



The sarl Handyman France Annual Awards 2020

Welcome to the annual celebration of human nature, otherwise known as the *Handyman France Annual Awards*. 2020 - the year of the Coronavirus Covid 19 pandemic. Misery, despair and disruption everywhere. But at **Handyman France**, we don't let things like that get in the way of what we do. Oh no. And that includes these Awards. Because even in a pandemic, there is no law that prohibits having fun at work.

This year's nominees list is a little restricted though. But we still have...

Belgium
France
Germany
The Netherlands
UK
USA

...all providing tourists to the South of France, and therefore eligible for the prestigious Awards. There is also a non-tourist related award which we hope will add some schmaltz to this year's ceremony which would otherwise be a little muted.

USA first. A charming American couple had a problem with completely blocked toilets. The remedy wasn't too tricky, but involved prodding with a stick a big lump of, shall we say, waste. Obviously once I'd finished I needed to wash my hands, so I asked to use a sink, soap etc. "Oh no," they said, "what about the germs?" A **Homer Simpson ("Doh!") Award** is called for here, I think.

A French family arrived with an elderly Labrador, which just plodded around and seemed to like me. So I patted and stroked him. Then, because I can never resist doing this with bigger dogs, I started whacking him on the top of his head. I've never understood why, but nearly all dogs like this. (A police dog handler taught me this trick many, many years ago.) The family stood around looking somewhat aghast, then they all burst out laughing. When I stopped, the dog looked at each of them in turn, and I swear the expression on his face was, 'See, that's what you're supposed to do!' **Ian Drury and the Blockheads ('Hit me with your Rhythm Stick')** is awarded not just to France, but to the dog personally.

The same guests contacted me a few days later to say that the pool control box had 'exploded'. It had blown a fuse, so not so dramatic. It's a Desjoyeaux pool and, for the uninitiated, it has the pump in a plastic box immediately next to the pool and below ground level (hands up who thinks this is a good idea?). The pump box was flooded and the pump submerged. Luckily, the pump seems to have survived the experience. Subsequent checks proved beyond doubt there are no leaks. I really don't know how the guests managed to get so much water in there. On changeover day, just four days later, the water level in the pool was far lower than it should have been - and too low for natural evaporation to be the cause. I also found that a washer was missing for the hose pipe adaptor on the outside tap. There can be absolutely no doubt that they were playing water games, and at considerable cost to the owners. So they win **The Dam Busters' ('Après Moi, le Déluge') Award** (it's the motto for 617 Sqdn, meaning 'after me, the flood'). Sadly this is not the last for this family...

...because the aforementioned doggy leads to their third mention. When we went to clean the house after they had left, we found dog hair everywhere. And I mean everywhere. On top of all the bedding; on the mattress protectors; on the mattresses; on all the furniture and lamp shades; even inside the fridge. As the dog is instrumental in the first and last awards in this trilogy, they win **The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band ('The intro and the Outro') Award**.

Despite being advised at the meet and greet not to use an electric shutter because it was in need of repair, and a very big notice above the switch which clearly said, '*Attentie! Niet volledig openen aub. Autostop weret niet. Manueel stoppen met knoppen*', the guests tried to open it and then found they couldn't close it. Quelle surprise! Or, as they say in Amsterdam, '*wat een verrassing*'. The **'Niet Fingerpoken unt Niet Mittengrabben' Award** for the Netherlands.

We had a perfectly normal couple who presented no real challenges, other than their tendency to break things, like the pool cover winder and a bicycle pedal. Both were deemed to be accidental, especially as they reported each breakage immediately, so their damage deposit wasn't affected. A **Queen ('I've Got to Break Free') Award** goes to Belgium.

For those who follow these annual awards, it will come as no surprise that the **Head Office Seal of Approval** for guests who leave the house exceptionally clean and tidy goes two families from Belgium. But it's shared with a French family who also win a **Lady Gaga ('So Happy I Could Die') Award** because they were so overwhelmed by the house when they arrived.

Other than the dog hair issue, no house was left particularly dirty, so the Steptoe Award is suspended this year. Though there was one group who left soiled sheets, neatly folded on the bed, in a house where we do not do the changeovers, just the pool. What makes it even worse is that the guests were friends of the owners. Note the past tense. A special **'I Wanna be Loved by You - Poo Poo Pi Doo' Award**. How can people do that? British.

German guests who arrived in August complained about hot weather – and then wanted to know how to use the central heating, as they were sure they would need it. A **Buck Fizz ('Making Your Mind Up')** Award for them.

At this point, it's worth reiterating that nothing that appears in the Awards is invented or exaggerated. We have no need to do that. No matter how unbelievable some of the accounts are, they are all true. Even this one.

The individual concerned isn't a tourist – she is French and lives in France, but nonetheless deserves a mention. I visit every month or so in the winter, and every week in the summer, and so I've come to know her quite well. But as I found out recently, not as well as I thought. A very sweet, charming and utterly harmless old lady in her eighties, she lives in a fairly isolated house, on her own except for lengthy holiday visits from her equally delightful family. She also has a very kind nature – maybe a bit too kind. See what you think...

I have often seen her going walkabout in the garden, even in the winter, and always wondered where she was going. I'm told she takes bread to feed the wild deer that live nearby. That's nice. And there's more...

...because she also feeds birds by leaving food for them on her terrace immediately outside the back door – that's nice as well, isn't it. However, as a consequence she has a recurring mouse problem. Normally, once a mouse is caught in a non-lethal humane trap, she takes it to her car and drives 10 or 15 kilometres before releasing it back into the wild, presumably in the hope it won't return. But there's more...

...because one mouse in particular drove her to despair. It evaded the cage traps, and I'm reliably informed that for three days she chased the rodent around her house, cursing and swearing because it was 'ruining her life'. Eventually, and very reluctantly, poison was used. The mouse died. She was very upset, and I believe she cried. Her grandsons consoled her whilst they performed a funeral in the garden. But there's more...

...because by a process of elimination, she has established that cantal cheese (which she doesn't like) is the favourite of rats. So she buys it especially for them, and uses it in humane traps. Not just a little piece mind you. Oh no. Enough to treat them to a slap-up meal before returning them to the wild, again at a distance of 10 or 15 kilometres from her home.

Choosing an award isn't easy. The obvious choice is '**Rat Trap**' by the **Boomtown Rats**. Or maybe '**A Good Heart (is hard to find)**' by **Feargal Sharkey**. Or a slightly more theological '**All Creatures Great and Small**'? How about **Queen's 'I'm Going Slightly Mad'**? Or maybe all of them.

Again this year, I think we have proved that it's only by being a little bit loony that most people avoid total insanity.