

Refinishing YOUR FURNITURE

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Refinishing Your Furniture

Charlotte Kirchner

Many pieces of furniture—modern or old—can be refinished to become part of the decorative scheme of the home. Furniture should be of good wood, good lines, and good construction to be worth the effort of refinishing.

FINISHES

Preserving the natural beauty in wood is an essential feature of an ideal finish. For this reason one usually finds mahogany, walnut, cherry, oak, maple, and early birch done in a natural finish to show the grain of the wood.

Finishes which bring out the natural grain are oil, wax, varnish, and shellac. Pine, poplar, ash, and other plain woods may be stained or painted if not pleasing in color or grain. Old pine pieces, if in good condition, are beautiful when cleaned and waxed.

Painting is advisable on pieces which do not have attractive grain and coloring. Furniture of ash, poplar, pine, and wicker can be painted.

Light colors in wood finishes are popular. To get this effect, a thin layer of paint can be applied over the clean and unfinished bleached wood, then wiped off immediately. The final finish is then put on.

Light wood stains are also available now. Most paint manufacturing companies are putting out these stains.

MAKING REPAIRS

All necessary repairs should be made before refinishing but only the simplest ones attempted at home.

Removing Detachable Parts

Remove all undesirable ornaments and detachable parts with a thin knife blade, a chisel, or pliers. Be sure to use these tools carefully.

Old-fashioned mirror supports on sideboards and bureaus may be removed. And old bed frames are improved by cutting the head part down and then reversing the head and foot parts.



Remove undesirable ornaments.

Filling Cracks and Holes

Fill deep holes or cracks with plastic wood or stick shellac in colors to match the wood. Follow directions closely to get satisfactory results.

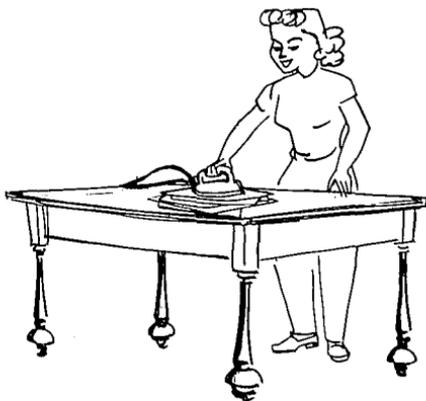
Gluing

First scrape all old glue off loose joints and wooden pulls—glue sticks to wood better than to hardened glue. Then prepare the glue as follows: mix 1 part carpenter's flake glue with 1½ parts hot water.

When surfaces are clean and dry, the hot glue should be applied and the joints bound with strips of firm muslin or other stout material so the glue will hold. Too much glue may prevent the parts from making contact, and the joint will not hold well. Press the parts together very firmly to squeeze out as much glue as possible. Allow 3 or 4 hours for the glue to dry, then remove the bindings. Remove all excess glue while it is soft.

Removing Dents

Dents which mar the appearance of the furniture can be treated with steam. This treatment makes the wood swell and thus lessens the effect of the dent. Here is how to go about it: Soak about



Remove dents with steam.

six sheets of brown paper or several thicknesses of woollen cloth in water. (The pieces should be a little larger than a flatiron.) Place over the dent and press a hot iron down on the paper or cloth for a few seconds. In case the first operation fails to remove the dent, repeat until the dent disappears.

Scratches

Scratches in the wood become saturated with stain or dye and in time appear darker than the surrounding surface. To remove small scratches mix a stain of the required color with water until it becomes a bit lighter than the wood to be colored. Apply this to the wood, then dip a camel's hair brush in plain white shellac and fill in the scratch. Do not overlap the edges.

For larger scratches, use stick shellac. Heat the point of a spatula or knife, then rub it on No. 0 sandpaper to remove the smokelike deposit. Use this clean and heated spatula to slip the shellac into the depression and then to smooth it off. Sand the surface until it is clear.

Removing Stains

Dark stains on wood can usually be removed by bleaching after the original finish is off. Use a saturate solution of oxalic acid in 1 pint of hot water and apply with a brush while it is hot.

