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EC54-1101 Preparing Furniture for Refinishing

Magdalene Pfister

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PREPARING FURNITURE FOR *Refinishing*



EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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W. V. LAMBERT, DIRECTOR

Preparing Furniture For Refinishing

Magdalene Pfister

Great pleasure awaits the person who can transform a shabby old piece of furniture into an attractive and useful piece. Revealing the beauty of the color and grain of wood is most rewarding. Many wise homemakers find it smart and thrifty to refinish old pieces or to purchase unpainted furniture and finish it themselves. They feel satisfaction and pride in accomplishment.

Although refinishing is not difficult, it requires patience, time, energy, and a small expenditure of money to accomplish best results. Before starting to refinish a piece, ask yourself these questions:

1. Is the piece worth refinishing: made of good wood, well constructed, with pleasing lines and proportion? Will it serve a purpose in the home?

2. Am I willing to give the time and effort necessary to produce satisfactory results?

A successful job of refinishing depends upon the care and thoroughness with which the old finish is removed and the surface cleaned and sanded.

Careful work takes time and good finishes can't be hurried, so work leisurely and enjoy the results!

REMOVE OLD FINISH

Remove all parts from the furniture, such as drawer pulls, glass knobs, mirror, that are not to be refinished.

Use a good commercial paint or varnish remover. There are now products on the market that are noninflammable and wax-free. An average size table or small dresser will require about 1 pint of remover if properly used.

It is not generally advisable to make removers at home, as the cost may be excessive, the procedure dangerous, and the product is not always effective. Avoid the use of a lye mixture, because it raises the grain of the wood, discolors the wood and affects the final finish.

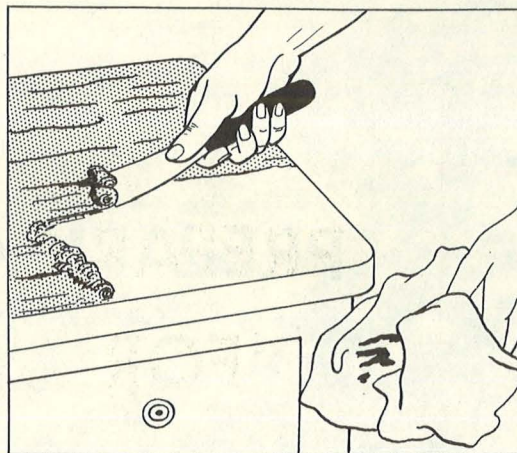
Apply remover as directed on the container to a small area, brushing in one direction only. When the surface appears softened and wrinkles show (5 to 20 minutes), remove the finish with a putty knife, spatula or commercial scraper.

Great care should be exercised in using liquid removers or water on veneer surfaces. Too much moisture causes panels to pull and the glue to soften.

Hold the scraper at an angle to prevent gouging the wood. Take long even strokes, following the grain of the wood, to remove the finish.

All of the old finish should be carefully removed where there is carving, fluting or turned surfaces. On turnings or grooves a vegetable brush, an orange wood stick, or a pad of steel wool will help. A piece of twine or cord dipped in remover and pulled through fine grooves will also help. Sawdust or excelsior can be used to rub off old finish.

Rinse as directed on the container or wash with de-natured alcohol or turpentine. A wax-free remover does not require washing the surface.



Follow the grain holding scraper at an angle.

There are some times when the old finish does not need to be removed and you may put a new coat of finish over the old one. In that case, first remove any wax or oil by washing with turpentine. Use sandpaper or pumice and water on the surface.

Woods should be allowed to dry thoroughly before the next step (24 to 48 hours).

MAKE NECESSARY REPAIRS

Glue Loose Joints:

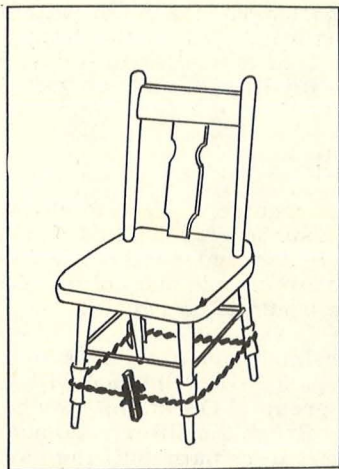
It is best to take the pieces apart if joints are loose. Before doing this, label the parts so that they may be re-assembled correctly. When necessary to force pieces apart, put a heavy pad or block of wood between the pry or hammer and the wood.

