

Recoating Wood Floors

Q. *We're renovating a home with hardwood floors that are somewhat worn and lack luster but don't seem to need resanding. Is there a way to restore the finish without sanding?*

A. *Floor finisher Michael Purser, owner of the Rosebud Co. in Atlanta, responds:* I recommend that you consider recoating the surface. It offers great value and a quick turnaround and should be completely dustless. You can recoat any contemporary finish as long as paste or acrylic wax has not been applied over it. I further recommend that a professional floor finisher do the work because professionals have the appropriate equipment and experience.

After the rooms have been cleared of furniture, prepare the surface with a buffer and a maroon synthetic pad or well-worn 120 screen-back disc. Simple vacuum attachments are available for the buffer to collect all the dust created. You might also consider using a chemical prep by one of several manufacturers (Basic Coatings and Bona Kemi both have one), which eliminates buffing entirely. Either way, there need not be any dust.

After preparing the surface, you apply the finish. I suggest water-borne polyurethane because of its speedy drying and curing time, its ease of maintenance, and its attractiveness. If you have any high-wear areas, you might want to touch them up before making the final application. After that, one coat usually does the job.

Understand that a recoat does not remove serious gouging or indentations, nor will the preparation remove paint or stains.

I regularly recoat floors after renovation or when a property is changing hands. It provides excellent long-term protection and enhances the appearance of the floors with a lot less effort and money than a full-blown sanding and refinish. It's worth checking out.

Cleaning Grout

Q. *I have a client who had a tile floor put down a few years ago. The tile installer told her the grout already had a sealer in it so no additional sealer was ever put on. Now the grout is stained, and she has been trying to clean it with bleach (the grout is white) but cannot stand the fumes. Is there anything that can be used to clean the grout that would be fairly simple to use and not smell too bad?*

A. *Tilesetter and author Michael Byrne responds:* No grout I ever used or heard of contained a built-in sealer, and although latex and epoxy grouts are somewhat more stain resistant than regular Portland cement grouts, a quality high-performance sealer should always be applied — after the grout has cured — to help reduce staining and to make housekeeping easier.

White grout is never the best choice for any tile installation intended for a heavy-use or food service area, and without a sealer, it may turn “antique” white or even gray. Bleach can sometimes be used to remove stains from white grout, but it will fade colored grout. Once grout has been cleaned, it should be allowed to dry thoroughly, then be protected with an appropriate sealer.

The first step in the cleaning process is to identify the grout. Many

grout manufacturers offer lines of cleaning and sealing products that, when used as a single-source system, can significantly reduce fading and color change. If an after-market sealer is used, I choose a manufacturer that produces both a sealer and a cleaning preparation. Some acid-based cleaners may require one or more wash-rinse neutralizing cycles before a sealer can be applied.

On new installations, I never use regular grout, which is a mixture of Portland cement, sand, and water. Instead, I replace the water with a liquid latex or acrylic, and mix it with regular grout powders (sanded or unsanded). If the latex component is factory-added as a dried powder — called *polymer-modified* grout — water is the usual liquid component.

After the tiles are cleaned, and once the fresh grout joints have begun to set up, I strike the joints to produce a smoother grout surface. When hard, cured, and protected with an impregnating sealer, smooth-surface joints are significantly easier to clean than joints whose surfaces are rough or uneven. Striking fresh grout is one of the secrets of easy maintenance for tile. Adding the protection of a quality sealer makes this kind of finish ideal for an installation whose appearance is important.

Lumber Choices for Porch Floor

Q. *I recently requested a quote for 1x4 T&G fir for a covered porch. The lumber supplier added two new species, meranti and Brazilian redwood, to the quote list. How do those woods stack up against Douglas fir, which has been used traditionally for porch floors in my area? I plan to paint all sides of the flooring.*

A. *Contributing editor Paul Fiset* responds: This is a real apples-to-oranges comparison. The short answer is that all of these choices can work for you, but there are distinct differences worth considering.

Meranti (*shorea* spp.) is commonly sold as Philippine mahogany. But your expectations for meranti should not be confused with the superior properties associated with real mahogany. Merchants separate 125 species of *shorea* into four groups of meranti. Each has different properties. As a result, when you order meranti, you really don't know what you're getting. It's separated according to color and weight: dark red, light red, white, and yellow. The grain is often interlocked. White meranti dulls cutters because it has a high silica content. The dark red and

yellow varieties tend to warp. Dark red is moderately resistant to rot. The light red, white, and yellow versions are not durable in exposed conditions. I would only consider the dark red varieties for exposed locations.

The other new option, Brazilian redwood (Massaranduba), is an interesting choice. It is widely distributed throughout the West Indies, Central America, and northern South America. The wood is hard, strong, and heavy — generally about twice as strong and four times as hard as Douglas fir or meranti. The specific gravity is about 0.85, making it roughly twice as dense as your other options. You will have to predrill to fasten these boards. However, this wood is surprisingly easy to work despite its high density and is resistant to decay and termites. Brazilian

redwood is also resistant to water absorption, which helps improve stability. But be careful: The natural oils found in this wood make it tricky to glue and paint. You might want to forget painting and consider treating the boards with a water sealer or penetrating oil to avoid the potential finishing problems and enjoy the natural figure of the wood. If you decide to paint, be sure to experiment with some test boards first.

Got a question?

Send it to Q&A, JLC, 186 Allen Brook Ln., Williston, VT 05495; or e-mail to jlc-editorial@hanley-wood.com.

