



RESTORING EXISTING WOOD FINISHES AND HARDWARE

If the finish of the wood you are considering is dull or has minor scratches but not badly cracked or blistered, try restoring it first. This may save a great deal of effort, time and money. The first step in restoring a finish is to determine what type of finish you are working with. There are four types of finishes in common use:

1. shellac
2. lacquer
3. varnish
4. penetrating oil

The types of finish on the wood can be determined by the following steps. Work on a small, unnoticeable area of the finished piece, such as the back of a dresser, under a ledge or the inside of a leg:

1. Dip a rag into denatured alcohol and rub it on the work piece. If the finish softens, it is a shellac finish.
2. If denatured alcohol did not soften the finish but it turned white, it is probably a lacquer finish. Try rubbing the area with lacquer thinner. If the finish softens, it is a lacquer finish.
3. If the finish did not soften with either denatured alcohol or lacquer thinner, it is probably varnish or a penetrating oil finish. After determining the type of finish you are working with, remove all of the hardware and decorative materials that you can. If you can't remove them, cover them well to protect their finishes from the restoration solvents you will be using. Then remove all dirt and old wax with turpentine.

Shellac and lacquer finishes

The easiest of the wood finishes to restore is the shellac finish. Denatured alcohol is the solvent for shellac and as such is the recommended restoration chemical. Most lacquer finishes can be restored by using lacquer thinner. The method of applications of the solvent depends on how deteriorated the original finish is.

1. If the original finish is dull but not cracked, dip 000 steel wool into the appropriate solvent. Squeeze out excess and rub wood surface with light pressure. Work quickly since the finish will soften and get sticky. Use quick, smooth strokes, always with the grain, smoothing out the surface as you go.

2. If the original surface is cracked (alligatored), literally brush on solvent and rapidly work it into the finish; as the finish softens, smooth it out with your brush.

Varnish finish

Because of the durable nature of varnish and the fact that there is no pure solvent for all varnishes, it is difficult to restore a varnish finish. However, not all varnishes are alike. Some varnish finishes can be reconditioned with a mixture of 3 parts boiled linseed oil and 1 part turpentine. Mix this solution well and apply it sparingly to the varnish with a cloth or grade 000 steel wool. This may work - it's worth a try. Heat some water and pour into a cup or small can placed on a saucer or small pie tin. Shake the cleanser-conditioner and pour enough into the cup to cover surface of water. Do not stir.

Dip an old cloth into the oily layer floating on the surface of the hot water and apply this solution to a small area at a time. Keep excess moisture away from joints to prevent glue from softening.

Rub the surface with mixture. Use toothbrush on carvings and grooves. Dip 000 steel wool pad into oily layer and rub lightly with the wood grain to remove dirt if necessary.

Dip a clean cloth into clean warm water; wring and wipe surface. Finish by wiping the wood surface with a soft, dry cloth.

Discard the cleanser-conditioner that remains in the cup when it becomes cold. Do not reheat since it is flammable and will become gummy.

After cleaning old furniture that has dried out and has a low luster, use 0000 steel wool to apply a greaseless furniture cream that contains beeswax or apply a paste wax to replenish moisture and natural oils. On other old pieces, apply polish.

Penetrating oil finishes

Because these finishes have penetrated into the wood, they are difficult to remove. Restoration may be the most practical approach to remove water spots, minor scratches and other blemishes. First, clean the surface with turpentine and 000 steel wool. After surface has dried, reapply a coat of boiled linseed oil or penetrating oil.

If desired, add a new coat of shellac or varnish followed by a coat of wax to the surface for a high gloss look and to protect the finished surface.

RESTORE HARDWARE AND DECORATIVE ITEMS

Hardware

Remove all hardware, hinges, pulls, knobs, escutcheons and casters from the piece. Restore the original hardware if possible, particularly if it is brass or wood.

This will add value to the piece and will save you time in looking for new hardware in a compatible design. All wood items should be restored or refinished the same as the rest of the piece.

If metal hardware has been covered with finish over the years, place it in a glass jar with a small amount of paint and varnish remover in the bottom. There is no need to cover the hardware completely with the remover, since the fumes will do the job. Seal the jar and set it aside. When the remover has done its work (usually in a few hours), wash off the softened finish with hot water and detergent. Use a small stiff brush like a toothbrush to clean out recessed areas.

Polish the hardware with a good metal polish that will not leave a residue. When polishing hardware, always wear gloves since the acid from your fingers will tarnish brass and copper almost immediately.

Solid brass can be cleaned with a commercial brass cleaner or, if possible, completely immerse and soak overnight in equal parts of household ammonia and water. Then rub with 000 steel wool and clean in warm, soapy water. Rinse and dry.

To polish antique-finish brass, apply commercial brass cleaner or a paste of rottenstone and commercially boiled linseed oil. Wipe off paste with cloth moistened in boiled linseed oil. Polish with dry cloth. Rinse and dry.

Leather

Wipe with a cloth moistened with solution of mild detergent and water. Then wipe with cloth dipped in clear warm water. Buff well. If additional cleaning is needed, dampen a sponge in warm water and wring dry. Rub over a bar of castile soap or saddle soap. Work up a good lather and rub the leather again with a soft, dry cloth to restore sheen.

If the leather seems dried, rub a small amount of leather dressing into the leather to replace oil. You can buy a leather dressing or make one, using ingredients available at a drugstore.

To make a leather dressing:

- 60% pure neat's-foot oil (in a small container)
- 40% anhydrous lanolin (in large container)

To mix, warm the container of lanolin in hot water until melted. Then slowly add neat's-foot oil, stirring until blended.

Apply small amounts of dressing to leather with fingertips. Rub with hands until dressing is completely absorbed. Rub tooled areas or old leather gently. The leather dressing can be stored indefinitely.

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Restorewoodfurn.wpd.

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