Scrape off all the old glue with a knife or razor blade. Do not sandpaper as the joint must not be reduced in size or the pores closed. Old glue must be washed off with steel wool and a solution of warm vinegar and water in equal parts. Dry thoroughly. If the wood surfaces to be glued are very smooth, slash the surface with a knife so the glue can hold better.

Plastic resin glue is most satisfactory to use. It is waterproof, does not stain wood, is easily handled and makes a strong bond. It is sold under various brand names in powder form to be mixed with water according to directions.

After the surfaces are well cleaned and dried, and the joints are made to fit each other, the glue should be spread on in medium thickness to both surfaces. Both the glue and the wood should be warm (75° or 80°).

Ease the dowels and tenons into the holes to prevent air pockets from forming. Place joint under pressure immediately, using clamps (such as bar, cabinet, quilting frame) or by using a tourniquet made of strong cloth. Protect the furniture surface under clamps with pads of cardboard or cloth. Allow to dry under pressure at least 24 hours.



Use tourniquet to apply pressure.

RAISE DENTS

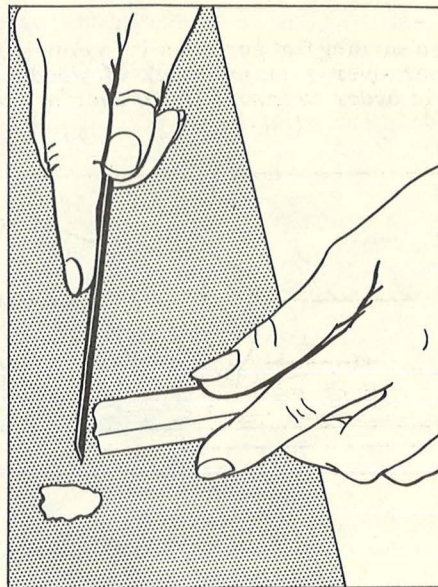
Raise shallow dents by placing a damp woolen cloth or wet blotting paper over the depression; then hold a hot iron over the cloth until the steam swells the wood to eliminate the dent. Sand when dry. This treatment can not be used for veneer.



Remove dents with moist heat.

smooth before being filled. Melt the shellac with a heated steel knife. When hardened, shave off excess shellac level with the surface.

Plastic wood is not very satisfactory, because it may shrink and drop out and is difficult to stain.



Use stick shellac to fill holes.

REMOVE DARK SPOTS

Dark spots may be removed by sanding or bleaching. Too severe treatment will remove the lovely quality that age has given the wood.

Commercial bleaches are available with clear directions.

An oxalic acid solution may be made using 1 ounce (2 T.) oxalic acid powder or 2 ounces (4 T.) oxalic acid crystals to 1 pint of warm water. Apply the solution with brush, cloth or sponge. Let stand 10 to 20 minutes. Repeat as necessary. Wash with ammonia solution (1 T. ammonia to 1 quart water) or with a solution to 2 T. borax dissolved in a pint of water. Rinse with clear water.

Caution: Oxalic acid is poison.

Household laundry bleaches (sodium hypochlorite) will bleach most woods several shades lighter, with the exception of oak, which may turn slightly darker and brown. It will change the color of the dark streaks in poplar to the yellow green color of the rest of the wood, but it will not effectively bleach the yellow green.

SAND

Much of the beauty of the finished wood will depend upon sanding. The finish you choose will not cover up scratches and dents. In fact, the finish magnifies blemishes of any kind.

The correct grade of abrasive must be selected for best results. On smooth wood start with fine; on rough wood start with medium. Then continue with successive finer abrasives.

FILL CRACKS AND HOLES

Stick shellac may be used to fill cracks and holes left where hardware has been removed.

