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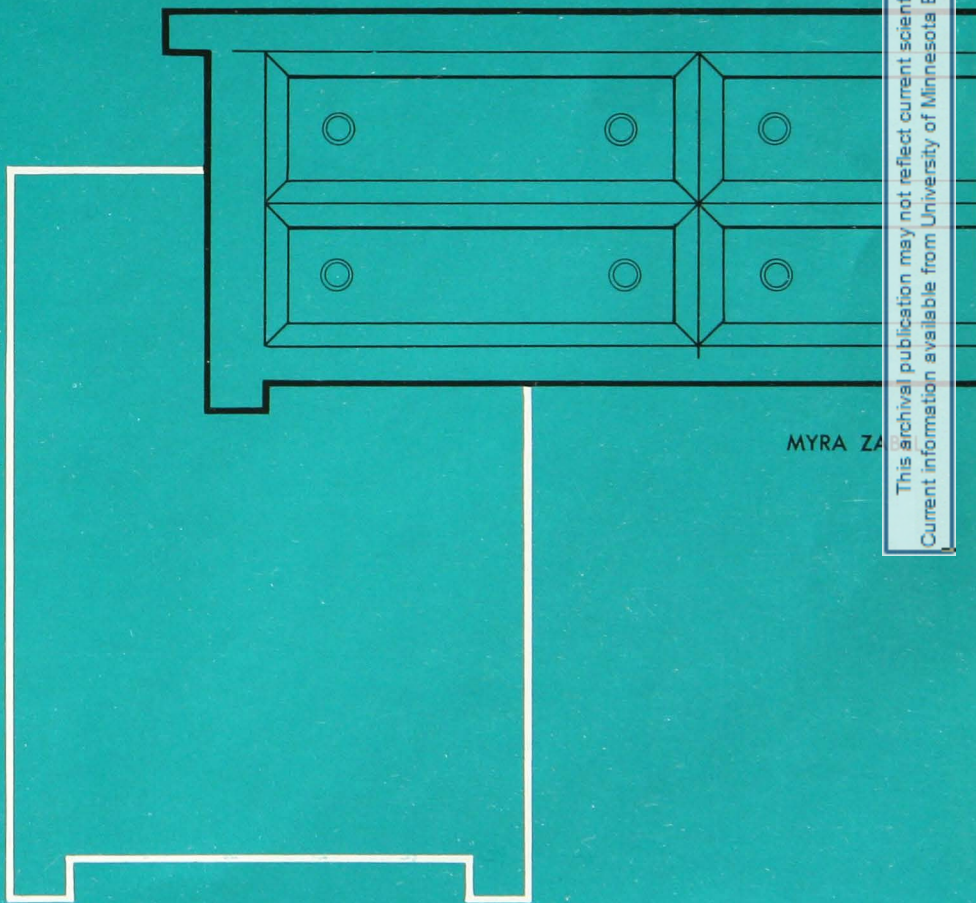
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# *Finishing and Refinishing Wood Furniture*

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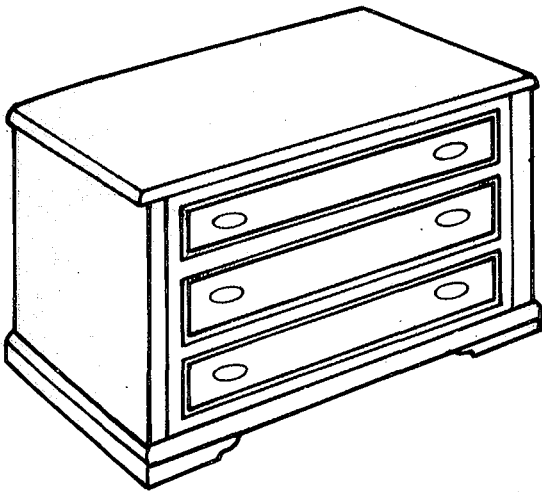


MYRA ZABALA

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# Finishing and Refinishing Wood Furniture



New developments in wood finishes have made refinishing easier and more enjoyable than it used to be. The finish you choose, how you apply it, and the job you do on the final rubdown will determine how your finished product will look.

