

**THE COWBOY HOUNDS**  
Jack's Home Improvements  
Patricia Marchand

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# The Cowboy Hounds

## Jack's Home Improvements

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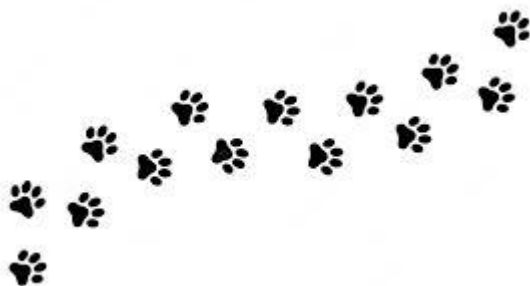




*Patricia*

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## INTRODUCTION



“It’s alright, he’s only eaten two people today!” My owner, Patricia, tries her humour out on the grumpy human parent of the arrogant black Labrador, which I have taken an instant disliking to.

“Ouch!” Pat yanks me off in disgrace and I know that my precious time in the park has come to an abrupt end, as I am dragged back home. But Pat and I are more alike than she realises. I’m only protecting what I see as my rightful territory, just as she protected hers when the saunter of cowboy builders overtook our precious home!

This book promotes a serious message, that there are not sufficient constraints within the building’ trade, and I think you will be as shocked as a parrot falling off its perch when you read some of the true tails – sorry, tales – that my owner, Pat, suffered when the horseless cowboys descended on us. Many of you will no doubt think it is nonsense that I, Jack Marchand, Jack Russell cross, can speak to you, but Madame Patricia has learnt that her pets do speak, but only to those who know how to listen!

My hackles have risen so many times when Pat experienced confrontations with tradesmen whilst trying to get a decent job completed on our home. My main aim is to share with you everything that happened in the hope that, one day, we might all be able to change the way some traders deal with consumers. Many builders think that because they can do extensive DIY in their own home, they can get paid doing the same in other people's properties without regulated training.

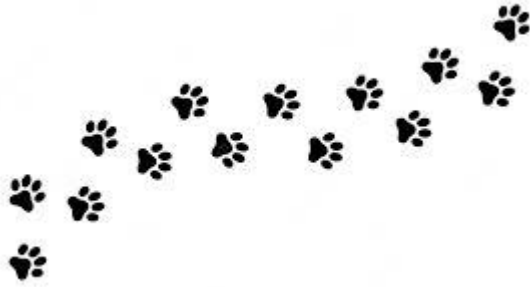
I must point out, at this stage, that many of them have excellent "throw the ball for the dog" skills and I have enjoyed fun games with the majority of them. Despite a lack of relevant qualifications, these cowboys congregate in directory listings. Rubbish companies receive money from these cowboy traders for advertising on their platforms. I would like to sniff out some of their glowing reviews to check out if they are fake.

Hiring the odd trader is very different from entrusting thousands of pounds to a builder whom one only knows from the positive online reviews. I have seen through the reassuring smiles of the traders whose most favourite phrase, "Trust me!", floats out of their mouth every time they give a quote.

Unfortunately, things rarely went to plan – did these builders even have a plan? Trying to get a



refund was so often worse than getting Pat's parrots to shut up! Pat's problem was getting her warranted complaints accepted. Pat talks to her parrots a lot, and I've overheard her concerns that she believes the cowboys treat her with such disrespect because she is elderly, a female on her own, and a foreigner with a very strong French accent.



## THE DRIVEWAY

I dream of bones, but Pat dreamt of having a welcoming, very good-looking driveway! I guess that, having a good-looking dog, she felt the need to have a drive to match!

Pat decided to replace her extremely narrow driveway with a very large, grey-cobbled one. She wanted a sliding gate and a door for the postman and, naturally, a plaque with the words “Le Jardin”, the new house name!

Pat chose to use a managed digital marketing service for local businesses and requested some quotes. I sensed they were cowboy builders when all their quotes were verbal. “This will cost you,” seemed to be another favourite phrase, always unaccompanied by an actual cost.

Finally, Patrick arrived on the scene. Patrick was very polite and respectful, but, my God, he loved money! He saw pound signs in his dreams the way I saw dog biscuits! He agreed his fee, with his customary handshake (it was before Covid!), and Pat transferred the required deposit. She described the style of cobbled path she wanted, but Patrick managed to persuade her to accept his suggestions – not a cobble in sight!

Three weeks later, Patrick arrived to commence work at 7 am with a fanfare of six builders, all hammering at our door. Three van-type lorries, with diggers, droned by our gate. I scarpered. I can't stand noise.

Every day, except for weekends, the men and machines came to dig, dig and dig. I was quite jealous – Pat will never let me dig, dig and dig in the garden! They had a mountain of earth to dispose of – I don't know where it went!

Patrick left other workmen to complete the job, but they were all good ball throwers so I wasn't too bothered! They were Armenians who did not speak, nor understood, English or even French. When Pat spoke to them, they raised their thumbs to say "Okay, got it!" and then just carried on, but at least they knew the word "Fetch"!

One of Patrick's Armenian employees, Emil, was great at throwing a stick for me, but there was something even better about Emil! Each Sunday, he came back specially to help Pat with gardening and a bit of house DIY, and sometimes he was accompanied by a white female Bichon Frisé. It was love at first sight for me, and she returned the compliment by letting me lick her face!

In the front garden, which was being dug up, there was a preformed pond surrounded by

greenery, which was full of frogs. Pat kindly purchased another preformed pond and one of Patrick's team agreed to site it in the side garden over the week-end. He gently picked up each frog, placing them in a glass jar. He had to close the lid each time he popped another in as they kept jumping out! Finally, he emptied them all into the new pond.

The new grey path looked smart and Pat seemed happy with her very nice, presentable driveway, which was big enough to park three cars. Patrick eventually agreed to Pat's additional request to lay some concrete down for her planned hot tub – of course tub – of course, at an additional fee! Meanwhile, a carpenter, from Colchester seemed to know what he was doing when he made the sliding gate – to prevent me running away!

Unfortunately, the driveway was not sealed; it had only been sanded. Pat only discovered this much later, so she had to call in a specialist to clean up the mess by removing the sand. It reminded me of the beach – “Oh, I do love to be beside the seaside!” They put more sand on, which seemed odd to me – take sand off, put more sand on – before sealing it to keep the weeds away. It was very sad when the work was completed and my little Bichon Frisé was never to be seen again!

To cheer myself up, here is a poem Pat wrote about her driveway:

My driveway is really not the star,  
Too narrow is the path to park my car.  
The long broken concrete track is full of weeds,  
All dandelions fight to succeed.  
Each time I open the iron gates, loud cries can be  
heard  
Punishing me for disrupting its peaceful world.  
It grazes on both sides of my car  
Grinding the metal, it leaves scars  
So, I leave my auto out on the road,  
Having to transport the shopping load.  
I close my eyes and imagine a welcoming  
driveway,  
A large entry where my car is safe all the way.  
I close my eyes and imagine a nice entry, large  
enough for a van if I ever get one.  
The gate is welcoming and I can close it keeping  
its secrets within  
Welcome to my home and my new driveway.

## THE HOT TUB

Pat spends her breakfasts with Picture and Max, the two African Grey parrots, the banes of my life; they squawk my ears off but worse they steal Pat's attention away from me! She has to feed Picture by spoon – that could be time better invested in taking me on an early morning walk in the park. Pat puts up with their screams but she doesn't like my barks and has even employed a famous dog whisperer to supposedly teach me to keep my snarls to myself when we pass any other canines. The only good thing is that she talks to those bothersome birds and I get to hear her plans.

“A hot tub seems like a necessity,” she told Picture as she spoon-fed the twenty-three-year-old some mush.

The next thing I heard was Pat chattering away, on the phone, like one of her overgrown sparrows! Pat was ringing various companies that sold hot tubs and swim spas which, apparently, were her preference. I was getting very concerned at this point, because she said she was interested in digging up the whole side garden to make room for an extra Vanguard swimming spa, which I overheard her promise Picture would be ever so trendy!

I enjoyed the car rides to the various garden centres where she picked up numerous brochures and asked the salespeople “How much and how long to wait?”

One evening, as Max sat on her arm she explained to him how she was amazed by the diversity of spas. “All so beautiful, I just have to have one, but at a reasonable price.”

Max played on her enthusiasm by cocking his head, as if interested, and I reckon he got even longer than his usual three hours on her arm. I didn’t look so enthusiastic on the announcement of yet another – find a hot tub trip.

My ears pricked up when Pat, now on the phone, said, “From one of the directories, I see you supply and install swim spas and hot tubs. Could you tell me what would be the cost for, let’s say, one to accommodate three people?”.

Three people! Who was she hoping to entertain in there? I had a momentary hope it could be Emil and my sweet Bichon Frisé! Pat is on her own, but she told me on the way home that people might queue just to embrace the hot tub, that she might make new “hot tub” friends. Oh, she was boiling with enthusiastic fantasies! I was in two minds — did I want extra company at ours, or did I prefer to have Pat all to myself? I know she has had many boyfriends in the past,



but boyfriends could bring pets with them if they become a permanent fixture – but no more birds, please!

Pat is not very good at driving to places she doesn't know and often gives up half-way because she can't find the route, even with her GPS navigation system. She used to have a sports car, but the garage couldn't repair it, so now I am chauffeured around in a vehicle that looks like a big box — a Toyota Yaris hybrid. Pat has muttered many times that she doesn't like it, but it is cheaper to run and has much more internal space than the Audi. It has a navigation system included, but it doesn't work properly and does not speak (wish those parrots would take a tip!).

“Let's go to this garden centre in Brentwood,” she said as she coaxed me into the car. It was an interesting place — no plants or flowers — just lots of up-market sheds called log cabins. I decided I'd prefer a log cabin because I imagined she might be able to use it to house some of those cockatiels she keeps in the back room. They used to live outside in an aviary and life was so much more peaceful then. I just couldn't see any spas. Where could they be?

