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ASK THE EXPERTS

All your questions answered by House Beautiful's panel of professionals

Our EXPERTS



BUILDING EXPERT
Gary Webb,
President of the
Federation of Master
Builders, London
region (fmb.org.uk)



**INTERIOR
DESIGNER**
**Laurence
Llewelyn-Bowen**
(llb.co.uk)



DIY EXPERT
Bridget Bodoano,
author and
refurbishment
specialist



ARCHITECT
Gareth Bridge,
founder of South
Bank Architects
(sbarchitects@
btconnect.com)



GARDENS EXPERT
Caroline Tilston,
award-winning garden
writer, designer
and broadcaster
(theoakstudio.co.uk)



ECO EXPERT
Colin Butfield, head
of WWF campaigns,
including One
Planet Living
(wwf.org.uk)



PROPERTY LAWYER
Christine Minty,
founding partner
of Reid Minty
LLP law firm
(reidminty.co.uk)

If you have a question for the panel, email it to us at houseb.mail@natmags.co.uk

**Gustavian bedside
table, from £199,
Scumble Goosie**

Brick fireplace

I've bought some reclaimed bricks for a new fireplace, but how do I go about building it myself?

Gary Webb says:

First, decide what look you want. When I built my fireplace I got inspiration from magazine cuttings and visiting a pub in Wales. When you're ready to begin, check that the area is stable and as level as possible, then visit the National Fireplace Association's website, nfa.org.uk, for all the technical information you'll need.

A rustic look suits reclaimed materials, so mix up the different shades of your bricks. However, make sure each batch of mortar is the same colour by repeating the exact amounts of sand and cement. For a professional finish you should take time to get the pointing right, ensuring the mortar is evenly spread and does not protrude from between the bricks.

'For a professional finish you should take time to get the pointing right, ensuring the mortar is evenly spread' Gary Webb, BUILDING EXPERT



Give your room a rustic look with a brick fireplace

Going Gustavian

I've had a gilded side table and mirror frame for years and would like to give them a chalky white 'Gustavian' look instead. What's the best way to achieve this effect?

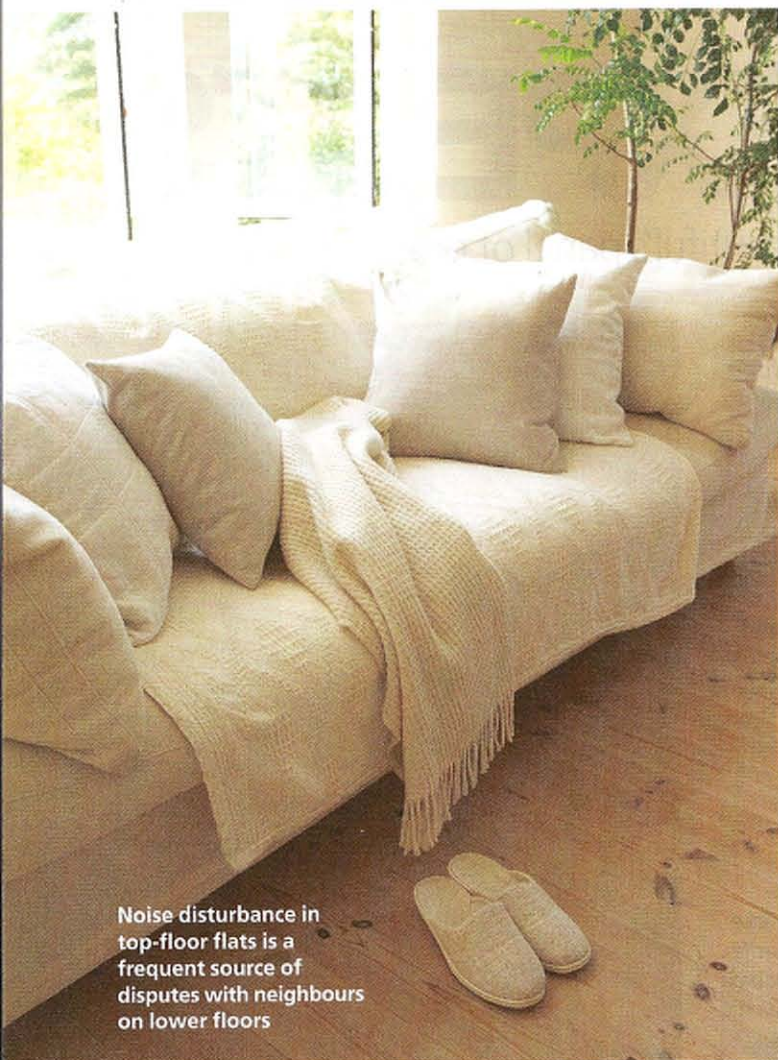
Bridget Bodoano says:

