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REFINISHING YOUR WOOD FURNITURE

By David Crowe

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About the Author

David Crowe, like many other boys and some girls, started woodwork when his father decided he was old enough to handle the basic tools safely.

He has always been grateful for those sessions, even though his early desire to make his living from carpentry of some kind was dropped in favor a career in marketing.

His home workshop has been great respite from the stresses of day-to-day business and the pieces he makes, or refinishes, are treasured by his family and friends.

His skills came in very handy when his wife inherited some old furniture which had not been looked after and also to improve the appearance and strength of cheap pieces that they find at garage sales.

He hopes that readers of his first book will be inspired to use the tips he provides and also to encourage their children to learn them as well.

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Part-I: Introduction

1. Refinishing Wood Furniture – An Overview

Wooden furniture has a lot of charm but it can, with time, develop blemishes. Refinishing can help you get back the shine on your wooden furniture just like careful restoration can give artworks and antiques back their old glory.



Getting professionals to restore your old furniture can prove expensive because of the time required and the limited number of people that have the necessary knowledge and skills.

Doing it yourself requires that you have patience and the energy to complete the job, or it's better not to start. An un-restored but solid piece is more valuable and sought-after than one that has been poorly restored.

Check the Quality of Your Furniture

Before starting, you have to analyze the quality of your wood furniture.

Wood grains reflect wood quality. Wood grain should be clearly visible throughout your refinishing process.

You probably will have to take off old paint on your furniture. There are various types of paint strippers available on the

market. Care must be taken to use the most appropriate one for the type of furniture that you have.



The next step before refinishing of your wood furniture is to scan your furniture for any holes, cracks, broken edges and the like. Repair as neatly and as much as possible. Fine grade sandpaper might be used to

level out some minute inconsistencies.

If your wood furniture includes fabric work, like a cushion in the middle, do not remove old fabric until you have completed all your woodwork. You can change the fabric after that.



Refinishing wood furniture depends a lot on how well you remove old paint. You can use caustic or solvent solutions like acetone, methylene chloride, and alcohol or you can use sandpaper, a hand scraper and maybe an electric sander too. Most importantly, you should treat the wood gently so that it retains the existing quality.



While repairing, fill in holes and wood pores with diluted paste fillers.

Refinishing wood furniture is not a simple job and it requires care and energy.

It can prove to be an excellent pastime. There are many new products entering the refinishing market every day. You can ask for valuable guidance from your local hardware store personnel. Attend in-store demonstrations too.

Simple tools, modern stains, and varnishes can produce professional results when you refinish wood furniture but you must persevere.

Then, you can relish the beauty of an exclusive piece for years to come.

Part-II: Getting Started

2. Steps to Refinish Wood Furniture



Refinishing can help restore the original beauty of your wood furniture and be enjoyable. Nevertheless, it requires immense patience and dedication.

Choose a well-ventilated open area.

Cover the floor of your workplace with old newspapers or spread a huge work-cloth.

Dismantle your wood furniture and remove all mirrors, drawers, doors, and similar hardware.

Clean all furniture parts with oil soap.

Scrape off old paint or varnish.

Use a wire brush in gentle forward and backward motion, always keeping in line with the direction of the wood grain. Going against the direction of the wood grain can damage wood.

A wire brush can help make your way through ornate wood furniture.

Do any simple repairs in your wood furniture, like fixing holes and pores, rounding off edges and smoothing any broken parts.

Fix drawers in their original position with doors facing outward. If you do not want specific areas to be exposed to strippers, cover them.

Vacuum or dust away residue after scraping.

Use a disposable but reasonable quality brush to apply stripper on your wood furniture. A cheap brush could leave hairs in the finish. Leave the stripper in place for the required amount of time. Scrape off the stripper thoroughly to remove all old paint.

Use a fresh cloth to clean the surface.

Flip wooden furniture in all directions to allow the stripper to penetrate each surface and take off all the old paint.

Use sandpaper to make the surface smooth before staining. Clean furniture with a cloth thoroughly to remove all scrap. Change newspapers or work-cloths frequently.

Apply stain and allow it to dry for the required amount of time. Staining darkens the wood color and enhances the appearance of the wood grain.

Apply the first coat of stain evenly, as this is the only one that penetrates the wood. More coats only conceal the wood grain and small blemishes.

Use a piece of cotton cloth to apply the stain. In difficult places, you can use a brush. Then, wipe the liquid away with a cloth and allow it to dry.

Sand gently after the stain dries.

Next, apply varnish on your stained wood. Use a foam brush to apply varnish as some brushes shed bristles. Start varnishing from the top and proceed downwards. Apply evenly and brush away any varnish runs. Allow a full day to pass after applying one varnish coat.

If you have to apply multiple layers of varnish, use fine quality sandpaper to sand in between layers. Three to five coats of varnish are essential. Light sanding and removing residue in between coats can bring out a professional look. Use sandpaper only after the varnish dries thoroughly on your furniture.

Reattach all removed hardware and mirrors. Your wood furniture refinishing is complete.

3. Preparing for Wood Refinishing and Assembling Materials

Wood refinishing requires working with various tools and materials. You can make your temporary workshop in an unfinished basement or a garage too but there must be sufficient ventilation.

It is best to stay away from direct sunlight and excessive wind too.



An isolated area is a perfect location and reduces interruptions and the possibility of visitors (children or friends) being hurt by chemicals or tools.

Do not keep anything else in your workplace, save your materials and tools. Remove all furniture that is not required for the work you are doing.

Lay old newspapers or work-cloths on the floor.

Make pathways from and to your workplace for easy mobility.

Mask off all other adjacent and nearby areas like ceilings, floors and walls with thin poly sheets.

Materials and Supplies for Wood Refinishing

- Protective Gear for You

- Mask
- Elbow-length rubber gloves (should be chemical resistant like butyl or neoprene)
- Long-sleeved clothing and closed-toe shoes
- Safety goggles

Essential Tools

- Plastic putty knife
- Scrubbing pad for stripping wood
- Wooden stir sticks
- Tin pie plates
- Brushes
- Screwdrivers
- Various grades of sandpaper
- Sanding block
- Various clamps to suit your wood furniture
- Electric drill
- Vacuum cleaner

Essential Materials

- Stripper
- Finish sealer
- Sanding sealer

- Stain
- Varnish
- Denatured alcohol
- Steel wool (0000-3)
- Cotton balls or swabs
- Wood dough
- Carpenter's wood glue
- Lacquer thinner
- Latex wood filler
- Paraffin or linseed oil
- Mineral spirits
- Paste wax
- Clean dry rags
- Lint-free rags
- Bucket of water
- Toothpicks
- Newspaper
- Plastic drop sheet
- Paper towels or rags
- Metal cans for holding paint while working. You can use them for collecting all waste materials too.

- Most metal containers with lids could be very useful.

Project Preparation

The first step with your wood refinishing is to locate good old wood furniture. It could be an old table, chair, or anything else but made of wood. Wood furniture with a good finish is ideal.

Look through your attic to locate such furniture.

Some furniture could have cardboard or plastic within. Do not use these for your project.

Removing paint or varnish off old furniture is fairly simple if you follow the easy steps that I describe.

Before starting on your wood furniture, remove all hinges and other hardware from your furniture.



Then, check your furniture for any necessary repairs; a drawer coming apart, loose hinges, cracks or loose runners are common on old wood furniture.

Use appropriate glues to close cracks and clamp or tighten loose hinges and screws well before starting with any refinishing work.



The total time necessary for completion of your wood refinishing project cannot be easily specified. It depends on the length and complexity of your project.

You also need to allow sufficient time gaps in between stripping, staining, and varnishing. Allow your wood furniture to dry thoroughly before you start your next step.

All necessary tools are easily available and are probably already in the average well-stocked home toolbox.

Always stick strictly to the directions of use as specified in the manufacturer’s instructions of the materials you use to refinish your wood furniture.

You do not have to follow any permit codes for wood refinishing.

Check if there are municipal codes or restrictions on using the chemicals or whether any power equipment that you want to use is not allowed to be used apart from certain times of day.

Do not alter the original designs of your wood furniture unless you are happy to lose any value it has as a genuine period piece.