Leave the bleach on about an hour or until it is perfectly dry, when it will have turned white. Then remove all traces of the acid by rinsing it thoroughly with lukewarm water two or three times. Wear gloves because the oxalic solution could eat into your hands.

This treatment has proved effective in bleaching rings caused by potted plants and in removing ink stains and rust. Surface stains can usually be removed by means of sandpaper or steel wool. Household bleach removes some stains that have not penetrated deeply.

REMOVING OLD FINISHES

Equip yourself with these supplies:

Paint and varnish remover
Denatured alcohol
Turpentine
Old paint brush
Putty knife
Fine steel wool
Sandpapers (Nos. 1, 0, 1/0, 2/0, 3/0)
Newspapers
Soft lintless rags
Three or four clean tin cans or glass jars.

Follow these steps:

1. Apply varnish remover with an old paint brush.
 - Be generous with remover.
 - Work only a small area at a time.
 - Brush in one direction only.
 2. Allow remover to stand until bubbly
- and old finish can be lifted with a putty knife.
3. Remove old finish.
 - Lift off as much as possible with a putty knife, keeping knife wiped clean on old newspapers.
 - Wipe surface with coarse cloth to remove rest of softened finish.
 - Repeat remover application if necessary.
 4. Wash surface of furniture thoroughly with turpentine.
 5. When wood is dry, sand until smooth, using sandpaper numbers ½ through 3/0 successively.
 6. Give the surface a final rubbing with very fine steel wool.
 7. Wipe surface with a cloth dampened with turpentine to remove all dust before applying new finish.

APPLYING NEW FINISHES

First—You May Need To Stain

If the wood in the furniture has an uneven color, is poor quality, or has been impossible to sand clear after the removal of the old finish, you may want to apply a stain before building up a new finish.

Equip yourself with these supplies:

Oil stain—Avoid penetrating stains, for they are difficult for an inexperienced person to apply. They cannot be lightened and they may turn soft woods black.

Boiled linseed oil
Turpentine
Soft lintless cloths

Follow these steps:

1. Rub a coat of half boiled linseed oil and half turpentine into the surface
- with a cloth. This will make for slower, more even penetration of stain and you will find it easier to control the depth of color.
2. Saturate another cloth with the stain and rub the surface to the depth of color you want.
 - If stain becomes too dark, wash the surface with turpentine.
 - If one application does not make the surface the right color, let it dry 24 hours and apply a second coat.
 3. If you are going to apply a varnish finish to the surface, seal in the stain with a coat of half shellac and half denatured alcohol. Let it dry and rub lightly with fine steel wool.

Note:

✓ A stain made up of half semigloss interior paint and half turpentine may be used to get light-colored effects.

- Brush onto surface.
- Let stand 4 to 5 minutes.
- With a soft cloth wipe off the surface leaving only enough paint to fill the pores of the wood.
- Seal with shellac before applying varnish finish.

✓ Gray, white, and light green give nice color effects.

✓ There are a number of new light wood stains now on the market.

For an Oil Finish

This is an excellent finish to bring out the natural beauty of wood. It is easy to apply and is especially good because it is not easily marred and resists damage from heat and water. And you can use the furniture while the oil finish is being built up.

Equip yourself with these supplies:

Boiled linseed oil (this is a commercial term applied to linseed oil which contains a drier. For safety's sake **do not** attempt to boil raw linseed oil at home.)

Turpentine

Lintless cloths for applying oil

Fine steel wool.

Follow these steps:

1. Be sure furniture is clean and smooth.
2. With a cloth, apply a generous coat of a mixture of $\frac{2}{3}$ boiled linseed oil and $\frac{1}{3}$ turpentine. The turpentine helps this first coat penetrate.
3. Rub until the wood will absorb no more oil. This should take 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Wipe off excess oil.
5. Let furniture stand 3 or 4 days to dry thoroughly.
6. Rub the surface with very fine steel wool until it feels satiny.
7. Apply a coat of oil without any turpentine.
8. Repeat this process as often as desired until the furniture has a rich,

satiny luster—possibly 6 to 8 coats of oil.