However, Pat dragged me into the office where an over-enthusiastic salesman welcomed us.

“Are you looking for a log cabin, madam?”

I tried to send yes vibes out to Pat, but she obviously didn't pick up on them.

"No, I called you earlier," she replied. "I am looking for a spa."

"Ah, madam, you're at the right place. Follow me."

He led us to a concrete building in a dark corner of the carpark, I thought – "I bet Pat is glad she has her guard dog with her going into a dump of a place like this." As the door was pushed open the heat and the damp made me yap. A very narrow, very long swimming pool with some type of huge tap at one end filled our vision.

"This is the pearl of the pools, the Endless Pool," the shifty salesman hissed.

"What is the cost to supply and fit?" I couldn't believe that Pat was really going to buy this lake.

"It all depends on what service you would like with it."

Pat explained that she'd like it fitted.

"Oh no, madam, we do not lay any foundations," the salesman said "But we can recommend builders."

“What is the cost?” How many times have I heard that phrase? — So many more times than interesting phrases like, “Fetch your ball!”

“£12,000“

“Is installation included?”

“Let’s discuss this sitting down, where we can be more comfortable,” said the salesman.

Why would she need to sit down? I wanted to lie down by this stage.

So, we went back to the office. How many calculators does a man need? The desk was covered in them!

“So, £12,000 for the pool. The shell for the pool is £7,320, the outflow and the heart of the pool come to £9,000...”

I decided to growl as the battery of one calculator ran out. Pat needed saving from this money-grabbing man, who made Patrick seem like an angel.

I knew Pat didn’t like my aggressive barking, so I did a huge show of it until she took notice of me.

“Oh, is that the time?” she said, although there wasn’t a clock in sight and she didn’t have a watch on! We left the shark of a salesman to go jump in one of his own lakes.

Pat is a very determined lady, so our spa pilgrimage was far from over and the trustworthy Toyota winged its way to a very large store in Chelmsford.

“On your own, madam? Will your husband join us?” said the saleswoman.

Pat does not like to reveal her private life to all and sundry. Why should she?

She replied, “No, he is too busy. You will just have to deal with me.”

I could read the woman’s face – us dogs are good at judging expressions! She was clearly thinking, “Madam, *you* will have to deal with *me!*”

Approaching one of the hot tubs, the woman then yelled to the other sales assistant.

“Hey, John, do we have this hot tub in stock? The lady might be interested.”

It was clear this woman was trying it on because she had pointed to a bright blue monstrosity in which ten Great Danes could comfortably fit.

I pulled Pat over to a much smaller, light blue version with a grey frame. And, of course, the price was nowhere to be seen!

“What is the cost of supplying and fitting this one?” asked Pat.

“This is one of our best-selling hot-tubs, only costs £9,000, all included.”

I yelped at the sound of that figure – just imagine how many soft toys Pat could buy for me.

“I cannot swim in this one,” Pat complained. At that point, I wondered about my swimming skills — she’s never let me go for a swim anywhere.

Two days later two people came to carry out a survey.

“I do not think we can get the hot tub in-there,” one of the men said to Pat. “We would need to balance a crane. May I take a few photos? Also, I need to speak to your neighbours to make sure the crane won’t be in their way.”

Pat flinched at the idea of neighbour involvement. Pat, understandably, does not like her neighbours. Anyone would feel paranoid about our nosey neighbours. One of the neighbours transformed a side garden of a semi-detached property into a block of flats to rent out and told the tenants to keep an eye on us! These flats overlook us, and the mean man has even pestered Pat to sell him her side garden so that he can build more flats. I wish she’d let me go at him next time he shuffles past. I dream of what my teeth could do to his ankles.

So, it was *au revoir* to the hot tub man and our search continued at more showrooms.

We were soon back to the same old chat again.

“Are you looking to purchase a hot tub? All included, this one is £6,000.”

“My driveway is under construction and the builder can build a reinforced slab to support a hot tub or swim spa.”

“Marvellous, do you want us to speak to your builder and your electrician? We can come for a survey tomorrow.”

“Yes, please.”

The survey was done satisfactorily, the deposit paid and Pat waited patiently for the installation.

One month passed and, at 9 am on 15th June a huge lorry arrived with four guys to set up the hot-tub and to play fetch with me. Finally, by 3pm, the hot-tub was installed and the water was warming up, ready for the grand first dip the following day! A stern Pat warned me that I couldn't learn to swim in it, after all — the chemicals would apparently harm me!

The following morning, Pat cut my park walk short so that she could be back in time to plunge into the warm water. She had set up some music to accompany her. As Pat lifted up the soft top,

she screamed in horror, on discovering that slugs had taken a fancy to her hot tub and were having a good spa. How come the chemicals didn't seem to be affecting them?

Pat was on the phone within seconds to explain the disaster to the company. Someone came immediately to remove the slugs, to clean, disinfect and refill the spa. Pat said it still wouldn't do and she asked the man if she could have better cover. Within a flash, he saw his opportunity and sold Pat, right there and then, a Covana for £15,000. It was, of course, all electric, opening and shutting on the turn of a key. Pat was relieved to know there would be no more slugs and the hot-tub would maintain its heat.

I noticed a big decrease in "Jack's attention time", as every day the music would go on and Pat would bathe. I began to think the skin on her legs shrivel up, before long, like those of Picture and Max. She tried to drink coffee in there but despaired when the drink holders weren't really suitable. Pat's friend did not seem to want to go in her hot tub, so I noticed Pat gradually began to miss a day or two. Using her mobile phone, she took a picture of herself in her hot tub to send to her friend. Pat is a modest person, so the photo just included her foot. She typed an accompanying message "Come on over" and then

she pressed “send”. Oops, she had sent it to the wrong email address by mistake! She discovered her error when a builder, who had initially refused to attend for a job, suddenly turned up. Pat has young-looking, well-manicured feet and, as she had been bathing less frequently, they were not shrivelled up at this point. The builder clearly thought his luck was in as he marched down to our hot tub.

One of the annoying neighbours poked her beak into Pat’s business and declared, “I know when you go in your Jacuzzi, I hear the noise of the dome and the music.”

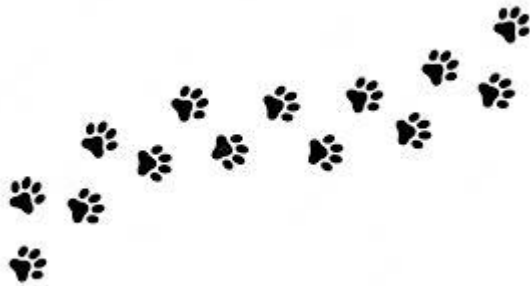
Those neighbours make more trouble than the cockatiels which cavort around in the back bedroom. The neighbours push their beaks into every aspect of Pat’s life. There was a huge kerfuffle when they stole some of our fence panels and then the smoke from their own garden bonfire caused Pat to have to evacuate the birds permanently inside.

Before then, the cockatiels had a great aviary out there in the back garden and Pat and I had the house to ourselves. Now, Pat has to spend her afternoons cleaning out the cages in the bedroom. The cockatiels aren’t tame enough to be allowed to fly around the house, but to tell the truth, I think “stay wild, you feathered friends”. There



are six of them, so just imagine the volume of squawks I suffer! Pat has banned me from their room because I stuff myself on the food they spill. Lots of it is splattered across the floor when it is mating season as that is when the males throw the food around. They are barking mad creatures I can tell you!

One year later Pat decided to sell the hot-tub and the Covana. She had to beg the man who sold it to take it back. In its place, we now have the wooden log cabin, but the birds don't inhabit it. Pat's reluctant hot tub friend moved to Yorkshire. Why couldn't she take those parrots with her!



## THE KITCHEN

Pat retired in March 2019 and that's when I came on the scene and we soon became best buddies; whoever claimed that diamonds were a girl's best friend clearly never owned a dog. She splashes out on the best for all us pets but I am still awaiting my diamond collar! Pat has a kind heart and she couldn't stop herself responding to a preloved advertisement for a Jack Russell for sale with digestive and behaviour problems. Yes, folks, that was five-year-old me! I'd like to point out that *you* would probably have problems if *you 'd* been left alone with the collie from hell and a mad owner!

Our kitchen was small and the fittings very old when Pat moved into this property. The cupboards seemed to have been made from a wardrobe cut in half! The kitchen walls were papered in blue flowers to match the blue cupboards and blue linoleum. The kitchen sink was aluminium. On the whole I thought the place looked okay but Pat doesn't do okay, Pat does "top-of-the-range chic!"

It was great fun as she began to peel off the blue flower wallpaper and, as it fell to the floor, I rolled around in it. It stuck to all my paws and it

quite annoyed Pat when I helped to scatter it throughout the house!

At first, the wallpaper came off very easily but then Pat resorted to pouring buckets of water down the walls to try to soften the paste. The mix of paper and water on the linoleum made a great skid area for me to twirl round and round in and I think it might be fair to say that I had one of my mad moments when I chased my tail round and round. This resulted in Pat searching online for a decorator to dash round with a pot of white paint to cover all the walls and cupboards.

“No problems, I will do a good job, trust me,” said the decorator. “I am doing an apprenticeship in painting and decorating; you won’t regret it.” Then he added “Will you pay cash?”

“Yes, I can pay cash.”

I sobered up from my mad moment and thought, “Really?” He was obviously a cowboy with his trademark phrases of “trust me” and “will you pay cash?”

Pat asked for the cupboard handles to be painted black. She left the guy on his own in the kitchen although I tried to sniff things out from the crack under the door. He completed his task and scurried off. I had been right, the cowboy’s painting was a disaster, the black paint had

dripped from the handles all over the floor,  
leaving drips down the white cupboard doors.