4. Checklist for Tools and Materials

Cleaning and Testing Materials

- ✓ Clean Dry Rags
- ✓ Cotton Balls
- ✓ Denatured
- ✓ Lacquer Thinner
- ✓ Linseed Oil
- ✓ Paraffin
- ✓ Paste Wax

Stripping Materials

- ✓ Cardboard Box
- ✓ Newspaper
- ✓ Paper Towels or Cotton Swabs
- ✓ Rags
- ✓ Steel Wool
- ✓ Toothpicks

Stripping Tools

- ✓ Brushes - Natural Bristle and Brass Bristle
- ✓ Cloths
- ✓ Durable Rubber Gloves
- ✓ Old Paintbrushes

- ✓ Paint Scraper
- ✓ Plastic Buckets
- ✓ Plastic Drop
- ✓ Putty Knife
- ✓ Safety Goggles
- ✓ Screwdrivers
- ✓ Squeegee

Repairs and Sanding Materials

- ✓ Carpenter's Wood Glue
- ✓ Latex Wood Filler
- ✓ Masking Tape
- ✓ Plastic Sheeting
- ✓ Sandpaper (100-Waxed paper 120-grit)
- ✓ Tack cloth
- ✓ Wood Dough

Repairs and Sanding Tools

- ✓ Files
- ✓ Orbital Sander
- ✓ Rubber Mallet
- ✓ Sanding Block Blade
- ✓ Sanding Shapes

- ✓ Screwdrivers
- ✓ Seam Roller
- ✓ Sharp Razor
- ✓ Syringe or Putty
- ✓ Vacuum Cleaner
- ✓ Various Clamps
- ✓ Wood Chisels

Refinishing Materials

- ✓ Clean Rags
- ✓ Finishing Sealer
- ✓ Mineral Spirits
- ✓ Paper Towels
- ✓ Paste Wax
- ✓ Sanding Sealer
- ✓ Sandpaper
- ✓ Stain

Refinishing Tools

- ✓ Brushes
- ✓ Electric Drill
- ✓ Lamb's Wool Pad
- ✓ Orbital Sander for Drill and Sanding Blocks

5. Selecting Your Worksite

The best place for working on wood furniture refinishing is outdoors but away from sun and wind. Working in a shaded area with plenty of ventilation and fresh air can make it all the more enjoyable. Sunlight helps in fast evaporation.

You can work in a carport or similar shaded area to escape working under direct sunlight. Otherwise, a garage with windows and doors on both sides, accelerating cross ventilation, is also a good choice.



6. Safety Precautions - Before You Begin

Wood refinishing involves use of various chemicals and tools that could prove dangerous.



Adopt these precautions to protect yourself:

If you have to work indoors, ensure maximum ventilation. Maintain a strong flow of fresh air in your workplace always. Ventilation through fans is a good option and can enhance the effect of any fresh air circulation within the room.

You should be careful while using removers on wood furniture indoors. Some removers are flammable. Any spark could ignite vapors due to friction between metal parts.

Paint removers contain

harmful chemicals.

The level of health risks depend on the extent and duration of exposure but be cautious. Read all instructions on the label for proper ventilation requirements before using any remover.

Provide strong supports for your work to elevate it so that it is almost at your waist level. This makes working easy and you do not have to bend so much.

Your work should not touch the floor for obvious reasons.

Keep children away from your work-site to prevent them being exposed to paint-removing chemicals.

Always wear protective gear, including safety goggles for your eyes, durable rubber or neoprene gloves and long-sleeved clothing when stripping wood.

Ear protectors are essential while using power tools, as the high decibels can damage your eardrums.

Your protective gear protects your body and eyes from chemical splatters, burns, and rashes.

Use a face shield for complete protection of your face.

Wear a rubber-coated apron while working on any wood furniture refinishing project.

Chemicals in use for wood refinishing are inflammable. Do not smoke while working on wood refinishing work or anywhere in the vicinity. Put out any open flames or pilot lights.

Chemical strippers let off harmful vapors. Therefore, work in a well ventilated area, preferably outdoors. If you have to work

indoors, select a location with many doors and windows and fans.

Sanding indoors causes the accumulation of wood dust, which ignites easily, and prolonged exposure may also be bad for you.

You must seal air-conditioning ducts and electrical outlets to prevent an accident. Sanding in your basement can damage other home equipment.

Oily rags are easily combustible. Rag and brushes containing varnishes and finishes are very dangerous. Put them in a bucket of water immediately after use and discard them later. Do not keep them together in a bundle anywhere in your workplace.

Use proper tools for every job in wood furniture refinishing. Always unplug the sander before changing sandpaper and treat other power tools with equal care.

Wash work clothes separately from other laundry.

Keep all wood furniture refinishing materials and tools out of reach of children and pets.

Do not allow pregnant women to come into your workplace.

If you have any pulmonary disorders, chest pains, or suffer from short breath, take advice of your physician before starting on your wood furniture refinishing.

Old paints contain lead that comes out during stripping. Dust masks cannot provide much protection. Use a respirator with cartridge designed to filter lead while sanding, scraping or stripping.

Do not store paint removers for long periods.

Read all directions for use and manufacturers’ safety precautions on the labels before use. Refer to them occasionally to familiarize and adopt the required precautions.

Work in a well ventilated area to allow all fumes to pass off. Take fresh-air breaks regularly.

Open remover containers carefully. Cover with a cloth and open lid gradually. This helps to make the escape of vapors gradual.

Pour only the necessary amount of remover into a metal can and replace lid immediately. Follow the same procedure every time you use remover.

While testing products and their compatibility, choose obscure and inconspicuous places on your work to avoid any accidents.

Part-III: Stripping Old Finishes

7. Basic Stripping Procedures

Stripping old paint off wood furniture can bring out the beauty in your furniture. Stripping can help you get the best results from your refinishing.



Simple Procedures for Stripping

Spread a plastic sheet or a large piece of strong cardboard at your workplace. Strip off old paint from your furniture on this

You have to test the finish - whether it is lacquer or shellac. Start by using lacquer thinner and denatured alcohol. Apply to a small, hidden area and allow around fifteen to twenty seconds for it to take effect. Wipe the surface.

If it is a lacquer finish, it will come off with the thinner. If it is a shellac finish, it will liquefy with denatured alcohol.

However, if neither happens, your wood furniture has a varnish finish and therefore, does not come off with lacquer thinner or denatured alcohol.

You would need to use a chemical stripper.

There are various wood strippers available from hardware stores in gel or liquid form. Gel is best for use on vertical surfaces while liquid helps in penetrating crevices and holes.

Use an old paintbrush to spread stripper on a small part of the wood furniture.

Work on small parts at a time, as the stripper might dry while you are spreading it on large area. Removing dried stripper is very difficult. Apply a thick coat of stripper in a single direction only. Do not over brush or apply many coats.

Normally, it is sufficient to allow fifteen to twenty minutes after application of stripper. But, check the manufacturer’s directions on the label.

Use a plastic scraper or a putty knife to scrape off paint from your old furniture. Use the scraper or knife carefully as stripper makes wood soft and you could gouge out the surface if you put more pressure on it.

If your wood furniture has stubborn paint, use a second coating of stripper.

Dip a piece of steel wool in stripper and rub it directly on the wood surface. This takes away any finish that had become ingrained within the wood.

Continue in a similar fashion until you are through with stripping all parts of your wood furniture.

Clean the entire surface of the furniture with naphtha gas or lacquer thinner. Or, you can use any other recommended chemical as directed by manufacturer.

Dispose all accumulated old finish lying on the floor and clean any other mess.

Allow time, at least an overnight spell, for your wood surface to dry thoroughly. You can then start with your staining process.

Precautions

Practice utmost safety while using strippers. You require excellent ventilation. Open all doors and windows if you are working indoors. Use fans for sufficient ventilation and regulation of fresh air.

Stripping off paint lets out strong fumes. Hot halogen lights and pilot lights can cause ignition of these fumes. Switch off all such lights, extinguish all open flames, and do not smoke during paint stripping.

Remove and allow all finish to dry in a metal can before disposing into trash. Put rags soaked in strippers into water pails before disposing. Do not keep them in a bundle, as they can catch fire easily.

Always wear protective clothing like chemical resistant rubber coated apron and rubber gloves and safety goggles.

Strippers can cause severe burns if it is exposed to your skin.

8. Stripping Paint from Wood

The best technique to strip paint off old furniture is to do it by hand.

It is possible to strip by dipping furniture in strippers but this is more likely to cause damage.