Furniture inspired by 18th-century Swedish style, with its pale painted finish, suits both modern and traditional homes. For an authentic look, you can buy specialist paints and glazes. Try Swedish furnishings specialist Nordic Style, which has helpful information online at nordicstyle.com. For a simple solution, use a 'chalky finish' emulsion

from Farrow and Ball or Aglaia Natural Paints.

Prepare the wood with sandpaper and wire wool to provide a surface for the paint to adhere to. Wear a mask as it can be dusty. For a smooth white surface, apply one or two coats of primer and then a top coat. To make the finish more hardwearing and to add character, apply beeswax buffed with a lint-free cloth.





Noise disturbance in top-floor flats is a frequent source of disputes with neighbours on lower floors

Noisy floors

My husband and I have lived in our Victorian conversion flat for 25 years. The freeholder has recently laid wooden floors upstairs and it's so noisy. I've asked him what his lease says about our 'quiet enjoyment', but he says he doesn't have a lease. We're reluctant to approach him again unless we have the law on our side. Can you help?

Christine Minty says:

The Land Registry can tell you whether the freeholder has a lease, as the freehold title will list any leases that have been granted. If there is one, bear in mind that a covenant for 'quiet enjoyment' is antiquated language to protect the lessee from substantial interference with the enjoyment of the property and doesn't necessarily relate to noise. And, win or lose, a court case will be expensive, stressful and time-consuming for both parties.

Approach your neighbour again and propose that he

installs sound insulation. If that fails, contact your local authority and ask for an environmental health officer to investigate. You may need to keep a diary of the noise, or equipment may be left at your home to measure it. If the local authority is satisfied that there's a problem, it will take action to remedy the situation. It may also recommend mediation.

'Ground source heat pumps are extremely efficient and are becoming a viable way to heat a home'

Colin Butfield, ECO EXPERT

Ivy control

How can I remove well-established ivy growing against a wall?

Caroline Tilston says:

There are two types of climbing plants, those that need posts to grow up, like wisteria or clematis, and those, like ivy, that cling to the wall by pushing into plasterwork and mortar. To get rid of the clingers, the one thing you must avoid is pulling them out because this may damage the pointing. Instead, treat the roots and the top growth separately. Cut the plant low to the ground and kill off the stump with a root killer. Then, wait for the plant to die or treat it with a systemic weed killer. A product that contains glyphosate is a good bet, but you may need several applications as the leaves are so glossy that the chemicals may not penetrate easily. You'll then need a wire brush and plenty of elbow grease to get rid of the dead stems and roots.

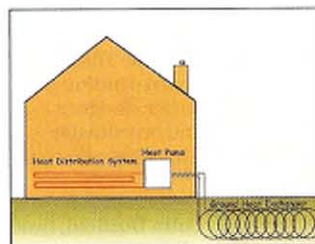
'To get rid of clingers, the one thing you must avoid is pulling them out because this may damage the pointing' Caroline Tilston, GARDENS EXPERT

Green heating

I'd like to update my old heating system before winter sets in. I'm interested in ground source heat pumps, but can you add them to an existing house, or do they have to be put in when the house is built?

Colin Butfield says:

Ground source heat pumps transfer warmth retained by the ground to heat your home or your water. They're extremely efficient and are becoming a viable way to heat a home. They can be installed in most



Ground source heat pumps provide ecofriendly heating

properties, providing there's enough space outside to bury the loops of underground piping that will absorb the heat. It's worth noting that they're particularly effective when used to supply warmth to your underfloor heating, although they work very efficiently with radiators, too.

I know several people with them and all have found that once installed they're very easy to use. You should be able to get a grant towards the cost from the Low Carbon Buildings Programme (visit their website at lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk), which will also point you towards approved installers.