

RENOVATING WOOD

SKILL LEVEL



Renovating wood is not difficult, but it does require patience and application. Don't be tempted to work on fine or antique furniture - leave that to the experts!

SAFETY FIRST

Always wear a face mask when working with an electric sander. Wear protective gloves when using paint stripper or solvents. Work in a well-ventilated atmosphere when stripping or finishing wood. Keep your fingers away from the cutting edges of tools. Keep stains, varnishes and solvents away from naked flames.

INTRODUCTION

Warmth, colour, and subtle or dramatic grain patterns are amongst the stunning effects this natural material can bring into your home.

Renovating wood can take many forms, from stripping and varnishing floors and internal fitted woodwork to stripping and staining chairs, tables and fittings, polishing surfaces and colouring.

Wood sometimes requires a facelift but be selective and choose your projects carefully. There is little point in stripping or altering antiques, because it will almost certainly reduce their value. Some pieces are often the better for their aged appearance.

2 - Planning your work

Decide on a method to remove the old finish on the timber (if there is one). For instance, by blow torch, paint stripper, planing or sandpaper.

On large areas, such as floors, you may need to obtain an industrial sander. Remember, you will also have the room out of action for some time.

Structural damage through rot, wear or accident should be repaired before any overall renovation can begin. These repairs can often be something simple such as letting in a small section of floorboard, patching a window frame or perhaps filling the hole where a lock has been removed from a door. You may also need to apply a fungicide in areas of poor ventilation or where there is evidence of fungal activity.

To avoid handling the wet areas when staining or varnishing a piece of furniture, decide upon a sequence of work before starting. With panelling, work out where you can finish with your brush strokes so that there is no obvious line when you begin again.

Before proceeding, always test dyes, stains and varnishes on a small, inconspicuous area of the wood to be treated, in order to assess their suitability.

Have your materials to hand, and if working with movable furniture, have a clear and clean area set aside to work in.

If you are working a large area such as a floor, set yourself a reasonable target.

When stripping vertical panelling, try to work from the bottom up when using a blowtorch because the rising heat will pre-soften the paint or varnish above. Work from the top down when re-applying any wet finish.

3 - Initial preparation

Remove any projecting nails, screws or any other metallic objects which may damage tools.

Door and drawer knobs should also be removed. These can be cleaned, renovated or renewed separately.

Before sanding wooden floors, punch the heads of the nails below the surface to avoid any possible damage to the sander.

When using paint stripper on a piece of furniture on the bench, cover the top of the bench with a cloth or newspaper for protection, and possibly the surrounding floor area also.

When using a blow torch, have at least one spare canister ready to hand for replacement.

4 - Stripping wood

Wearing a face mask is a sensible precaution



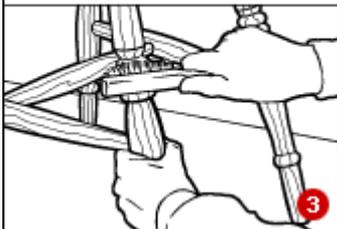
This is the first step in wood renovation. Before you start the stripping process ensure you wear protective gloves, eye protection, a face mask and follow all safety instructions on the stripping products you intend to use.

A scraper is used to remove the old finish



Regardless of whether you use a blow torch or paint stripper, you will need a shavehook or scraper to remove the old finish (2).

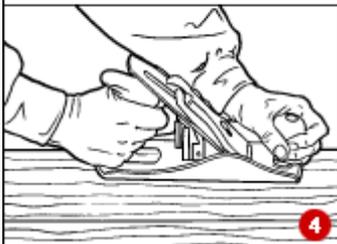
Use a fine wire brush in awkward places



It may be necessary to use several applications of stripper to get into small crevices, and this is often best achieved by rubbing the area with paint stripper on wire wool by hand. A small wire brush (like those used for suede shoes) or a toothbrush can also be useful

(3). It is not advisable to use a blow torch on furniture or areas with deep profiles and crevices for fear of scorching the wood.

A few strokes with a finely set smoothing plane



Wood that has been discoloured by age, weathering or fingermarks can often be brought back to life by taking off a few light shavings with a finely set smoothing plane. You must always work with the grain of the wood to avoid tearing out (4).



After you have stripped the timber, it must be prepared for finishing by sanding, either by hand or with an orbital sander. When hand sanding, it's useful to wrap the sandpaper around a cork block. This helps to create a flat surface and protects the user's fingers (5).



Orbital sanders come in various sizes and are used for finishing larger areas (6). Some are also designed to reach into very small spaces. These are called detail sanders.

One good way of getting a smooth surface is to rub along the grain with wire wool. Be sure to vacuum the surface of the wood afterwards, or wipe it with a dry rag, to remove any tiny wire particles which may be picked up by a wet paint brush and spoil the finish.

