

Help and advice



Sid Bourne on installing solid wood flooring

Float solid wood and you'll likely be sunk

I AM one for adopting quicker installation methods if it is proven that they do work properly. But I see many weird installations which go wrong on a regular basis.

The one that still annoys me more than any other is floating solid load bearing floors just using a PVA. I see this type of installation fail more often than any other that I can think of.

I work for a German manufacturer of solids and under no circumstances would we advise you to float a solid wood floor.

But we still get calls from installers who, for whatever reason, think they know best, because they have installed hundreds of solids this way without any problems until now. Do we really believe this?

I attended one such problem installation where the installer who was very experienced. He claimed to have been installing solid wood flooring without any complaints for many years.

He actually boasted:

'I know more about wood than any person in the country. So don't you come here trying to tell me that I have not installed this material correctly. It is your wood that must have been too dry when I installed it.'

I usually don't for get a name or a face, especially where there has been a problem installation. So I asked this so-called expert: 'Don't you remember me?'

He replied that he didn't remember me. (He must be one of the only wood installers who doesn't read CFJ).

I told him to think back two or three years when I attended at least five complaints about his work, all involving the same problem.

In fact, one complaint went to court, and he lost. The judgement went against this self-proclaimed expert. But in the end he got off very lightly.

His response was that these were the only complaints he had ever received. I might have believed him, but thousands wouldn't!

But giving him the benefit of a serious doubt, I said: 'Okay, let's look at this disaster in hand.' And

'I believe in telling like it is, and I make no bones about criticising bad installers unless they are bigger than me. In that case I just shout a few choice words out of my car window when I am driving away'

disaster is the only word I can think of to describe the situation.

I know that some people reading this may think I am quite rude. Well it's the only response I think is justified when I meet pig-headed installers like this.

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Anyway, the installation in question was a 180mm wide plank installed onto a concrete base with no underlayment whatsoever.

It was installed in a lounge, diner and hallway with no breaks and no expansion gaps. In many areas of the lounge the floor had lifted by over 30cm. It was up by over 45cm in the diner and hallway and both were unusable.

Fortunately, most of the material could be recovered and re-installed correctly. However, the so-called expert wood floor installer also had to buy another couple of metres extra material.

But he was having none of this.

'Who will have to pay for the extra wood planks?' he asked.

'You will,' I told him. He responded loudly, making his feelings clear: 'F\$@£% off!'

Just at that moment the lady consumer popped her head round the door. 'That man will not be fitting my floor!' she stated.

She told me that she would prefer to pay for a proper expert to undertake the job. And I gladly gave the name of a person I knew could do the job correctly.

Hearing this, the wood flooring expert promptly left, with a number of choice words that I won't repeat here.

The good news is that the person I had recommended so impressed the lady consumer that she paid him immediately and added an extra amount by way of a tip.

By the way, he had to level the floor and apply a liquid dpm before starting to install the wood. So everyone was happy,

except our previously mentioned wood flooring 'expert' who continues to claim that he never ever gets any complaints.

I did try to find out where this so-called expert bought his product from but to no avail.

Please don't read this to mean that I am having a go at all installers. My concern is with people who go round nicking the job off the real experts and do the job cheap and cash in the hand.

Naturally, some of the blame must also go on the dear old consumer who wants something done for nothing and when it goes wrong they plead insanity. They never knew what they were doing in hiring the first cowboy to knock at their door.

I live in hope that one day all the real expert installers will be qualified and recognised by the public for their skills and, of course, be entitled to a fair day's pay.

So please all you would-be installers of real wood floors, get on courses.

Learn to do it right, and you will be surprised on how much pleasure you get from achieving a high standard of work. **CFJ**

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Peter Kaczmar on wood flooring problems

Pick a whole in engineered

I AM often taken aback at how often technical problems in the flooring sector seem to arise in runs or spates where a particular issue is responsible for identical, or similar, defects at different locations.

While it is not uncommon to find such periodicity in aspects of flooring, dependent to a large extent on seasonal fluctuations such as gap opening or swelling, there are those occasions where there is no immediately obvious causal link.

A particular case in point recently occurred to me where I was called out to several successive inspections to investigate the development of cracking within the wearlayer of engineered woodstrip flooring.

There is nothing particularly remarkable in this

when taken on face value – until the construction of the boards in all these cases was shown to consist of a hardwood wear layer bonded to a conventional 11-veneer plywood base, complete with balancing veneer. In each case, though, the flooring was made by a different manufacturer.

The floors in question were all installed into high-value properties with under floor heating and showed a characteristic cracking and fissuring of the surface which extended through the full depth of the wearlayer.

Each case was mirrored in its own potentially litigious background of claim and counter-claim, where the cause was attributed either to a too high moisture content at the time of installation, or to

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