Hand stripping is the best choice and likely to provide the wood with a brighter shine and color. It is possible to refinish such stripped wood with a natural or a light tone of paint.



Strippers

Strippers normally have a thin liquid consistency, almost like a semi-paste. It is best to start with a semi-paste stripper and finish off with a liquid one. The premium agent in most strippers is methylene chloride. This is inflammable, toxic and carcinogenic in nature.

People with heart ailments should avoid working with strippers that have methylene chloride. It metabolizes with blood and forms carbon monoxide. This can trigger a heart attack in people with serious heart ailments.

Sixty to seventy degrees of temperature proves to be the optimum for working with wood stripper.



Protective Gear and Surroundings

If working indoors, cover all other furniture and the floor with a thick layer of plastic and further cover it with canvas. Keep your work table at a convenient place.

Ensure maximum ventilation by opening all doors and windows.

Use a window fan with external exhaust for additional ventilation. Wear old clothes and cover with protective gear like rubberized gloves and a rubber-coated apron. Use safety goggles for your eyes. Wear a respirator to protect from harmful fumes off the stripper.

Preparing Furniture for Stripping

It is best to strip all parts of furniture separately. Applying stripper all over the furniture only spoils furniture and does not bring out the desired effect.

Dismantle furniture to make it more manageable. Separate drawers, doors and other removable pieces of your furniture. This helps you to work on all pieces of the furniture at the required elevation to facilitate comfortable working.

Take away mirrors from furniture to avoid any damage to the silvering of the mirror. Similarly, remove all hinges, handles, and hardware. Soak these separately in a bucket of liquid

stripper. Keep bucket covered to prevent evaporation of stripper.



Application of Semi-Paste Stripper

Stripper has a high rate of evaporation. Therefore, do not use it directly from the container. Instead, pour a little semi-paste consistency of stripper into a bucket and keep the container's lid tightly closed. This prevents drying of stripper. Use an old paintbrush with natural bristles. Natural bristles do not melt away in the chemicals of the stripper like synthetic bristles.

Always apply stripper from top to bottom. Work on one section of the furniture at a time. Take a liberal quantity of the stripper and apply it in a single direction. Apply a thick layer in carved areas. Always keep the surface of the furniture wet to prevent stripper from drying due to its high rate of evaporation.

Normally, it takes around five to twenty minutes for stripper to take full effect. This depends on the type and quality of your stripper. You should also carefully read manufacturer's instructions for use.

It also depends on the number of layers of stripper you use on the surface.

The semi-liquid stripper can easily stick to all parts of your wood furniture on both vertical and underneath surfaces too. Stripper takes effect without causing any harm to the wood quality. It does not discolor wood nor raise the wood grain. It retains the wood’s charm and quality.

It only softens the paint on the wood and slowly lifts it off the surface of your furniture.



Depending on the quality of the paint and how old your furniture is, as it could take quite a number of stripper applications for the paint to finally come off. But, do not apply any force or try to scrape out the paint with a chisel or any other sharp object. This

could destroy the furniture and the quality of the wood too.

After applying stripper and waiting for the required amount of time, use your scraper to remove the residue. Collect all residues in a cardboard box. There are various scrapers available in different curves and sizes. Use them appropriately to reach all parts like rounded legs, carvings, and others without any difficulty. Toothpicks, dental tools, and pipe cleaners are also useful in stripping intricate carvings in wood furniture. You have to be extremely patient in cleaning all residues from intricate woodwork. It takes a lot of time to do well.

Application of Liquid Stripper

Most of the work is easier with the use of semi-paste stripper. You can now use the liquid stripper with another old paintbrush having natural bristles. Keep liquid stripper in a separate bucket. Dip brush into bucket and apply. Always keep the surface moist while working with any kind of stripper. This prevents the wood from drying.

Safety goggles are very essential while working with liquid stripper as it splatters and splashes more than the semi-paste stripper splashes. It could reach your eyes.



After allowing some minutes for the liquid to spread evenly, use a brush with brass bristles to allow stripper liquid to reach corners and within the intricate carvings of your wood furniture. You can use steel wool in place of the brush. However, steel wool often breaks and gets entangled within wood grains. This does not happen with the brass bristles of a brush.

Two Stages to Remove Stripper from Brushes

You have to keep two separate buckets of the liquid stripper handy. Use one while scrubbing and removing residue and paint.

Use the other one for a final rinse.

Do not use water to clean away any residue. It is easy to remove all residues with the help of old toothbrushes or paintbrushes.



Use the bucket with clean stripper and clean paintbrushes for the final rinse of your furniture with the stripper. The final rinse removes any possible paint left behind through previous scrubbing of residue.

You can use a putty knife covered with a thick cloth as a scrubber. This proves very useful for cleaning edges, corners, carvings and holes.

Check your furniture well after the final rinse. Make sure all paint and residue has been taken off. Working in a well-lit area can prove helpful. You can use either a 100-watt bulb or a high-intensity desk lamp. Check and clean even the slightest tinge of paint away in your furniture.

It is easier to take some pains to remove it now rather than sanding and removing it while staining. Sanding harms the wood quality and makes it rough. Wood grains also lose their beauty.

9. Common Mistakes in Stripping and Tips to Avoid Them

Stripping is an important process of refinishing wood furniture. Strippers are available in gel, paste and liquid forms. Use specific types of stripper to get the best effect of your refinishing job.



You may commit simple mistakes while stripping but the following tips will help you understand them and how best to avoid them:

Use gel or paste strippers for

vertical surfaces and liquid strippers for horizontal surfaces to avoid instances of dripping.

Always keep your stripper containers tightly closed as they evaporate very fast.

Before starting the stripping, dismantle your furniture. Stripping and refinishing an assembled piece is not only difficult; it usually finishes as an incomplete work.

While using liquid stripper, pour a small quantity into a pie plate after shaking the bottle well.

Apply stripper in a single direction only. Do not apply in a back and forth manner.

Apply generous coats of stripper so that it can soak into the wood. You may reapply if the stripper dries within half an hour. Covering of your stripping part of furniture in wax paper can prevent it from drying. It may be necessary to apply many coats of stripper before all the paint comes off.

Do not apply stripper on refinishing furniture in direct sunlight. This causes stripper to dry very fast. Using too much stripper in one application can cause problems too. Also, apply stripper in a shaded place with plenty of ventilation but free of strong winds.

Allow sufficient time for the stripper to work and then scrape off the paint.

Schedule your stripping process to be completed within a single day. Extending stripping over many days only causes the stripper to harden and you may have to repeat same part of the process without making any progress.

Do your stripping work on a small area each time. Always start from the top of the piece and proceed downwards.

Stripper starts bubbling to indicate it is time to start scraping with a putty knife. However, do not exert excessive pressure

as putty knives create gouges on the wood surface, causing irreparable damage to your furniture.

Use wood-stripping scrubbing pads to reach difficult parts like spindles and corners of the legs. You can rinse and re-use these pads. Steel wool is also efficient and useful. These ensure complete removal of all traces of stripper from the wood furniture.

Do not use water or other washable removers as it can spoil the wood grain.

Do not use any metal scrapers as they can cause indents on the soft furniture. You may not be able to see these indents initially but they show up after completion of staining process.

Wipe the surface thoroughly with a lint-free rag to clean off any traces of stripper.

Do not allow wood to stand for many days before you start with staining. Unfinished wood could warp, if it remains so for many days, due to environmental changes. one night may be sufficient for your wood to dry completely before you start with the staining process.

If wood is very soft, it could require around forty-eight hours to dry thoroughly.

Complete the stripping process thoroughly. Do not leave any paint on your furniture to take off during sanding. This would only harm your furniture.

Part-IV: Preparing Wood

10. Preparing the Surface

After completing the process of stripping and allowing your wood furniture to dry thoroughly, it is now time for sanding the wood or preparing the surface.

If you have done a clean job of stripping, the sanding process does not take much time and effort at all. Sanding is an important part of wood refinishing. Careless sanding can ruin the look of your furniture.

Check the surface for any traces of old paint left behind after stripping. There should be a minimum gap of twenty-four hours between stripping and sanding. This allows sufficient time for the wood to dry thoroughly before sanding. If wood remains damp, even after such a time, postpone your sanding process for later.



It is important to prepare the surface of your furniture for sanding.

