

Tips on Finishing Wood Furniture

Each piece of solid wood furniture is an original, the result of nature's handiwork. Every item has its own grain pattern and color, according to the character of the wood. Light and dark areas blend during the finishing process to produce the uniquely attractive look of real wood furniture.

While you can paint, varnish or finish your furniture in other ways, one of the most commonly used finishing processes is staining and top coating. To help you get the best results, here are tips to help you finish your furniture using this method.

Preparing the surface

Most unfinished pieces need additional fine sanding before finishing to avoid surface fuzz or roughness that will show when the stain is applied.

- Always sand in the direction of the grain.
- Oak should be sanded to medium smoothness with medium-coarse 120-grit sandpaper. Other woods should be sanded with medium sandpaper, generally no finer than 150-grit.
- If wood fill has been used to cover nicks or holes, be sure the residue has been sanded well. If not, the area around the fill will not stain properly and may have a blotchy look.

Staining

Stains contain colored pigments that often settle to the bottom of the can and must be thoroughly mixed before application. It may take as much as five minutes to thoroughly dissolve the "mud" so that the color remains consistent as the contents are used up.

To apply stain, you can use almost any type of rag (cotton works best) cut approximately 10 inches square (larger ones sometimes get in the way). Foam brushes also work well. Stain can be applied in any direction, usually cross-grain first.

- Read and follow the directions on each container. The manufacturer knows its products and will tell you how to get the best results.
- Do a test "doodle" on the piece first on the back, bottom or other inconspicuous area check the stain color before proceeding. Once the stain on the test area has dried, apply a coat of the clear finish on it. If the stain looks evenly coated and you like the look, one coat staining is adequate. If the stain is too light or uneven, a second coat of stain may be needed before the top coat is applied.
- Pine, aspen and some other woods stain more evenly if a sealer coat is applied before the stain. Check with a Vitte's sales person to see if this is right for your application.
- Stain one surface at a time, and do the corners and uneven areas first. Do these areas when the applicator has the most stain on it so you can get full penetration. You can then spread the rest on the flat areas.
- As you stain each area, wipe with the grain to remove excess stain, then move to another area. As you finish, go back over the entire piece with a clean rag to pick up all excess stain and wipe the surface dry.

The Top Coat and Sanding

Most clear top coats are designed to be wiped on. You can use a brush, but wiping helps prevent runs. Apply at least one coat of clear finish to all surfaces, both seen and unseen, to prevent cracking as the piece continues to dry out over the years.

- Do one small area at a time, applying the top coat with the grain. In corners, you may need to pat the coating on or apply with a circular motion to get full coverage. Just be sure to wipe off any excess immediately with the grain.
- Allow coating to dry. The surface will feel gummy if not fully dry, and drying time will vary depending on weather conditions.
- Sand the dried coating with very fine #400 or #600 wet/dry sandpaper to remove any fuzz. Wipe sanded piece with a tack cloth or a rag dampened in mineral spirits to remove debris. (Be sure to dispose of the rag properly.)
- Feel the piece with your hands and sand any areas that still seem fuzzy. Fuzz must be removed before applying additional coats. It will not go away until you take care of it.

You are looking for a consistent sheen. If after two coats you have it, and if water protection is not a major concern, the job is done. If you have uneven sheen, apply additional coats, sanding lightly and wiping with a tack cloth between each application.

If water resistance is a goal, we recommend four coats of finish on the surface area of concern, usually the top. Remember to always sand and remove debris with a tack cloth between coats.

Congratulations! You have a beautifully finished piece of furniture you will be proud of for years to come.