

WHAT ROOF OWNERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CONTRACTORS

by Joseph Jenkins

As a professional slate and tile roof restoration contractor with many years of experience, I am sorry to have to report that probably 50% of our workload involves the removal and replacement of faulty repair work on old slate and tile roofs.

Unfortunately, many contractors who have no business being on slate or tile roofs manage to convince property owners that they know what they're doing — when they don't. Even professional full-time roofing contractors may have little or no experience with slate and tile and simply view such roofs as modified asphalt shingle roofs, which they are not.

To make matters worse, competent slate and tile roofing professionals can be hard to find in some areas. The jenkinsslate.com website maintains a free Directory of Contractors who claim to be slate professionals. Although we offer no endorsements of any contractors, our Directory is a good place to begin looking for slate roofing professionals (if you're a slate professional and want your name listed—it's free, just go to the site and email the info).

There is also a page on the site titled, "How to Tell if Your Contractor is a Neanderthal." This page is linked to a page of photos showing some examples of Neanderthal work, and is worth a look. To avoid paying Neanderthals to deface your roof, make sure they have the correct tools (slate ripper, slate cutter, slate hammer, ladder hooks); make sure they do not walk on the roof routinely (they must use hook ladders), and make sure they know something about types of slate (they should be able to identify the slate on your roof).

This is fundamental stuff for any slate roofing professional. The jenkinsslate.com website also displays information on the repair of both slate and tile roofs, and offers slate tools for sale as well as *The Slate Roof Bible*, a "must have" book for any slate professional or slate roof owner. [Jenkinsslate.com](http://jenkinsslate.com) also lists sources of new and used slates and tiles (if you're a supplier and not

already on this free listing, please get on the site and send an email!).

If you're having a new slate roof installed, *beware*. As a slate roofing consultant offering services nationwide, I receive a lot of calls from people with *new* slate roofs who are having major problems *within the first ten years of installation*.


Here's an example: Recently, a fellow called me from South Carolina. His family had scrimped and saved their money for years in order to re-roof their house with the world's finest roofing material — slate.

The roof was only seven years old and already dozens of slates were falling out. He was disappointed and frustrated, to say the least. There were a few reasons for the problems the roof was having: he had purchased an imported slate that had *drilled* nail holes *without a counter-sunk hole* for the nail head to sit into. This caused the slates to be "under-nailed," which forced the nail heads to rub against the overlying slates.

This problem was compounded by the main reason new slate roofs fail prematurely: *the roofers who installed the slate walked all over it during installation*. Acting as if the slates were asphalt shingles, the "Bigfoot" roofers tramped all over the roof, breaking and cracking the slates everywhere. Months or even years later the cracked slates fell out. Also, a variety of incorrect nails were used on this roof, which was also nailed onto a plywood roof deck (which is suitable for asphalt, but not for slate).

The man summed up his experience by saying that contractors who don't know what they're doing are giving slate roofs a bad name. He's right — the best roofs in the world are only as good as the installation.

Buyer beware. ☒



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