

Help and advice



Sid Bourne on the European wood floorlaying competition

Chris flies the British flag, single handed

I WAS honoured to be a judge in the European wood flooring competition in Salzburg, Austria, last February.

The competition was for wood floor installers under the age of 25. The participating countries included Austria, Germany, Italy, Holland, Switzerland, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic and the UK.

Each country's two person team had to install the identical design (see diagram below right), using unfinished blocks. Each team was given the same number of blocks. If done correctly only three blocks should have been left over. Therefore mistakes could be easily spotted. If teams ran out of blocks it was all over for them.

On day one of the competition the blocks had to be installed and glued down using two different species – Iroko and Oak – to create the design pictured. Then, on day two, the floor design had to be sanded and finished. The judges were present throughout at each stage, giving marks.

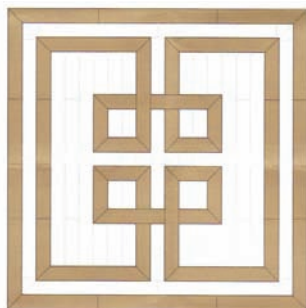
I was very impressed with all the young installers for their attitude and quality of work. Also, remember the difficulty of the design. It is one I give to many more experienced installers on training courses. Most scratch their heads in confusion with little idea of where to start.

The Salzburg competition rules banned the use of fillers. Marks were given for the skill of cutting joints perfectly. I take my hat off to all of the young guns who bravely entered.

What this competition clearly demonstrated is the differences between individual countries about training and attitude.

Most of the participating nations – with the exception of only a couple including the UK – have established training colleges, where young and even older students can go to learn about installing wood flooring. Individual courses last for up to three years.

At the end of each course, a qualification is awarded. These qualifications are widely recognised within each of these countries where consumers rightly demand that only qualified people install their expensive wood flooring.



ABOVE: Chris Peile in action at the European wood floorlaying competition in Salzburg, Austria; RIGHT: Chris with Sid Bourne; and LEFT, the pattern which competitors had to create

Virtually every student who qualifies gets a job. Those who are unable to find employment on their own are helped by the colleges to get jobs with recommendations to retailers and contractors. This process greatly reduces the number of cowboys, who are still prevalent in the UK.

The BWFA (British Wood Flooring Association) wanted to get two young wood floor installers to take part in this competition, representing the UK. But after many enquiries we could only find one person under the age of 25, prepared to accept this challenge. Having a team of only one, put the UK at a great disadvantage.

However, Chris Peile from Northern Ireland did the UK proud. Aged only 18, he surely has a brilliant future ahead of him.

Chris was up against far more experienced competitors aged 23 and 24. Before starting we advised him to just enjoy the experience and try his best. But he finished the task and was outstanding.

Furthermore, he established lots of contacts from among the other competitors. We are now considering arranging exchanges to each country for Chris. What an experience that will be for him.

Chris's boss who has training facilities of his own had coached

Chris to an excellent level and he still is learning. His performance in the Salzburg competition was amazing.

That just proves my point that training will work if you allow it to. So often I talk to companies in the UK who say that if they pay to train their staff they will leave and go to work for someone else. That is untrue.

The fact is that if you make time for younger people, treat them with respect and train them, the rewards will far outway the negatives.

Companies in most other European countries train their staff and find that this inspires loyalty so that most of them stay.

Wood floor training, together with qualifications, is offered in the UK through different sources, including BWFA and FITA. But for whatever reason a lot of companies seem to think that their workforce doesn't require training 'because they know what they are doing!'

I say – smell the coffee and have a close look at the real standard of workmanship of your staff. But do remove the rose tinted glasses when you examine the jobs.

Before I get shot down in flames by offended retailers, I ought to say that I know there are companies who pay for training and send their installers on courses. I truly do applaud them. But these companies number probably no more than 20% of the total.

If only the other 80% did the



same we would all be making a better living. Then we can ram down the throats of consumers that trained and qualified installers are the only people they should ever have to install their flooring, regardless whether it is wood, carpet or smooth.

But unless ever yone in the flooring trade as a whole supports the training facilities that are available, the UK will always be way behind our European cousins in terms of skills and experience.

In conclusion I want to thank young Chris for giving me hope that we do have some great young installers about.

I urge any young wood installers who will be under 25 next year and who would like to experience this competition in Europe to contact me directly on the number below.

If you are suitable we will offer you free training by BWFA in the skills of design work and sand & finish. T: 07841 500 940 **CFJ Sid Bourne is technical director at Grundorf Terhurne and has over 25 years of installation experience.**

Further information on
T: 01562 861351

Register now for your free ticket www.floorstyle08.co.uk