Finishing or refinishing furniture requires patience and lots of hard work. You will need a well lighted and spacious work area where you can leave your project set up even when you aren't working on it. Either your basement or a heated garage makes a good work area.

## Preparing the Wood

Before you can finish a piece of furniture, you must make all necessary repairs. Replace any broken chair rungs. Remove the knobs and handles from desks and chests and finish them separately.

If you want to restyle or update a piece of furniture, you can: (1) Remove gingerbread trim. Such trim often is glued or nailed on and you may be able to pry it off with a thin knife blade or screwdriver. (2) Saw off elaborately curved chair backs and arms to form straight lines. (3) Cut off the long legs on dressers and chests.

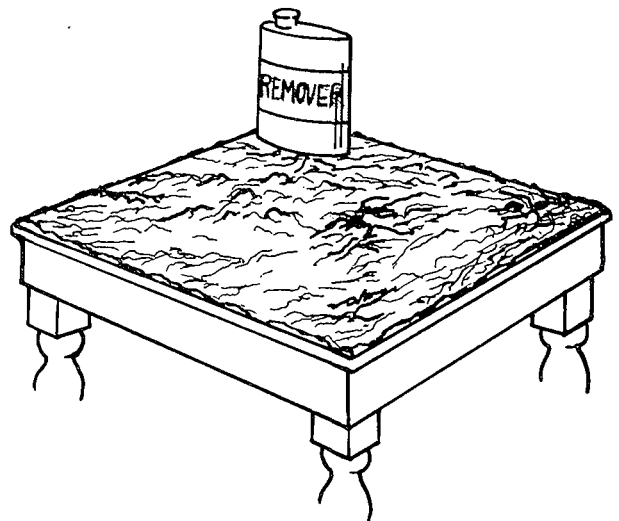
## Removing Old Finishes

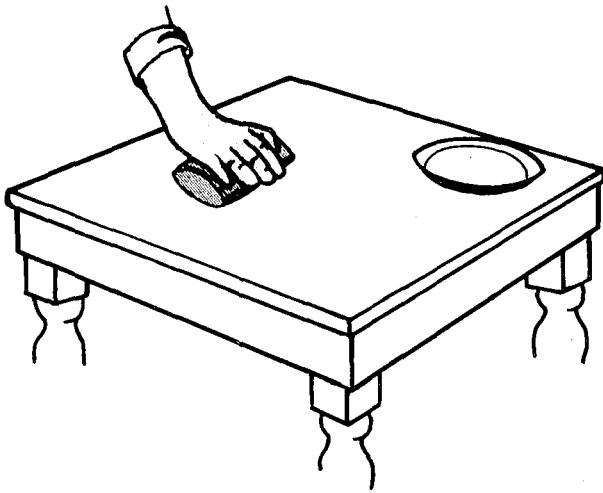
Work either out-of-doors or in a well ventilated room when you remove finish. First, assemble this equipment:

- \* Paint and varnish remover
- \* Turpentine and denatured alcohol
- \* Two or three clean tin cans
- \* An old paint brush                      \* A putty knife
- \* A box for waste materials           \* Old cloths
- \* Newspapers                              \* Steel wool (00 or 000)

Then follow this process:

1. Pour some varnish remover into a clean tin can.
2. With an old paint brush, apply a liberal coat of varnish remover to the furniture, working on a small area at a time. Follow directions on the label.
3. Let the remover stand until the surface becomes soft and bubbly.