Pat wanted to knock down the wall between the dining room and the kitchen, to make a modern kitchen diner, but decided the stress would be too much for her parrots! When Pat gets stressed, it does not help her arthritis, nor the skin condition which results in painful blisters, but Pat's main concern was not to stress out those birds. Pat thinks the world of us pets and has a very kind heart. She would not get an aquarium although I would like to watch the fish swim – I might pick up some tips in case I ever get to go in water! The reason she wouldn't get an aquarium is because she couldn't bear if any of us were to die and those fish have quite a short life-cycle, I hear!

When Max was four, he started to pluck out his feathers and Pat paid for a psychiatrist for her potty pet who refused to come out of his cage. The psychiatrist decided that Max was stressed, so ever since then he's been treated with kid gloves! The treatment involved Pat having to read a story each day to Max, in the hope her voice would calm him. After six months, he decided to venture out of his barred existence! He's still mentally fragile and frightened of the girl parrot, Picture, who is way above her station in life! Just because she's a rare breed of African

grey with her red feathers, she thinks she's Mrs High and Mighty and has to be spoon-fed.

So, Pat decided to install a modern kitchen in the existing tiny space. It was like déjà vu as I was whisked off in the car to more showrooms. It was like going round in circles, as the prices were extortionate and the choice was so varied that Pat didn't know where to start. Eventually we ended up at a kitchen design service and Pat was immediately impressed with the grey and white displays.

“Good morning, let me know if I can be of any assistance.”

“Yes, you can I would like for my small kitchen to be redesigned.”

“Do you have a plan with you?”

“No, but I can draw the kitchen on some paper quickly.”

“That won't be necessary. We could visit tomorrow to design your kitchen from your ideas.”

The next morning, the kitchen was measured up and three days later Pat found me picking the post. One of the envelopes turned out to be the design. Impressed, Pat phoned to order the units, the sink and all the apparatus. Her name was

passed on to their sister company, who apparently had more fitters to recommend. I sniffed out the scents of more cowboys approaching!

One of the fitters came to visit. He was very keen, too much so, but Pat was blind with happiness. The cost sounded reasonable, he was friendly and I liked him much more when he played fetch with me. He told Pat that he was not too busy and that he wanted to help so he could start next week. I thought “If you had a good reputation, wouldn’t you have a waiting list?” He asked for a deposit to secure his visit – this was the start of many deposits he needed to secure his visits!

He rang to say his wife was not well so we would have to wait another week. He was apologetic but told Pat that he had miscalculated the costs and could she please transfer further big deposits.

All the kitchen items were delivered on time, but in the absence of the fitter all were stored in the alley under a tarpaulin Pat had to purchase. I was not happy – that was the alleyway I liked to run down chasing imaginary cats!

The fitter eventually turned up and asked Pat to pay for a skip. I later discovered he didn’t mean skip as in hop, skip and a jump! He commenced by pulling everything away from the walls. It was

very dusty and very noisy. I had to stop my wicked thoughts that such noise might give Max a heart attack! –Karma for such thoughts resulted in Pat and me, plus the parrots all being locked together in the dining room. The madman had removed the kitchen and dining room doors, replacing them with plastic sheets, claiming it was to prevent the doors from getting damaged. We never saw those doors ever again. Was he a secret door hoarder?

He got very upset whenever Pat dared to pop her head through the plastic that hung at the door. She wanted to peep into her derelict kitchen but he told her to be patient.

We were locked in that dining room for six weeks. The only available water was from the garden tap, as the kitchen had nothing in it except for lots of concrete. We could hear the fitter banging the walls and I did worry about the sanity of the parrots and that of Pat and me. Pat was going to have to do a lot of story-telling to stop Max from going bald! Whenever Pat questioned the cowboy fitter, he would get very agitated.

At the end of each week, he asked for more money because, he claimed, the estimate on the timing was wrong. He told Pat that he needed to feed his family. He explained the need for excess



time by claiming the walls and floor were not straight! During this time the kitchen items were still in the garden and Pat was getting concerned as they had been expensive to purchase and she did not want them to be spoilt. The same sentence was delivered each time Pat voiced any fears: “Trust me, it will be all worth it.”

I had noticed when he threw my ball that he had a finger missing. I wondered if he’d done a job at that collie’s house, which had put the fear of God in me before Pat rescued me. Pat asked him one day what had happened to his finger.

“Yep, done this while refurbishing a kitchen,” he said. “I didn’t feel anything to start with, just lots of blood spurting out of my hand.”

“Gosh, who took you to emergency?”

“I called my wife and she came to pick me up straight away.”

“It must have been very scary?”

“Not as bad as my eye, see...” he said while bending closer to show Pat his eye. “I was doing a job and got one of those end nails in my eye. My wife came to pick me up and they had to operate. I have a glass eye now. Look!”

“Did you use your insurance?”

“I do not need insurance. Trust me, I am very careful.”

I heard Pat gulp!

He continued banging the walls with a hammer as bits flew everywhere.

“Are you demolishing the walls?”

“No, making them straight, so I can hang plaster boards to pass the electrics in between the wall and the boards.”

He continued to tell Pat he needed more money, when she had already shelled out £4,000, and the kitchen looked like a bomb site! He must have had a very demanding family, as he left at 1 pm on several days. In the sixth week he finally started fitting some of the kitchen items. Pat mentioned to the fitter her idea about purchasing a log cabin.

“Oh, I can build you one, trust me!”

“No, thank you, I prefer purchasing one already made.”

Three days later, the kitchen was silent and Pat and I ventured into the garden. We could not believe what we saw – lots of wood on the ground and the kitchen fitter kneeling next to it, trying to build a log cabin!

“What are you doing?”

“I am building you a good log cabin.”

“I told you I was purchasing one. You first need to finish the kitchen!”

“I need another bank transfer to pay for all that wood.”

“Please pack all that wood away.”

“Well, it is Friday today and I need to pick up my wife. See you on Monday”

Pat had had enough. We all had! She waited for him to depart and then texted him not to come back. He was very unhappy, but that was it. She had spent so much money, and the kitchen had a big hole in the floor and obviously was not finished.

She had wasted so much money on him and now I expected she'd have to fork out a lot more money on that bird psychiatrist – that fitter had driven us all nutty!

She then hired a tiler who finished the kitchen and tiled the entire floor downstairs so that it was easier to sweep up all those parrot feathers.

Pat filed a complaint to the company, but it was in vain. She then filed a complaint with their mother company, who, more or less, told her to

get lost. She lost a lot of money, as not only did she pay the fitter thousands of pounds, but she also had to pay somebody to remove all the wood from the garden.

This was not the end of the kitchen problems. Every time Pat switched on her washing machine, it fused. She called an electrician who told her that the fitter had put a cable at the bottom of the oven that looked like a cable for a kettle, which had been cut. The problem was that the resulting supply was too poor to power an oven, hot plates, kettle, Wi-Fi points, a fridge and the washing machine. The electrician had to create a new circuit just for the kitchen.

Pat never got her money back from that cowboy who still advertises as a handyman. I hope he does still have some hands and hasn't lost them in an accident like his finger and eye!

## THE BATHROOM

I was weary of all these cowboys, but they came in herds! Who knows who the first two lots of builders were who arrived to sort out the bathroom? Pat had found them through an online trade directory, but the owners of the companies they claimed to work for denied they knew them. If only Pat had finer senses like mine. I can now get the scent of a cowboy the moment they cross the threshold, and I bark like mad to warn Pat, but she just thinks I'm excited by the hope they will play ball!

Like the kitchen, the bathroom was ancient. The large bath was difficult for Pat to climb into.

She wanted it replaced with a walk-in shower. Finally, she thought she had the right people for the job!

“Hello madam, we are here about your bathroom refurbishment.”

Tapping the walls, they looked interested. “It’s a small bathroom, we do these all the time. What would you like?”

“A large walk-in shower, a small sink and, of course, a toilet.”

They brought in a catalogue with different types of cladding. Pat was expecting tiles but from the catalogue the claddings did not look too bad and Pat chose a nice marble type in greyish colour.

“Okay, madam, trust us. We can do this, but it might take up to two weeks.”

“I need a quote.”

“Well, all in, it will be £6,500. Most of this cost is in the items, the shower, etc... We will need a deposit to secure the job.”

That was it. I was rolling on my back in disgust. “Trust me” and “need a deposit” – I told you, they’re cowboys. Get them out!

However, Pat was saying “When could you start?”

“We have a cancellation so probably this Friday, when we will come with the cladding.”

Another cowboy trademark – they can start almost immediately!

“Fine, can you please give me your bank details for the transfer of the deposit?”

Pat trusted them and transferred the money. Friday came, and she received a call.

“Hello ma’am, sorry we cannot come today, the cladding was not ready for us to pick up. We can

start tomorrow, Saturday, if that's okay with you?"

"Yes, that will be fine."

On Saturday morning, they were at the door.

"Sorry ma'am we went to pick up the cladding, but it wasn't ready. So today, we will remove all the bathroom items, ready for Monday."

"Oh, okay."

Within four hours, everything from the bathroom had gone into their van. As they left, I was growling in warning to them not to mess with my owner.

Pat had to use the downstairs toilet because the bathroom was now just a shell!

Of course, on Monday nobody showed up. Pat phoned and phoned, leaving many messages on the mobile number they had left, but there was no reply! Those cowboys had ridden off into the sunset with the old bathroom and Pat's money.

She contacted the Citizen's Advice Bureau, who referred the case to Trading Standards. She even paid a detective to find out where the cowboys lived and he claimed they were in Canvey Islands. Pat called the company where they were supposed to be based, but the man hung up.

