

CFJ

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Help and advice

Solid wood flooring on underfloor heating



Terry Wolfe on achieving a perfect wood floor installation

Helping a contractor to fine-tune technique

I USUALLY base my **CFJ** articles on problems flooring contractors have met. I tell you how not to do the job and show you photographs of awful floors.

I was once asked by a magazine doing an article on flooring for attractive pictures. I replied that I had thousands of photographs of defects, but none of perfect floors.

However, this month is different. I was recently approached by Gary Jamieson of UK Wood Floors, CFA contractor members from Surrey, to discuss installing hardwood boards over underfloor heating.

His company had been successful in doing this over a number of years, but he wanted to fine-tune his methods. I felt it would be very useful for me, for a change, to speak to a contractor who actually did not have a specific problem, and see whether he might have tips for contractors working in this field.

Gary's procedure closely follows my advice but with one or two subtle improvements, which may interest other contractors. Here is how Gary lays a 20mm solid oak board with adhesive on a screed which contains underfloor heating water tubes.

Firstly, at the time of estimating, he specifies that the heating must be commissioned and running at least two weeks prior to the flooring installation.

His material must be delivered two weeks prior to installation and



Residential House
150mm wide oak country planks glued directly to screeded subfloor on underfloor heating

the bundles stacked in the area to be laid. All his material is kiln dried to 8% moisture content. He prefers this to 6%-8% because obviously, in summer, when the heating is off, the moisture content of the floor will revert to its normal 8%-10% and he prefers to avoid massive variations. He finds by using timber at 8%, there may be slight shrinkage initially, but this can be dealt with easily, as will be mentioned later.

A few days before installation, he conducts proper hygrometer tests to ensure the subfloor moisture content does not exceed 75% rh in

accordance with BS9201. Gary likes to do this with the heating off, because he believes the heat may distort the readings. I don't think this will matter. Indeed, if the heating is to drive moisture to the surface, it may be better to find out at the testing stage. Gary also checks the subfloor temperature to ensure it does not exceed 27degC. I would be happy using an ordinary surface thermometer for this; I usually use the attachment for my Protimeter mms meter. Gary, however, has a sophisticated sensor which he leaves on site for a

couple of days and which, when connected to his computer, prints out a graph of the temperatures.

The heating is then turned off or down during the floor fitting. Gary imports his own adhesive from Germany; he says it's very similar to, although he believes better than, Sika T54. It is that type of adhesive anyway. It provides sufficient flexibility to cope with the seasonal movement in the timber.

On completion of the flooring installation, the heating is turned back on and gradually brought back to full power. I usually advise 2degC per day. Gary agrees. He leaves his floors for at least three days, which permits any initial shrinkage caused by the underfloor heating. He then sands off the flooring and, should there have been any shrinkage, fills the floor with cellulose filler and clean sanding dust. He then applies the lacquer or oil.

Gary's company has been following this procedure for four years and never had a failure. Underfloor heating is becoming increasingly popular in new building, and it is essential to follow these guidelines precisely when using a material like wood, which is so moisture-sensitive. **CFJ**

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