



ACKERMAN & SONS

FURNITURE WORKSHOP

Denver • Minneapolis/St. Paul • Chicago

Do-It-Yourself Basics

A few pointers on keeping that beautiful piece of furniture looking great for years to come. From what to polish with to what kind of fabric protection is the best, you'll find all this information very helpful in making sure your furniture ages gracefully.

Restoring a piece of furniture is very satisfying and rewarding. Many people have the time and patience to undertake a project like this. We at Ackerman's have always encouraged our clients and friends to do as much as they can or would like to do. We have developed the following helpful ideas while teaching classes. We hope this information makes your project go smoothly.

Stripping

Strip in a cool, shaded, well ventilated area. Do not strip in the basement or near a source of combustion. ALWAYS WEAR GLOVES.

Lay newspapers down to protect the concrete or lawn. If the item is large, you may want to start with the top only, then do the front and sides. Caution: All repairs must be done first. Loose veneer, split boards, shake joints will require gluing. If glue gets on raw wood the stain may not take evenly.

Apply a thick, even coat of stripper. If the finish is thick paint or varnish it will help to lay waxed paper over the stripper. This prevents evaporation. DO NOT let the stripper dry. When the finish is bubbled, remove with the scraper. Pulling towards you instead of pushing the scraper will prevent gouging. (Rounded corners and filed sharp edges are a good idea!) A pick will help get into the tough spots. If all the finish didn't come off, immediately reapply stripper. If needed, use a soft wire brush in hard-to-reach places. Clean the wood with the lacquer thinner and steel wool. Pour onto the surface or dip the steel wool and apply. Scrub lightly with the grain to remove the last of the stripper and finish.

Wipe dry with paper towels. Some pieces will not strip to a light, natural color. Typically, these have been dyed. If a lighter color is desired, the wood will need to be bleached. Sanding the color off will leave a blotchy look. Ordinary Clorox bleach will do - 2 to 3 coats - dry in the sun. For better results use 2 part bleach. Always apply evenly to entire area. Never try to spot bleach, you will not achieve a uniform effect.



ACKERMAN & SONS

FURNITURE WORKSHOP

Denver • Minneapolis/St. Paul • Chicago

Prepping

Remember - the time spent in preparing the piece will be reflected in the finished product. Anything loose must be reglued. Use yellow wood glue and clamps. Glue is a bonding agent, not a wood filler. Joints must fit together tight. All old glue must be removed to insure proper penetration of the new glue. Don't use epoxy glues on joints that may need disassembly later. If you lack clamps, apply pressure with weight or a tourniquet. Tape cardboard over contact points to prevent damage. Use a 2 part glue on teak, rosewood, or other oily woods. Dark water or stain marks can often be removed with oxalic acid. Mix crystals in warm water until no more will dissolve. Apply solution evenly over entire surface, not just the stain. Reapply as needed.

Important - sanding will release an acidic dust into the air that is harmful to breath. Wear a dust mask! Before sanding, use steam to raise dents. Lay a damp cloth over the dent and press lightly with a hot iron. Let the steam penetrate, remove the cloth, and allow to dry 10 to 15 minutes. Repeat as needed. If the wood is rough, begin sanding with 80 to 100 grit sandpaper. Finish sanding with 150 grit if you intend to use a stain or dye. Finish sanding at 220 grit if you are staying natural. If you have an orbital sander, check that it's OPM rate is 10,000 or higher. If not you may leave sanding scratches. Sand with the grain, being careful not to sand through any veneers. Slightly round any sharp corners or edges.

Finish by block sanding all flat areas to correct any waviness or dips. Cross grain scratches will be difficult to see now, but will show up after finishing. Round, turned legs and posts may be sanded with Scotchbrite or a sand-a-flex machine. After sanding with either, go back over lightly with sandpaper with the grain.



ACKERMAN & SONS

FURNITURE WORKSHOP

Denver • Minneapolis/St. Paul • Chicago

Finishing

A furniture finish does two things. It adds color, depth, and sheen to the wood. But more importantly, it protects against stains, abrasions, and resin loss. As wood loses its natural resin, its ability to resist water gain and loss also decreases. If the wood is allowed to expand and contract rapidly as its moisture level varies, the eventual result is cupping, bowing, warping and splitting and glue delamination.

Finishes seem to provide protection in direct proportion to their difficulty to apply. Simple wax finishes, like Briwax, offer the least protection, but, like shoe polish, are simple to apply. Rub on 3 to 4 coats and your done. Reapply every 2 to 3 months. Stain and resin combination finishes like Watco and Minwax offer more protection without a lot more work. Apply 3 to 4 even coats. Allow to dry completely between coats. Follow with a clear wax coat. Reapply every 6 months.

Tung oil finishes offer the best compromise between difficulty of application and protective qualities. While not considered a permanent finish, (reapply every 6 to 12 months), its resistance to moisture and stain penetration is better for a longer time than either wax or stain/resin finishes. Application is easy but time consuming. First, stain or dye the piece to be finished. Allow 24 hours to dry. Brush on a 50/50 mix of boiled linseed oil and mineral spirits. This will give you a faster finish build. When dry, 6 to 10 coats of tung oil with a foam brush. Wet sand or steel wool (#0000) to remove dust after every 3rd coat. Polish out or Wol-Wax the final coat.

This brings us to the finish of choice for professional refinishers and fine furniture manufacturers - lacquer. More difficult to apply properly, it offers a far longer life expectancy and more resistance to abrasion, chemicals, and moisture penetration than the other finishes we have considered, while still allowing the wood to breath and climatize properly.

Lacquer finishes are applied in two stages - the sealer coats and the top coats. These may be applied by hand, but more often are sprayed on. Stain, dye or glaze the wood to the desired color and allow to dry 24 hours. Apply the first coat of sealer. Like every coat of sealer, this should go on every square inch of the piece, inside and out. This will keep the moisture transfer rate slow and even on both sides of the wood.



ACKERMAN & SONS

FURNITURE WORKSHOP

Denver • Minneapolis/St. Paul • Chicago

Finishing Continued

If the wood is very grainy, but you desire a smooth flat finish, a pastewood filler is applied at this point. The filler can be dyed to accent the grain. Using Mineral spirits to control its consistency, rub in across the grain. Allow the dry slightly and wipe the surface clean with burlap or a cotton cloth. After 24 hours, apply another heavy coat of sealer, allow to dry, and sand with 220 -240 grit paper. Be careful not to go through the finish. Repeat as needed. The objective here is to fill the grain, but not build the surface coat any thicker than 1 mil, which is one strong coat of finish. Next we apply the top coats.

Apply the first coat, allow to dry, and wet sand with 400 grit paper. At this point the piece may be shaded if need be. The final top coat is then applied, and, when dry, wet sanded with 600 grit paper. This will eliminate dust and orange peel. A light rubbing compound will get rid of sanding scratches. If a high gloss look is desired, follow with a glazing compound. If a lower sheen is wanted, use a light application of Wol-Wax or rottenstone. The finish will cure for 30 days. During this time don't apply any wax, which would prevent the finish from breathing and curing properly.

We recommend that you use a polish, like Guardsman Furniture Polish, no more often than once a month. For every day dusting, simply use a very lightly dampened rag. Never use anything containing silicones, they will build up and can change the chemical structure of your finish.

Please contact us for any help you may need. You can ask us a question directly via the contact form on our home page, via e-mail or by calling us at (303)798-3220.

Good luck with your project!