Out of the blue, two young men rang the bell and said they were from a large company which had received an email from Pat asking for a bathroom renovation. Pat thought they seemed okay, so once more she agreed to pay a deposit. They eventually returned with totally different items to what Pat had ordered, including a brown bathroom suite which she hated. They started tiling the bathroom floor with brown tiles despite the fact Pat said she hated brown! An argument developed and they left.

By then, it was the beginning of October and all the plumbers Pat contacted said they couldn't start until January – just imagine, three months without a bathroom! Mind you, I would be quite happy not having a bath for three months! Pat ordered grey tiles and stored them outside until she could get a workman.

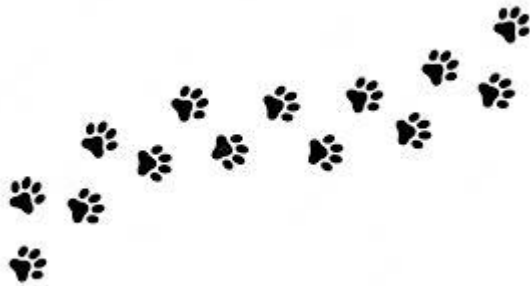
A man who called himself a tiler, was in a bad mood when he finally arrived. He refused to lay some dirt sheets on the floor and refused to cut the tiles outside. Instead, he used the stairs and landing to cut the tiles. This meant the dust and noise were very irritating to Max, Picture and me! Have you noticed in this chapter that I have not slagged off those birds once! I guess we sort of bonded when we were confined in the dining room together but don't expect my fondness for them to last to another chapter!



Pat dared to tell the tiler that the large tiles he put in first were not straight! He got very annoyed! Pat decided to buy him some dust sheets and sponges to help him keep her house clean. He dumped them in the skip!

“Are you really a tiler?” Pat ventured to ask and that was it. Without another word he left.

Most of the plumbing jobs had to be redone and Pat found many of those plastic spacers from the tiling effort in the U-bend of the sink. Eventually she got workmen to complete everything and she finally got a working walk-in shower. In my next life, I have decided I want to come back as a builder to help people like my Pat!



## THE PATIO

**P**at has great pride in our house. I am not surprised because she has created the most beautiful home which shines out in our neighbourhood from all the rest! She likes to make the immediate outside areas safe for walking, as well as attractive.

At the back there was once the aviary where she kept the birds. I mentioned this earlier. Cockatiels, ring necks, senegals and the African greys lived in it once upon a time! She only has the African greys and the cockatiels nowadays, which live indoors. Tweety is the only cockatiel she has named! He is rather like our nosey neighbours with a great long beak! Because Tweety's beak won't stop growing Pat has to cut it regularly with nail clippers. It's a difficult task as she has to place a towel over his beak to avoid being bitten. She buys wooden toys for the birds, which help to keep their beaks in good shape. But I check that she buys me equal amounts of soft toys, which I love!

Once the aviary was removed Pat wanted to neaten up the back garden area. I imagined a lovely lawn for me to run about on, but she invited a landscaper round and it was decided the entire back area would be tiled in dark grey. Oh,

how I wanted green, green grass! The Covid pandemic was in its fourth month and there was a ban on meeting people, but the landscaper was still very keen since he had less bookings than usual.

He looked very friendly and engaging. He measured up, asking Pat what type of tiles she would like. He asked for a deposit so that he could buy the tiles. I think the word deposit is the word I am most familiar with whereas most dogs would rate words like “ball”, “fetch”, “sit” and “toy” as top of their human vocabulary recognition list!

Surprise, surprise, the following day he called to say he could not get those particular tiles and offered Pat different types. Of course, they were more expensive! The work lasted two days and once finished it looked superb but unfortunately, a neighbour on the corner side of the road was not too happy about people working on our property while Covid restrictions were in place so, she came over to enquire,

“What is going on? Why do you have so many people in your home?”

I told you we have nosey neighbours. I showed her my teeth and tried to act like a sheepdog, to round her up!

Pat stood her ground.

“It is okay, they are builders. The law says that ten people are allowed to work on one’s property.”

“No, this is not right during lockdown,” said the neighbour.

“I hope you die from terrible pain and I hope you and your family catch Covid as well.”

I looked for some mud to stand in so then I could jump up, with my muddy paws, all over that woman. But there was no mud, just gleaming grey slates!

She then went back into her flat, which Pat refers to as a rabbit hutch! Pat immediately asked the landscaper to create a fence behind the conifers to block the woman’s view. I liked the idea of fence posts, against which, to cock my leg up!

The new fence panels were not such good quality because it was difficult to purchase the proper products while Covid was raging. However, the fence panels were installed and painted dark grey.

The weather changed and heavy rain fell. The extension to the house which was only one brick thick was full of water and Pat could not understand what was going on. She looked

everywhere but could not find any holes in the tiled floor. She invited a number of builders, who all said: “The problem is the level your tiles on your patio. They have covered the damp course.” Pat called the landscaper, who said “You loved your new tiled patio; you told me so,” and then he put the phone down.

Pat had to hire two ground workers to destroy all those new tiles and the cement underneath, and to dig down deeper to free the extension damp level. This meant hiring many skips! Lots of muddy clay was all that was left! So, Pat then had to hire another landscaper to make good all the mess. Instead of having all the back garden area tiled, it was divided into three areas to allow the water to drain properly. We ended up with a tiled area and a false lawn with a tiny frog’s pond and gulleys. I suppose false grass is slightly better for sniffing around on but the real stuff would have been better!

## FENCE & PERGOLA

**A**t the front of the house, we had two privet hedges – one between us and a neighbour and the other between the road and our front garden. The height of both hedges was much taller than Pat, so she asked a gardener to trim the top so that, in future, she would be able to maintain the hedges herself. The gardener came and, in between seeing to my games of ball and demands for a fuss, he trimmed both hedges to a manageable height. All was great – he did not have a scent of cowboy!

Suddenly there was screaming! Had those paranoid parrots finally escaped? A man I recognised as a nagging neighbour stood at our doorstep. Why was he lifting two fingers up and down repeatedly at Pat? Maybe he meant he had two of something and wanted to give her one?

Pat has a video door camera, so I am surprised that she opened the door.

“Who gave you the right to trespass on my property?” the neighbour was demanding.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, your man could not have cut that hedge without trespassing on my property.”

However, Pat is quick thinking and she fired a reply back at him.

“But, if this is the case, you are trespassing, too. Your driveway is wide open, but you had to open my driveway gate to come and scream at me. Go away.”

She called me back in and shut the door in the neighbour’s face but not before I had time to run round and round his ankles, barking incessantly, as I tried to trip him up.

Pat is wonderful at thinking of solutions, so she decided it might be better to replace the hedge with a fence. She also contacted a solicitor concerning the threatening behaviour of the neighbour towards an elderly lady, living on her own. Why did she not mention her guard dog protection service? The solicitor sent the barmy beast, from next door, a letter to underline that intimidation at the door of a lady, for no reasons but to harass, would have consequences if repeated.

Pat keeps the computer in her extension and I heard her tapping away again as she searched on the online trade directory for another workman. As she started to ring one of the contacts, I tried to give deep growls so that the human, down the phone, would assume I was a huge Alsatian and might think twice about sending a cowboy. She



confided in Max, in his usual position, perched on her arm, that a landscaper, who appeared to have positive reviews for fencing and pergolas, was on his way.

The quote was rather expensive Pat explained to the motionless Max – he is a lazy bird and will not fly an inch! She explained that there was not much choice because people were working from home and doing lots of home improvements so traders were in demand.

I caught the scent over the hedge as the bloke approached. Yep, another cowboy. And just to confirm it, he announced, “Trust me!”

He commenced by uprooting the hedges which had large roots, having been in the ground for many years. The planning laws meant that the scallop fences could not be more than one metre high. There were now concrete posts in place but not a whiff of a gate. That would have been – my chance to escape – but I had no desire to leave my wonderful owner, who drove us to B&Q to purchase a gate.

We soon discovered that the gap was too small for any of the ready-made gates. Of course, the cowboy never returned Pat’s concerned calls about the gate, but he suddenly appeared unannounced one day to commence the pergola – a large one, in the back garden, plus a roof for the

existing smaller one. He seemed to work on guesswork for his measurements because he never recorded any – this could explain the gate problem!

The workman brought lots of wood, which I enjoyed scrambling over and I picked up some great scents! Within two hours we had a new but roofless pergola! He disappeared for another four days, during which a huge plastic roof arrived, unannounced – this man seemed to enjoy springing surprises! Pat was on the phone in a flash.

“Yes,” said the workman, “we ordered the plastic for the roof of the pergola, we are glad it has arrived.”

“You should have informed me – I almost sent the delivery man back, telling him it was not for me!”

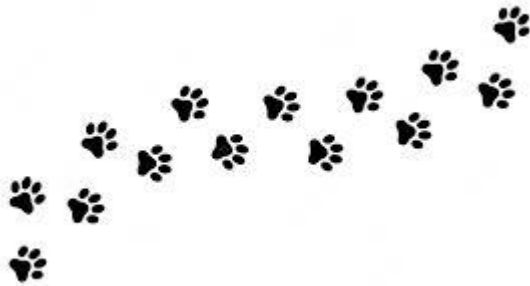
“Oh sorry, we will be there next week on Monday to install it.”

We had heard it all before and it was the same old scenario. Pat exclaimed in disbelief, “We should write a book!” So, we are!

After countless phone calls which bore no fruit, the workman finally turned up two weeks later. Somebody should really have bought that man a tape measure for his birthday! The pergola roof

was too short, just as the gap for the gate had been too narrow! He was supposed to come back to fix everything on the Friday but – of course – he made no appearance. He didn't call, or send Pat a text.

Then, three days later, up he popped! He removed the last fence panel to cut it shorter and tried to refix the post. He didn't concrete it in, but at least we had a gate! He never returned to fix the pergola roof so Pat posted a bad review online. Pat's solicitor was becoming quite a friend by this stage and one of his threatening letters resulted in a small refund for Pat.



