

Southwest Louisiana Woodworkers Club February 2021

Bill Fey, President
Patrick LaPoint Treasurer

Officers and Directors

Barry Humphus, Editor, Eltee Thibodeaux
Daren Hood, John Marcon, Robin Richard

Mentoring Program - If you have a project, a problem in any woodworking area, these members have volunteered to help. Give them a call. Frank Tartarmella 802-8989; John Marcon: 478-0646; Eltee Thibodeaux: 436-1997; Ray Kebodeaux: 583-2378. Each have years of experience and knowledge.

January Meeting Highlights -- None . But Wait!

We spoke to SWLaWW President Bill Fey the other day regarding future meetings. Treasurer Patrick LaPoint has kindly volunteered his car port for a meeting in March (3/13/2021). It is an open space and of course, outdoors. His address is 116 E. Thomas St., Sulphur, LA 70663. We will have a map on the last page. Contact Patrick at 337-563-8339 or deacon.lapoint@yahoo.com should you have a question about the location.

Now this is a fluid situation. Should Dr. Fey believe that it is not appropriate to meet, we will try again in April 2021.

Speaking of Treasurer LaPoint, now is the time to renew your membership to the Southwest Louisiana Woodworkers Club. Send your check for \$20 for a family membership to the above address for Mr. LaPoint to support our organization which this year will have been in existence for 31 years. We have a wonderful organization -- let's keep going forward.

Wood Warp and Solutions

The real cause of warps (compression shrinkage) on boards is from the continuous wetting and drying out of one side of the wood, whether or not the wood is finished on both sides.

Thinking about this, as it may have occurred to you, that it might be possible to correct warps by wetting and drying out the bowed side of the wood. You would cause this side to shrink so the panel would flatten out. I started experimenting with some warped boards.

I have no hard and fast rules. Correcting warps seems to be more of an art than a science because there are too many variables and no way to have a "control" to compare to. But I have had some successes, and I would say that in all cases I was able to make the warp less than what it was at the beginning.

Several years ago, I built a pool table. The wood was from a tree in the yard of late member George Kuffel. George wanted to take down a large red oak tree that was dropping limbs onto his shop as causing damage. So we agreed to have this great oak cut down and milled into boards.

The job was done and we stacked and staked this large collection of boards. I waited for almost a year for the wood to dry and then moved many of the boards to my home and into the room where the pool table would live. The idea was to allow the wood to adjust to the interior of the home with somewhat lower humidity.

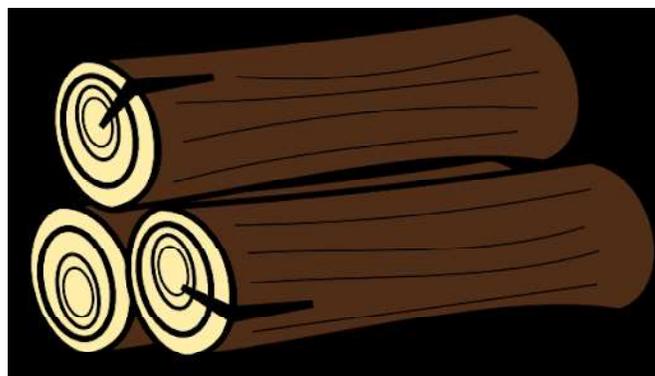
But a large red oak board warped and could not be used to construct the pool table. I had a choice -- correct the warp or get a different board and wait another few months to let it settle.

Correcting warps seems to be more of an art than a science because there are too many variables and no way to have a "control" to compare to. But we have had some successes, and I would say that in all cases I was able to make the warp less than what it was at the beginning.

The first step is to turn the board over so it's bowed on the topside. Then thoroughly wet this side with soaking wet cloths to make it swell. To encourage compression shrinkage of the bowed side, you can add clamps. Keep the board clamped while it dries thoroughly, which this may take many days. When the wood has dried thoroughly, it should have flattened noticeably.

After more than a few months, the board that was warped was flat. The warp did not come back. You may be able to encourage the flattening by adding weight to the bowed side as I did. I had a few patio concrete round objects that really encouraged the flattening of this board.

You can also try adding steam with a steam iron to the bowed side to deepen the moisture penetration. This also works and fast. Barry Humphus



The Half-Right Rule

There is a half-right rule. That is, half of what you read or hear about finishing is right; you just don't know which half.

I developed the rule in response to all the contradictory information published in woodworking magazines. The rule originated from my experience with a clerk, Bob, at the paint store down the street from my home, where I purchase most of my supplies. In my case, this the store at South City Paint on Sale Road.

I always enjoy my trips to the paint store because I'm greeted warmly, and I knew I was going to learn something. Bob has been around paints and finishes all his life, and he gave me many tips that helped me raise the quality of my work. He also led me astray just about as often. Oh well.

