

Real-Life Horror Stories

by Ed Pell

There's nothing like bitter experience as a teacher. We all learn from our mistakes. But sometimes we can get lucky and learn from other people's mistakes first.

That's why *Kitchen & Bath Business* collected these real-life "horror stories," true tales of jobs gone awry, told to us by flesh-and-blood kitchen dealers.

The names of the characters have been changed to protect...well...everybody. But all the tales are true. They serve as a reminder that Murphy's Law is alive and well in the kitchen/bath industry. Maybe they can keep you from having to learn everything the hard way.

"It glows at night..."

When the call came in, it made the receptionist laugh. It made the dealer laugh. It made the entire office laugh. The woman they had done the big master-bathroom remodeling job for last week was calling. "We can't sleep at night because of the wallpaper."

"What's wrong with the wallpaper?" the receptionist asked.

The reply: "It glows at night..."

Swell, the dealer thought as he drove out to inspect the project that evening. *I design her a bathroom, and she thinks it's a UFO.*

But the woman was quite rational, although obviously upset. And when the dealer walked into the darkened bathroom, he could see a strange, unearthly glow from the wallpaper.

He turned on the overhead light. A large glass mirror had been hung over the lavatory, and between the edge of the mirror and the foil wallpaper he could see marks where arcing had taken place.

"Not only that," the woman said. "Sometimes when I wash my hands I get a shock."

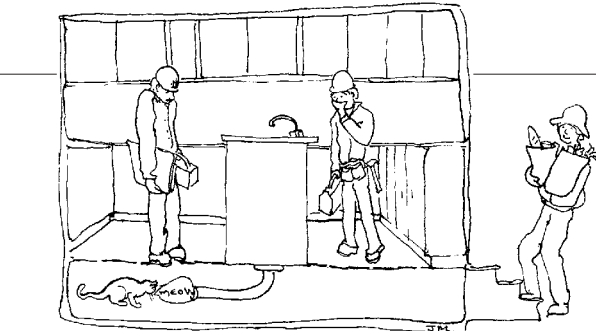
The dealer turned on the water and cautiously put a finger into the running stream. Instantly, he yanked



it out with an oath. "You're right," he said. "I'll get the electrician first thing tomorrow."

But when he called the electrician, the electrician laughed. "Does she have little green men, too?" he asked.

Later that morning, the dealer and the electrician returned to the wom-



an's home. By daylight, the wallpaper looked fine.

"Sometimes when I wash my hands I get a shock," the woman repeated.

"No way," said the electrician. He turned on the water and put his hand under the tap. "See?"

"I got a shock, too," said the dealer. "Whatever it is, it's behind the mirror."

"I'm telling you, it's nothing," said the electrician. He pulled out a screwdriver and removed the screws holding the mirror in place. As he lifted the mirror off the wall, he brushed the wet sink with his hip. Instantly, he let out a yell and dropped the mirror, which shattered.

"I got a shock," he said sheepishly.

Later they found that the glazier, when handling the mirror, had driven a screw into one of the wires leading to the light over the mirror. Electricity was traveling through the screw, across the back of the mirror, and arcing onto the foil wallpaper, which was metallic enough to pick up a glow. Occasionally it would store enough charge to jump to the lavatory.

Moral of the story: Your customers' complaints may sound strange, but they often involve real problems.

"It was sort of pleasant..."

If the first mistake hadn't happened, odds are good the second one wouldn't have. But then, maybe it would have in any case.

The dealer put in an exercise room with a big whirlpool bath and a steam room. It was located in the cellar.

Not long after it had been installed, the dealer got a call from the client. It seemed the whirlpool bath never got hot enough to be comfortable.

The dealer came out and looked the situation over. The problem was the hot-water heater: it didn't have enough capacity for the big tub. (The steam bath had its own heater and used only a pint or so of water.)

The answer was simple: Add a second water heater to double the capacity of the house. The client agreed, and the dealer got his plumbing subcontractor to come out and hook it up.

The next morning, the dealer got another call. "You'd better get out here," the client said.