Before sanding, complete all necessary

repairs and filling up of holes. Start sanding with sandpaper of grit 120. A smooth and steady sanding can give great results. It smoothes out any rough patches left in the wood.

While sanding by hand, be careful to move towards the grain. Be patient with your sanding process - do not work in a hurry. Take your time to do a complete and neat job.

It is possible to sand with a machine too. The final sanding should be with sandpaper of grit-220. A finishing sander can ensure a smooth finish. Check if the surface is clean of any old paint by using an after-stripper cleaner, lacquer thinner, or denatured alcohol to scrub gently with a 0000 steel wool. Never use water for cleaning, as water raises the grain.

After your project dries thoroughly, put on a pair of cotton gloves and move your hands gently over the surface. If your hands find any small hitches or hurdles anywhere on the surface, gentle sanding can erase it off. If there are rough patches, you have to restart with your after stripper cleaner.

If there are no hitches, your sanding process is complete and thorough.

11. Making Repairs to Get Smooth Finish

Repairs are common in old furniture. You have to check for any repairs even before the stripping process. There could be small holes, dents, chipping of wood at edges, or broken legs of chairs too. Further, after stripping, you could come across deeper dents or scratches that were behind layers of paint.

Setting Right Veneers

Veneers are common in old furniture. These thin, finished layers of wood allow stripper to penetrate in to the deeper layers of wood. It is possible to detect loose veneer edges by tapping your fingernails on it. Change of sound indicates presence of veneers. Setting veneers needs extreme patience and delicate handling.

Carefully take away all glue and dirt from the area without splitting veneer excessively. Use little bit of carpenter’s glue at the opening of veneer with the edge of a putty knife.

Alternatively, use a 20-gauge needle syringe, apply little amount of glue on it, and allow it to slide beneath the veneer.

Press the veneer gently yet firmly and rub away any extra glue that oozes from the surface. Cover the entire area with waxed paper and place suitable weight on it. This allows surfaces to press together firmly while glue sticks them together. Allow sufficient time for glue to take effect.

Repairing Chairs

Old chairs often have many loose joints. Rock the chair gently to detect loose joints. It is best to dismantle loose joints before stripping. Use rubber mallets to prevent any denting or marring of furniture while dismantling.

Sand joints and reassemble legs. Use carpenter’s glue in the holes before fixing in the legs. Clamp legs with a bar clamp. You can tighten loose joints by placing small wooden scrapes between clamp jaws and legs. This prevents any damage to the wood. Allow glue to dry thoroughly before starting with the sanding process.

Fixing Cracks, Screw Holes, Nicks, and Chips

Old furniture often has many small and insignificant cracks. They become all the more prominent after stripping of old paint. You have to fill all such cracks with wood dough before sanding or finishing.

Take a little wood dough on your finger and apply it in the cracks. Wood dough is available in various wood colors. Choose one that dries fast, can sand easily, and absorb stain too. After applying and drying of wood dough, use a fine brush to simulate it just like a wood grain. Latex wood filler is the best for filling splits and dents, as it resists shrinkage and accepts stain easily.

Taking Care of Wood Grain

Wood grains lend beauty to your furniture. Some woods have a tight grain while some like mahogany and oak have open grains. Wood furniture with open grains require proper filling before refinishing. This ensures a smooth and even finish.

Grain filler is available as pigmented paste in a hue of colors. Contrasting color can emphasize natural wood grain color. Otherwise, choose a matching color to add to the color of the wood grain. You can use grain fillers before or after staining of furniture. It is best to go according to directions given on the label of materials.

Use a stiff paintbrush or a rag to apply grain filler. Always work towards the grain to add to the natural look. After a thorough application, use a smooth-edged putty knife or a plastic scrapper to remove excess grain filler from the region. While working with a putty knife, be careful to hold it at an angle to the wood surface. This prevents any damage to the wood and the grain too. Allow filler to dry thoroughly before sanding the grain gently.

White Blotches or Rings in Furniture

This appears because of moisture trapped underneath the finish or a film of wax. The remedial measure is removal of wax buildup. If the area remains white, even after such cleaning, try other remedies.

Take a little toothpaste on a white cloth and rub it on the section. Dampen a small piece of cloth with thinner and pass it over the affected area. Fumes from the cloth will take away trapped moisture. Use sandpaper of grit 180 to 240 on shallow scratches and use a sanding block to make the surface flat.

12. Techniques for Sanding Wood

Sanding is an essential process of a refinishing project. It helps in preparing the surface of your wood furniture. There are various techniques of sanding, each with individualistic preferences. Nevertheless, all techniques ensure a smooth and clean surface so that staining is simple and perfect.



Necessity for Sanding

Sanding can remove all traces of stripping. Often, chemical strippers leave behind certain

traces. All of these vanish with sanding and thereby help stain colors to come out prominently.

Normally, wood has a certain glaze. Removal of such glaze proves essential for the stain to penetrate deep into the wood. Sanding does just that. It does away with such mill glaze and allows free penetration of stain deep into the wood.

Sanding causes small and almost invisible scratches on wood surfaces. This enhances the effect of non-penetrating finishes.

Sanding helps open wood pores for deep penetration of finish. Use of wood plane does not allow opening of wood pores.

Therefore, sanding becomes even more essential for wood refinishing.

How to do Sanding

Sanding can be in two ways: hand sanding and sanding with machines. Whichever type of sander you use, you need to do some amount of hand sanding to get the final look and appeal on your furniture.

Sanding by Machines

Sanding machines include orbital sanders and power sanders. These sanding machines create vibrating actions and cut through rough wood and old finishes quickly. These machines however leave behind grooves on the surface. Hand sanding is superior to machine sanding.

Hand Sanding

Fold sandpaper into thirds. Hand sanding requires proper coordination between sandpaper, sanding sponges, and a sanding block.

A sanding block helps you work faster by spreading pressure evenly over the entire surface. It further prevents you from concentrating and working in a single area. This could create a depression on the wood surface. A sanding block prevents such an occurrence. Sanding blocks and sandpaper can complete the sanding process on large flat wooden surfaces.

If you are working on contoured surfaces, a sanding block would not prove very useful. Sanding sponges or sandpaper

wrapped around a dowel or your finger can prove useful. Sanding sponges are available in various grits. You can use them across any type of contour.

Essential Sanding Techniques

Irrespective of whatever tool you use to sand wood, start with the smoothest available grit and proceed through different grits until you achieve the desired smoothness.

Using very coarse grit such as 80 or 100 grit can cause deep dents in the wood surface. It could cause small cuts too. You have to set them right before proceeding with refinishing a wood project. Instead, start with 120-grit and finish with 150-grit. This delivers a smooth wood surface without any major blemishes or cuts. You can proceed through higher grits to get more smooth surfaces.

However, too smooth a surface can cause problems too. Wood finishes form mechanical bonds with wood surfaces. Very smooth surfaces weaken such bonds. Ideally, wood sanding should stop at 150-180 grit. This is effective for thick finishes as applicable in protective coating available through lacquer or varnish.

If you use finishes like Danish oil and Tung oil, smoothness of surfaces does not pose any problems. An ultra-smooth surface gels perfectly with these finishes. You cannot make oils penetrate between coats. Therefore, ensure a superb smooth surface before application of such oil finishes.

For using pigmented oil stains, sanding wood beyond 180-grit is not necessary. Pigments collect in small scratches and pores in the wood. The deeper the scratches, the greater accumulation of pigments within them. Such accumulation highlights scratches. Therefore, restrict sanding within the necessary grit to get a smooth and even look of your furniture. You can experiment on a piece of wood before trying it on the requisite wood surface.

Great Sanding Tips

Keep brushing or vacuuming dust as it forms on the surface while sanding. Otherwise, dust loads onto sandpaper and restricts your working. Use an old toothbrush to clean out clogged sandpaper. This ensures a longer life for your sandpaper.

Expose fresh sandpaper surfaces often to get better cutting or sanding edges. You can refold sandpaper to expose such edges too.

Always sand wood along the grain. Never sand against the wood grain.

Use long, overlapping, and even sanding strokes to get an exquisite look.

Vacuum clean the surface thoroughly before changing to the next grit on your sandpaper. This clears all dust and prevents any possible abrasives.

Discard sandpaper if it is not sanding the surface effectively. Choose new and better sandpaper.

