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## The Handyman France Idiots' Guide to home renovation/repair

Any house purchase inevitably results in some work being necessary, even if it's only a lick of paint here and there. If renovation of even small areas is needed there are potential pitfalls that can be avoided. This guide is intended to steer you around the likely problems and therefore save you time and money. See also the [Handyman France Guide to TVA in your Home](#).

Let's assume for a moment that you've bought an old stone-built house. These old houses are charming, quirky and built to last. So there's unlikely to be any structural problems. Unlike the more modern structure on the right... Nevertheless, the electrics and plumbing could well be somewhat outdated; walls and floors are usually a little uneven, making tiling especially difficult; and windows and doors may serve little purpose other than adding to the *shabby-chic* look that France is so famous for - too often though the houses are more *shabby* than *chic*.



*Don't forget that especially with older houses, planning permission may be needed for some works.* Check with the local *Mairie* if there's the slightest doubt. It's what they're there for.

Always have the roof looked at by an expert with very old houses. Repairs are often boded repeatedly over the years until the day comes when it's beyond all hope.

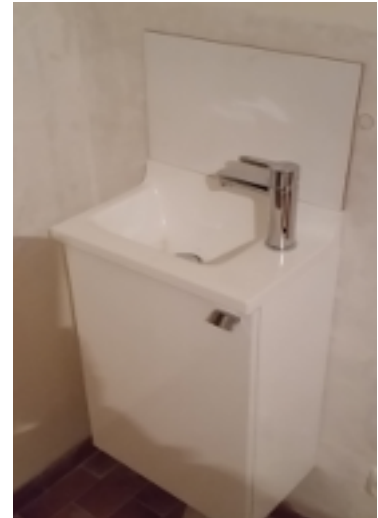
The picture to the right was taken in 2015. It is the entire electrical supply and fuse-board for a two-bedroom house. Fuse-board? A single fuse.

OK, so the house needs rewiring, whether or not the supply is as bad as the example shown. You have a contact in UK who can not only get the cable, switches and sockets at a discount but can also do the job at mates' rates. Problem solved. No, not really. The UK electrical system, along with Eire, is out of step with most



of mainland Europe. Twin and earth (mains cable) is substantially different; there's never a fuse in the plug; ring mains are unheard of in France; positioning of switches etc. are subject to regulations that the British find quite strange (e.g. it is not just common, but quite normal, to have a socket in the bathroom. As long as it's far enough away from the taps on the sink. And a light switch (not a pull cord) in the bathroom can also be perfectly acceptable).

But surely you can save a bob or two with the plumbing work. Another contact can get copper pipe, fittings, taps, showers units and anything else at a discount and he'll do the work for mates' rates as well. Problem solved. No. Problem created. UK copper pipe diameter is always an odd number - 13mm, 15mm etc. France? All even numbers - 14mm, 16mm etc. Connections to the showers etc. are also different, meaning that the shower that looked wonderful in B&Q looks hideous in your French bathroom because it simply won't flush-fit.

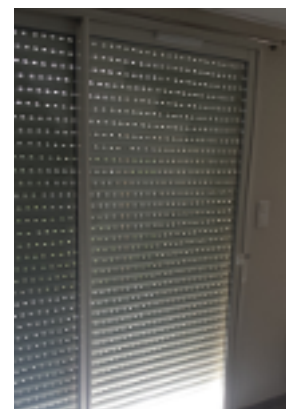


Just to add to the general absurdity, your UK bought washing machine, dishwasher, cooker (gas or electric) amongst other appliances will work perfectly well in France. Electric plugs need to be changed or plugged in through an adaptor, but otherwise they are totally compatible. Even the hose connectors on washing machines will fit the French taps.

*You still need to be cautious about buying new appliances in UK and then importing them into France if only because you have virtually no warranty.*

If you've bought a newer house the walls and floors will probably be straighter and less problematic for renovation. The electrical system can still be woefully outdated though, even if the house is merely forty years old. Electrical regulations underwent massive updates long after the UK's modernisation took place.

Windows nearly always open inwards because shutters prevent outward opening windows being of any use even where electric shutters are installed, which incidentally never seem to have a manual override in case of a power cut. So importing your double-glazed windows isn't a good idea either.



Hard floors are *de rigueur* in southern France at least, where carpets are rare because of the summer heat. There's absolutely no problem with importing your flooring. Other than the sheer weight of several square metres of ceramics.

Paint is extremely expensive in France – probably up to four times the price of UK. And it never seems as good. Import it? Probably, but remember that if you use it all, you'll have trouble getting more quickly for touching up when a minor disaster strikes.

So who is going to do all the work? Assuming that you're not a DiY fanatic, and that time is limited one way or the other, you'll need to get someone in to do the work. Language difficulties may hinder using French artisans, but do the British working here really understand the rules? Sadly, French tradesmen have a reputation for overcharging the British. Undoubtedly true in some cases. But some British traders are little more than bandits as well.

Go to reputable businesses, just as you would in UK. Simple.

One word of caution if using French traders. Explain everything in immense detail. If you don't ask for something you probably won't get it. Don't assume, for instance, that your new extension will have electricity in it. Because it may not unless you ask for it.

In any event, if you're uncertain if the trader you're talking to is on the level ask to see his **carte professionnelle**. From this you can establish that -

- He's registered
- His *SIRET* registration number is valid
- He's allowed to do the works you're asking him to do
- Company address etc.



In other words, that he is a legitimate trader. Which means that if he doesn't have this document, it's highly likely that he's not registered, not insured, not qualified where qualifications are needed, and will be working illegally.

What about the costs? The same as UK? More? Less? It depends on what you have done. Some things are very expensive (e.g. paint) whilst some are much less so.

If the house is old and stone-built, almost everything will be more expensive to do because the construction of the building pre-dates running water and electricity. Be careful not to underestimate the cost of your project.

So, you pay your money and you take your chance. But hopefully a little less chance now that you've read this Guide and perhaps some of the others in the *Handyman France Idiots' Guide* series.