When the dealer arrived, the client said, "I didn't mind having the toilet warmed this morning. When I sat down, it was sort of pleasant..."

"But look at this," he said, and

turned the valve for the lawn sprinkler system. Water sprayed out, and a moment later the lawn was clouded in steam.

The plumber, in hooking up the second heater, had managed to reverse the lines, so that all the cold-water lines in the back of the house were running hot.

Moral of the story: Don't depend on your subcontractor to check his own work.

"Where's my cat...?"

The job was almost over: a beautiful kitchen with a huge island and tile floors and countertops. It was for a lady who lived alone except for her faithful companion, a beautiful Siamese cat.

As cats go, it was pretty friendly. After the first day, it would come around and watch the crew. It rubbed up against their legs, and let them scratch it behind the ears.

The day came that the island was installed. In the morning, the crew brought the venting up through the subfloor for the down-draft range. They put the island cabinets together, all square and level. They put down a plywood top with a cutout for the cooktop.

In the afternoon, the tile subcontractor came in. In no time at all, he had finished the countertops and started laying the floor tiles. He was about three-quarters done when the client came home from shopping.

The foreman proudly pointed out all that had been finished in one day. He thought to himself, *We'll be done with this job ahead of schedule!*

And then the lady asked, "Where's my cat...?"

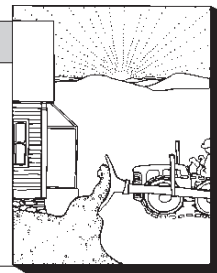
In the silence that followed, the crew could plainly hear the cat meowing...from under the subfloor.

Nothing to do but rip out the island, ruining the tile floor and countertop. Rip out the venting, and the straight and level island. And rip up the profit on that particular job.

Moral of the story: If your clients have pets, make sure they are locked up, away from the work area.

"That's the wrong house!"

Nothing makes a creative kitchen designer more happy than an ultra-high-end, spare-no-expense showcase kitchen, and Lawrence Talbot, CKD (not his real name), was ecstatic as he watched his well-to-do clients sign the contract. Visions of his design in the pages of *House Beautiful* danced through his head, and he began to



think about a design award at the National Kitchen & Bath Conference.

Well, came the great day, and the crew picked up the order he had written, jumped in the truck, and drove to the address. They knocked on the door.

When the maid answered, the foreman said, "We're here about the kitchen."

But the maid did not understand. "*La cucina?*" suggested one of the crew.

"Ah, *si, la cucina,*" said the maid, and led them through an elegant home, beautifully appointed. They entered a pretty-good-looking kitchen.

Boy, these rich people can change their kitchens whenever they want to, thought the foreman.

The installer, who spoke a little Spanish, explained to the maid that the cabinets had to be emptied. The maid looked puzzled, but emptied them.

The morning passed, and in the early afternoon Talbot drove out to the project to see how things were going. He drove to the address, got out of his car, and stood there wondering why his crew had parked across the street.

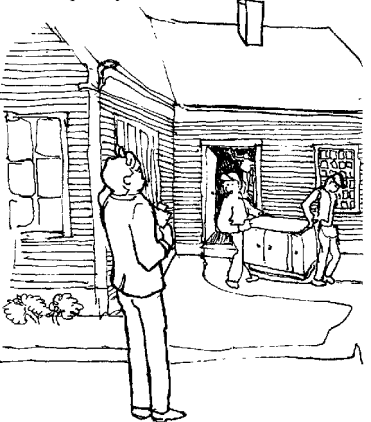
Just then the foreman and one of the installers dragged the countertop out into the other driveway.

"That's the wrong house!" the kitchen man screamed.

"This is the address you gave us," replied the foreman.

Sure enough, he had written down the address incorrectly on the work order.

The first kitchen (and the second, free one he gave the folks whose kitchen had been ripped out by mistake) was some of the best work he had ever done. But he never submitted either design to any magazine or contest. He filed them where he hoped he'd forget about them...quickly.



Moral of the story: Always check your paperwork. Twice. ■

Ed Pell is senior editor at *Kitchen & Bath Business* magazine.

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