Allow sufficient time for glue to set and dry before starting with your sanding process. High humidity in the environment can increase time required for glue to set and dry. Sanding requires extreme patience.

While using a sander, you do not have to press it down. The weight of the sander will itself do the required work. A simple guide sander even sweeps with the wood grain.

In places of wood dough application, sand the surface thoroughly and flush out evenly. This prevents formation of any halo while staining.

Extensive sanding is essential on very old wood and new wood too. Sanding with progressive grits can make it easier to sand through.

Part-V: Staining

13. Selection of Stain Material

It is optional to stain wood furniture while refinishing. Some wood species have an excellent look. They do not require any addition of color. Their natural colors are the best. You therefore do not require any stain for such wood. Stains normally change the color of wood. You can match them to available surroundings within the room. Staining reduces contrasts appearing due to different types and varieties of wood used in making of the furniture.



Types of Stains

The type of stain you choose decides the outcome of your wood furniture.

There are three types of stains -

- 1) Oil-based stains
- 2) Water-based stains and
- 3) Gel stains

Oil-based stains are similar to thin oil paints. These are pigments suspended in a solvent or resin mixture.

Water-based stains are somewhat similar to thinned latex paint with pigments suspended in a solvent or resin mixture.

Gel stains are pigments suspended in a paste. This changes from a solid into a liquid as you apply it on the surface.

Selecting a Suitable Stain

Selection of stain depends on the project you choose and the type of stain that can gel with your project. None of the stains poses any problems. Every stain is easy to apply.

This section gives the main reasons for selecting particular types of stains.

Water-based stains dry fast. You can complete wood staining and finishing processes within a single day using wood stains. It proves beneficial for smaller projects like a single door or mantle. You can deepen color with multiple applications. Cleaning is also convenient. You only need some soap and water. However, such stains raise wood grain. Therefore, before starting with water-based stains, dampen wood with rags and allow it to dry completely. Finish again with sandpaper. Similar repetitions can restrict rising of wood grain.

Oil-based stains take more than twenty-four hours to dry. It exercises a greater control over the outcome of the color. This stain is useful in full house projects consisting of doors,

windowsills, casing, and others. These are permanent stains and multiple applications can darken the outcome. Such stain does not affect wood grain. These have a strong odor and you require mineral-based solvents to clean up any mess created by such stains.

Gel-stains prove to be the best bet for any type of wood project. It allows perfect staining over any type of wooden surface. This stain is especially useful in wood surfaces posing problems with other stains. It is useful in staining veneers and plywood surfaces. These do not affect wood grain and do not run like liquid stains. These stains are very expensive.

Staining Tips

Remove all blemishes on wood before starting with staining. You can test the type and color of stain initially on a piece of wood. Thereafter, you can proceed. Starting without an test could prove risky. Your stain sample displays all characteristics of your wood. You can therefore take necessary precautions.

A thorough sanding is very essential before starting with staining of your wood furniture. Sanding clears wood surfaces extensively and brings out clear surfaces for staining.

Sometimes wood could look perfect for staining. However, with application of stain, it could bring out blemishes and scratches to the fore. You then have to stop staining. Allow stains to dry and redo the sanding once again. This would

involve sanding of stain too. Meticulous and thorough sanding can alone ensure a perfect finish of your wood furniture.

14. Staining Wood Techniques

Before starting with staining of wood furniture, you have to decide whether you want to stain it or not. Wood furniture without stain would resemble varnished furniture. You can try applying little thinner on a piece of wood. Unstained furniture gives the natural look. However, if you decide to stain your furniture, it is best to proceed according to certain specifications to get the perfect look.



Wood Staining Techniques

Wood staining depends mainly on the type of stain you use, volume, and object you want to stain. There are four wood staining techniques. These are:

Staining with a rag

Staining with a brush or pad

Staining with a worn lamb's wool roller and Spray

Staining.

Staining with a rag produces best results if applied on flat areas. It is simple to stain with a rag for small projects. Use an oil-based wiping stain while staining with a rag. Dip a clean white cotton rag into stain and soak for a few minutes.

Take liberal quantities of stain for application. Rub rag in the direction of the wood grain. You can use circular motions while applying but always finish with a straight direction, parallel to the grain. Continue application until desired level and thereafter remove remaining stain with a clean rag.

Staining with a brush or pad is similar to staining with a rag. You can use any type of stain for staining with a brush. Nylon brushes suit water-based stains best while bristle brushes suit oil-based stains the best. Apply liberal quantities of the stain and brush towards the grain. Remove any excess stain with a clean rag.

Removing oil-based stains with a rag could prove difficult. Hence, use a rag dipped in mineral spirits with gentle movements. Use little quantity of mineral spirits without any excessive pressure; otherwise, it could leave back spots. Apply thin coatings of gel stains. You can always add an extra coat, if need be.

Staining wood with a worn lamb’s wool roller is useful for staining large bases. Use a handsaw to cut roller in half. This gives you two stain applicators. Dip the roller into stain and rub down the wood. Allow wood to soak in stain for sometime.

Thereafter, start staining again if necessary. Such staining helps you cover large areas in little time.

Spray staining requires special skill to monitor the amount of stain on wood. Use an air sprayer with the smallest tip, rather a fine finish tip of 210 or 310. Keep very low-pressure on the sprayer, as stain being thin spreads very fast and could end with excess stain. Use this sprayer for staining multiple doors, as it works faster and proves easier too.

While spraying with a machine, dilute stain further although stain itself is thin and diluted. This helps you have good control over the color and you do not have to spend lot of time removing excess stain. Apply various thin coatings rather than a single thick coating. While spray staining on soft woods, dilute stain with an equal quantity of mineral spirits. However, spray staining on hardwoods does not require any dilution of stain.

An HVLP sprayer offers greater control over wood staining. This is because this sprayer takes more time to apply even thin coats. You can use this sprayer for small projects, especially with multiple angles. Airless sprayers are most popular for all staining projects.

Assuring Even Staining on Wood Furniture

Staining wood is not a simple task. The major problem with staining is differential color appearance due to blotching. Uneven stain penetration causes such an appearance. This

problem prevails in certain types of wood. Therefore, pre-seal wood with conditioners before staining. Conditioning is most essential on softwoods like fir and pine.

Conditioning does not cause any harm, other than lightening the shade of your stain. You can make it up by applying extra coats of stain after first coat dries thoroughly. Make sure you use water-based conditioners if staining with water-based stain and oil-based conditioner if using oil-based stain.

After each dip of the brush into the stain can, brush off excess on a plate edge to avoid any dripping on other wood parts. Such dripping could leave indelible marks. There should be a gap of twelve hours in between each coat of stain. Stains take a long time to get the desired color. It comes to the fore only after thorough penetration of stain into the wood. Allow stain to dry thoroughly before starting with your finishing work.

Essential Precautions While Staining Wood Furniture

Using oil-based stains on wood requires adhering to certain precautions:

Ensure sufficient ventilation while staining, as it allows an easy way out for the fumes.

Keep your staining area free of open flames and even pilot lights. Do not smoke anywhere in the vicinity.

Stains are inflammable and stain-soaked rags are self-combustible. Put all used rags into a bucket of water immediately after use. Put them into the trash can when it is

possible. Do not keep these rags in a bundle, as they catch fire easily.

Stains are poisonous in liquid form. Keep stains out of reach of children and pets.

Use protective clothing and wear nitrile gloves while staining. Refrain from prolonged exposure of your skin to stain.

Always read manufacturer’s recommendations on the label thoroughly and adhere to it strictly.

Part-VI : Final Touches

15. Applying the Sealer

Sealer coats help in even penetration of stains and finishes. It forms a perfect base for finishing and makes the finished surface smoother. It also prevents leakage of stains and fillers. Sealing is not necessary if finishing with penetrating resin sealer.



Thinned white shellac is the traditional sealer for use in shellac, natural varnish, and lacquer finishes. Sealer consists of one part of white shellac and three or four parts of denatured alcohol. This sealer is not usable with water-based stains, non-grain raising stains, and polyurethane varnish.

Commercial sanding sealer is beneficial for use where shellac cannot be used. This sealer has a good sanding base and dries very fast too. You can use it with any finish like shellac, lacquer, or varnish. It may not be that compatible with polyurethane varnish.

