

Help and advice



Sid Bourne on unscrupulous clients

Now let's talk about 'cowboy' customers

UNSCRUPULOUS clients are trying to exploit contractors. I find this happening more and more frequently. I was involved in a recent case concerning a contractor I know very well. I am familiar with his work. His attitude to quality workmanship is unsurpassed.

He had installed an oak unfinished solid with feature Iroko borders; he sanded and finished it using a high quality oil with a light golden stain effect. After completion, he left all the correct maintenance products and gave the client full instructions on maintenance and keeping floor looking at its best. Perfect, you may think!

However, after a couple of months he received a phone call from the client saying he was not happy. He claimed the floor looked 'terrible'. The client angrily demanded of the contractor: **'I want you out here now and put it right or I want my money back. If not I will sue the pants off you!'**

The contractor tried to ask about the problem, but he was met by a torrent of abuse.

The installation was two hours drive from his place of work, but the contractor made the effort to go and inspect the problem. He knew in his own mind that he had done everything in his power to leave the perfect floor.

So what could possibly have gone wrong? On arriving, he was shocked at the state of the floor. But guess what? All the maintenance products he had left were still there in full view of everyone, all unopened and unused.

The company the client employed to maintain the floor said the problem was down to the way the contractor had put the oil on the floor, not their cleaning methods.

Of course, this was a very large cleaning

company and the client accepted their word without question. But on further investigation the contractor discovered that the client had been cleaning the floor with a cocktail of water and bleach! Remember, this was a wood floor!

When he asked about this, the client proudly responded: 'We always clean floors with water and bleach. This method is much healthier!'

After further accusations from the client, the contractor offered to put right the damage, but at a cost. The client got even more angry, spurred on by the big cleaning company keen to ensure that they were not held to be responsible.

The little contractor stood his ground ('Go on my son') and said he could prove the damage was not his responsibility. He stated that the big cleaning company was 100% in the wrong. Luckily, the contractor had been paid or this case would have gone to court.

The sad part is that the client may well have won. Why? I have on many occasions written about drawing up a contract for any job.

It must include all the relevant information regarding installation as well as maintenance. It's absolutely essential, especially in a case like this, for the contractor to make sure that the client and the cleaning company both sign to say they have been advised, shown and given all the relevant instructions on the correct way for the flooring to be maintained.

The client must sign to say job has been done to their satisfaction. If you don't get that signature on a piece of paper you leave yourself wide open to unscrupulous clients, such as the one above, and from some ruthless cleaning companies.

In today's tough market, it doesn't take you a

lot to ensure you are covered from every angle, providing you have actually done the job to the highest standards.

I have a jobsite checklist, available free to members of the **BWFA**. It provides a document for a complete inspection of the finished job which, of course, must be signed by the client.

You must also have a completion sheet detailing everything about how the floor **MUST** be maintained in order to avoid damage. This must also be signed by the client.

I can tell you for fact that this really works! And here's a brief example to show how. It was on another site I attended. The problem was also down to maintenance. But in this case it was so extreme that the floor was beyond repair.

The retailer in question had used all the relevant jobsite sheets and had got them signed. The matter went to court and all that was required of the retailer was to hand over all the signed paperwork of proof along with the invoice, also signed, confirming that all the relevant products had been left with the client.

The client was speechless when challenged by the court ('yes but, no but') and within only a couple of minutes the court judged in favour of the retailer ... with costs. Do you think that retailer would have won without having the paperwork signed? I doubt it!

You have yet again been warned: Always get signatures! CFJ

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Alec Stacey on finishing timber floors

Natural finishes are still the fashion

TRENDS in timber flooring tend to be initiated by architects and specifiers which then cross over to the wider market. We've found this in our research. It is certainly the case with finishes that produce a 'natural' appearance.

Traditional oiled floors have always represented a simple way to enhance the appearance of timber, producing a very matt surface as these treatments produce no surface 'build'.

As the oil penetrates into the surface layer and hardens, it can produce dramatic effects on many timber species, especially tropical ones with vivid grain patterns.

However, with the lack of a surface coating can reduce the flooring's resistance to liquid spills and is also sensitive to wet

methods of maintenance.

Detergents for cleaning, bleach out some of the oil and, over time result in a 'dry' timber appearance. This can be remedied by applying maintenance oil. This characteristic can be a drawback when this type of oil is used domestically because the homeowner is disinclined to perform this level of maintenance, having unrealistic expectations and knowledge of the system.

However these treatments work well within demanding, high traffic scenarios where there is less time for periodic refurbishment.

Maintenance can be performed locally, without sanding and without having to allow time for the curing of the product, as would be the case with a varnish treatment.

This has proved to be invaluable

in environments like Copenhagen and Heathrow airports as well as the new Eurostar terminal at St Pancras. Unfortunately this offers little consolation to the domestic customer.

An excellent alternative to those wanting the oiled appearance, but with a more 'practical' approach to maintenance, are hard wax oils.

These will produce an analogous level of timber enhancement, again dependant on the timber species, but will also provide a coating of wax to the surface which adds a high degree of water/liquid repellence. T

his approach allows the treatment to be used successfully for example within domestic kitchen environments.

As with any treated timber floor

though a level of maintenance is still required. Floors treated with hard wax oils should be subjected to frequent dry cleaning to minimise the abrasive effects of grit and dirt, and periodically should be treated with a refresher specifically designed for this treatment.

When the surface begins to exhibit signs of wear it should be thoroughly cleaned and a thin application of the hard wax oil refresher applied, by brush or cloth. If an area is particularly worn it's also possible to confine a repair just to this area. **CFJ**

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