9. A final coat of wax may be used.

For a Varnish Finish

A straight varnish finish can produce a fine-appearing surface, but it must be done carefully to avoid a hard shiny look. Varnish finishes must be given constant care, since they mar easily.

Equip yourself with these supplies:

A good grade varnish (spar varnish if you want a table or chest top to resist heat and moisture)

Boiled linseed oil

Turpentine

Paste wood filler

Powdered pumice

A clean two-inch paint brush for varnish

A clean stiff-bristled paint brush for filler

A small pad of woolen blanket or similar material

Coarse burlap or other coarse cloth.

Follow these steps:

1. Apply a paste filler on open-grain wood like oak, walnut, and mahogany. This filler should be the same color as the wood. If stain has been used on wood, tint the filler the same color as the stain.
 - Mix turpentine with paste filler until it is like heavy cream.
 - Apply filler with a stiff brush, working it well into the grain of the wood.
 - When the filler begins to have a flat look, wipe off the excess **against** the grain of the wood. Use burlap or coarse cloth for this purpose.
 - Let the piece of furniture stand 24 hours.
 - Rub the surface lightly with fine steel wool.
 - Dust with a slightly dampened cloth.

2. Brush varnish onto surface of furniture, brushing first with the grain of the wood, then across the grain, and finally with the grain again. Keep the varnish coat thin.
3. Let the furniture stand 3 to 4 days until it is completely dry.
4. Rub lightly with fine steel wool. Be sure to rub **with** the grain of the wood.
5. Apply a second coat of varnish.
6. Repeat steps 2-5 until as many coats of varnish have been applied as is desired (usually two to four).
7. Let the final coat dry thoroughly and then rub down as follows:
 - Place a small amount of powdered pumice and a small amount of boiled linseed oil in separate saucers.
 - Make a thick pad of old woolen blanket or similar material.
 - Dip pad in oil, then into pumice, and then rub varnished surface. This develops a sheen instead of a shine.
 - Polish surface with soft cloth.
 - A final coat of wax may be used if you wish.

For a Varnish and Oil Finish

This finish may be used on walnut, mahogany, and oak at a saving of time and energy as compared with the oil finish. This is due to the addition of varnish to the oil and turpentine mixture. Varnish fills the pores of the wood more quickly and makes the surface dry faster.

Equip yourself with these supplies:

Boiled linseed oil
 Turpentine
 Spar varnish
 Soft lintless cloths for applying mixture
 Old woolen blanket or similar cloth for polishing.

Follow these steps:

1. Apply a mixture of $\frac{1}{3}$ boiled linseed oil and $\frac{2}{3}$ turpentine with a soft cloth. This mixture will be absorbed quickly, but let dry for several hours.
2. Apply a mixture of $\frac{2}{3}$ boiled linseed oil and $\frac{1}{3}$ turpentine. Rub in well. Let dry for several hours.
3. Combine equal parts of spar varnish and the first oil-turpentine mixture.
4. Work on a small area at a time applying the oil and varnish mixture generously with a cloth.
5. Rub the mixture well into the wood, rubbing as long as it keeps its thin consistency.
6. Wipe off excess, using clean cloths.
7. Polish to a satinlike luster with woolen blanket or similar material.

For a Shellac and Wax Finish

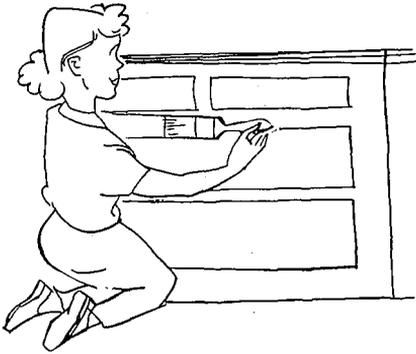
The shellac and wax finish gives a hard, glossy surface to wood but is easily spotted by liquids. The shellac in this finish serves as a wood sealer and a wax coat may be built up on it. Shellac is difficult to apply well since any flaws show through following coats.

Equip yourself with these supplies:

White shellac
 Denatured alcohol
 Clean two-inch brush for shellac
 Fine steel wool
 Wax
 Cheesecloth
 Soft cloth for polishing.

