



Bank Street
ANTIQUE MALL

818 Bank Street NE
Decatur, AL 35602
P: 256-351-1070
BankStAntiques@bellsouth.net

FURNITURE CLINIC 101

There are two questions that we are asked on a regular basis:

Just how do you get furniture to look like this?

How do you use these restoration products?

There is no answer that works every time. No two pieces of furniture are alike. Each is entirely different from the other and must be treated according to its individual needs. But there are some basics to consider when refurbishing furniture.

THE BASICS OF FURNITURE RESTORATION

STEP ONE - CLEANING

No matter how hard you try to restore a piece of furniture to its previous beauty, it will not happen if it is not clean. Adding more polish or stain will not do it. So what do you do? Clean it!!!

I take a piece of furniture apart - by that I mean I remove the drawers, leaves, and occasionally the pulls. Vacuum out the inside of the chest being sure to get all the dust off of drawer runners, backs and underneath of furniture.

Next prepare a solution of one gallon warm water and one cup of Mean Green or other universal cleaner. Full strength Mean Green is too strong and may damage fragile veneers, or remove the finish. I have experimented with many products and prefer Mean Green. You may find another works well for you – experiment. If the product does not cut through built up polish, a milky finish will result. If the product is too harsh, the finish on the furniture will be either partially or totally removed.

This information is provided courtesy of Bank Street Antique Mall, www.bankstantiques.com.

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To clean the furniture use a soft rag. Be sure to wring the cloth out as dry as you can. Wipe down all surfaces. The inside of a piece of furniture needs to be cleaned with the solution as well. Wipe down the inside of drawers. Because you have used a damp rather than wet cloth the furniture will air dry quickly. The first thing you will notice is that it smells clean. Musty smells in old furniture can be attributed to old dirt 90% of the time!

STEP TWO – THE FINISH

We have found several products to consider using. We have found them to be good time and time again.

Howard's Scratch Cover

- Works well on finishes that have fine scratches that do not penetrate the veneer or go deeply into the wood.
- Does not cover white moisture stains or dark rings
- Does not penetrate polyurethane or lacquer finish
- Lacquer and polyurethane can not be sprayed over Howard's

Apply liberally with a soft rag being sure to get solution into all ridges and crevices. Let the solution absorb over several hours. Wipe off excess scratch cover and polish. I will discuss polishes later in this article. Howard's comes in a variety of colors and a natural or clear solution.

Howard's and Menwax both make a scratch cover pen that helps restore minor scratches. It seems that vacuum cleaners are often the culprit for bumps and scratches on the legs and bases of furniture.

Briwax

- Works well on furniture that needs not only scratch cover but also replenishment of very dry or brittle furniture
- Use fine steel wool or 150 grit sandpaper to prepare the surface – rub with the grain

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- Apply Briwax with the grain of the wood allow to dry for a few minutes then buff with a soft lint free rag. Nylon panty hose make excellent buffing material.

Applying sparingly with a soft lint free rag is the key. It is easier to add additional Briwax to a surface than to try to remove excess amounts.

Some users have had success with Briwax and removal of white moisture rings. Use #0000 steel wool and clear Briwax. Apply wax to steel wool and rub with the grain over the moisture spot. Buff out. Repeated applications are most often required.

Briwax comes in clear and 7 tinted waxes.

Kramer's

We have found that this product is the closest to the Simple Satin so popular in the South. Simple Satin is no longer on the market. Kramer's is a turpentine base product and requires a ventilated area. Kramer's is good for removing years of surface build up, hazing, crackling.

- Apply with a soft rag working with the grain of the wood
- Fine steel wool (0000) can be used for difficult areas.
- Repeat applications are often required
- Do not leave excess Kramer's on the wood – wipe it off and reapply if necessary

We have had customers who used the Kramer's Improver on ceiling beams, floors, and other interior woodwork with magnificent results.

Kramer's Clarifier

Works well in eliminating white spots and dark rings.

- Multiple applications may be necessary for removal
- Not always completely successful, but improves appearance if the white spot or dark rings are not completely removed

STEP THREE – THE FINISH

There are two excellent polishes available at Bank Street Antiques - Natchez Solution, and Howard's Orange Oil. All work very well. The choice often depends on individual preferences – oil versus cream. The aroma of the product is a deciding factor as well. Experiment with the polishes.

We used to carry Glorified Antiques. The manufacturer has been unable to supply this product due to his inability to acquire some of his ingredients.

One of the things that I suggest to customers is to keep their polishing rag in a zip lock bag. I use this rag for touch ups and light polishing. This makes the polish last longer and prevents over polishing.

Grandmother might have polished her furniture every week, but it is not the best thing for your furniture. Wax build up is what often is the cause or major contributor to hazy, dull furniture. Use soft cloths, swifters – whatever to dust on a regular basis. Deep cleaning and dusting should be a two or three times a year job.

THE REFINISHING DELIMA

Everyone watches Antiques Roadshow. The Keno brothers and other experts on the television program adamantly advise against refinishing and harsh cleaning. I once heard a expert call patina “the years of built up from polishing”. That basically is true – but if that patina keeps me from seeing the lovely grain of the wood - is it patina or grime? I guess that is left up to the owner. Granted very old 17th and even 18th century pieces do not need to be stripped down to the raw wood. But I do believe that they do need to be cleaned!

Well, now what about refinishing? I have seen pieces of furniture that have been so abused by their owner or that have not been stored appropriately that would be ugly at best without refinishing. I have seen ugly pieces become their once beautiful selves. So what do you do?

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Again, certainly if it is a museum quality piece consult an expert that could give better advice than me. If it is a wonderful 19th or 20th century piece that is ugly because of abuse and can be returned to its once beautiful state – then I say DO IT !!!

But do what suits you and your taste never what a friend, an expert or your mother says is best.

PREVENTION – THE KEY TO MAINTAINING BEAUTIFUL FURNITURE

I have always believed that antiques are to be used and loved not looked at and admired. I sleep in an antique bed, sit in an antique wing back chair every night. There are some things that you can do to prevent furniture from being damaged.

1. Use coasters to prevent moisture build up on tables from hot food or moist glasses.
2. Rotate furniture out of windows that get direct morning or afternoon sun.
3. Doillies and runners may leave imprints on soft woods especially if there is a heavy piece sitting on top of the cloth.
4. Never leave table pads or plastic cloths on tables for long periods of time
5. Do not push back in dining chairs. This loosens the joints in the back and the legs.
6. If you do not know how to repair a piece of furniture – find a qualified restorer.

We are more than happy to demonstrate the products we sell. We can show you the ins and outs of cleaning as well. Please feel free to contact us. Now go enjoy your prized possessions!