

Real Wood Furniture Care Guide

Wood Characteristics

Each piece of wood is unique and as such the natural color or grain variations will cause the wood to react differently to finish. It is common to find several contrasts in the same piece of furniture. The lighter pieces were closer to the tree's bark, the darker pieces were closer to the tree's center.

Pitch pockets and mineral deposits should not be viewed as flaws. These natural markings have absolutely no effect on the furniture's durability or structural integrity. Knots and other characteristics are much like the nubs you find in such fine fabrics as silk and linen. They are true indications of genuine quality found in authentic materials.

TIPS FOR PROTECTING AND PRESERVING YOUR WOOD FURNITURE

Your Mother was Right : DUST FREQUENTLY

DO NOT USE A FEATHER DUSTER because it will simply move dust around, flinging it into the air. Feather dusters can't be washed, and a quill could scratch the wood surface if a feather breaks off. Dust is abrasive so infrequent or improper dusting can create a worn, dull surface over the years. Dust can accumulate in carvings, cracks and grooves and make wood look dark and unattractive. This dusty buildup eventually becomes hard to remove.

BE VERY CAREFUL USING WATER to clean wood. Wood should never get wet or soaked. Water can cause swelling, warping or staining when it penetrates a finish. Use coasters, pads, cloths or runners to protect against spills and water rings.

How to Dust

Here are some detailed tips from the experts. Use a clean, washable cloth made of soft, lint-free cotton. The best choices include an old T- shirt, diaper, cheesecloth, dish towel, piece of flannel, or chamois. The cloth should have no snaps, buttons, zippers or thick seams that could scratch furniture surfaces. Do not use a cloth that has hanging threads or unraveling edges. These could catch on wood slivers, molding, knobs or other loose pieces.

Dry Dusting Versus Damp Dusting

Many experts believe that dusting with a dry cloth is abrasive and will ultimately dull the finish. A dry cloth will not really remove dust, they say.

These experts typically recommend sprinkling a few drops of water onto the dusting cloth. The trick is to moisten the cloth just enough to make dust adhere to it. The cloth should not be so damp that it wets the wood. If you can see any trace of water on the wood after you wipe, your cloth is too damp.

Wipe off dust using gentle, oval motions along the grain of the wood. Turn or fold the cloth as soon as dirt is visible on any section. Lift, don't slide, lamps and objects to dust under and around them.

OILY CLEANERS and polishes will not provide a lasting, hard coat. Those containing silicone oil will create a nice shine and a slippery surface, but they can interfere with refinishing. This type of oil can seep through cracks in the finish into the wood. This can ruin the new finish later. Be aware that labels often fail to say whether products contain silicone oil. We do not recommend use of these products. Changes in humidity, not a lack of oil, cause wood to crack.

Watch the Humidity

Wood is very sensitive to changes in relative humidity. As the weather changes, so does the relative humidity in your home and in the moisture content of the wood in your furniture. This means that furniture is constantly expanding and contracting. Wood does best in moderate conditions of around 70 to 72 degrees Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of about 50 - 55 percent. That means using a humidifier in winter and an air conditioner in summer. Furniture ages more quickly if stored in a basement, attic, garage or warehouse. Excess heat and dryness can cause wood to split and crack. Place furniture away from all heat sources, if possible. If you must put furniture near an air duct, use a shield or guard plate to direct heat away.

Frequent and sudden changes in relative humidity are especially bad. Wood is most likely to crack when the climate in a home suddenly changes from hot and humid to cool and dry. Avoid placing furniture in front of radiators, heat runs or fireplaces. Store table leaves as close as possible to the table so they adjust to the same humidity conditions.

Here are More Tips for Dealing with Relative Humidity:

1. If furniture is to be stored, it generally does better in an unheated environment because the relative humidity will fluctuate within a much narrower range. Air can hold more moisture at a high temperature than at a low one.
2. Wood can best handle temperature and relative humidity changes if they occur gradually. Abrupt changes (closing or opening a vacation home, for example) can cause serious stress to your furniture.
3. When air conditioning your home, it is best to keep the intake of outside humid air to a minimum.
4. Humidifiers or vaporizing units can be added to a heating/air conditioning central system to help stabilize the humidity level.
5. Dehumidifiers need to be used during wet, rainy times and in damp rooms to remove excess moisture from the air.

Avoid Direct Sunlight

The ultraviolet rays of the sun will damage a finish and bleach the wood underneath. Prolonged exposure to sunlight can cause the finish to crack, sometimes in a pattern resembling the skin of an alligator. Tablecloths and doilies slow down the process, but they don't stop it. Try to keep furniture out of direct sunlight. When this is not possible, reduce the amount of light streaming on any piece of furniture. Use window shades, drapes or blinds to block light during the time of day the furniture is exposed. Uniformly expose surfaces to light. Especially avoid letting the sun hit only part of a surface. Occasionally move lamps, doilies and other objects so the wood bleaches uniformly.

Avoid Chemical Exposure

Keep solvents such as nail polish remover, alcohol and paint thinner away from wood furniture because they can harm the finish. Alcohol is contained in colognes, perfumes and medications as well as in wine, beer and liquor. Fingerprints, perspiration and body oils can harm a finish over time, especially on chairs. Plants and flower nectar that touch the finish can also cause permanent stains. Placing hot items on furniture can cause a chemical change in the finish that results in white rings or spots. Products containing ammonia should never be used on your furniture, as they will harm your finish. We recommend the use of hot mats, coasters even though the finish is water and heat resistant.

Do not leave plastic objects lying on wood surfaces. Color from plastic tablecloths, appliance covers, wrappers, place mats and toys can leach into wood over time. Plastic can also stick to a finish, damaging it when it is pulled up. Firm writing on the finished surface may cause indentations to the finish/wood.

Lift, don't slide, objects on wood. Place objects on trivets, tablecloths, doilies or others covers to protect the finish. Use felt bottoms on lamps and other decorative objects. Avoid brightly colored felt because its color could leach into the wood. Some experts say brown is the best color choice.

Carefully Move Furniture

Lift heavy furniture with the help of at least two people. Sliding pieces could hurt the wood floor and damage furniture legs by applying too much sideways pressure. If a drawer has two handles, use both to open it. Don't stuff drawers with too many items. Simple care will keep your wood furniture beautiful for years to come!