Follow these steps:

1. Apply a mixture of half shellac and half denatured alcohol with a brush. **Do not** brush this on, but draw the brush once across the surface, holding it as horizontal as possible. Do not go back to smooth the coat or remove bubbles. Try to make each



Hold the brush horizontal.

application as smooth as possible. Do not lap strokes.

2. Let dry thoroughly. The first coat will be dry in 20-30 minutes.
3. Rub lightly with fine steel wool, rubbing with the grain of the wood.
4. Repeat this process seven or eight times.
5. Use clear, undiluted shellac for the last three or four coats. At least 24 hours between coats should be allowed for drying after the first two or three coats have been applied.
6. When the last coat has been applied and rubbed with steel wool, dust well before waxing.
7. Place a small amount of wax between layers of cheesecloth and apply a thin layer to the surface of furniture, using a circular motion.
8. Let the wax dry three or four minutes—that is, until it begins to look cloudy.
9. Polish with woolen blanket or similar piece of material until the surface is hard and smooth and has a high luster.
10. A second coat of wax may be applied. Keep the wax coats thin.

For a Sealer Finish

Similar to the varnish and oil finish but somewhat quicker to apply is the finish using a commercial floor sealer.

Equip yourself with these supplies:

- Floor sealer
- Clean paint brush
- Fine steel wool
- Paste wax
- Old woolen blanket or some similar cloth for polishing.

Follow these steps:

1. Apply a coat of floor sealer, following the instructions on the container.
2. Let dry thoroughly.
3. Rub smooth with fine steel wool.
4. Apply a second coat of sealer.
5. Let dry thoroughly.
6. Rub smooth with steel wool.
7. Apply a thin coat of paste wax.
8. Polish surface to a satinlike luster with a piece of blanket or similar material.

For a Paint Finish

If the furniture wood is uneven in grain and poor in quality or color after the old finish has been removed, it may be better to give it a paint job rather than try to build a satisfactory transparent finish.

Equip yourself with these supplies:

- Paint undercoat or paste filler
- Paint of desired color (either gloss or semigloss)
- Enamel of same color as paint—or flat varnish
- Clear brushes for applying paint and enamel or varnish
- Fine steel wool
- Powdered pumice
- Boiled linseed oil.

Follow these steps:

1. BE SURE surface of the furniture is clean and smooth. This is as essential for paint as for any other finish.
2. Apply a coat of paste filler or a paint undercoat to insure a smooth sur-

- face for the paint. Let dry for about 24 hours.
3. Apply a coat of paint.
 - Be sure that the paint has been mixed well.
 - Work with the grain of the wood.
 - Brush paint out well, avoiding runs and sags.
 - Let dry at least 48 hours.
 4. Rub paint coat with fine steel wool. Dust carefully.
 5. Apply second coat of paint. Let dry thoroughly.
 6. Rub with steel wool; dust the surface.
 7. For a final finish, choose one of the following four steps:
 - Rub the last coat of paint with pumice and oil as described under the varnish finish.
 - Apply a coat of enamel the same color as the paint. Rub with pumice and oil when dry.
 - Apply a coat of spar varnish. Rub with pumice and oil when dry.
 - Apply a coat of flat varnish.

Your County Extension Agents

A familiar expression heard on Minnesota farms is "see your county agent." Every county in Minnesota has a county agricultural agent, and many counties also have home and 4-H Club agents.

Actually these county agents are part of a four-way partnership among the United States Department of Agriculture, the University of Minnesota, the county government, and farm people.

It is the job of the county Extension staff to bring to farmers and homemakers the latest information on farming and homemaking methods and to conduct 4-H Club work in the county.

Local committees, cooperating with the director of the Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service, hire these agents and map out their programs.

Most county agents have their headquarters in the county courthouse. They are available to answer your questions and help solve your farming and homemaking problems.

This bulletin is one of many published by the University of Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service as an additional service to bring up-to-date information to your attention. These Extension Service bulletins are distributed through your local county agents or through the Bulletin Room, University of Minnesota, Institute of Agriculture, St. Paul 1, Minnesota.

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