## CLADDING & GUTTERING

Pat was totally consumed with making the property look even more stunning. She was constantly looking at home improvements magazines. One photograph took her breath away – the side of the house was clad in dark grey, while the rest had been painted in broken white. I could tell she was in a daydream and, when I jumped up on the sofa, next to her, I saw the photo.

I immediately knew what was coming and, yes, she began searching the online for a builder who would fit cladding. I began to wish that gate had never been fitted – maybe I would run away, after all, because I could not entertain the idea of another cowboy riding in! Sure enough, one arrived! “Deposit please,” was one of his first greetings. He first nailed very long wooden battens on the wall to hang the PVC cladding on. Three days later Pat had the biggest beam on her face as she looked at the beautiful exterior walls of her house which now looked exactly like her magazine picture. I was a bit worried, as the top did not seem to be held in place by anything. I knew disaster was on its way. I could smell it in the air!

“This should be okay but we are not roofers so we can’t climb and hang something on top but you could call a roofer to do so. Your gutters are white. Do you want me to replace them with black so the colour fits the cladding?”

I knew Pat would like that idea and she did. Her smile grew even broader when the new black guttering was in place but that disaster smell was increasing in my nostrils! I decided to brush against the man’s trouser legs in the hope I would cover them in hair – anything to get back at him for whatever trouble he was brewing up for Pat.

Unfortunately, the week after it rained, and both gutters collapsed. It was terrible, water was gushing where the gutter had dropped, because the man had obviously not fitted the essential clips. I felt we were on a treadmill – the same old saga, yet again, where phone calls of complaint were ignored, and the workman would not return. Yet again, he was like all the other cowboys and he would bang the phone down if Pat did get through to him.

By contacting the online register, she had booked him through, to give a bad review, Pat eventually made him return. However, he was a truly artful dodger when he screamed at Pat,

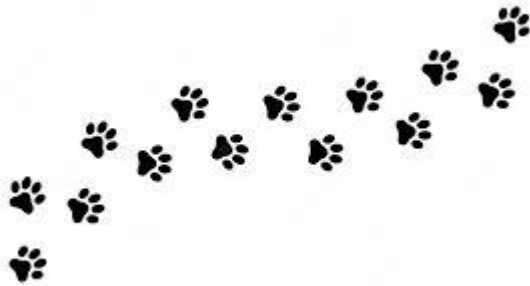
“Oh Pat, don’t make me look up, I suffer from vertigo.”

“Sorry, but I have seen you climbing on a ladder at the top to raise and fix the cladding, then to put up the gutters!”

“Yes, but it comes and goes.”

“When could you fix it?”

“You are a very aggressive lady,” he said and left. I tried to show him the true meaning of aggressive. Maybe this is why his workmate turned back and agreed to fix it if Pat promised never to call them again! I am pleased to say the gutters are still in place!





## THE ELECTRICS

**T**here were electrical problems again and again. But, let's face it, where weren't there problems in "Le Jardin?"

Pat had to have a new fuse box fitted for the hot tub and additional electrical sockets in each bedroom. She was happy as all seemed to be working properly and importantly, she received a certificate to prove all the work met the required standards. But then the fuses started tripping each time she switched on a bedroom light. She called the electrician.

"Sorry, there is a problem. The fuses are tripping when I switch on a bedroom light."

"Is the whole system tripping?"

"No, just the light fuse is tripping."

"Well, it happens sometimes – just switch them back on."

So, she did but she was not happy.

"Would you mind coming over, just to check? I do not feel confident with the fuse situation."

"I cannot, I am very busy. It's your age. You just want 24/7 attention."

I could not believe what he had said.! What had her age got to do with things?

“No, I need for you to come and check.”

The electrician, then, hung up on her. How many people have done this to Pat in this story!

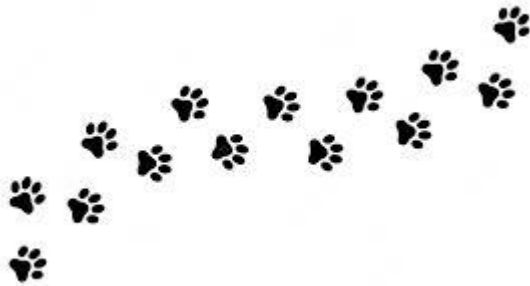
So, Pat found another electrician and asked him to put some external sockets in place. By this time, I was wondering to myself – just how many cowboys had visited “Le Jardin” since renovations commenced?

He actually did turn up and checked everything but could not find the cause of the tripping. He was with his apprentice, but it was Pat who had the excellent idea of checking if it was the hot tub which was causing the problem. The hot tub had a wooden post with an electric and metal converter fitted on it. The apprentice grabbed hold of the metal box and almost got electrocuted! The electrician announced that he wasn’t able to fix this problem because it was due to the other electrician who needed to replace the post and the box. However, this was not the cause of the fuse tripping! He found a new socket upstairs which the other electrician had put in. It was on fire!

“Yes, he should know better,” said the electrician “he was my apprentice for a little while.”

“Oh, I did not know this.”

Pat, later, checked with the other electrician who told her it was a lie.



## THE GARDEN ROOM

**A**t the back of our property there was a large gap between the house extension and the fence which Pat decided she could use for a conservatory or garden room. My ears wagged as well as my tail when she said she could house the cockatiels in a building on that space, in order to free one of her indoor rooms.

We were back to our car journeys to hunt down a suitable garden room or conservatory. We found a showroom in Colchester and all looked promising. They seemed happy to arrange to visit us to provide a quote and Pat and I were already envisioning ourselves relaxing in the hopefully, warm and bright garden room.

A lady promptly came to view and discuss our requirements. She was a very nice lady, and I wondered why we had not had any ladies visit us – maybe they would have been more understanding of our needs? This lady made a huge fuss of me and I could tell that Pat had confidence in her advice.

Following this visit, a survey was carried out and a date to start the work was decided. I tried to cover my ears with my paws when the subject of deposits arose and I couldn't help but notice Pat

hand over a deposit of thirty per cent. I tried to share Pat's confidence as we awaited the installation date. Then we received a call to inform us that they would not be able to install our conservatory until the Covid pandemic regulations allowed them to. They could not tell Pat when this would be so she ended up asking for a refund. They argued against this idea so our solicitor wrote another of his magic letters which did the trick!

Pat whispered to her cockatiels that she was still going to try and get some sort of garden room to house them in so I tried to sit up straight and be the most obedient dog in the hope that she would be encouraged to see this idea through. The cockatiels try to take over the place by breeding and producing eggs, but Pat has to remove these as she hasn't the space for more birds although there is a rumour in the wind that she is considering buying a pair of budgerigars! I need ear muffs for my birthday – please note the date – 1st November!

My "Perfect Dog" routine seemed to be helping to maintain Pat's positive approach to the conservatory idea and she asked a windows company to come to measure up for a room for the birds. Pat was happy with the design and I kept doing a little dance of joy every time Pat's back was turned as she told the cockatiels about

their proposed new abode. A survey was undertaken and a date was arranged for the installation. Oh, what a good dog I was as we waited for the big day when construction would commence. We were on countdown and just one week before the foundations for the conservatory were laid by a builder Pat hired at the windows company request. I even dreamt of the great removal date when my feathered friends would move out. I had every hope in that windows company.

On the day of the installation, I was more excited than Pat as we waited for the van to arrive. We were both very anxious when midday arrived and there was not a white van in sight! Pat rang them and they apologised and said tomorrow would be a better time for them. I felt sick with worry as did Pat – this was too typical a scenario. I tried to keep Pat calm by sitting next to her on the sofa and pawing her for extra strokes but I could sense her anger rising. When the van failed to turn up the very next day she was on the phone and my tail drooped when I heard her cancel and ask for a refund!

I felt so depressed as I looked at the hole where the foundations stood. My dream had popped and it was a very disappointing day when Pat arranged for those foundations to be paved over!

No conservatory, no garden room and the cockatiels are still in one of the double bedrooms. I sat and moped in my basket for days! Meanwhile Pat was using her initiative to think of her next creative idea for that space. She ordered an awning and lights and now she has a beautiful grey awning inscribed with her name and I must admit it all looks very posh and is a pleasant space for us to chill out in but those cockatiels still croak away in our house.



## THE LOFT CONVERSION

I had my eye on that loft space, a sort of kennel in the sky away from the birdsong, well, I don't think song is a good description, but away from the bird shrieks. Pat considered the idea of creating a dorm space up there, but it would have been a huge cost to make it into a full room with permanent stairs, so we now have a great foldaway ladder. On first inspection, dead rats were discovered up there in the loft, that could have been a job for me – Jack Russells love catching rats.

Anyway, I can assure you there are no rats up there anymore. It's like a palace. There are two solar opening windows now and Pat sometimes goes up there to draw and paint. She carries that miserable Max everywhere – why can't she carry me up there? The company she employed for the conversion seemed to be excellent – miracles do happen! There were so many cables in the loft for all her electrics that they had to sort those into a tidy, concealed place before they fitted insulation and boarded the floor and insides with wood, which Pat painted white. There is a nice strip light on the ceiling of the loft.

Pat was very happy with the loft refurbishment and furnished it with a nice carpet and a desk. Pat

has an eye for home décor and her favourite store is Dunelm. She loves to buy ornaments but doesn't clutter up. She loves clocks and mirrors and quirky plant pots, both for inside the house and outside. If she needs to get rid of one, she leaves it outside her home with a note, "Free to a good home!"

I know that feeling because I was free to a good home and I couldn't have got better than *Pat's Le Jardin*. Pat had gone to buy a chihuahua – just imagine – but thankfully she came back with me! I had been raised in a kennel with a bully collie dog, so I wasn't in the best of health. At first, I used to be sick all the time, but Pat listened to me. She took me off that disgusting dog food and planned a healthy diet for me. I never barked at first – what a wimp I was! Pat is equally as kind to her birds and buys salad from Marks and Spencer's for the cockatiels. She buys lots of vitamins and minerals for the birds.

