

Expert advice

DIY DILEMMAS

From quick fixes to home-improvement projects, *Big Strong Boys'* Jake Robinson can lend a hand



Jake's guide to... home security

Follow these tips to cover the basics and keep burglars at bay:

- The front door is the most common point of entry. When you move into a new home, change the locks (you never know who still has some keys). Check they conform to your insurance policy.

- First-floor windows are the second favourite entry point. All accessible windows should be fitted with a key-operated lock – Chubb bolts or casement window locks are a good bet as they're harder to tamper with.

- Lighting is the cheapest form of security. A light with a movement detector is particularly effective. A bulkhead light with two 9W energy-saving bulbs, fitted with a photocell, can light up the whole side of a house and is very cheap to run. Micromark (0844 871 0011; www.micromark.co.uk) has a good range.

- Although it may act as a deterrent, an alarm should only be used as an additional safeguard on a property that is already secure. A competent DIYer can easily fit one and some home-insurers offer a discount.



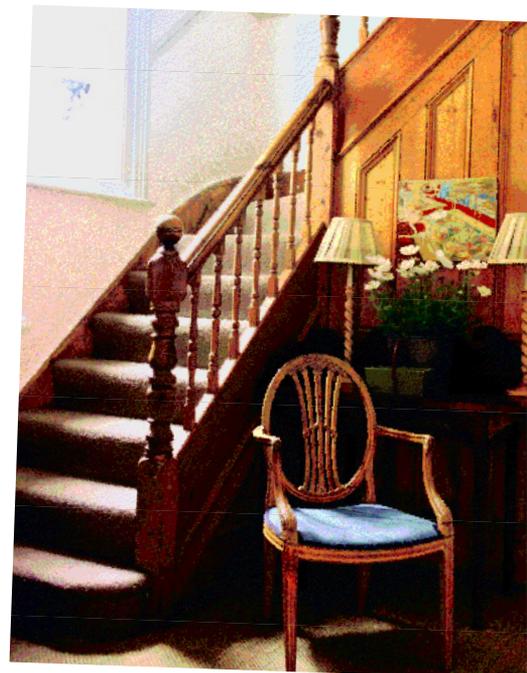
JAKE ROBINSON

HOW DO YOU REPLACE SPINDLES ON A STAIRCASE?

I have just moved in to a Victorian house. Sadly, someone has replaced the original spindles on the staircase with plywood. How can I restore the banister using Victorian-style features?

Maggie Hunter, Felixstowe

Jake says There are many spindle designs available to buy, from traditional twists to modern designs in wood and metal, so you shouldn't have a problem finding a Victorian-inspired one. Cut the spindles at an angle to fit vertically between the banister base and handrail. Take time measuring the first spindle accurately as that one can then be used as a template when cutting the others. For safety, the space between two adjacent spindles must always be less than 10cm.



WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO REMOVE VINYL FLOOR TILES?

I want to redo my kitchen floor using ceramic tiles but at the moment it's covered with old vinyl ones. I've tried to remove them using a big scraper but they are glued solidly to the concrete. Have you got any tips on how to get them up more easily?

Rosie Jenkins, Harlow

Jake says Before you start, be aware that any vinyl tiles over 14 years old may contain asbestos, in which case you will need professional help. Seek advice from your local council. If you were the one that laid the original self-stick vinyl flooring then you'll know what material you're dealing with, so you can remove it yourself with care. Get a gas burner or heat gun from your local DIY or plumbing shop, plus some heat-resistant gloves and a mask. With the windows open to let out any toxic fumes, heat the tiles up and slowly remove them with your scraper using a left to right movement. Make sure you scrape away any excess glue before laying your new ceramic tiles.

WHY ISN'T MY HOT-WATER SUPPLY WORKING?

We replaced a pipe from our electric hot-water tank, but when we opened the water shut-off valve there was no pressure build-up. Nothing is leaking and the tank sounds like it's filling up. Any ideas what's wrong?

Frances Wallis, Dundee

Jake says The stem on the shut-off valve may have snapped off and it might still be partially closed. This does happen with old water valves, so check it and replace if necessary. If it's okay, it may be a build-up of debris blocking the flow. Try shutting off your hot-water supply using the stopcock under the sink. Disconnect the supply pipe at the valve then hold a cloth over the valve and turn it on and off two or three times. This will dislodge any sediment. While the pipe is disconnected, hold a container underneath and turn on the cold water. Some taps will allow the water to cross over and flush out the tap and supply pipe. Re-attach the pipe and see if that makes a difference. Also drain the water tank and clean out any particles.

Below A burglar alarm will give you extra peace of mind when fitted to an already secure home



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Send in your DIY queries to

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