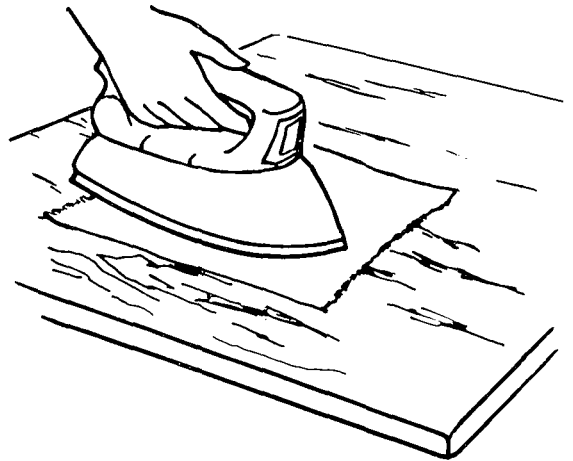




If screws or nails are visible on the furniture you are finishing, countersink them and fill the holes with a mixture of fine wood sandings and glue or with plastic wood. Be sure to follow all label instructions carefully. Allow the filler to dry thoroughly before you begin sanding. Fill any cracks, holes, or deep gouges in the same manner.

To raise any dents in furniture, soak a thick cloth in water, wring it out, and place it on the dent. Then press down on the cloth until steam appears. It takes several minutes for the wood to expand. Repeat this process after a few minutes if it is necessary.

4. With a putty knife, remove the softened finish. Wipe the putty knife on old newspapers.
5. Wipe the surface of the furniture clean with coarse cloths.
6. Dip a pad of steel wool into alcohol and rub the wood *with* the grain to remove all remaining softened finish. Wipe the surface dry with a cloth.
7. If necessary, repeat this process to remove all traces of old varnish or paint.
8. Clean one area at a time, continuing until you have completed an entire piece of furniture.



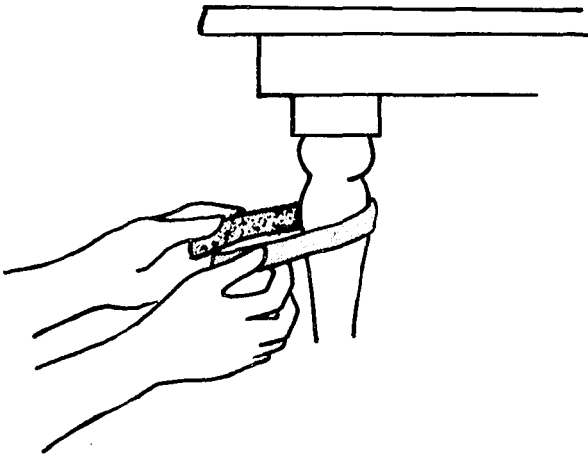
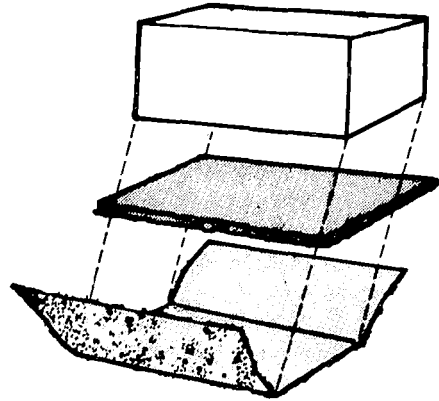
## *Smoothing the Surface*

A finish is only as good as the surface on which it is applied. To obtain a satiny finish, you must do a thorough smoothing job before you apply the finish.

Use sandpaper and steel wool to get a clean, smooth surface. Start sanding with number 1 or 1/2 (medium) sandpaper on rough wood and number 0/0 or 1/0 (fine) sandpaper on smooth wood. Continue through 2/0 and 3/0 (very fine). Finish with 000 steel wool or 4/0 to 8/0 (extra fine) sandpaper.

Sanding curved or rounded sections of furniture requires an emery cloth. Use it as you would a shoeshine cloth.