Anyway, enjoy this short chapter – a short chapter means no disaster. The loft is a disaster free zone and its lack of bad building experience adds to the aura of calm. Didn't Pat say those parrots need some peace and quiet!

## THE ROOF

**Y**ou might be thinking – that must be the end of the disasters now – but believe me the worst was yet to come! Pat admits to having a pretentious nature and she became obsessed with making the house appear dark grey and white.

The discoloured roof tiles were causing her distress. She set upon the idea of having the moss removed from them and the tiles generally cleaned and when the next cowboy said that he could paint them anthracite grey she was over the moon! They actually looked more black than grey when he had painted them, but she still liked them. As in the tale of the kitchen cupboard handles, the paint began to peel off when it rained. It was raining cats and dogs – what a silly phrase – and the paint was just flaking off! I was worried Pat was going to flake off with all this stress! She was back on that phone – she must have huge phone bills!

“Hi, this is Patricia. The house looks so good after you painted the roof but the paint seems to be peeling off. Please visit to see what you can do about this.”

“Oh, I would, darling trust me. But, you see, my boy is not well. I will call you back when time is on my side, sorry.” Without waiting for her to reply he hung up. Six weeks of similar phone calls then followed.

I wish I had been born a cat and then I could have got up on the roof for a snoop around! I became of the opinion that Pat was never going to stop finding a major building task on her house when she decided that it was time to remove her chimney! She contacted a builder via another trader’s directory with a supposedly good reputation. The new trader agreed to remove the chimney and to build Pat a “glass room” – her latest passion! He was respectful and friendly but I grew concerned when deposits were demanded.

Pat decided to check with the council if she needed planning permission, and Building Control agreed to oversee the project. It was agreed that there was a chance the chimney could fall, one day, if it was not removed.

Pat told the builder Building Control were overseeing the work and that it was necessary for him to leave the top open, so Building Control could check and produce the required certificate. I saw her give him the reference number so he could call the inspector when ready. Of course,

when he came to demolish the chimney, he forgot all about Pat's request and the Building Control visit had to be cancelled. So, she decided not to use them again and asked for the "glass room" deposit back. She had to fight to get her deposit back and had to pay another builder to open up the loft, where the base of the chimney had been, so that the building inspector could pass the work.

When the chimney was removed the builders broke a few tiles. So, on the phone again, Pat asked for a man who advertised himself as a roofer with excellent reviews on one of those traders' directories and he agreed to do the work. When finished, he came back down and declared that he had to concrete the top of the verges on the roof and we had to pay him additional money.

Unfortunately, two weeks later on a Sunday, there was a crashing noise and as we rushed outside there was carnage on the side of the house. Both verges had collapsed. Pat called the "roofer" but, he hung up. Panicking, she called an emergency roofer who came to inspect. He then pulled some string that was hanging down and more tiles came crashing down. He asked for £750! The verges then had to be replaced. The online directory, where the cowboy's contact details were found refused to help, so we had to

swallow all the costs, including the fees for having the verges redone.

Three months passed and it was now February. Looking up, Pat screamed in terror. The roof was green with algae and it was dripping on her new awning. A roof cleaner was then called, who arrived in one of those cherry picker machines – how I wanted a ride in it! At the end of the job, all seemed okay, so Pat transferred the required money.

While closing the curtains in the evening, Pat noticed a few broken roof tiles on the roof of her extension. She questioned herself as to whether they were there before the roof cleaning. So, she looked at the CCTV footage of the back garden (I sometimes think she got that just to spy on me and to check I don't dig where I shouldn't) and it was just unbelievable! One could hear the cleaning process on the roof and see and hear the tiles flying off, landing on the extension and the patio.

Pat was back on that telephone – it's more of a fixture in her hands than Max is on her arm! She called the workman who had cleaned the roof to challenge him and you know what? He accused her of going up on the roof to break those tiles! He was barking mad! Looking further into the CCTV footage, his partner could be seen going

out onto the patio to remove some broken tiles, first placing them on our garden furniture before taking them away!

Pat contacted the trade directory company and, of course, they gave no assistance. They supported the builder's tale. Pat emailed the CEO of the trade directory but as you will have guessed there was no reply. My determined owner decided to complain about the company's advert, which promised a guarantee of up to £1,000 for the work of their traders. I was proud of her when she succeeded in getting a refund of £250. This was not the end of it, as for punishment the trader put in a complaint against Pat accusing her of harassing him for texting him demanding a refund!

Pat paid for a drone roof survey. It revealed the extent of the damage caused by the traders walking on her roof. There were countless cracked and broken tiles. This was when she decided to have the roof replaced! A huge expense! I thought it was a sensible decision because I didn't fancy waking up to find my basket soaked through.

The roofer Pat contacted happened to be one of our neighbours. I couldn't believe that Pat had finally employed a builder who was not from the cowboy trade directory! The grey tiles were

safely delivered, the felt and all the battens were replaced. It took three weeks before the roof was finished, but what a relief: a proper roof!



## PLUMBING

**P**lumbers are another type of people who, except for a few, are very proud to ignore the consumers.

Pat wanted to change her Vaillant combi boiler. It was her third one in ten years. It was not even one year old, yet it needed plumber care constantly.

She didn't want to have to beg plumbers to constantly come over in the winter time, so an electric boiler seemed much more appropriate.

Searching on a well-known consumers trust type traders' listing, Pat found a large plumbing company that was advertising the supply and fit of electric and gas combi boilers. I heard Pat on the phone trying to explain to the company what her requirements were.

“Hello, I live in Chelmsford. I currently have a Vaillant combi boiler that seems to be faulty. What with all the faulty combis I have had over the last ten years and the constant requirements for a plumber, I would be looking to replace this gas combi with an electrical one.”

“Yes, madam, we can do both. May I please have your address so we can arrange a visit to quote?”

An appointment was made.

The sales man arrived at the previously arranged date and time.

"Hello!"

"Oh Hello!" Pat replied.

I looked up at the gruff man, wagging my tail to signal my hello. I was totally ignored. He was such a rude human.

"Woof!" I went up close and sat at his feet. However, in my little life experience, a plumber will not even try to throw the ball for you to catch; they hardly look at you, unless you cock your paw up their leg which is what I did on a few occasions.

"Woof!" Look at me, dear. Am I so small?

The salesman seemed to know what he was talking about. I sniffed problems, but Pat smelled knowledge and he persuaded her that electric was not the answer, because the combi boiler and the radiators would still need yearly maintenance.

"Grrrrrrrrrr... Woof!" I didn't feel good about that.

"What's wrong Jack? Be nice" Pat said but I was not going to have that.

"Woof! Woof!" I felt frustrated when she wasn't paying attention to what I was communicating. I began to whine loudly. I barked, cried, shook my toys in an effort to get her to stop but it was no good.

"I'm to sign here, right?" I heard Pat asking the unfriendly, questionable man.

"Yes, right there. Go ahead," he replied.

She signed on the dotted lines for one of those very expensive Worcester Bosch combis.

"Woof!" I so much hate to be ignored. I knew Pat was going to regret it and I was very annoyed. As the salesman left, I managed to cock my paw at the beautiful black trouser suit he was wearing.

The order came in at just under £5,000 for a gas combi boiler with all the new pipes, including those that needed to go outside.

Two weeks later, two plumbers and one electrician arrived.

“Good day, madam”

What a good day? Well, the weather said so, but not the look on those faces I saw.

“We are going to install a top-of-the-range combi for you and it might take up to two days,” one of them said with a gruff voice.

"No problem at all, so long this issue gets fixed for good."

"Alright ma'am. You'll be satisfied with our services."

"Okay. Do you need anything?" Pat asked as the plumbers began to offload their tools to start working.

"No, we're good for now. I'll let you know if we do."

Oh dear! Two days of those ignorant people who could not even look at me, even though I waved my tail and brought them all my favourite toys.

"Grrrrrrrrrrr.." I couldn't help growling in frustration. I hated what I heard. I mean, who does that? Just nothing, nought, no play with the dog to make the owner smile!

It took most of the day for the whole apparatuses to be installed.

As soon as they finished, they asked Pat for the rest of the money. Again, I couldn't stay calm. Growling, I protested, "Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.. Ooooooof!"

"What's up with your dog?" One of the men questioned Pat, having no idea why I hated him. Couldn't even look me in the eyes. At that point, I cried and barked, but no way. I watched my loving Pat pull her bank card and instantly made the payment.

I waited very patiently for them to be on their way back to their vans, just to cock my paw at the overall of one of the plumbers, the one who dared to push me away from the combi place! In fact, I sat at his feet and peed on his shoes. That human deserved it.

Two hours after they left Pat opened the central heating cupboard here the new combi had been installed.

"Oh my! What's this?" Pat yelped as I rushed to where she stood. There was a big hole in the wall where the old pipe to the outside had been removed. Not only that, but the thermostat was badly installed, all crooked in the hallway.

I couldn't help it. "Woof!" I was sad. I was right.

"Is there any plumbing company one can really trust?" she said angrily. "Why do all these things keep reoccurring? Who should we rely on for issues like this?"

"Woof!" I told her to calm down. She carried me in her arms as we went out into the garden to get

some air, while she tried to calm her nerves. She reached out to the company. Many complaints, including complaints to the online traders' listing (which claim to be a consumers' association), and she still had no reply, so Pat had to make do with another plumber. They also had to replace the lever on the toilets downstairs which was not working properly.

As usual, the jobs were paid for but the standard of work was very poor. Yet again, Pat had to call yet another plumber to make good what was done bad.