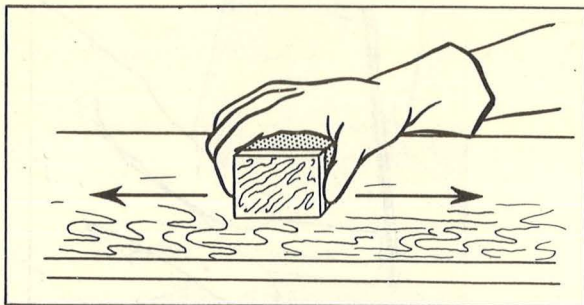
If the piece of furniture is to be stained, select the shellac color and fill the holes after the stain is applied. Wet a spot on the wood with turpentine or alcohol to find out what the final color will be. The shellac will be darker in the stick. It will be wise to melt some of the shellac and test its color. If the exact color is not available in the stick, two colors can be blended as they meet.

Cracks and holes should be cleaned out and the edges

Garnet paper is better for all-round household use. It's reddish in color and costs a little more than flint (so-called sandpaper), but it's harder and sharper, so lasts longer.

Smooth the surface by sanding with the grain of the wood when the wood is dry. Cover adjoining cross grain sections of the wood before sanding.

When sanding flat surfaces it is convenient to hold the sandpaper over a small block of wood or a blackboard eraser in order to insure more even pressure.



Sand with grain of wood.

For grooves and crevices, fold squares of sandpaper in quarters. Folding the sandpaper over itself will keep it from slipping. Fine steel wool can be used although it has a tendency to discolor some woods such as oak. Emery cloth torn in strips is excellent for smoothing deep turnings when used "shoe shine" fashion.

Wipe the sand dust from the surface frequently. A cloth dampened with turpentine is helpful.

Be sure the wood is smooth as glass.

STAIN

Stain may be desired to bring out the beauty and to match varying shades of wood. If your wood has a nice natural color or if the stain has not been removed, you will not need to use stain. Remember that any type of clear finish will darken the wood somewhat and magnify the beauty of the grain and wood pattern.

Use an oil stain, as it is easy to apply and the color can be controlled more easily. Walnut and mahogany colors mixed in varying proportions will produce most of the desired shades. Varnish stain is not recommended.

Be sure to test the stain, since woods vary greatly in character. Soft woods absorb the stain and darken quickly, while hardwoods do not darken readily. Some woods, especially fir plywood, have both extremely hard and soft portions. When stained, they will show contrasts of light and dark that are not pleasing. To overcome this, apply a penetrating seal to the entire surface before staining. End grain surfaces are very absorbent and should be sealed with a mixture of 5 parts alcohol to 1 part clear shellac (4 lb. cut).

Test for color on an inconspicuous part of the furniture. Wipe off with a soft cloth in the direction of the grain. If too dark, add turpentine to the stain and test again. Repeat the application if the shade is not dark enough. A built-up color is clearer and softer than a one-coat job. As a rule amateurs use stains too liberally.

When the shade appears satisfactory, apply the stain evenly to a small area. Wipe off with a soft cloth with the grain of the wood. Allow the stain to dry 48 hours. Seal with a thin coat of shellac to prevent the color from mixing with the final finish and rub with fine sandpaper.

APPLY FILLER

Most woods require a filler to close the pores; thus making a smooth surface for the final finish and for easier maintenance. If used correctly, the filler does not obscure the grain or change the color. Generally, woods of old furniture need not be refilled.

On open grained woods such as oak, mahogany and walnut, use a paste filler thinned with turpentine to the consistency of cream. Oil stains may be used to get the desired color. Brush the filler across and then with the grain, allowing it to remain until the paste becomes dull (15 - 20 minutes). Wipe with a coarse cloth across the grain or in a circular motion to force filler well into the pores and at the same time wipe off excess.

On close grained wood such as pine, birch and maple, use a liquid filler. Shellac mixed with equal parts of alcohol is good for these woods. After it has dried, rub down with fine steel wool. A penetrating seal can also be used for a filler on these woods.

Check Your Piece Of Furniture

Much of the final finish depends on how well the surface has been prepared.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Have necessary repairs been made?
2. Is the surface clean?
3. Is the surface:
 - a. smooth?
 - b. old finish removed?
 - c. cracks and holes filled?
 - d. sanded smooth as glass?
 - e. filler used on open grain woods?

4. If it is stained was only enough used to enhance the beauty of the wood?

Extension Circular, E. C. 54-1102 Finishes For Furniture will be helpful.