

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I am planning to renovate our home in the Mid-Levels. Any suggestions? Because the size of the flat is about 4,000 square feet, it seems to me that it is beyond my ability to plan it so I have been pondering who, or what, would be the best thing for me to do. According to Judy, the lovely lady who gives me facials every Sunday for 2 hours per session, I should be very careful because some Europeans are parading round Hongkong, claiming to be architects of record in the territory when, in fact, they are not qualified here. Further, many of them are charlatans. What this means is that they can demand high fees without having to take responsibility for any errors or negligent acts that they may, by accident or design, commit. My Froglike husband, Bo-Bo, is known to have money so I am afraid to approach any so-called professional of an architectural firm in Hongkong for fear of being milked like a cow by these known miscreants. I know that the Swire Group of Companies has, thus far, paid out more than \$HK1.30 billion in order to renovate Pacific Place and, for the life of me, I can see little improvement in this shopping mall other than, hopefully, the roof will stop leaking. I do not want to spend money, unnecessarily, on renovating my home and, at the end of the day, I discover that there is no apparent improvement other than a new coat of paint. You know, there is a big difference in Hongkong between one so-called professional and another, and that goes for especially architects and people, claiming to be experts in designing homes and offices. The Government should, really, do something about the situation. When you go to see a doctor about a medical problem, he is deemed to be responsible for his actions and he can be punished should he err, either in respect of his diagnosis and/or the suggested treatment for the medical problem. When you go to see a solicitor, this professional has to stand behind his advice – or suffer the consequences for his negligent acts. For doctors and solicitors, one can be assured, to some extent, at least, that they will act in a professional manner. This is not always the case with regard to a number of so-called Hongkong architects, however.

So, what is a poor woman, such as I, to do about renovating my home? What do I know about matching colour schemes? What do I know of the best choice of materials for the floor, the walls, the ceiling, etc? I have been told that I have to change all of the wiring in my home as well as change all of the sewage pipes. One manager of a company that came to give me a quote on the work said that, because the flat is big, there could not be a fixed price, but that the firm would charge me according to the number of times and the number of hours, expended in getting the relevant Hongkong Government Authorities to confirm the quality of the work, carried out, in addition to the fixed price for the work. The Frog, on hearing this, nearly had a seizure. He shouted at the manager of the company: 'You want us to give you an open cheque? You are mad!' You know, in Canada, they have a group of people, called Amish Mennonites. These Christians, among other things, are artisans, but they refuse to accept modernity because it is not written in The Bible. They continue to live in homes, which have no running water, no electricity, no microwave ovens, no dishwashers, and so on. They ride horses in order to get to and from one place and another. They have one quality that I really admire though: By and large, they are honest folk who believe in following The Bible's creed as written in the Book of Matthew: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' This Golden Rule, unfortunately, is not inscribed in the minds of many so-called professionals of Hongkong. What do you think of importing some of these Amish Mennonites to come to Hongkong in order to renovate my flat? The

trouble is, of course, that they cannot fly here because aeroplanes were not invented when The Bible was written so, I suppose that I shall have to sail them here on a ship, driven by wind power, only. Very difficult, I would think. Even if they could sail here, where would they agree to live? They, definitely, could not live in a hotel because of the modern amenities that all of our hotels guarantee. As for food, well, that would be another problem, wouldn't it? And, as for transportation, I don't think that horses are permitted to be ridden down Queen's Road or Des Voeux Road or any other road on Hongkong Island. It seems to me that the price of honesty in Hongkong is in the coin that many people cannot afford, other than people, such as the Amish Mennonites who, still, believe in what they term, The Good Book. I wonder whether or not some of our so-called professionals have ever even heard of it and, even if they had, do you think that they could understand its content? Life can be so complicated, don't you think?

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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