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Care and Maintenance of Fine Wood Finishes

1) French Polish

French Polish finish is the most beautiful and versatile finish ever developed. A common misnomer, is that it can't withstand water or alcohol, would never be used for a bar top finish or to varnish a boat and therefore has little practical application in a modern bustling home. In actuality however, it is one of the only finishes that is easily repairable without resorting to harmful chemical strippers and sanding. All finishes, no matter how "durable" get damaged. It's inevitable. However, hand rubbed shellac French polish has supported dining room tables, chests and sideboards for the last two and half centuries without ever needing to be stripped. Cleaned and restored or refreshed, yes. But not stripped.

Newly applied French Polish finish will continue to harden for up to seven months after application. But no matter how old the finish it will still immediately amalgamate or marry new applications. In fact, you may find that a French polish finish applied to new wood in your home may benefit from "refreshing" those surfaces which receive a great deal of use. The more the finish is built up over time, however, the stronger and more resistant it will become to water, and alcohol, and the less maintenance will be required.

That being said, one should strive to treat an architectural use of French Polish the same way you would a piece of fine furniture or an antique. For instance, making coasters easily available near counter or shelves on which one might set a steaming cup of coffee or tea, a sweating glass of iced beverage, or a roving and soon forgotten cocktail, is helpful.

The best routine care of your French polish finish should involve nothing more than dusting with a soft rag. If there is a food spill, some sticky jam or some other dried water soluble substance, one should clean it with a damp cloth and then buff it dry. Obviously, the sooner spills can be wiped up and dried the better. Housekeepers will want to use some kind of spray, be it Pledge or Fornbies, or Howards or Liberon or MURPHIES. These should all be banned from contact with fine furniture or architectural finishes. Apply nothing. These substances, over time will leave a film that collects dust and will also work to degrade a finish, and otherwise make it much more difficult to perform restoration if there is damage, or cleaning and refreshing of the finish if that is desired.

If there is a real demand for something to pick up dust, than a damp soft rag followed by a dry rag should suffice. In the Southwest where dust is a particular issue, I often supply anti-static

flannel clothes from Liberon, which don't leave a residue but do a nice job of picking up dust, and can be washed and reused.

Finally, if there is an accident, UV fading of the underlying wood, or you just want a fuller fresh glow over time, feel free to call us for consultation or service. All repairs, and maintenance of French polish are non toxic and can be performed on site with little disturbance to normal life. There is no drying time involved, though letting a surface harden up again for a couple of days before setting a heavy object on the freshly polished surface is necessary.

2) Polymerized Tung oil

Our choice for surfaces that come in contact with dishwashers, kitchen sinks, pet's or children's dining habits, is a many layered application of tung oil. It is a flexible surface that will not chip or separate from the wood surface if there is a contusion. It is also highly resistant to water and alcohol and can be refreshed and recoated without stripping.

The surfaces can be wiped with a wet sponge and buffed dry.

There should be no contact with caustic spray cleaners or cleansers. It is critical that no abrasive cleansers are used around the sink edge. This will quickly wear down the protective seal of the the oil finish and allow black mold or metallic stains to invade the wood. This is a very important part of the longevity of this finish. It is easy to drift from scrubbing the sink to scrubbing the wood edge of the counter. This needs to be resisted.

However, if with time the surface seems to have dulled, or thinned around high use areas, you can always schedule a maintenance application or repair. This finish needs a dust free overnight drying time before it can be used again.