builders in the Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia since 1972.

Previously, the house had been home to Fanella's entire family, which includes six daughters. Now, with the girls grown and out of the house, Fanella was seeking how best to utilize his space, especially the family room located on the ground-level floor.

Given the home's desirable location and the fact that the family room was already finished, the thought of selling the property and moving altogether was an attractive prospect. Ultimately, though, Fanella decided the best option was renting part of it to a tenant. "Instead of moving out to downsize, we decided to build a studio apartment," explains Fanella.



Larry Fanella, president of May Supply Company, stands in front of his home-on-a-hill in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Its beautiful setting made conventional plumbing problematic.

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The only obstacle separating Fanella from a lease agreement was the absence of a bathroom in the future studio apartment. Fanella's home is slab-on-grade construction built into the side of a hill. Paradoxically, its ideal, elevated location made installing a bathroom problematic. The drain line for the structure's plumbing was necessarily located below the second floor; i.e. along the first-floor ceiling, creating a dilemma in regards to plumbing a bathroom on the first floor. Even if he were willing to undertake the expense and hassle of creating below-floor drainage in the slab, a means of pumping waste to the drain line above was required.

A No-Brainer

As president of May Supply, Fanella was familiar with all manner of plumbing products, a knowledge that came in handy now that he was undertaking his own personal project. A traditional solution to Fanella's plumbing needs would have involved breaking up the concrete slab and installing a sewage pit with a pump that would force effluent up to the drain line, explains [Brian Burgess](#), the plumbing contractor on Fanella's job.

Due to his experience working with plumbing professionals, Fanella was well aware of an alternative option, a line of above-floor products for both residential and commercial applications manufactured by SFA Saniflo. "I didn't have any question in my mind that I would use this type of technology for my bathroom," he admits.

Unlike conventional options, installing above-floor systems does not involve the laborious task of breaking through concrete. Instead, a macerator or grinder located behind the toilet breaks waste into tiny particles that are pumped up to the drain line. Additionally, unlike sewage pits that often store waste for a time before pumping it out, above-floor products do so immediately, avoiding the problems associated with potential leaks and odors. In Fanella's case, effluent is pumped eight vertical feet to the drain line.

The only remaining question was the choice of product. Fanella knew from experience that people often have little regard for what they flush down the toilet. "I had occasions throughout the years when my daughters would flush items they shouldn't have." Since the bathroom was to be part of a studio apartment, he knew special precautions were needed to ensure that the plumbing system could handle anything.

For Fanella, this was another no-brainer. He decided to install a Sanibest Pro, which contains a powerful, stainless-steel cutting blade, or grinder, that can easily handle the accidental



Behind-the-wall perspective:
The powerful grinder unit handles the accidental flushing of various sanitary articles before the effluent is pumped up to the drain line.

flushing of sanitary articles, such as feminine products, baby wipes, dental floss, condoms, etc., before the pump inside the unit propels them to the drain line.

Quick and Simple

Knowing exactly what he wanted, Fanella had Burgess get to work. The installer cut through a cinder block supporting wall into an unfinished storage area of the ground floor and framed out a bathroom, installing a tub and shower unit, as well as a sink with a granite countertop and, of course, the toilet itself.

Since the grinder can handle sewage and wastewater from several fixtures, Fanella decided also to connect the lower level kitchen and bathroom sinks and tub and shower to the unit. Connecting the tub and shower led to a special platform being built to provide eight inches of clearance for the trap. "I ended up building the platform extra wide, effectively turning it into a nice step leading into the shower."

Regarding the grinder unit itself, Fanella decided to install it in the wall directly behind the toilet, using a special extension tube specifically designed for this type of concealed application. "I wanted to minimize the sound of flushing, so I opted to install the pump out of sight."

As for the grinder unit's installation, plumber Burgess testifies that it couldn't have been simpler. "There was absolutely no difficulty in the installation," says the 20-year plumbing industry veteran and owner of Burgess Plumbing Inc., also in Harrisonburg. He maintains this simplicity largely results from the significant reductions in labor required to install the above-floor system, as opposed to the sewage-ejector option. "In terms of labor costs, Larry saved around \$2,000 by going with an above-floor system," estimates Burgess.

The project's cost-effectiveness was rivaled only by its quick installation. Plumbing the bathroom spanned two days. Installing the grinder took only a few hours, and there were no unexpected challenges. Having to drill through the concrete to install an ejector system would have taken much longer and involved greater risks.



Fanella (right) and his installer, Brian Burgess, stand atop the platform that provides clearance for the trap concealed below. Fanella calls the platform "a nice step leading into the shower."

Overall, Burgess recommends that anybody faced with the challenge of having to install a bathroom below the drain line consider an above-floor system as his or her best option. “I’m really impressed,” he comments. “The system is really durable, and I have never had any call-backs on it from customers.”

For Rent

After completing the entire renovation in around four to six weeks, Fanella’s new studio apartment went up for rent and was recently claimed by a tenant. The toilet works effectively with minimal sound and vibration, and there is no unpleasant storage of waste in a sewage pit.

For Fanella, this successful installation of an above-floor system in his home comes as no surprise. “I always knew these are good products,” he admits. “We sell them at our distribution center, so I decided to use one myself. Without a doubt, I highly recommend this technology to anyone installing a bathroom below the drain line.”

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SFA SANIFLO U.S.A. — whose parent company originated macerating plumbing technology — offers a complete line of up flush toilets and gray water pumping systems for residential and commercial applications. Saniflo developed its innovative, “above-floor plumbing” technology more than a half-century ago and has led its commercialization worldwide. Today, the company markets macerating technology through 22 subsidiaries in 50 countries and has sold more than six million units worldwide since 1958. Saniflo markets through independent sales agents throughout North America, and the product line is currently available at distributor and dealer locations throughout the United States and Canada.

- For more information, contact Saniflo at 1-800-571-8191. Or visit the Saniflo website at www.saniflo.com.
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- To download images (hi-res .tif files) to accompany this article, use this link: <http://saniflo.oreilly-depalma.com/2015/cs-larry-fanella.shtml>.

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