

finish line

12 quick tips

BY TERI MASASCHI

Every shop has a container for odd nuts, bolts, and washers that are not needed immediately but will handle an emergency one day. These finishing tips fall into the same category: They're a grab-bag of solutions I've found over the years with no common theme. I hope one or two will come in handy when you hit a snag.

Warm up a water-based finish

Water-based coatings are convenient but add no color to wood. If that is a problem, warm up the look by first applying a thin coat of dewaxed shellac tinted with a concentrated dye such as Wizard Tints or TransTints. A few drops of honey amber or medium walnut work wonders. When dry, scuff with P320-grit sandpaper, remove the dust, and apply the water-based topcoat.

1



2

Size furry wood before you sand it

When sanding woods such as mahogany, certain areas will have "fur" that refuses to sand off. Just like the nap of corduroy, sand one way and it flattens; sand the other direction and it stands up. Mix one part glue size to four or five parts water and coat the entire surface, not just the problem area. Let it dry overnight and then sand the surface smooth. The glue size will stiffen the wood fibers so sanding can shear them off.

3



Color epoxy filler to match the wood

Using two-part epoxy is a great way to fill holes, cracks, and knots and add strength as well. But because dried epoxy won't accept stain, it must be colored when mixed, to match the finished appearance of the wood. Universal tinting colorants blend in easily.



4

Get greater stain absorption on tight-grained woods

It is hard to get some boards to accept much stain. One trick is to lightly spray the wood with water, allow it to dry, and dewhisker the raised grain with a gray abrasive pad or P220-grit sandpaper. The wood will be more receptive to any kind of stain, and the raised-grain problem will be solved as well.



5

Substitute rubbing oils

It's Sunday afternoon and you are all set to start rubbing out your finish with pumice and rottenstone. You suddenly discover that you are out of paraffin oil. Rather than drive around looking for it, simply borrow junior's baby oil. It's the same stuff but it smells prettier. Mineral oil is also an acceptable substitute.



6

No-clog spraying

When you're spraying a water-based finish, the coating tends to dry too quickly on the air cap. It is a nuisance to stop and clean the encrusted cap in the middle of a big job. A thin application of Vaseline on the horns of the cap will make it easy to pop off any crust of finish with a fingernail.

7

Spray a flawless coat of lacquer

Here's a way to achieve a flawless finish right off the spray gun. Spray the last coat of satin lacquer as pristinely as possible. Let it dry just enough to lightly scuff off nibs or debris. Then fill the gun with one part lacquer and five parts lacquer thinner. Mist the surface just enough to melt it slightly and blend the scuff marks away. It will dry quickly, leaving a beautiful surface.



8

Coax dyes into open-grained wood

It is difficult to coax water-based dyes deep into open-pored woods such as oak or ash. A drop or two of soap detergent will relax the tension of the dye, making it more willing to sink into the pores.

9 Fill the hole and not the grain

When filling nail holes, it's hard to avoid getting putty into the grain around the hole that shows later when you apply stain or finish. If you are hand nailing, stick a piece of blue masking tape over the finish nail head, and then set the nail right through the tape. If you are using an air nailer, apply a small piece of tape wherever a nail is needed and shoot through the tape. Apply the putty with the tape in place, and when it dries, remove the tape to reveal a clean, filled hole.



10 Try vanilla for a pleasant smell

Oil-based and solvent-based finishing materials can have a noxious smell. Add a few drops of vanilla extract to make these products more bearable. Please note that this does not make them harmless; you still must have good ventilation and use a respirator when spraying.

11 Keep finish out of the rim

How often have you had the rim of a can fill with liquid? Unless you clean up the mess before it hardens, the lid will not fit properly, speeding the deterioration of the contents. Take an awl and punch a few drainage holes through the lowest part of the rim. These holes will not cause evaporation because the lid will seal nicely above them.



12

A rubdown with a brown bag

Wood turners have long known about “denibbing” a spindle with brown paper. This technique also can be used on flat surfaces where you want to rub out the topcoat to a satin or semigloss sheen.