A plumber is coming soon to do our yearly maintenance on the combi boiler. I will make sure to cock-up my paw before he enters to warn him not to mess with my owner.

# TILING

## Downstairs tiling

**A** tiler was contacted via an on-line directory. He visited and Pat agreed to the cost. There were no deposit requests and the tiler arrived at 8 am, on the date and time he promised he would start.

"Hey boyyy, how are you?"

I could not contain my excitement as I danced around him, my tail speaking for my heart. This friendly tiler is a good pawson, I mean, person. "Hey Pat, did you see that?" I thought and ran to the living room where Pat was busy folding some clothes.

"Jack, are you having a good day?"

"Woof!"

"That's my boy. I'm excited too. "

The tiling all over the house went all ok, and the tiler was so nice he played with me after he finished his work.

## Utility room tiling

The tiler we had used for the downstairs tiling was no longer available when Pat decided to have the utility room tiled. So, a tiler, who advertised on the side of his van was hired after a brief visit and a quote.

Pat purchased the quarry tiles and the grout. She called the trader to show him what she had bought, to make sure it was correct and he said all was great.

On the day, he arrived late, hardly looking at me (he must have been a plumber in his past life). Half way into the job, he disappeared before lunch time and didn't come back until after 5 pm. By the time he finished, it was 9 pm, Pat was tired of waiting and she just paid him so that she could take me for my late walk.

In the morning, Pat noticed that the tiles in the utility room were covered with big white marks and they were not fitted up to the end of the wall, probably because he did not have the right machine to cut them. It was a disaster.

Pat called the tiler on the phone.

"Hello."

"How do you do?" Came the curt reply.



"I was thinking, could you please come back and check the job you just did? I don't think this is how it's supposed to look." Pat tried to say what she wanted to say without offending him.

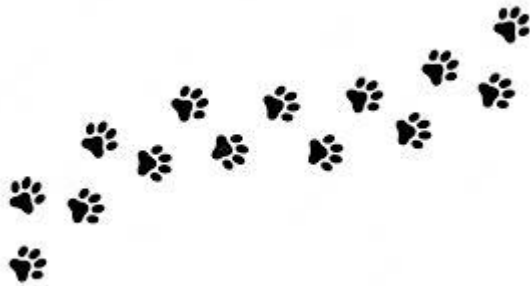
"I'm done with your tiles, ma'am. What are you saying?"

"The job looks bad. And I'm just realising this after I've paid for it. It looks horrible."

"Excuse me ma'am, all I can say is you must have been happy and satisfied with the job, else you would not have paid me. I have to go now please." He hung up.

" Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr..." I couldn't help growling my anger. If only I could lay my paws and claws on him, he'd be so sorry for his words and actions.

He still drives past the house sometimes with his name boldly advertised on the side of his van. Unfortunately, I am not able to bark and growl to catch him, but maybe one day. Oh, how I dream of sinking my teeth into his white hairy leg!



## PAINTING

**W**e had it all, a guy calling himself a painter who locked himself in the living room to repaint it all white.

"Arrrrrrrrrrgh! Ooooooooooo! Golly gee?!"

There was a pull and push of the living room door until it finally flew open.

"Get out of my way!" He swore fluently "What kind of godforsaken job? Paint those walls yourself and leave me alone!"

The painter yelled and cursed his way out of the room after Pat found him with a foot in a paint bucket. He swore at Pat as she entered as if it was her fault.

He had to clean all the tiles in the living room and put his shoe and sock into a plastic bag, so he went without finishing the job and almost bare feet. We've never seen him again!

All the rest of the house, in and out, was painted white. The outside front was rendered, then painted white. The external brick wall at the back of the house was painted white, the extension was rendered in white and the side of the house was clad in dark grey.

All the painting, in and out, was done by different painters at different times and all went well.

## WINDOWS AND DOORS

**O**ur windows were from the 1950's. The frames were in iron cast into the brick and painted white.

Pat contacted many windows replacement companies, who changed their quote even before the job was due to start and after the deposit was paid. Pat barely managed to get her deposit back after many arguments.

One of them didn't even turn up.

"It's been one week already and these people have not shown up," said Pat.

She contacted the window company that was due to start.

"Hello, is that Mr Richard?"

"Yes, who's this?"

"I've been expecting your team. The installation date was a week ago, and I have been waiting for your team. I was told you could make it today?"

"For what, please?"

"To replace my windows."

"Okay, give us a couple days and we'll be there."

"It's already been one week."

"Oh ma'am, exercise a little bit of patience and you'll have your window fixed."

"Aren't these the same words you said a few days ago?"

"Madam just be patient"

"Please, how do I cancel? I want a refund of the payment I made."

"Errm...okay. Call back tomorrow for that."

And so, after one week of waiting we cancelled the request for their service. They refused to give us our money back, but with the help of a solicitor, we managed to get that deposit back. My dear owner had her patience stretched to such a point that she had a breakdown.

Finally, and it's such a pity we are not allowed to reveal any name, we found a well-known, friendly and polite windows and doors type company, who claimed that windows are like crystals! In just two days, they managed to remove all our windows and beautifully replaced them with very nice double-glazed ones. So, we called them again for our back patio and side door. We are very happy with them.

## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

### Missed appointments

**W**e have one of those doorbell cameras that makes loud noises when somebody approaches the front door and I make every effort to make more noise to let whoever it is know that the guard dog is here Grrrrr!

Pat always answers the door, but sometimes she first looks at her phone to see who is there.

Four years ago, when we barely started on our home improvements, we noticed a builder's van parked round the corner. Naturally, Pat enquired and I heard her speaking on the phone

“Hello, I noticed you have a sign on the side of your van advertising building work. Would you like to make an appointment to quote for various jobs?”

“Ah yes of course. If you give me your address, I could be there tomorrow morning around ten o'clock.”

I heard Pat give the man the address.

Tomorrow came, 10am, nobody. 11am nobody. By 1pm, Pat phoned the man back

“I am still waiting for you – are you still interested?”

“Oh yes, sorry. What about tomorrow, around 10am?”

“Okay. If you cannot attend, please text or phone me.”

Tomorrow came, 10am nobody. By 11am still nobody. Pat called the man again

“Hello, are you interested or not? This is your second missed appointment!”

“Oh yes, sorry. See you tomorrow around 10am.”

And you guessed it, tomorrow came and nobody showed up.

One-week later Pat received a call from the same man, who wanted to make another appointment

“I do not think so, you messed me about three times, so no more.” And Pat hung up.

One hour later, a man was at our front door, screaming and swearing, wanting for Pat to come out.

“Eh, lady, come out to fight with me if you dare”

I barked and barked and the man probably tired of his own voice left. Pat reported this using the



police online chat but no report seemed to have been filed.

Is this what they call an encounter of the third kind?

## **Round up**

**P**at and I, both like going shopping. Well, I keep the car safe while Pat is in the store. Sometimes, she brings back some nice hot sausage rolls we eat in the car.

One day, we were on our way to Sainsbury's, one of Pat's favourite stores. As we approached the last round about, before turnoff for the store, a large white van with roofing advertising pushed us almost onto the other side of the road. We were a little bit stunned by this. Then the van was at the back of our car and cornered us in Sainsbury's car park. The man then started shouting at Pat

“How does it feel to complain?”

Pat did not answer, busy trying to find her mobile to call 999.

Pat found her phone and decided to leave the car to take photos of the men in the van who then decided to leave at speed.

Pat reported the matter to the police but we never heard from them.

## **Pigeons anybody?**

**A**t the end of all our home improvements, three months after the roof had been finished, we received a visit from somebody claiming to be a builder. As usual, when Pat opened the front door, I showed my teeth and jumped up on the man, hoping for a fetch session – but the man remained cold.

“Do you know you have pigeons on your roof?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I am working next door and I noticed you share your chimney with next door and there is a nest of pigeons up there. I need to go and have a look.”

“No, you cannot. I doubt it very much, as my roof has just been redone.”

“I have permission from the RSPCA to kill those pigeons.”

I could see Pat was ready to push the man physically out of the driveway. Pat loves animals and no way was this man going to enter the house.

“You are a liar, go away.”

“Do you know what I am going to do? I will go up there to get those birds. I then will wring their necks and bring them to you. This is what I will do.”

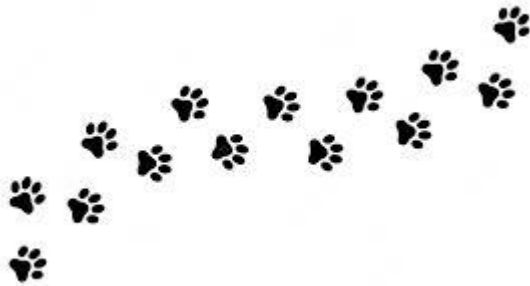
“Leave now while you can. Just go.”

At that point Pat was shouting, so I started barking too.

The man left, swearing at Pat as he went.

There was nobody on neighbour’s roof nor any other neighbours, so this man was probably a chancer, or perhaps he wanted to see the layout of the house, we just don’t know.

Pat reported the matter to the police and provided all the footage videos.



## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Pat has disproved the saying “you can’t teach an old dogs’ new tricks”. Both she and I are in our senior years but the above experiences have taught us both much. It’s not whether one is knocked over but if one has the strength to get up and Pat has risen up time and time again.

At one time, she took diction lessons to try to disguise her French accent but I am so glad that my madame has retained her accent. She should be proud of it. Pat has the kindest heart and all my mates bear witness to that. The robin has its own bird bath which she provided plus it’s amazing feeding station; she purposefully bought a new pond for her frogs. She devotes hours to those pecking parrots who parade about as if they own the place. But I remain the true master of Le Jardin!

