

Expert advice

DIY DILEMMAS

Whatever your DIY problem, House Doctor's handyman Jake Robinson has the solution



Jake's guide to... refreshing your bathroom

■ A simple way to update your bathroom is to clean your grubby tiles. If the grout is dirty, dig it all out with a grouting knife and clean off any excess. Mix up some new grout and apply to the tiles, making sure you have mixed enough to cover the whole area. For a good finish, wipe off any excess grout while it's still wet.

■ If the silicone seal around your bath is looking far from its best, use Silicone Eater (£5.99 from your local DIY shop) to help dissolve it then strip off with a sharp plastic scraper. Replace it with White Silicone Mastic (by Evo Stick), which is great because it doesn't collect any mould and stays white. First ensure the area is totally dry.

■ For a quick and easy floor revamp, lay stick-on vinyl floor tiles. You will need a dry, flat surface to work on, so screw down a sheet of marine plyboard cut to size first, placing the screws about 10cm apart. Be sure not to hit any cables or pipes (you can check for these with a pipe/cable finder, available in most DIY shops). When the screws are in, apply a PVA sealant to the board then, once it's dry, you're ready to start tiling.



JAKE ROBINSON

HOW DO I PREVENT ANOTHER TV DRAMA?

I recently fixed a 42in plasma screen TV to my plasterboard partition wall, but soon after came home to find it on the floor. Luckily, my insurance company is going to replace it, but how should I attach my new television to make sure it doesn't fall off again?

Dave Chalmers, Guilford

Jake says Carefully! Plasterboard partition walls aren't designed to carry heavy weights, so you must fix the screen's wall-mounted bracket into the timber joists behind. First, choose a spot for your screen. Next, position its bracket against the plasterboard accordingly, draw around it before cutting out the board within the outline. Now look for the joists – they'll be 40cm or 60cm apart, depending on the age of your building. If you're lucky, you can simply replace the board and fix the mount straight into the joists. If, however, the joists don't correspond with where you're putting the screen, you'll have to attach noggings (lengths of timber) horizontally between the joists, then replace the board, make good and screw the bracket into the noggings.

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS CHILD-FRIENDLY FLOORING?

We want to replace our grubby old carpets but are unsure about what to replace them with – especially

as we have two children aged four and six. Please can you advise us?
Lisa Burns, Chester



Jake says Real wood or laminate flooring is a great choice if you have kids. The best real wood flooring you can get is oak, and Element 7 (020 7736 2366;



www.element7.co.uk) offers a good range in a variety of finishes and different widths (make sure you see some samples before you choose). Laminate flooring is even more durable, cheaper and won't scratch like oak. Laminates can be bought from large DIY chains or flooring specialists such as Floors-2-go (0121 359 0234; www.floors2go.co.uk), which stocks the Havana Wild Beech laminate flooring (below left), costing £8.99 per m².

HOW CAN WE CLEAR A STUBBORN BLOCKED PIPE?

I've just moved house and the waste pipe at the side of the property is blocked. My neighbour and I have tried unblocking it with a hosepipe and broom handle, but with no luck. We asked local plumbing companies but their prices are extortionate. What do you suggest we try?

Brian Williams, Manchester

Jake says It might be worth trying rods. You can hire or buy them from your local DIY shop. They generally come with two attachments: one is a plunger and the other has bristles on. Both screw into the end of the rods to help unblock and remove any debris. If this doesn't work, the cause of the blockage might be a structural defect, in which case you will need to call in the professionals – they can use CCTV drain surveying to diagnose the problem.

Send in your DIY queries to

Expert advice, Real Homes, 64 North Row, London W1K 7LL or email Jake at realhomes@hf-uk.com