He wasn't misleading me on purpose, of course. He was merely passing along tips and explanations he had picked up from painters and finishers who he came in contact with. A lot of nonsense is passed around in these circles, and some of it has become deeply embedded. There are a few examples that may sound familiar.

Thin the first coat of finish by half for a better bond. On the contrary, full-strength finishes bond perfectly well. The purpose of thinning is to create a thinner build that is easier to sand.

Don't sand to too fine a grit or you'll close the wood's pores and it won't take stain as well. You don't "close" the pores with finer grits. You create finer scratches that retain less stain when you wipe off the excess.

Use sandpaper to soften sharp edges because these will show wear too easily. The better reason to soften edges with a couple of sandpaper passes is because the finish is likely to peel away from sharp edges.

The longer you leave a stain wet on the wood the more it soaks in and the darker the coloring when you wipe off the excess. This isn't the way it happens. The stain isn't soaking deeper; the thinner is evaporating, which leaves a higher colorant-to-liquid ratio.

Note that in all the above examples, the problem with the instruction is not that you should or shouldn't do it. It's the explanation of what's going to happen or why it happens or how it happens that is incorrect.

When the "what," "why" and "how" explanations are wrong, you are left struggling to understand finishing. Which side of the half-right rule is correct?

In addition to some nonsense explanations, mislabeling by manufacturers and also poor instructions are also at fault. Take some responsibility for contradictions you have to work through.

Manufacturers typically tell you to apply stain within two hours when using a wood conditioner to reduce blotching. I suggest you that you have to let the wood conditioner, if it's oil- or varnish-based, dry at least six hours to overnight to get good results.

Watco and other manufacturers of Danish oil, which are mixtures of oil, varnish and thinner, tell you to let the first coat penetrate for 30 minutes then apply a second coat and let it penetrate 15 minutes. Finally, wipe off, and the finish is ready to use in 8 to 10 hours. I (and others) tell you to let the first coat dry overnight after wiping off the excess. Then sand lightly, apply a second coat, wipe off and let dry overnight again. By the way, you can create your own 'Watco' -- just take a look at the MSDS online and make your own.

Instructions will tell you to apply stain within two hours of applying a wood conditioner. This doesn't reduce blotching. In fact, waiting for two hours increases blotching because more of the thinner has evaporated. I suggest (and Bob Flexner's wonderful book, "Understanding Wood Finishing") suggests, that you apply stain directly to the top of particularly piece (such as pine or other wood). Then you apply wood conditioner to the rest of the board and stain immediately, stain after 10 minutes, stain after two hours and stain the next day. After the wood conditioner dries, the color is lighter, but there isn't any blotching.

There is not an easy solution. Many people pass on information about finishes, including store clerks and many who write about finishing who have never really done much of it. These people often don't have the experience to contradict what they hear from others or read in the literature. But read the books such as Flexner's work above.

From my own experience, it took me a long time to feel secure enough contradicting what I was hearing to actually say or write that it was wrong. When everyone else is saying the same thing, the inclination is to think that your own experience is lying to you, in some way. Sometimes, I just put something "out there" to see if you got any push back.

I believe that every manufacturer of wood conditioner says to apply the stain within two hours. It took me a while of knowing that this did not work, because the wood still blotched when I followed the instructions, to finally realize that the explanation was drying time. My "washcoats" using thinned lacquer worked well quickly because lacquer dries so much faster. Varnish-based wood conditioner just requires much longer to dry. Think this through.

Continued on page 3.

Half Right Rule continues

It also took me some time to contradict the prevailing claim that shellac is the best sealer. I love shellac. It is quick, simple and coats anything as well as cheap. I finally got the courage to say this can't be true after I learned that no large cabinet shop or furniture manufacturer uses shellac at all. (You should be careful saying "none" because there might be an exception somewhere.)

Why cabinet shops do not use this perfect finish, I have no idea as it is easy, fast, completely safe and you could even eat it. Oh well.

Perhaps most difficult of all was figuring out what tung oil is all about. Everyone knows that there were differences. All sorts of attempts are made to account for these: "resin fortified," "modified," "processed," etc. Finally, a chemist friend suggested that I see what happens when I let puddles of various brands dry on glass, and he tested the brands to see what was in them. Then it was clear. Many of the brands aren't tung oil at all. They are varnish thinned with paint thinner. They are falsely labeled.

When products are labeled correctly with good instructions for using them, and the what, why and how mythologies are cleared up, finishing won't be difficult at all. The half-right rule will disappear.