In case of lacquer or natural varnish finishes, use a thinned mixture of the same finish as a sealer. Thinning varnish with mineral spirits or turpentine can get you a natural varnish sealer. Mix lacquer and lacquer thinner in equal parts to make lacquer sealer. However, these sealers do not work with polyurethane varnish or shellac.

Polyurethane varnish may or may not require sealers. Go through manufacturer’s recommendations before using sealer. Sometimes, you can use thinner as a sealer for this finish. Nevertheless, ensure full compatibility of sealer and varnish before use. A penetrating resin sealer is the best for such a finish.

Techniques for Applying Sealer

Before application of sealer, free wood of any possible dust accumulation. Apply sealer in thin coats with a clean brush. Allow sealer to flow evenly and quickly with the wood grain. Cover all surfaces evenly and be careful about the end grain. Incomplete and uneven sealing across end grain will cause it to absorb stains and finishes more than the rest of the wood.

Allow sufficient time for sealer to dry thoroughly, normally around an hour or two. Thereafter, sand surface with fine grit sandpaper of grade 7/0.

16. Preparing to Fill Wooden Furniture

Filling is not an essential process of refinishing. It depends more on your preferences and choice of wood furniture too. Filler makes your furniture smooth and mirror-like. If you prefer a natural look, there is no need for filling. You can leave wood pores open. Otherwise, you can use a penetrating sealer to close all pores.



Normally, furniture made of redwood, pine, bass, maple, willow, hemlock, poplar, cedar, ebony, and cypress do not require any filler. Hardwoods like sycamore, birch, and cherry do not require any filler either, as they are close-grained. It is sufficient to stain, seal, and finish furniture of such wood. Open-grained

woods like walnut, oak, beech, satinwood, rosewood, elm, teak, mahogany, ash, butternut, hickory, and chestnut require filler.

Choice of Filler

Fillers are available in paste and liquid forms. Liquid filler does not prove effective on open-grained wood. You can use tinted liquid filler for lightening stains or changing color of wood.

Filler is best if used in paste form. You can thin it down to the necessary consistency to help easy penetration into pores.

Paste filler is available in two types. One is cornstarch based and the other is sanding filler. The most commonly available is cornstarch-based. It is available in various colors with a neutral tone. Match available filler color with that of wood. Even after drying, filler is just a shade lighter than its apparent color.

You can mix oil stain with filler for a darker finish. Few extra applications of this darkened filler can bring out a dark look to your furniture. Sanding filler is transparent and you do not have to match it with wood color. This has a silicate base and you require just a single application on your furniture.

Filler Applying Techniques

Seal stained surfaces before filling. If your surface is unstained, apply a thin coating of sanding sealer or thinned shellac. Allow sealed wood to dry completely and then sand using a fine grit sandpaper. Clean surface of all sanding residue and then apply filler.

While using paste filler, mix with turpentine to make a smooth batter. If wood pores are big, use a thick batter. Dip a clean

brush into filler and work in firm strokes along the wood grain. Next, work across wood grain to close pore thoroughly. Take up one single area if working on a large surface. Complete it before proceeding to next surface.

Allow filler to set for around fifteen minutes. Make sure filler surface is not dull. Next, wipe off excess filler with a rough towel. This should only remove excess filler from wood surface but leave it within pores. Wipe wood surface with a clean cloth in the direction of the grain slowly and deftly. Allow twenty-four hours for filler wood to dry.

Checking Filling Outcomes

The best test for detecting perfect filling is the look of your wood furniture. If there is a dull haze on the wood surface, excess filler has not been completely removed. This could cause clouding later while you are finishing it. Use fine grit sandpaper to clean wood surface without harming filler. After removing all debris, allow filled furniture to dry for another twenty-four hours.

Sealing finished surface with filler can prevent it from leaking or bleeding. Thinned shellac or any other sanding sealer can do a perfect job. Always check compatibility of sealer and filler to get a thorough finish.

17. Final Coat to Get Smooth Finish

Finish determines the final look of your furniture. There are different types of finish available. You can make your choice according to your personal preferences. Finish includes polyurethane, lacquer, penetrating oils, catalytic sealers, and natural waxes. Each product comes in a variety of sheen like semi-gloss, high-gloss, matte finish, dull finish, or satin finish. Choose the type you need for your furniture.



Ideally, your choice of finish should be one that gives a good look to your furniture. Finish should be more durable and waterproof too. Finish with a slow drying time can help you manage your finish better. It would also cause fewer problems than a quick drying finish.

Water-based Polyurethane

These environment-friendly finishes are simple to use and therefore are very popular. Rub a piece of damp cloth over your furniture before applying polyurethane. Allow wood to dry and sand away raised grains. This is essential as water present in the finish has the tendency to raise the grain.

This finish looks white and gives a similar appearance on application too. However, it dries away later to a transparent

and clear color. As these finishes dry quickly, you do not require lot of time in between coats.

Polyurethane

This finish is very durable and provides extensive resistance to alcohol and water. There are various sheens available in this finish. Dip brush into polyurethane can and tap it lightly against the can. Apply various thin coats of polyurethane in long and overlapping strokes.

Restrain from applying thick coats of polyurethane finish. This could cause wrinkling, sagging, and dripping of finish. In between, sand furniture with 220-grit sandpaper. Stir polyurethane within can well before dipping brush into it. This keeps flattening agents suspended in the finish.

Lacquer

Lacquer finish lends an exquisite look to your furniture. Application of lacquer requires extreme patience and dexterity. You need to apply many coats of finish and do sanding in between application of coats. Do not apply it over other finish, as it will soften and lift the finish. Spraying of lacquer brings in best results. If you apply lacquer with a brush, apply fast with a natural bristle brush.

Penetrating Oil Finishes

Danish oil, Tung oil, and Antique oil are popular penetrating oil finishes. These oils produce the best results in furniture that

do not undergo extensive wear and tear. These do not offer finish as available through lacquer or varnish finish.

Oil finishes are simple to apply. They lend a natural and soft appearance to your furniture. You apply them on wood, allow it to soak in, and thereafter remove any excess by rubbing with a rag. Such application requires various coatings for getting the final desired effect.

Putting right small defects and scratches is simple with penetrating oil finishes. Sand away the defective area and reapply more finish oil. An additional coat at periodic intervals can get you an excellent look. Applying paste wax on furniture with penetrating oils can further complement the appearance.

Essential Precautions

Simple precautions while applying finish on your wood furniture can bring out an unblemished and excellent piece of refinished furniture.

Allow sufficient time for finish to dry before applying the next coat. Some finishes require four to six hours to dry thoroughly. Lack of adhering to such time can cause smudges and blotches on your furniture.

Apply finish smoothly without leaving behind any streaks or ridges.

Restrain from shaking finish container and applying from it. This causes bubbles on your furniture. Instead, use a long wooden stir stick to stir contents within the can.

Pour finish in to a pie plate and apply lightly with a new brush. Take a little finish at a time as it could cause drip marks and annoying bubbles. Do not allow drips to harden; instead, catch them in your brush.

Apply as many coats of finish as you desire. However, take care to sand after each coat except the last one. This will retain the smooth and silky look on your furniture.

18. Finishing for First-Timers

The basic steps involved in finishing include sanding wood to get a smooth appearance, choosing color and applying it, and finally applying the finish. All steps are easy to follow and implement.



Sanding

Sanding is essential to remove any gouges, scratches, or marks on the wood. These flaws come to the fore if you do not sand them away and instead apply stain or finish. Sanding should always be in the direction of the grain.

Use coarse sandpaper with a grit of 80 to 100. This helps remove present flaws. Next, use coarser grit sandpaper of around 150 to 180 to do away with any traces of scratches or glitches. With experience, you will be able to analyze when to move into a higher grit of sandpaper.

If you are unable to understand if sanding has been sufficient or not or if flaws appear after staining, you can remove stain or finish with the help of a varnish or paint remover. You can restart on your work again.

Staining

Different kinds of wood require different types of stain. Gel stains are best for use in hardwoods like mahogany, oak, and walnut. These thick stains reduce blotching.

While staining, work on small surfaces. Use rag or brush to apply a wet coat of stain and wipe off excess before it dries. If you are unable to wipe off excess and it dries off, do not panic. Instead, apply more stain on it and make it liquid. Remove any excess stain immediately. Do not overlap stain on completed surfaces. This could cause change in color of stain.

Finishing

Finish protects wood from any type of damage like stains and dirt. Apply finish directly over wood or stain as soon as it has dried completely.