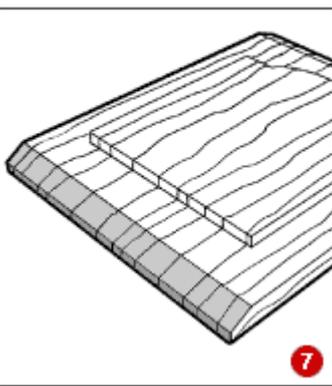
Most stripped surfaces need to be neutralised with water or white spirit. Be sure to do this, and remember to let the surfaces dry thoroughly before attempting to use sandpaper on them.

5 - Before applying finishes

All finishes, even clear ones such as polyurethane varnish or wax polish, will darken the appearance of the wood to some extent. Bear this in mind, especially when trying to match wood tones. Bleach will lighten wood.

All woods, with the exception of pine, tend to get lighter when exposed to daylight. Pine will get progressively darker even if it has been treated with varnish or polish.

End grain is more absorbent, and so finishes darker



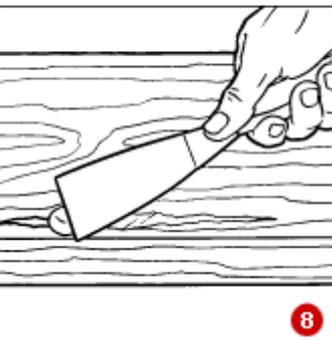
The 'end grain' of wood will always absorb more stain, varnish or polish than the other surfaces, so it will show up darker (7). It is important that the end grain is sanded well before applying stain or varnish. Use a sanding sealer or give it only one light application, even if the rest of the piece takes several coats. After the first coat is dry on the end grain, you can wipe wax polish along it to prevent it from absorbing any more

surface finish.

The first application of any stain, sealer, or varnish may raise the grain of the wood and give it a slightly rough feel. When the first application is perfectly dry, give all surfaces a light rub over with fine sandpaper following the grain, then re-apply the finish.

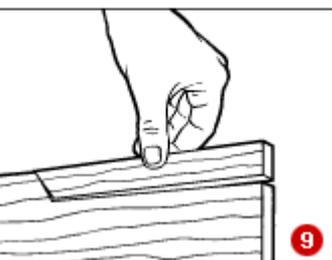
6 - Wood fillers

Wood filler can be used to repair minor damage



Small nail holes or gaps in joints can be filled with one of the many available wood fillers. These often come in colours to suit various woods, and most will accept stains and dyes (8).

Cut away areas of damage and let a piece in



replacement may be necessary if damage is very severe.

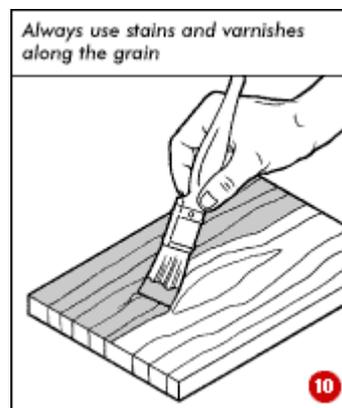
Wood fillers can be used to fill fairly deep holes by building up layers successively after the previous one has dried. However, they should not be used for large areas. These need additional wood 'let in' to the damaged area, after the rotted or damaged area has been cut away, leaving only good wood (9).

7 - Staining

This must be done before any varnishing or waxing takes place.

If you wish to colour your wood, there are many stains and dyes you can use. Most of these will allow the beauty of the grain to show through the finish, and you can adjust the depth of colour by adding additional coats. Remember, you cannot lighten the effect with subsequent applications, only darken it, so experiment first! Remember also that when you apply the varnish or wax afterwards this will darken the finish still further.

It is essential when applying stains and varnishes to brush in the direction of the grain (10). You should also keep a 'wet edge' and never let a part of the stain dry before coming back to it. For this reason, always work out an area you can treat in the drying time of the stain, or have an edge where you can finish easily, such as a floorboard.



8 - Protective finishes

There are dozens of products for the protection and enhancement of wood, and one of the most popular clear varnishes for indoor use is polyurethane. This will bring colours to life and enhance the grain formation, giving it a vibrant glow. Polyurethane is available in gloss, satin or matt finishes. It is not suitable for outdoor use. In that case, a yacht varnish or similar preparation is preferable. It may be necessary to apply several coats for maximum effect, and each coat should be rubbed down with fine sandpaper when completely dry and before the next coat is applied. Remember too, that the finish will darken slightly each time, even though this is classed as a clear varnish.

Some timbers used outdoors, such as cedar or teak, have special preparations or oils manufactured for their treatment, and these are applied by brush after the timbers have been sanded down and prepared.

Clear grain sealer can be used for indoor projects, followed by several applications of wax polish. This will give a lovely 'body' to the finish which will improve over the years with the application of more wax with each polishing. Remember that you must sand your wood to a fine finish for the best

results.