So Many Sealers

Many products are marketed and sold as sealers. The purpose, however, isn't to seal. All finishes seal. It is to provide easy sanding. The only finishes that are difficult to sand are lacquer and alkyd varnish, so these are the only finishes where a special sanding sealer makes sense

Lacquer, in other words, nitrocellulose lacquer is difficult to sand because it gums up sandpaper causing little lumps of build-up, called "corns," that scratch the surface. This happens even when using steared sandpaper.

So what is it that makes sanding sealer different from the finish itself – lacquer or varnish? It's the addition of zinc stearate to the finish. Zinc stearate is a type of soap. Think about what would happen to the dried finish film if you added the characteristics of hand soap to the finish.

The film would be slicker, thus it would be less likely to clog sandpaper. This is a good thing. But then consider the negatives. The film would be less moisture and liquid resistant. The film would also be softer, so it would scratch easier. The film would crack easier because of reduced plasticity. A finish applied over the sanding sealer might not bond as well.

Sanding sealers for lacquer and alkyd varnish contain zinc stearates, a type of soap. The stearates make the

finish easy to sand, but they weaken the finish by making it less moisture resistant, less scratch resistant, less plastic so it cracks easier, and they weaken the bond of many finishes.

These qualities are easy to picture once you know that zinc stearate is soap. Sanding sealer is therefore a trade-off between easier sanding and these four negative qualities. The conclusion is obvious: You put up with the more difficult sanding of lacquer and varnish unless your project is large, in which case the time and effort saved, together with the savings on sandpaper, are worth the trade off.

Factories and cabinet shops typically use lacquer sanding sealer, but there's seldom a need for you to use lacquer or varnish sanding sealer unless your project is large. You can make the sanding a little easier by sanding with steared sandpaper.

Polyurethane varnish dries hard and is easy to sand, so no special sealer is needed. In fact, using anything other than the polyurethane itself as the sealer weakens the total protection and durability of the polyurethane film.

If you have been finishing for a decade or longer, you've surely noticed that polyurethane varnish has largely replaced traditional alkyd varnish in the stores. Polyurethane cures harder than alkyd varnish and does not bond as well to soapy sanding sealer. If the finish takes a hard knock, the polyurethane can separate.

As the market for polyurethane grew, manufacturers became more aware of this problem and began cautioning against applying it over a sanding sealer. But woodworkers had been conditioned to the need for a special sealer, so shellac was increasingly promoted. After a while, it became apparent that polyurethane didn't bond well to shellac either because of the wax it contains naturally.

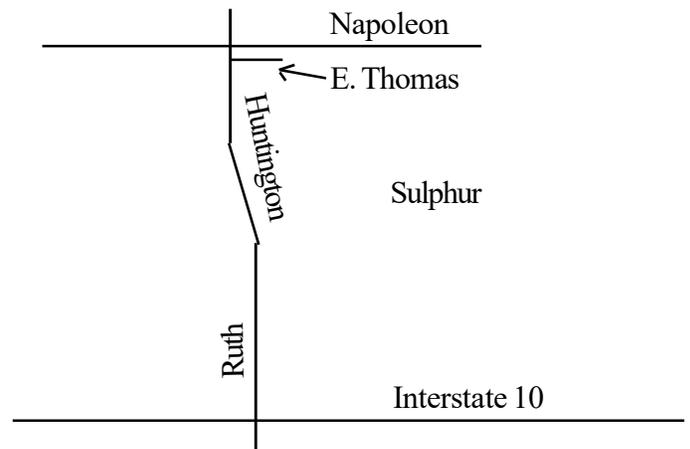
So Zinsser (Bull's Eye), the only remaining supplier of liquid (as opposed to flake) shellac, created a dewaxed version called SealCoat, which they marketed as a sealer for polyurethane. It works well enough, but consider how absurd this is.

Polyurethane sands very easily, meaning it powders and doesn't clog sandpaper. So no special sealer is needed. A first coat of shellac, in fact, can only have the effect of reducing the protection and durability of the total film. Why would you want to do this?

As with polyurethane, water-based finish dries hard and is easy to sand without gumming the sandpaper. So there's no need for a special sealer under water-based finish. easily. But the market was conditioned to need a separate sealer. So manufacturers provided a water-based sanding sealer. Whether this was because of their own ignorance of "sealing" or because they just wanted to sell you another product, or both, you can decide.

March Meeting Location

We have the wonderful opportunity to meet at the shop of Patrick LaPoint's car port. It is an open area so you will likely be safe but consider wearing a mask as possible. Patrick's home is at 116 E. Thomas St., Sulphur, LA 70663. Contact Patrick at 337-563-8339 or deacon.lapoint@yahoo.com should you have a question about the location. Take I-10 East to Sulphur and exit North onto Ruth St.. Continue onto S. Huntington. Turn right onto E. Thomas (just before Napoleon).



February 2021