Wiping varnish and oil-based polyurethane in a satin sheen are the best choices of finish for first-timers. Wiping varnish is oil-based varnish. These do not dry very fast nor raise the grain, thereby proving easier to use than water-based finishes. You require just two to three applications.

Wiping varnish could require more applications than polyurethane to get the same durability. Apply polyurethane on surfaces facing lot of wear and tear. Wiping varnish gives a thinner and flawless finish. Use a foam or bristle brush to apply polyurethane.

Apply the first coat fully or thin it with paint thinner, similar to a wiping varnish. Thinning causes finish to dry faster and you can sand it sooner too. Remove sanding dust and apply a second coat. Always brush with the wood grain.

While working on flat surfaces like tabletops, spread finish by working from side to side. Apply thin layer of finish and use brush strokes after covering six to twelve inches of the surface. Use gentle lifting strokes near edges to move to the other side. Continue doing until all bubbles go. Always work in artificial light or reflected light. This light shows problems immediately.

Part-VII: Restore the Beauty of Your Wooden Furniture

19. Restore Wooden Furniture without Refinishing

Refinishing old furniture is a long and cumbersome job.

However, it is not always necessary to refinish all old wood furniture. Refinishing can decrease worth of old furniture. An old piece of furniture with its old paint albeit in good condition is definitely more worthy than a completely refinished piece of furniture. Simple restoration techniques can bring back the old shine and revive the look on your old furniture.

Starting the Restoration of Old Furniture

Identification of Finish

The very first step in restoration of old furniture is to understand the type of finish on the furniture and thereafter decide how to clean it and bring back its past glory.

Analyzing the finish on your furniture is very essential. This can determine the type of repair work you need to undertake. If your furniture does not have any gloss, the finish would normally be wax, oil, or penetrating sealers. Reapplication of relevant finish can restore such furniture.

It is easy to identify pigmented finishes like enamel or paint. There are three major types of finishes: lacquer, shellac, and varnish. Before you start working on such furniture, test the finish to identify it.

Rub a little alcohol into an obscure place on the furniture. If finish dissolves totally in alcohol, it is a shellac finish. If it dissolves partially, it is either shellac or lacquer. Thereafter, use a combination of lacquer thinner and alcohol and apply in a similar obscure place on the furniture. This mixture would dissolve it totally.

Next, apply little lacquer thinner at a small place, away from the main part of the furniture. If applied area becomes rough and thereafter smooth, it is a lacquer finish.

However, if finish does not become smooth again and instead develops wrinkles, it is a varnish finish. Alcohol or lacquer thinner has no effect on varnish. After thorough and sure identification of finish, start with your restoration process of old furniture.

Cleaning Techniques

The very first restoration technique is cleaning of dirt, as old furniture develops a coating of wax and dust. Use oil-based commercial wood cleaner to clean such dirt and dust accumulation.

Saturate commercial wood cleaner to a piece of soft cloth and apply to furniture. Allow it to stand for an hour or more.

Thereafter, wipe off dirt with another clean cloth. You may have to repeat it three or four times to clean away all dirt and dust.

If commercial cleaner does not deliver the desired effect, use a stronger solution of warm water with a little liquid detergent mixed in it. Use it in small quantities on your furniture and do not soak furniture in it. Clean furniture thoroughly and thereafter dry furniture with a soft cloth. Buff the surface with 0000-steel wool lightly. Apply commercial conditioner and buff again.

If detergent cleaning also does not do the trick, use a solvent like turpentine, mineral spirits, or denatured alcohol according to the type of finish. Solvent cleaning can damage the finish; therefore, use it sparingly and as a last resort too.

Allow furniture to dry thoroughly, preferably in sunlight. Apply one or two coats of spray varnish and allow it to dry. If there are only few worn-out spots on your old furniture, sand them lightly with fine grit sandpaper. Apply little oil-based stain with a painter’s brush and match it with the rest of the furniture.

20. Repairing Wood Furniture Surfaces Fast

Wood furniture offers exquisite beauty. Small scratches, marks, and disfigurements can rob the look of your furniture. It is possible to repair and restore wood furniture without undertaking to completely refinish it. Polishes, cleansers, fillers, and various other liquids and pastes can preserve the look of your wood furniture.



Before trying any of the remedies, experiment on an obscure part of your furniture. This will help you understand effect of your remedy on your furniture. If satisfied, you can continue with the cleaning and restoration process of your old furniture.

Simple solutions for fast repairing of wood furniture surfaces include:

Filling - Old furniture develop deep gouges or scratches too. Filling and sanding these properly can get back the look of your old furniture. Use a putty knife to fill gouges with wood filler. Smooth excess filler from the surface and allow it to set and harden. Sand off any bumps using fine-grit sandpaper. Stain filled places to match with surrounding areas. After the area is fully dry, apply sealer or polyurethane layer.

Polishes - There are various wood polishes available in the market that can blend in any surface scratches and polish

furniture thoroughly. There are various shades of polishes available to match the color of your furniture. Tinted polishes help stain scratches and bare spots as you rub polish on to the surface. Regular use of such polishes can help maintain the shine and beauty of your wood furniture.

Crayons - Collect matching crayons to suit the color of your furniture. Melt crayons and rub them into the scratch. This proves to be a fast way of concealing scratches and small abrasions.

Iodine: Iodine, as available in pharmacies, can prove useful to hide and blend scratches in wood furniture. Rub gently and apply as many coats as need be to allow it to blend within the color of the furniture.

Homemade Remedies - Cut a Brazil nut or walnut and allow the oil to come out. You can rub scratched surfaces with the meat of this cut nut. This remedy works fine for concealing scratches on light colored furniture pieces. Tung oil or vegetable oil can restore polish and the look of your old furniture. This produces best results if used on light pines. Use a small piece of cloth to rub in the oil. Allow oil to soak into the wood and reapply if necessary. Normally, you can get the desired look after an application of around three coats of the oil.

Cleansers - Regular use of commercial cleansers as available in the market can help retain the beauty and look of your wood furniture. Simple homemade cleansers can also do the

trick. Mix two tablespoons of vinegar or ammonia in a quart of warm water for cleaning painted surfaces. If you need to clean away rough patches, use a solution of baking soda and water. Use a damp cloth to clean away residue.



Mix equal quantities of olive oil, lemon juice, turpentine, and denatured alcohol.

Shake mixture and apply with a lint cloth. Remove excess with another dry lint cloth and thereafter, use a fresh cloth to buff surface.

You can replace olive oil with vegetable oil or linseed oil.

These easy and incognizant remedies can set right irregularities, scratches, abrasions, and others ruining the look of your furniture. They can make your old furniture look new and bright again without having to go in for any huge refinishing jobs.

21. Tips to Spruce up Old Furniture

You develop specific attachments or sentiments to certain furniture and you do not have the heart to give it away although it looks old. You do not have to worry; instead, a simple facelift can change the look of your furniture and turn it into a beautiful piece.



Distressing: This is a simple option for changing the look of your old bookcases and dressers. Paint a base color and thereafter apply a second color on top of it. Use a piece of rag to wipe edges and corners with the second color. Fling tiny speckles of paint all over furniture with a paintbrush. It will change appearance of your furniture and make it look very different from its old and drab look.

Decorations: Stencils and sponges can create fun designs on surfaces of furniture. You can stencil any design or image of your choice. Otherwise, make hand painted designs like flowers, butterflies, and more. These add elegance to your furniture and enhance its beauty.

Restoration: Repainting or restaining can bring back the original shine and look of your old furniture. You do not have to make any changes in the look of your furniture too. Apply enamel finish over old furniture to give it a distinct and new look.

Personalize Furniture: You can personalize baby furniture or those of children. Inscribe birth dates with name of the baby or child to add a personal touch to baby furniture like cradles. Similarly, inscribe alphabets or numbers on a child’s desk to make it look different. It also encourages children to study.

Tiles: Mosaic tiles and stained glass can add more life and beauty to your old furniture. Allow your creative juices to flow and create any innovative designs. Attach glass or tiles with super glue. Allow sufficient time for glue to fix tile firmly into place.

Simple things can add lot of beauty to your old furniture and give it a new look. It can also remove the boring and drab look of your furniture.

