

handy mac



Don MacAlister (pictured above) recently celebrated eight years as a DIY columnist for Independent Media. Also known as Handy Mac, Don is based in Cape Town and has been involved in the building industry for decades.

WORKERS CAUTIONED

WE HAD a disturbing occurrence at work this week. One of our estimators – and a partner in the company – went out to quote on work for an insurance company and was held up at gunpoint. Fortunately it ended well. Contractors are all facing more and more danger in their daily lives. We all need to be aware that as the situation continues to deteriorate in certain areas, those who work for us are facing bigger hardships, so I appeal to everyone to support those doing their best to survive and get to work.



FEEDBACK



Tiling can be a challenge.

Good to get out and meet readers

OVER THE past few weeks, I have managed to visit some of you who asked for advice.

I met Barry and Mina at Jambo Guest House and, with the low-tech aid of a trusty marble, I was able to show them how much the floor had sunk.

I also showed Barry where to glue a piece of glass over a crack to see how fast it was developing.

I looked at tiling for Dave and Susan and got the following reply:

Thank you for sending us this report on our tiling. We appreciate the time you spent and will keep you posted on developments.

It is rewarding when I get feedback, especially from other parts of the country.

Brian, who asked for advice about a door opening, sent me this:

I took a giant leap of faith and had the problematic door replaced. The contractor replaced the metal frame with a wooden frame and thereafter replastered the walls and fixed the tiling. The wooden frame matches the wooden window frames.

The tiling presented some challenges as I battled to find a match to the tiles I have.

I am now waiting for the plaster to cure before painting the wall and thereafter will refit the security door.

The whole job took five days.

Handy Mac, aka Don MacAlister, is our expert on household DIY issues

Q

SALMAA has a problem with a damp wall:

Q: *I have a wall which is not plastered on the outside, and I think that is why the inside wall becomes damp and bubbles start to form in the paint.*

It's impossible to plaster on the outside because it's adjacent to my neighbour's vibracrete. Please advise.

A: This is one of those problems that rears its head quite frequently.

If any of you are about to do a similar build, start by asking your neighbour if you can remove the vibracrete panels to allow you access to plaster and paint. This is neither expensive or difficult.

The next best bet is to ensure the wall you are building is a cavity wall to stop the penetration of moisture.

But here are a few solutions to Samaa's problem.

Obviously if you could remove the vibracrete that is your best bet.

If the gap is big enough you could spray the wall with a moisture-repellent product. You would need to use a garden spray type to get down to the bottom.

However, the gap is probably full of rubbish which will have accumulated over the years so the chance of getting right down to the bottom is remote.

The next best solution would be to get permission from your neighbour to install flashing, waterproofed on to your wall and dressed down over



Painting and plastering a wall protects it from damp.

the top of the vibracrete. This will prevent any further water getting into the gap.

An extreme solution would be to build another wall in front of your internal wall, leaving a cavity which could be drained to the outside. You need to check the water is penetrating from the outside and is not, in fact, rising damp.

Q: Annie has problems with her doors,

I am so frustrated, I am nearly in tears. I have had meranti French doors on a cottage in Cape Town for some 25 years. It was probably Swartland then but today you can't buy Swartland with their "engineered wood" and veneers. That will never last in the African sun.

Our doors have worn well but since it's a tenanted house I only got

to treat the wood every three or four years. Lesson learnt. Time for new doors.

For a year I have been speaking to joiners and carpenters but am nowhere near finding a good replacement. One door is a weather door that gets baked by the sun all day long.

I have been told today's meranti is not the same as that of yesterday. Next up is iroko at nearly double the price. Besides, I am told iroko is a long-grained wood that can crack or buckle in the sun, so meranti is better.

I will need a glazer, a carpenter and a painter – so many trades adding to the cost.

Please tell me which wood I should use or if I should buy a ready-made door?

A: We are all starting to feel the effects of having no respect for the world's forests over the past century.

Decent wood is becoming scarcer and more expensive, which is why regular yearly maintenance is so important.

As you say, lesson learnt.

We also have to realise that nothing is made or built to last these days – obviously suppliers need to keep selling.

Unless you want to spend 10 times as much on a solid teak door, I would suggest sticking to Swartland but use their top-of-the-range product in selected meranti.

You get a 10-year guarantee in today's market, and that is not bad.

Remember, however, that guarantees are only as good as your maintenance, so if a product fails and it is obvious you have not maintained the product, your guarantee is useless.

Remember to treat the tops and bottom of the doors as well. Use glazing beads and silicon instead of putty.

There are a range of timber treatment products.

It is pointless to put a cheap sealer on an expensive door.

Finally give the door as much protection as you can.

Install awnings or some other shade- providing device above the door. Protection from the sun is just as important as protection from the rain.

If you have a question for Don, please send it to don@macalister.co.za or SMS only to 082 446 3859. Find more: property360.co.za