You can make a sanding block from a piece of wood about 2 by 2 by 4 inches (about the size of a blackboard eraser). You may pad the block by tacking a piece of heavy cloth to it. Tear a sheet of sandpaper into quarters and wrap one piece around the block. Here are some tips on how to do a good sanding job:

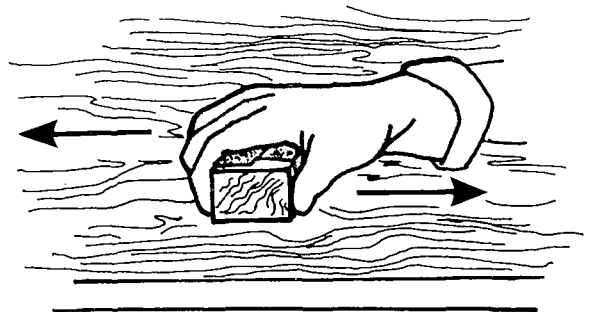


Sprinkle varnish on the rag until it is quite yellow. Then fold and twist the rag into a tight roll to force out the water and allow the varnish and turpentine to saturate the cloth. Twist the rag a second time.

A tack rag should be sticky enough to pick up dust, but dry enough not to leave moisture on the furniture. If your rag dries out in use, sprinkle a few drops of turpentine and water on it. If it is too moist, shake it in the air for a few minutes. Fold the rough edges of the cloth inside as you use it. Store your tack rag in a quart jar with a tight-fitting lid or in a plastic bag folded up very tightly at the top.

- ☞ Always sand *with* the grain of the wood, *never* across the grain.
- ☞ Hold a cloth in your left hand and use it to remove dust from the surface as you sand.
- ☞ Sand until the wood is clean and very smooth.
- ☞ Finally, wipe the surface with a cloth moistened with turpentine to remove any dust left from sanding.

You can use a tack rag for removing dust from furniture before you apply finishes. To make one, wash a piece of closely woven cheesecloth several times. Dip the clean cloth in warm water and wring it out. Then wet the cloth with turpentine.

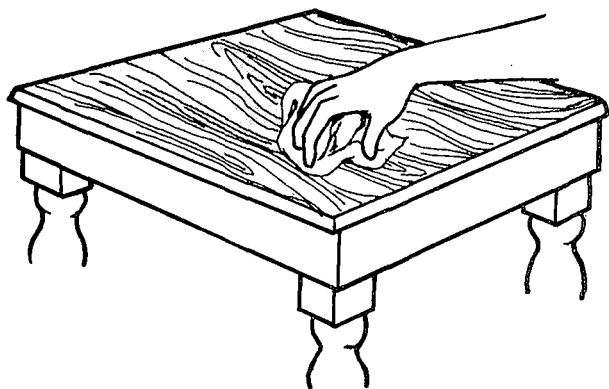


## Staining the Wood

You can apply a stain to a whole piece of furniture to change or improve its color, to parts of the same piece of furniture that do not match in color, or to portions of the same wood that are uneven in color. Oil stains come in such colors as walnut, maple, oak, and mahogany.

You can apply stains with a brush, but you will be able to control the amount you apply better if you use a cloth. Test the color on some unexposed part of the furniture first. Saturate the cloth with stain and rub the areas needing color until the wood is the color you desire. If the color becomes deeper than you want, saturate a cloth in turpentine and wipe off the excess. Always stain the most inaccessible parts of a piece of furniture, such as the underside of a table, first.

Allow the stain to dry overnight. Then sand surfaces lightly and wipe away any dust. Usually, you should apply a second coat. A second coat helps to mellow the first.



## Getting a Good Finish

Select a finish that has the qualities most important for the furniture you are finishing. Use the finish application table on the opposite page as your guide.

