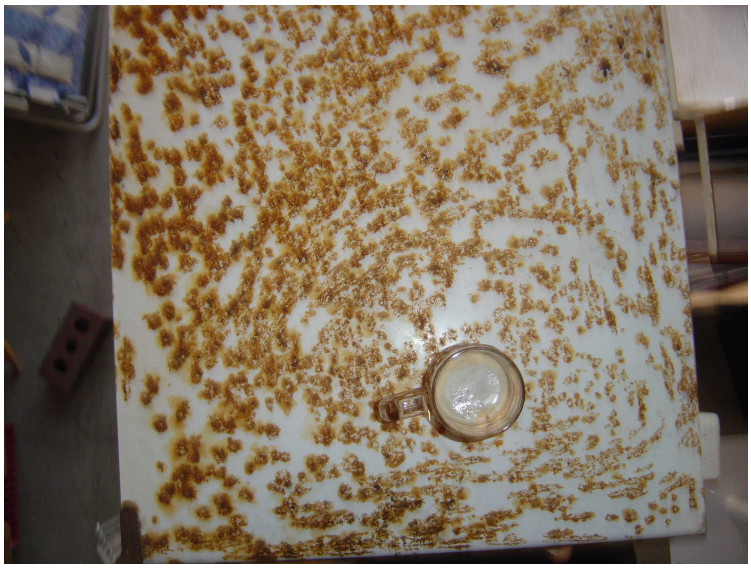
Fridge Modding 101

I picked up a crappy old fridge from a guy at work and intended to turn it into a kegging fridge – with the main goal of a fridge that ended up looking good – without having to spend heaps.

On your knees people…

Here's the view from the top with brew….



Inside…

This fridge lent itself to modifications, as it's a single door fridge with a plain exterior (other than the rust). I planned to attach a sheet of stainless steel to the front door panel, and paint all other visible surfaces gloss black. The aim was to blind everyone with the awesome stainless steel frontage, and use the positive initial impression to reduce the attention they paid to the less than perfect sides and top of the fridge. Sure – that's cheating, but hey, I'm on a budget here.

After hosing out and scrubbing down the fridge (damn it was filthy – I later found out a creeping vine had been growing over and through it!), I got together a bit of a shopping list of what would be needed:

Replacement door seal	$40
Satin Stainless Steel (0.7mm 690x1470)	$85
El Cheapo Spray Paint (Black Gloss)	$4 ea x 3
Wet and Dry Sand paper (fine grain)	<$10
Liquid Nails (Squeeze Gun Size)	$5 ish
Glue Gun thingy for above tube	$13 ish
Enamelled MDF / Press Board	$45 (for a large sheet cut to size - this seemed to me to be the best option as the enamelling would give the exposed surface good water proofing while still being light and easy to work with)

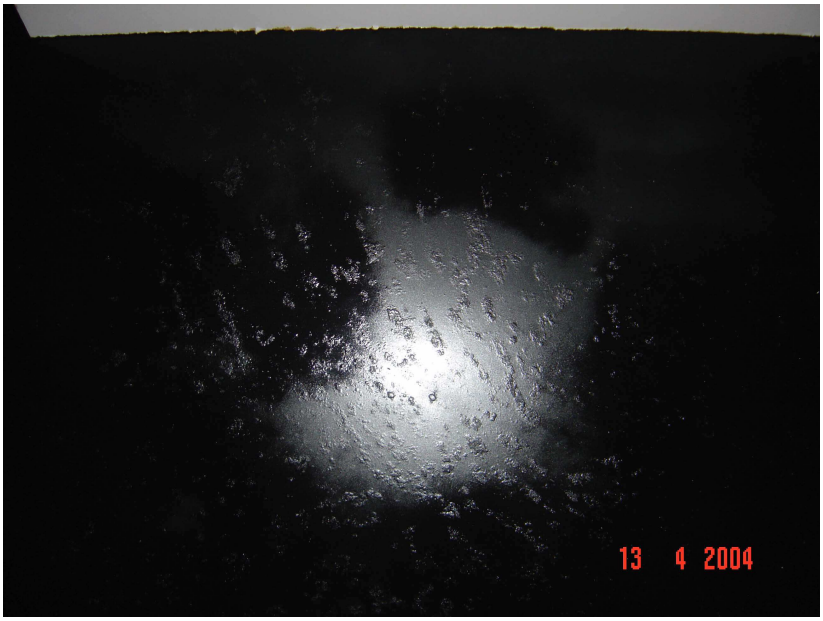
My intention was to replace the door seal, remove the inner door-shelving panel (to create extra keg space), install the MDF inner door panel, spray paint the exterior and then attach the steel fascia. Easy peasy.

