

Expert advice

DIY DILEMMAS

Need a hand with home improvements? No task is too tough for *Big Strong Boys'* Jake Robinson

Jake's guide to...
avoiding DIY
accidents
in the home

■ Always make sure that you have a first-aid kit close at hand when working, so you don't have to go hunting around for one should an injury occur.

■ Spend more time planning the job and wear safety gear, such as gloves, masks and goggles, when necessary.

■ Don't wait until disaster strikes to find your gate valves and stopcocks. Open and close them four times a year to make sure they work when required.

■ Don't stay in the dark if a fuse has blown or tripped out. Keep a repair kit close to your mains fuse box, including a torch (check the batteries regularly), spare fuses, fuse wire, rubber gloves, light bulbs, screwdrivers, insulated pliers, a trimming knife and insulating tape.

■ Always use the cover guards that come with sharp tools such as saws, knives and chisel blades, and never wear baggy clothing when working as this can get caught up in the equipment.

■ A staggering 41,000 people ended up in hospital last year from accidents linked to ladders. When using a ladder, position its base one measure out for every four measures in height. The feet should be on a firm, level surface and the top resting on something solid – never against guttering or a window sill.



JAKE ROBINSON

CAN I PLACE SKIRTING ON TOP OF MY FLOOR?

I want to lay some reclaimed oak flooring in my Victorian living room, which has beautiful high skirting boards. I want to preserve these, but should I take the skirting off first so it then sits on top of the floor?

M Wickham, Devon

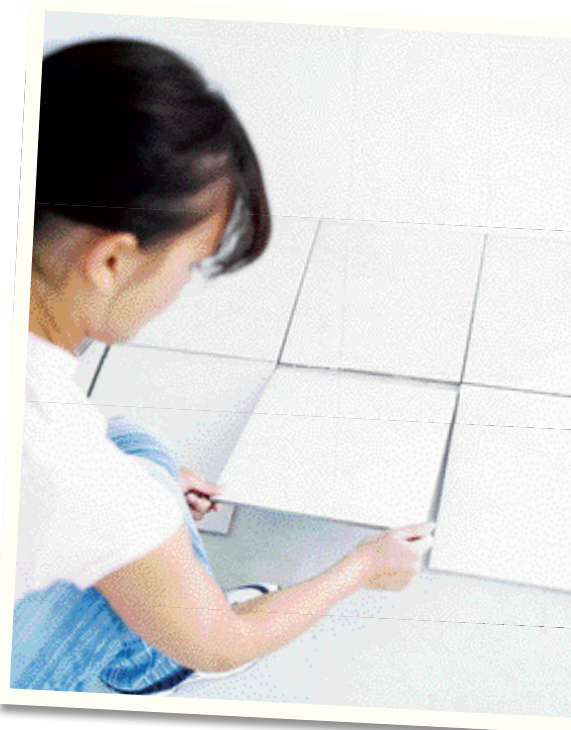
Jake says You could take off the skirting and place it on top, but if you have a lovely old Victorian room I imagine the walls are made of lath and plaster. This could create a much bigger job, as they will be very brittle and may crack or crumble. I suggest you lay the floor up to the skirting. You need to leave a 10mm gap for expansion, otherwise the floor can buckle, so get some scotia or quadrant beading to match the floor and cover the gap. You shouldn't lose too much height on the skirting and it will still look great.

DO YOU HAVE A SPACE-SAVING IDEA FOR STORING SHOES?

I have lots of shoes and am running out of room for them all. Have you got any storage tips to keep them tidy?

M Foster, Dublin

Jake says One option is to use the space at the base of your wardrobe. Get metal poles and ferules (sockets) from a builder's merchant. Fit the ferules on either side, 10cm from the base and far back enough to fit shoes in when the doors close. Cut the poles to size using a pipe cutter or hack saw and insert into place.



HOW SHOULD I LAY TILES TO PREVENT THEM LIFTING?

I recently laid some new floor tiles in my bathroom but they have started to lift. I screwed down some plywood and added adhesive. Is there something I've done wrong that would cause this to happen?

L Newman, Portsmouth

Jake says When laying bathroom tiles you should always use waterproof adhesive and grout, and complete the following steps. First, you should make sure the area you are working on is level, then screw the plywood firmly to the floor – the wood should be 12mm or 15mm thick. Next, you need to apply some PVA glue to seal the boards. Give it one coat and wait for this to dry, which usually takes around 90 minutes. Once dry, apply adhesive directly onto the tiles and set. Mix the grout and then, using a sponge, apply it in-between the tiles. Make sure you wipe away any excess grout before it dries, otherwise it can be a nightmare to remove. If you do all this, you should avoid the tiles lifting.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY, CAMERA PRESS

Send in your DIY queries to

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