These cowboy builders who haunted our lives did not know the steel of the frail-looking woman they were hoping to hoodwink! Her determination has meant that, despite their clodhopper ways, she has transformed the “in need of improvement house” into a palace of a home. Lovely lights silhouette its beauty. I’m

surprised that, passers-by do not confuse our garden for the local garden centre because Pat's passion is to fill our beautiful garden with potted plant and flowers. Ornamental monkeys hang from the trees.

Inside the house, she has kinetic lights which work on Wi-Fi, Alexa switches them on and off. We sit out under Pat's awning on lovely garden furniture, on a paved patio with not a weed in sight. "Le Jardin" is our happy home and I have Pat, to thank for her determination to fulfil her dreams despite the nightmares we encountered on the way. In a moment of madness, I will admit I have slightly over-exaggerated my negative feelings towards the pet birds – at the end of the day they are part of our tribe and clan! We are family and if Pat loves them then so do I! Did I really just say that!

Pat will always find a way to successfully fight her battles, and I warn you – any cowboy builders out there who are still considering an attack on Le Jardin – you will not win, Pat will!

Some creepy car owners tried to take the liberty of parking outside Pat's house but she and her professional sign "Please do not block the driveway" booted them out of the way.

Pink, grey and white are the signature colours of our awesome abode – pray God these colours

stay in fashion or else Pat will be redecorating and I think it's fair to say we are both cheesed off with countless cowboys invading our peace and quiet.

On a serious note, we believe that more councils need to get their Trading Standards departments to issue warnings – advising people to be on their guard for cowboy builders, who target residents who they assume to be vulnerable. Those builders got a taste of their own medicine when they tried it on with my owner, and a few of her solicitor friends saw a few of them off. However, Pat did lose lots of money from her pension funds, and, as my story has shown, underwent a great deal of stress, inconvenience and months of nightmares.

In the United Kingdom, any company or person is legally allowed to undertake construction work and they only need to demonstrate a minimum level of competence. There are no mandatory qualifications required to trade as a builder.

If you decide to use an online trade directory which has been set-up to connect tradespeople with the consumers, remember that Pat found these directories were not always reliable. We discovered the reviews were often untrue and probably made up by the traders themselves – so beware.

We witnessed men calling themselves builders who show up at a customer front door. They carry with them business cards, on which a name and mobile numbers are printed, the company name very often cannot be found. They will lie telling you they are currently working with one of your neighbours, and attempt to make you part with your cash.

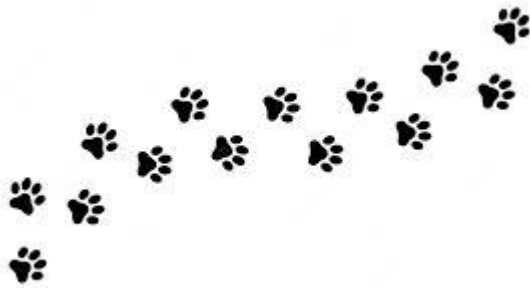
Before hiring a trader, make sure you do have a proper address for them, not their accountants, but their own name and address. That way, if anything goes wrong, you can send them a letter, as required by law, to fix or offer a refund. As we witnessed, in most cases the directory listing from where you find the trader will refuse to give you their address and without it, you cannot go further in taking any actions.

Also, beware of directory listings that claim to guarantee the work of the traders they are listing. In most instances, this has limitation, so all you might get from thousands paid to a bad builder will be few pounds, and of course, you can only claim once so you cannot use their guarantee later on.

We hope our true story will show you that, despite using builders from a trade directory, the cowboys still got to us. You really need to do



some thorough research before rushing into projects.



## APPENDIX – PHOTOS



This is me, Jack Marchand, see how handsome I am!

I love soft toys and balls so if you want to be friends with me you need to throw a few balls and say the magic word “fetch”.

You are welcome to visit, as long as you bring with you a little Bichon Frisé

## The House Transformation



This is was our house before all our home improvements.



This is our house now, after home improvements.

## The Driveway



This was our driveway before.



Part of the old driveway was turned into a bigger and much more efficient driveway with a sliding gate.

## The Hot Tub



The hot tub with the Covana after installation

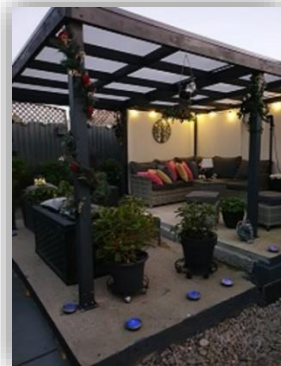


The hot tub area.

## Log Cabin and Pergola



Because we never managed in getting the nice garden room/conservatory at the back we end up having a log cabin fitted on the side of our property.



The garden furniture ended under a new pergola at the back.

## The Patio

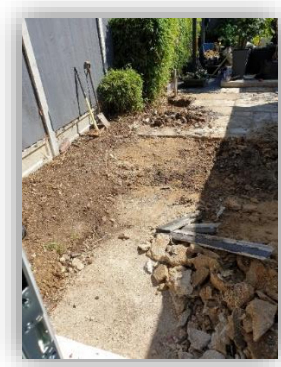


This was our patio at the back of the property enjoyed mostly by me, Jack, and few frogs in the pond.



A landscaper tiled the whole area at the back, it looked so nice but it was lethal as he covered the damp level and water started filling the house extension ruining the plaster and the tiles.





Because the level was too high all those nice tiles had to be removed and the ground dug up. I tried to help but they got very upset!



Took over 3 skips to remove it all.



Not a very nice area for 3 weeks as it rained and the water accumulated.

## The Extension



Following the damages caused by the tiles covering the outside damp level we also had to refurbish the extension



All the flooring, plastering and painting of the extension had to be redone due to the water damages the landscaper caused by covering over the damp level.



We decided to insulate the outside bricks walls of the extension.



Finally, the patio was finished still with a tiny pond for the  
frogs!

## The Chimney in the loft

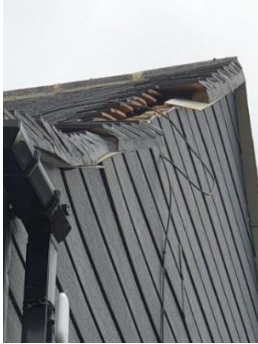


The chimney in the loft was in a bad way, the cement between the bricks were full of cracks and it looked like the bricks were dislocated, so we had to have it removed

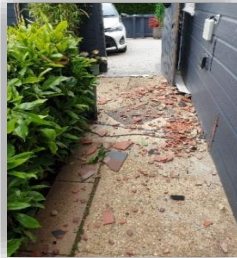


Unfortunately, while removing the chimney, the builders broke few roof tiles.

## The Roof



We called a roofer via one of those builders' listings to replace the broken tiles, but the so called "roofer" decided to concrete the side of the verges which later on collapsed.



An emergency roofer was called. He pulled a string and other tiles came crashing down, he charged us £750!

## Replacement of the roof verges



We then had to have both of the roof verges replaced



## Disatrous Roof Cleaning



February came and we discovered green algae growing on the roof dripping on the awning, so we called a roof cleaner who came with a cherry picker to clean the roof.



Unfortunately, he broke many tiles on the roof while jet washing. All filmed by our CCTV, his colleague picking up some of the broken tiles to then take them away without reporting the problems to Pat.



## Roof Replacement

A drone survey revealed many broken tiles, we could not trust to have a roof over our head so we had the roof replaced at a very high cost!



We had to have scaffoldings for over 2 weeks front, side and back of the property.



Those are the tiles that were then used to redo the roof:  
beautiful dark grey tiles.



It took many skips to remove the old roof.

## Loft Refurbishment



When the loft was refurbished, the man threw a ball from a space he made in the roof. Look this is me searching for the ball he just threw!



The loft was totally refurbished with two windows, wood painted in white, cupboards all around

## The Bathroom



All our bathroom items were removed and the picture shows you where the bath was. We were left without a bathroom for many months as all the plumbers are busy filling vodka into people central heating pipes, so one of them explained.



Finally, we managed to get our bathroom redone but we had to use so many builders! Although they were paid, they were more out than in!

## Electricians

The electricians we called were not as professionals as their reviews claimed and they refused to come back to fix or refund



A new installed socket burnt because of faulty wiring



A new wifi light switch plate came off the day after installation, the walls are strong brick walls not plaster

## The front of the property



The front of the house used to have an edge



We had to replace the edges with a fence and gate, but the builder left such a small gate space none of the standard gates fitted so we had to call another builder to fix it.



Finally, all was redone properly



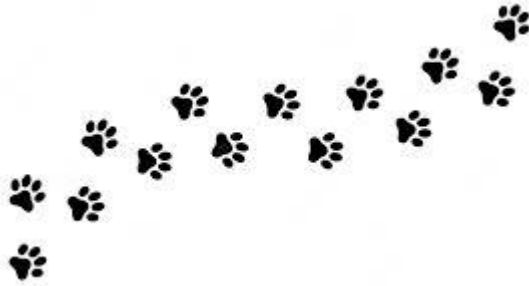
The house looks so much better!



**Thank you to**

Van Woof  
for the beautiful front and back covers  
designs

Jack  
for been my best friend





A cautionary tale of sharp practices found among the domestic building trade.

Pat, a French pensioner, who has lived in England for over 46 years, decided to make a few home improvements. All Pat dreamed about was to make the home she shared with her Jack Russell called Jack, two African Grey parrots and her dwindling number of cockatiels, as nice looking as possible. But Pat soon discovers that, just because a builder is listed on an online trade directory, doesn't mean they are reputable.

Told from the point of view of Jack, this humorous short story with an underlying serious message, tells the exasperating journey of one woman, as she takes on the "Cowboy Builders" and quite frankly, gives as good as she gets! Hot tub, kitchen, bathroom, patio, driveway and roof to mention a few, all fall prey to a succession of bandit builders, as one after the other they ride into town. But they didn't reckon on tangling with the tenacious pensioner and her Sherriff hound, Jack.