22. Protect Your Wooden Furniture with Varnish and Preserver

Varnishes and wood preservers help safeguard wood quality making them more durable. You can restore old furniture and protect furniture from losing their luster through simple applications of varnishes and preservers. It does not take long to use these. Rather, they help save lot of time you would otherwise have to spend in refinishing old furniture.



Using Varnish to Protect your Furniture

Before starting with varnishing of furniture, prepare workplace by spreading many layers of old newspapers. Work in a well ventilated room with room temperature ranging between 70 to 75 degrees F. This is necessary for varnish to dry quickly without formation of any bubbles or

streaks.



Wear a protective facemask and gloves. Use stripper to remove

existing finish. Make a mixture of mineral spirits and linseed oil. Dip steel wool in this mixture and clean wood. You can dry wood with a clean rag.

Pour four parts varnish and one part mineral spirits into a container. Also, look through the manufacturer’s recommendations and any special warnings before starting to varnish your furniture. Dip foam brush in this mixture and work on your furniture, moving in the direction of the grain.

Allow it to dry thoroughly, normally for six hours. Thereafter, apply a second coat using a new foam brush. Overall, your furniture would require around five coats of varnish application. However, use new brushes for every new coat. Keep your workplace dust free, as a little dust could stick to your varnish coating and rob its look. If dust creates problems, use sandpaper to sand it away before starting with your next coat.

Working with Wood Preserver

Strip varnish or paint thoroughly from your furniture. Use a stiff bristle brush to clear all debris. Use clear wood preserver to make wood free of fungus and insects. Next, paint a full coat of preservative on wood and repeat next coat as soon as the first coat soaks in.

Normally, three coats of preservative are essential. Make sure you reach all joints, ends, and sides. Work in a well-ventilated area wearing a facemask and protective gear and gloves.

23. Maintenance of Wooden Furniture

With time, new furniture starts losing the new look. This is due to various factors. Dust, dirt, cobwebs, and grime often accumulate on wood furniture. These gradually lessen the shine and gleam of your furniture, making it look dull. Sometimes they form a wax type covering on furniture, which makes its color turn dull and lifeless. You often try to discard such furniture without realizing its worth. Good cleaning can make your wood furniture look new.



Simple tips can help you maintain the shine and look of your furniture without damaging the interior woodwork. Treat woodwork with linseed oil or Tung oil. This forms an invisible protective covering on your furniture. Next, rub a soft cloth dipped in lemon oil polish over the furniture. This clears off all grime from the surface.

If your furniture has a coating of wax formation, use a mixture of white vinegar and water on your furniture first. Thereafter, rub a soft cloth dipped in lemon oil polish over the furniture. Next, clean a wood surface with a soft cloth clearing off all dust from the surface.



Woodwork could have a varnish or polyurethane finish. Clean this with moistened baby wipes. Wipe off all accumulated dirt and dust from across edges of doorframes and baseboards. You can use ladder to reach the upperparts of your door, which could be at the ceiling level.

Throw away dirty wipes and clean with as many wipes as necessary until you are able to clean the entire wood surface of all grime and dust. You can wrap wipes around your finger to reach small parts of your furniture.

Body oils, creams, and other sticky things accumulate on wood furniture, mainly on armrests and chair backs, on top of kitchen cabinets, and similar other things. Although you can scrape off grime with your fingernails, it damages look of your furniture.

The best way to treat this is to wash old furniture using a mild soap and water. This soap does not damage the wood finish and removes all accumulated dust and grime thoroughly. You can also use a mixture of mineral spirits and linseed oil. Mix three parts of the mineral spirits in one part of boiled linseed oil. Use this mixture to clean all grime, dust, and dirt from old wood furniture.

Essential Tips for Maintenance of Wood Furniture

Do not rub cloth roughly across wood surface. It could cause small scratches.

Use a soft cloth like a cotton cloth or baby wipes.

After cleaning of wood, you might find few cracks and gouges. Fill these with appropriate fillers and stain them to get the old look of your furniture.

Part-VIII: Frequently Asked Questions

24. Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Which are the best chemicals for stripping or removing paint finishes?

A: Denatured alcohol, lacquer thinner and mineral spirits are good for stripping finishes. Denatured alcohol can take off shellac finishes while lacquer thinner can work on lacquer finish. Using branded products can help you benefit from pure products. Sometimes cheap mineral spirits contain latent oil that leaves residue on your wood after applying finish. Good quality mineral spirits leave no residue and evaporate thoroughly.



Q: Newly purchased furniture has a distinct odor emanating from it. What is the remedy?

A: Odors from furniture are often due to insufficient evaporation of chemicals. Odors intensify during cold months. Allow sufficient sunlight on the furniture for all chemicals to evaporate thoroughly. As a remedy for the time being, use a strong room freshener that could subdue odor from the furniture in the room. This is a temporary measure.

Q: There are few stain drips at door edges. How do I clean them?

A: Dip some coarse cloth in mineral spirits and scrub away the drips. It could take some time and effort too. This can take some shine off your door. If drips or runs are not on the main part, you can sand them. Otherwise, use scotchbrite dipped in paint thinner.



Q: How to get a dark stain on cabinets made of Maplewood?

A: Use Red Mahogany oil based stain. Oil stains are very easy to apply. Apply thick and liberal coats evenly over the entire surface. As this stain remains wet for a longtime, you can take your time to apply and wipe off any excess too. Maplewood is hardwood and therefore takes lot of time to take in the stain. You need to apply many coats of the stain to get the desired effect.

Q: How do I stain? Which are the best stains?

A: There are different types of stains like gel stains, oil-based stains, and water stains. You have to choose stain according to the type of wood you are staining. Hardwoods require oil stains while gel stains are the best bet for small projects. Gel stains dry faster and therefore, you should control flow of

stain to prevent any unevenness on the furniture. The best way of working with stains is to use small quantities and apply it evenly. Allow it to dry and then apply further coats to achieve required color.



Q: Can I do stripping and sanding of furniture within the house?

A: Stripping and sanding should ideally be within well-ventilated areas. Ventilation with free circulation of air can take away all fumes of

stripping and sanding. Lingering of such fumes within the house can prove harmful. All such fumes are inflammable too. Use a shop vacuum with a HEPA filter to take away all sanding fumes and dust. Work in a secluded but well ventilated room in your house and keep door to the rest of the house closed. Wear a respirator and vacuum the room well before opening to the rest of the house.

Q: How long does it take finish to dry completely?

A: Stain takes around eight hours to dry thoroughly. You have to give sufficient time for every coat to dry completely before proceeding to the next. Oil-based stains oxidize. High



humidity could prolong drying processes.

Q: Placing hot dishes on a dining table leaves milk-colored heat blushes. How do I correct this?

A: Heat from the dishes form vapor and it settles as rings on the wood surface. Light or milk colored rings is due to the presence of water within the finish. Use a soft cloth dipped in camphor spirits or denatured alcohol and rub the area. This could remove the light colored rings. Otherwise, use a little toothpaste, mayonnaise, or a mild hand cleaner. Rub with steel wool size 0000 or a clean cloth along the wood grain. If your furniture has a wax finish, use turpentine dipped cloth to clean wax and allow it to dry completely.

Q: How does pine wood furniture react to stain?

A: Pinewood does not take in stain instantly and evenly. It stains irregularly. You can use a conditioner to even out the stain on pinewood. Pine takes some time to darken stain and better results are available through exposure to sunlight. Apply around three coats of polyurethane finish to protect pinewood from regular wear and tear.



Q: How to remove scratches and burn marks from tabletop?

A: If burn marks and scratches are deep into the wood of the table, you have to go through complete refinishing of your table. Start by stripping the finish and

then the surface of the table. You should sand out burn marks evenly and thoroughly. Use artists’ oil paints to touch up burn marks. Start with lighter colors first and then proceed to darker colors. Apply in definite strokes and do not pile up paint. Allow wood to soak in paint and then let it dry completely.

Q: How do I scrape off veneer?

A: Veneer is thin layers of wood. If veneer is very old, soaking it in hot water can take away hidden glue. It then becomes easy to peel off veneer.

Q: How do I take off mold build-up on a wooden table?

A: Use equal quantities of household bleach and water. Mix well and apply on mold to remove it. You can also use a similar mixture of TSP (trisodium phosphate).

Q: How do I remove a sticky finish from within a cedar box?

A: Sticky finish within a cedar box indicates the finish never dried fully. Remove the finish and do it all again starting with stripping.

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