



## The sarl Handyman France Annual Awards 2023

It's that time of year again. The time for the *Handyman France Annual Awards*. In some ways, it's more of the same, but as always some of the Awards are quite unique...

2023 was a strange year for tourism. It started late, finished early and had numerous cancellations in between. One group had to forego their holiday because they simply couldn't afford it; two holidays ended after only a couple of days due to health issues 'back home'; and no fewer than four others cancelled, with at least three of them, again, due to health problems - all of them cancer related. And all of these were British. Draw your own conclusions...

And as always, no names, no pack drill. Identities and locations are concealed to protect the guilty. And nothing has been invented. Why should we when true stories are so good?

Participating countries for 2023 are -

Australia  
Belgium  
France  
Germany  
Ireland  
The Netherlands  
UK

Remember the *Handyman France First Law of Holiday Rentals* - if a guest can, a guest will. Bend it, break it, bugger it up, lose it and a lot more besides. And not just paying guests...

Family members of an owner stayed at the house for a week. Despite requests to go easy on the sun cream when using the pool, they took no notice and completely blocked the filter in a couple of days. The photo on the right shows how it looked. It should be white. Consequently, the water was cloudy, and it took a couple of days to get the pool looking as good as it should for the next guests. When we arrived for the changeover, the house was a tip, with the guests sitting around waiting for their taxi. A couple of kitchen knives had gone missing, and several towels were stained so much they were written off. A **Sister Sledge 'We are family' Award** goes to Ireland.



Sticking with the family theme, there's yet another award coming. But first I should explain the origin of this particular gong. In 1996, The Beautiful South released a record called 'This could be Rotterdam'. Later that year, a west country radio station released a charity single called 'This could be Totterdown'. Totterdown is a suburb of Bristol, and is where you'll find the steepest inhabited hill in England (Vale Street). It also had the most pubs per square mile until they were all demolished to make room for the M32 motorway – which stops a couple of miles away near the city centre. But back to the main plot. I needed to do a minor repair on a pool, and met the guests who I knew had stayed the previous year. I didn't at this stage realise they were related to the owners. I rang my colleague who does the cleaning (we only do the pool at this house) and advised her that my impression of the guests was that the changeover when they leave might be hard work. Yes, she agreed. Because last year, they left the house in a disgusting state, not least because there was vomit on the floor in a couple of the rooms. Hence the belated '**This could be Totterdown' Award**, because it has in the lyrics "...we have pavements covered in vomit and Christmas lights shaped like Wallace and Gromit"... (Bristol is the home of Wallace and Gromit, in case you didn't know.) UK is the proud recipient of this one.

Returning to the First Law theme... The first thing I noticed when I arrived at a house to check the pool was that the grill on the *bonde de fond* (main drain) was missing. It was in the skimmer basket, in several pieces. So it was obvious that whoever had broken it had gathered up the pieces and put them where I found them. I asked the English guests if they knew what had happened to the bottom grill (phrased deliberately vague). Without hesitation the reply was that it was like that when they arrived. Which it wasn't. Apart from the fact it was OK the day before they arrived, my colleague who did the meet and greet confirmed that it was intact at that time. A '**Liar liar, pants on fire' Award** to UK.

Dutch guests, though pleasant enough to chat with when I visited to clean the pool, were, shall we say, a bit less than fussy. I won't go into details about the state of the house as some of it is too disgusting to mention. The '**Steptoe Award**' is fully justified for these people, and...

...another one for them for being too lazy, stupid or selfish to even try to operate the pool cover properly, or to close it when they left. The winder to open the cover is clearly visible in the photo, as is the strap for closing it. A '**Lazy Holidays**, by Emily, **Award** for these people, but not a 'Good mood' Award (another record by Emily. And no, I've no idea who they are!)

A French family arrived at the house a little later than planned, though not by much. But it was clearly a critical time for the son, aged around twelve. Despite all the frenzy of unpacking and the meet and greet, he simply sat eating a bowl of cereals, completely oblivious to all that was going on around him. A '**Duran Duran 'Hungry like the wolf' Award**' to the boy who clearly had his own priorities.



This family also wins the '**Head Office Seal of Approval**' with two British groups coming a close second. All left the house in superb condition.

Moving away from tourists for a moment, an unusual recipient is a French phone/internet company. A client was having phone/internet problems, so I rang the phone/internet service provider to arrange for a technician to visit. All went well until I needed to be transferred to the technical department. They couldn't do that - because the phones weren't working. *Sigh...* An **ELO 'Telephone line' ("...I'd tell you everything, if you'd pick up that phone...") Award** is all I can think of.

The vast majority of guests we meet are perfectly normal, and therefore very forgettable. But occasionally we meet someone who is memorable not for eccentricities or problems, but simply because they're so nice. This applies to a group of people we saw this year. So a **Brucie "Nice to you. To see you, nice!" Award** to Germany.

One of the last minute bookings, and therefore at a bigly reduced price, generated more complaints than all the other bookings put together. In a property where **Handyman France** only looks after the pool, we've known the owners for many years and, come to that, the cleaner as well. We have no doubt that the house was up to standard. That didn't stop the British guests complaining, apparently on a daily basis, about a wide range of 'problems' they had with the house. At the end, they demanded a refund - *quelle surprise!* Whilst one or two of the observations may have some merit, it's quite obvious that all they wanted was to reduce the cost of their holiday even more. We had no contact with these guests so in fairness, we have to say that we only have one side of the story. A **'Life Is A Lemon And I Want My Money Back'** (by Meat Loaf) **Award** to UK.

We're well aware that when renting a holiday home, you want be sure that you're getting what you're paying for. Especially if you're paying over 5000€ per week. But there are limits. After making the booking, the guest started to demand information. Lots of information. Among the numerous emails received by the owner was a request for a full itinerary. This would be hard enough for a studio apartment, but an eight bedroom château is a bit more of a challenge. The last straw for the owner was the demand for a floor plan of the house. The booking was cancelled and deposit refunded. Quite right too. So, for the UK guest that never was, a **David Cassidy 'How can I be sure?' Award**.

No sooner had I arrived at a property to clean the pool, one of the guests introduced himself. "Hello, I'm Dan, and I've had a pool for 30 years" he proclaimed. He then spent well over thirty minutes telling me all about pools. Mostly it was wrong. Clearly some of what he said was simply invented. It would have been funny if he wasn't being so serious. My next appointment was with a retired dermatologist, and I was tempted to say I've had this skin for seventy years to see what his reaction would be. But back to Dan. This Englishman wins a **Dunning Kruger Effect Award** which, if I may oversimplify, states that someone who knows very little can think he's an expert - especially if that person is a bit dopey.

And that's about it for 2023. No Einstein Award this year which is good news. No mega-late arrivals either, so it has to be said that the planning was easier than usual. And as usual, we've proved that despite national stereotypes, no country has a monopoly on any human characteristic. We're all as bad as one another!

So in some ways, 2024 won't be any different...