Follow these suggestions for getting a good finish:

1. Use a good quality brush.
2. Be sure your brushes are clean and free from dust before you begin.
3. Apply several thin coats, not a few thick ones, to build up a smooth, even finish.
4. Use alcohol to thin shellac, turpentine to thin varnishes, and lacquer thinner to thin lacquer. Clean all your brushes in thinner.
5. Be sure the wood you are finishing is free from dust, lint, or sandings before you apply the finish. Work in a dust free room when you apply finishes.
6. Whenever it is appropriate (check the guide on the opposite page), rub down the surface between coats to smooth it for the next coat. Use either 000 steel wool or fine finishing sandpaper.
7. Dull a high gloss and give furniture a satiny smooth sheen by giving the last coat a final rubdown. Dip a pad of soft cloth into some boiled linseed oil and then into powdered pumice. Rub wood with the grain until the shine is replaced by a soft sheen. Then wipe and polish the whole piece of furniture.
8. Protect your finish by applying a coat of paste wax. (You needn't wax an oil finish, since you may want to apply additional coats of oil from time to time.)

The experienced refinisher has good results because:

- ✿ He schedules his work to allow ample time for each step—sanding, finish application, rubbing, and drying.
- ✿ He works in dry weather to avoid a sticky finish.
- ✿ He rubs down wood between coats to obtain a satin smooth finish.
- ✿ He does not use a too full brush and so avoids getting drips and runs on the surface.
- ✿ He gets into the corners but doesn't fill them with finish.

# *Kinds of Finishes and How to Apply Them*

Kind of finish	Characteristics of finish	Supplies needed	How to apply the finish	Drying time between coats	Number of coats
Oil	Durable. Deepens wood color. Resistant to water, heat, alcohol, and mars. Penetrates deep into wood.	Two parts boiled linseed oil to one part turpentine. Small brush. Several soft, lintless cloths.	Keep oil and turpentine mixture hot, double boiler fashion. Apply hot with brush or pad of cloth to one area at a time. Apply cold to carved parts. Let stand 15-20 minutes. Rub area to remove excess oil. Rub with second clean cloth. With a third clean cloth, rub area for 10-20 minutes.	2 days-1 week*	5-12
Varnishes	Durable, film-type finishes. Regular varnish is clear and has high gloss. Spar varnish is heat, water, and acid resistant. Satin finish is dull. Urethane varnishes are highly durable.	Good varnish brush. Turpentine for thinner.	Thin first coat with one part turpentine to four parts varnish. Brush on an even coat over a section at a time. Go back over it with the brush to smooth it and pick up excess. Rub between coats with fine sandpaper or steel wool.	3 days for first coat, longer for second; follow label directions	2
Sealers	Durable, long wearing. May be used for woodwork and furniture. Dry quickly. Resist mars and scratches. Some have dull finishes; some glossy ones. Available in clear or wood colors. Easy to maintain and renew. Penetrating seals used mainly for floors.	Cloth pads.	Follow label directions. Apply with a cloth without thinning sealer. Cover surface generously; allow finish to soak into the wood. When dry, rub evenly with fine steel wool. Apply a second coat, allow to dry, and rub with steel wool.	24 hours or as directed	2-4 or more for furniture
Shellac	Film-type finish. Dries to touch in an hour. Easily applied. Comes in either clear or orange. Not resistant to hard wear. Water spots.	Alcohol for thinner. Brush for applying shellac.	For first coat, use three parts alcohol to one part shellac. For second and third coats, use equal parts of alcohol and shellac. Apply with brush, smooth out quickly. Don't rebrush or bubbles and streaks will appear. Rub lightly between coats with fine sandpaper or 000 steel wool.	8-12 hours	3-8
Lacquer	Durable. Fast drying. Nonyellowing. Resists heat, moisture, mars.	Brush for applying lacquer. Lacquer thinner.	Do not use over paint, varnish, enamel, or shellac. Apply liberally and level off with brush. Rub lightly between coats with fine sandpaper or 000 steel wool.	3-4 hours	2 coats on paneling; 3 coats on kitchen cabinets, door sills, and trim

\* You can use furniture with an oil finish between oil applications.

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