

Help and advice



**Terry Wolfe on issues regarding wood**

# Chewing the fat over hardwood flooring

I RECENTLY went to inspect a flooring problem in Llandeilo, a delightful town about 20 miles from Swansea. Broadleaf Timber, an importer and distributor of flooring, have their head office in Llandybie, another small town just a few miles from Llandeilo.

They heard, through the local grapevine, that I was coming, and invited me to visit them to discuss procedures for dealing with problems, as and when they arise. It also gave me the opportunity to discuss the present state of our industry with them and hear their views.

I was picked up and driven to the Broadleaf head office and showroom by Luke Cocksedge where I was introduced to his brother (and managing director) Tom. Apart from the head office, Broadleaf have eight flooring shops as far afield as Harrogate, Yorkshire, and Eymet, Southwest France with a ninth in London opening soon.

Our conversation began with the commonest problems I encounter in wood flooring installations: Cupping, crowning, shrinkage and gaps between boards, expansion and lifting, and surface defects.

You will note that most of the above defects are moisture related. Broadleaf do not lay floors, but they do have a group of flooring contractors whom they recommend.

All these installers are properly equipped with moisture meters for wood and concrete. But if their customers wish to carry out their own installation, Broadleaf gives them full

instructions and even lends them a Tramex concrete encounter meter.

Tom and I clashed over the use of a hair hygrometer, as specified in BS8201:1987. Tom felt that, for domestic customers who were flooring just one or two rooms, hygrometer tests were too time consuming, and subject to corruption and limited in scope.

I replied that although Tramex tests were well tried, and usually accurate, they did not take account of residual moisture at a low level in a screed, which might be drawn to the surface when the screed is covered by the new flooring.

I referred him to John Roberts' article in August **CFJ** regarding testing over under floor heating but Broadleaf work extensively with underfloor heating with few problems so he was not convinced.

We talked about the recent spate of problems relating to the delamination of the hardwood surface in engineered boards. Tom and Luke were well aware of this problem, which is why Broadleaf specialise in solid boards.

However, they did show me samples of Strata, a new multilayer board that they recently launched. It has a hardwood core instead of softwood or ply, which whilst its grain is at right-angles to the surface, its edges have the grain the long way, which enhances the strength and accuracy of the tongue & groove.

This will be a very stable board which should completely eliminate chances of delamination. I think boards like this will be a very good thing

for the industry, because their stability will be a great asset over under floor heating.

I advocate expanding the CSCS scheme to embrace all floor fitters so that the cowboys in our industry would be squeezed out. I explained to Tom and Luke that I felt it was an opportunity to raise the standards in our industry.

Tom did not agree with me. Firstly, he felt the scheme was uncontractable; but, more significantly, he felt it would create an elitist labour force which would drive up the cost of flooring installation, harming the industry.

I pointed out that such schemes worked successfully in the gas and electricity industries. He referred to the high rates one had to pay an electrician or gas fitter. I remain convinced CSCS is the best way forward.

Tom took me to see new premises nearby, where he intends to manufacture his own flooring. He is passionately committed to the ecological use of timber, and the production of high quality flooring at competitive prices.

We discussed that, whilst some engineered boards might have a life of up to 25 years, a good solid board could last hundreds of years. He did not believe in built-in obsolescence in order to sell more flooring; he would be happy to sell just one quality floor to ever yone! **CFJ**

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**John Roberts on installing wood flooring**

# The importance of being sound and dry

DRY, SOUND and LEVEL. These three words are highlighted in British Standards and many other documents, including manufacturer's instructions.

Let's look at two of these words this month, dry and sound.

**DRY:** There have already been many words published about this which still remains the most problematic to many floorlayers.

My only comment on this point is to say that there needs to be more education, particularly involving architects and main contractors, who seem to want to skip over the subject mainly because they have not allowed sufficient time for screeds to dry or for liquid DPM's to be applied.

**SOUND:** What does this mean to a floorlayer? Unfortunately, some don't know or understand the implications of a subfloor which is not structurally sound. And even if they do, they then

have to deal with the end user who thinks this is an excuse to make some extra money.

Have you ever heard the customer or main contractor say 'Don't worry it will be ok!'

People jump red lights and get away with it, the consequences of not getting away with jumping the red light, doesn't bear thinking about.

With this in mind, ignoring problem subfloors can be just as tragic. You get away with it when you don't get a follow-up phone call and the expected complaint. But when the installation goes wrong, what are you going to say?

Remember you are the professional and as such, you should be giving good advice. If the customer insists you carry on with the installation, you should document the discussion giving copies to all parties.

Documenting your advice and pointing out that the customer rejected it, will reduce the risk you are taking.

The bottom line is you should refuse to carry out the installation, but let's be honest this is a real world and sometimes you do have to carry on with the installation.

Remember, if you do carry on

with the installation, knowing there is a potential problem, most manufacturers will not be prepared to help. And why should they; they have done nothing wrong.

What is sound? This is the movement or deflection of a subfloor when weight is applied. Movement is mainly associated with suspended floors, of wood construction but solid floors can also suffer from movement.

What is the tolerance? How much movement does a subfloor need to move before there could be a problem?

I have not been able to find any document that refers to the amount of movement before the subfloor is unsuitable or out of tolerance.

Let us consider the implications of movement, in relation to floorcovering products. Obviously

**'Remember, if you carry on with the installation, knowing there is a potential problem, most manufacturers will not be prepared to help'**

Continued on page 24