



Sid Bourne on attitudes to wood flooring

I came face-to-face with Bob the Builder acting exactly like one of The Sopranos

WHEN I am driving to or from a site visit I often wonder where our industry is going, and what a good quality wood flooring installer must do to prove that it is in fact a very skilled trade.

Here is an example. I was called out to a site where a solid wood floor had cupped severely and had lifted so much that the door leading into the room had to be smashed so as to gain entrance.

I was greeted by the consumer, not with a 'good morning', but with a tirade of abuse, to the effect that the product was rubbish and would cost the supplier a fortune. No, I will not name the supplier.

The history behind this case was simple. The retailer quoted for a full supply and fit, plus the required subfloor preparation.

But when doing his survey, the retailer noted that there was underfloor heating. Therefore he advised that an engineered wood floor would be a better option.

However, the builder, while doing a separate survey for all the works extension, commented that the retailer's advice was rubbish that solid wood flooring should be fitted over under floor heating.

The retailer did not want to get into an argument, but privately repeated to the consumer that engineered was the better way to go. But Mrs Consumer replied that Bob the Builder must know what he is talking about and she would choose solid.

She also decided to employ Bob the Builder to install the wood flooring because he must know what to do.

And so up to the present when I was greeted by Mrs Consumer who was not at all happy. I knew the cause of the problem even before I started the inspection.

At that point Mrs Consumer phones Bob the Builder to hear my report. Literally within 10 minutes he arrives on the scene, rushing into the house and very aggressively announcing that the problem was not his fault.

Then he turns to me with his

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voice raised: 'It is not my fault; make sure your report states this fact or else.'

I thought that Bob the Builder must obviously be a keen Soprano's fan.

Getting down to work, I started to question Bob on how he went about the job and why, in his view, solid wood was perfect over underfloor heating.

The concrete slab had very recently been laid with pipes embedded. So how did he know whether the floor was dry at an acceptable RH, not to mention the moisture content of the Beech flooring?

Furthermore, why did he think Beech was a suitable choice?

In his best Soprano voice he responded: 'I wish I was that good that I can just look at something and say yep that's dry or that will be perfect.'

I started to lift up areas of the floor, asking Bob things like – did you know that when you glue down a floor you should trowel the adhesive properly and not spot blob every 3ft?

I measured the moisture in the slab and the result could not have been clearer. I called Bob over and pointed to my moisture meter, which was singing to me.

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At this stage I had to explain to Mrs Consumer that the house was not big enough for both Bob the Builder and me. I said would leave without making a report, unless Bob left first.

Mrs Consumer, coming to her senses, thanked Bob very much and he left. I also thanked Bob very much for leaving.

In a much calmer atmosphere, I asked her why – after all the good advice from a very well respected retailer – she let Bob the Builder loose on her floor.

On reflection she admitted that she should have listened to the retailer, but Bob had been working there for many weeks and she trusted him.

This is the point where I have to say to her that I come across this situation so often. Unfortunately, decisions are too frequently made on the fact that Bob the Builder will always do it cheaper.

I drive away from these site visits utterly frustrated with what is happening.

I really hope the BWFA will make a difference in the future. Let's get wood flooring installers on courses to prove they are capable and earn their qualification and make it mean something just like Corgi gas fitters etc.

You would be mad, apart from acting illegally, not to have a Corgi approved installer fit your gas fire.

So why does it happen when wood flooring is sold that anyone can install it. Yes I know wood floors don't blow up, but believe me in the wrong hands a lot of damage can occur.

I speak to many highly skilled installers who all say that their livelihood is being 'stolen' by a load of non-skilled people. And that they are called in to offer their expertise and to sort out problems when it is often too late.

I blame a number of factors for this dire situation. Firstly, there are manufacturers and retailers who all obviously want to sell their products.

Their cop-out is that they supply instructions to be read. Perhaps they should also tell customers in clear terms that if their new wood flooring is not installed by a recognised wood flooring specialist no warranty will be given.

Problems are also caused by retailer who choose installers by how much they charge and not the quality of their work, and when it goes wrong the retailer blames the product.

The BWFA, when fully operational, can help to resolve these major issues, but they need to be supported by everyone in the industry.

Let me finish by saying that I take my hat off to all the retailers and manufacturers who do the right thing for their customers. I only wish that all would follow their example. It would certainly help to raise the standard of the whole industry and give consumers confidence in real wood flooring and the installation.

I can tell you for a fact that there are an increasing numbers of consumers out there who have had nightmare experiences, such as the one with 'Bob the Builder' I described above, that they have vowed never ever to buy wood flooring again. So think on! **CFJ**

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