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Couple go Dutch to rid their home of dampness

Eve-Ann Prentice discovers a damp-control system from The Netherlands that promises to dry even the wettest home

Valerie and Richard Little have become the first people in Britain to go Dutch to cure the bane of their lives. The home they bought six years ago was dripping with condensation. Paint flaked off window frames almost as soon as it was applied. Upstairs rooms had an unnatural chill. Even their metal curtain rings turned green.

They bought a dehumidifier, but even that was defeated by the chronic damp at the family's home in Sanderstead, near Croydon, south London. It collected five litres of water in just two days.

Now the Littles' detached home has become the first in the United Kingdom to be fitted with a Dutch damp-control system which has won awards in its wet and be-dyked home country.

The system was devised more than 20 years ago by Dutchman Henk Schrijver, who specialised in fireplaces and chimneys. He noticed that chimney walls were often drier than the rest of a house, even if the home was plagued by damp. Since 1976 Mr Schrijver's device has been installed in tens of thousands of homes in The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Portugal and Spain.

The Schrijver Systeem is designed to draw damp air out of a house through a series of ceramic tubes cut into outside walls which act like mini-chimneys. Dry air is

drawn into the tubes and over a bell-shaped clay element, where a draught is created causing a cold spot. Damp from inside the house is sucked into the system where it condenses in the cold spot and is carried outside by the constant airflow.

Now Mr Schrijver's son, Frank, and Evert de Graaf, a director of the Dutch company, have come to Britain to try to interest owners of damp homes in their product. The Little family became their first customers last month.

"The wall in one bedroom was very wet," says Mrs Little. "Windows would run with water and pools formed in windowsills."

"I don't think we will really know if it works until the autumn, but my husband and I were very impressed by the way the system was explained and how they worked when they installed it. They took a day-and-a-half and were so keen on

cleaning up afterwards that in the end I had to push them to go."

The system, which carries a money-back guarantee, costs a running metre to install — about for the average British semi, the Schrijver company says.

"It looks very neat and friends who have called since it was installed did not even notice. I am very impressed," says Mrs Little.

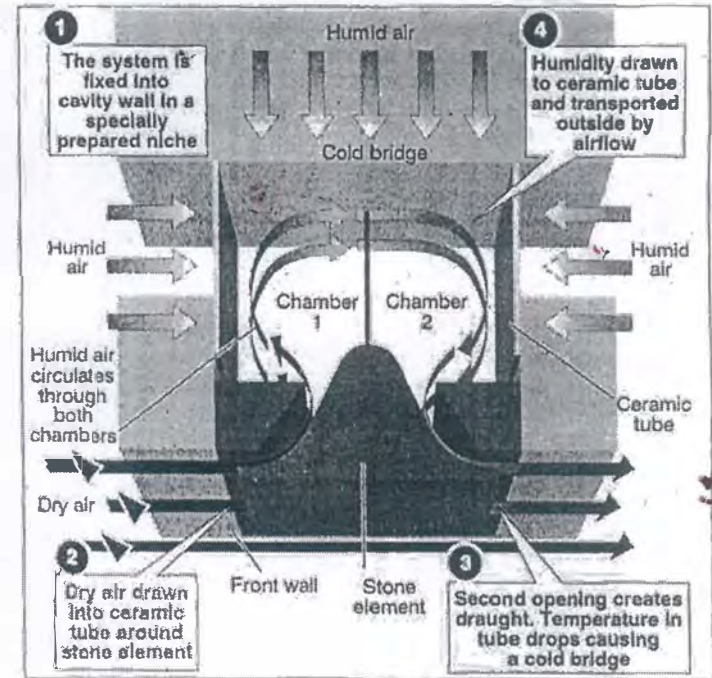
Damp caused by condensation has become a problem in many modern homes where double glazing, draught excluders and damp courses can over-insulate rooms. David Tuffin, a chartered buildings surveyor and spokesman for the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, says: "We used to rely on natural draughts. By sticking in all these modern materials with impermeable finishes we are destroying the natural balance."

Mr Tuffin had not seen the Schrijver method, but said: "It may

be a new product but the principle is not new in this country and devices that enhanced the natural draughts were used long before damp courses were thought of. They worked."

Other damp proofing specialists, who were also unaware of the Schrijver device, were less flattering. Mike Bromley, of the British Wood Preserving and Damp Proofing Association, said he could not see how it would work better than existing damp treatments, and Peter Trotman, of the Building Research Establishment, said: "I would think there would be a danger of salt contamination. I am highly sceptical."

Nonetheless, the Schrijver Systeem has won first prize in a national Dutch competition for new inventions and says it received its patent in 1988 only after tests on hundreds of houses in The Netherlands were carried out. It



can be used in single brick and cavity walls, insulated and non-insulated homes, the Schrijver company says.

Professor Ingo Oldenkamp, of the Department of Design Engineering at Delft University in The Netherlands, has investigated the method and says: "It definitely works. At first I was very sceptical

when I heard about it, but when I visited some houses treated with the system in a very damp area I was surprised. The people who had damp houses before are now very happy and I am impressed by how efficient it is."

● For information about the Schrijver Systeem telephone

Examples of houses treated with the Schrijver Systeem[®]

