

Handyman on call

Cleaning paint from brick siding

By Peter Hotten, Globe Staff | August 27, 2009

Q. My house in Louisiana was built on settled earth, which made it quite stable. Houses around New Orleans are built on slabs, which "float" on the wet earth. Recently we had a prolonged drought, and the land dried out unevenly, knocking the house out of level. It is still livable, and we plan to raise it and put it on pilings when we can afford it. But I have an idea: I plan to put a soaker hose around the house to get the earth back to its normal saturated wetness, refloating it. That should get a jump on the eventual return of the rains. Would that work?

EVELYN THIBEAUX, Metairie, La.

A. By God, I think you've got it! Your idea to restore the status quo is excellent, and I'd like to give you as much encouragement as a handyman can. Check with your community to make sure it is legal, because it involves water.

Q. I installed a glued-up oak threshold, and primed and painted it black. After a short time the paint peeled and lifted at the glued seams. What did I do wrong and how can I fix it?

FRED BUSTMAN, Newton

A. Glued items can be painted, and the glue is waterproof, but in your case the primer and paint simply did not work. So, remove all the paint and primer and apply a semitransparent stain; only one coat is needed and it will last five or more years without peeling. It should cover the glue lines, and if some glue has spilled on the wood, sand off all the excess glue before staining.

Granite forever

When the handyman wrote about countertops and what material is best, he was rather critical of granite and liked Corian, and his remarks brought a maelstrom of reaction, mostly good-natured but definitely pro-granite.

Paul Tucceri of Tewksbury, who heads up Granite Restoration in that town, summed it up: I agree that marble is not a good material to use, and soapstone, while soft, is easy to sand off blemishes and make other corrections. But there is nothing better than granite, and you have to be careful what you choose. Polished granite is top rated, while honed granite will not stand up as well. The darker the granite is the better, and if sealed, can go for years without resealing. That is, if maintained well and buffed regularly. Clorox makes a sanitizer that will keep the granite virtually germ free.

Thank you, Paul Tucceri and all the others who responded. Your comments are forever etched in stone.

Globe Handyman on Call also appears in the Sunday Real Estate section. He's available 1-6 p.m. Tuesdays to answer questions on house repair. Call 617-929-2930. Hotten (photten@globe.com) also chats online about house matters 2-3 p.m. Thursdays. Go to www.boston.com. ■