Painting the Body of the fridge

I wasn't going to worry about painting the door because I had the steel sheet, so before I did anything else, I sanded back the body of the fridge with the wet and dry (using it dry). This fridge was really badly rusted so I wasn't too fussed about how good a job I did, I mainly just wanted to get any loose stuff off so the paint would stick, and try and smooth out some of the bubbling. If you had a better fridge, I would recommend using a base coat of primer etc. to help the final finish. As it was, with a 30 min sanding job, and a wipe over with a metholated spirits damp rag, the spray paint adhered fine, and even gives a good gloss. There is obviously no need to use expensive whitegoods style paint. As I said, I'm sure you'd get a better job by preparing the surface better, and applying more coats, but no amount of work would have got this fridge smooth for a perfect finish, as the rust has bubbled and warped the surface.

I ended up using 2 ½ of the 3 spray cans.

The view from the top again, with paint …



Removing the inner door panel

This was a simple case of undoing all the screws behind the old door seal, pulling out / off the seal, and then removing the door panel. It

must be noted (preferably with hindsight) that exactly half of the door insulation was actually in the plastic panelling / shelving of the door, so by removing it, I lost half of its insulative power. Full of handyman zeal, I totally ignored this fact at the time.

My fridge also had a butter keeper in the door, which had a resistor to keep it a bit warmer than the rest of the fridge. I cut the cabling for this at the door hinge where it entered the fridge. Hmmm now that I think about it, I could have used this compartment for keeping / serving traditional English ales.

Just put your computer on its side to look at this one of the door sans panelling.

Replacing the inner door panel and seal

I used the original door panel as a stencil to mark the drill holes on the new MDF panel (which had already been cut to size), then loosely screwed it onto the door, fitted the new door seal, and tightened the door seal screws. If you're doing something similar, be sure you get the seal insert as far in as it will go, and try not to stretch the seal, as it will pull it out of shape leaving you with a kink at a corner. There's nothing amazingly difficult about fitting a door seal though.

The enamelled MDF…

Attaching the Stainless Steel Panel

I bought the steel cut to size so didn't have to worry about cutting it. I chose to glue it on for a number of reasons, with ease being the primary one. Everyone I spoke to suggested the Liquid Nails, as apparently it can "stick shit to a blanket" - I didn't test this particular theory, but it has certainly worked a treat with the steel.

To "stick it on" I kept the door off of the fridge so I could lay it flat, and sanded the face of the door with the same wet and dry, wiping it down with metholated spirits to get the dust off. I "gunned" a pretty generous amount of the liquid nails onto the door using as much artistic flair as possible, dropped the S/S sheet on and weighted it down.

I left the door flat for a couple of days to make sure it was stuck, then mounted the door back on the fridge. Sweet. I have left the door handle off, because I quite like the look of the door without it. I will possibly add some sort of novelty handle to the side of the door in the future.

At this point the fridge was working fine, and looked good. As I don’t have any of my kegging gear yet, I started using it for my

bottled stock. It was at around this time that I realised my mistake. This was an old (therefore pretty inefficient) fridge, and I had removed half of the door insulation… The temperature didn't really get below 8 degrees, and it was running nearly all the time. SHIT!!

I belatedly came to the conclusion that I had to either put the original shelving panel (with insulation) back in, or think of another way to install some extra insulation. Of course, I put the original door panel in. With it, I lost about 4 inches of internal depth, but I can now get sustainable temperatures of 2 – 4 degrees, without having the electricity meter spin off it's dial.

In Summary

- I love my beer fridge, and so have all privileged people who have bathed in its glory :)

- Don't be afraid to paint your fridge, it looks good, and is a cheap upgrade. If your fridge is worth it I would definitely apply some sort of primer, and maybe two coats of paint.

- Shop around for replacement door seals. I had two companies quote me $80 or more, before I found someone who worked from home, and charged half as much.

- Always keep heaps of beer in your fridge :) Seriously though, the thermal mass will help hold temperature, and the fridge won't have to run as much as it would if it were empty.

- If you are going to remove the inner door panel, the enamelled mdf is a great option. I got mine from Bunnings, and I'm sure it's available at and Hardware store / joinery.

- If I can do it …. Blah blah blah :)