

A SUCCESSFUL FINISH

Informing your customer helps create a positive finishing process

(Photocopy the opposite side of this page and give it to your customers.)

M

any things can go wrong when you finish a floor. Just as you're spreading that perfect final coat, the family cat slides across the floor and becomes a urethane-soaked furball. Or maybe the first coat looks dry and someone from another trade walks across it during the evening, leaving dusty, dirty footprints. Or the job is finally completed and looks perfect, only the home owner thought he could move all his furniture back in for his dinner party tomorrow night — and now he's furious. In any of these situations, a little education goes a long way. The customer, general contractor and other trades all need to know what to expect before, during and after the finishing process.

Before you even think of going in to finish a floor, whether it's new construction or a remodeling project, the customer needs to be aware of how the different types of finishes will look with the species and stain she has selected. (If she's aiming for a whitewashed floor, she probably won't be happy with an oil-modified patina.) Sheen level is another important issue — if the customer picks a high-gloss finish, she should be made aware that it will tend to show wear more than a satin finish. To be safe, make samples of the specific combination of species, stain, finish and sheen the customer has chosen and have her sign off on her choices.

If the project is new construction or an extensive remodel involving several trades, you need to make it explicit in your contract that while you are finishing the floor, the work area belongs to you. That means no other trades are on the job site while you are attempting to finish a floor that is totally free of dust and other debris. This is im-

portant while you are actually on the job site and while the finish is drying. Other trades may not realize that when the finish begins to feel dry, they still can't walk on it — and then you end up starting all over again.

If the project is a remodel, the same can be said for the family and pets who live there. Most wood floor finishers have at least one story about a coat of finish ruined because a dog or cat walked across the floor and skidded right through. Most of those stories also involve veterinarian bills.

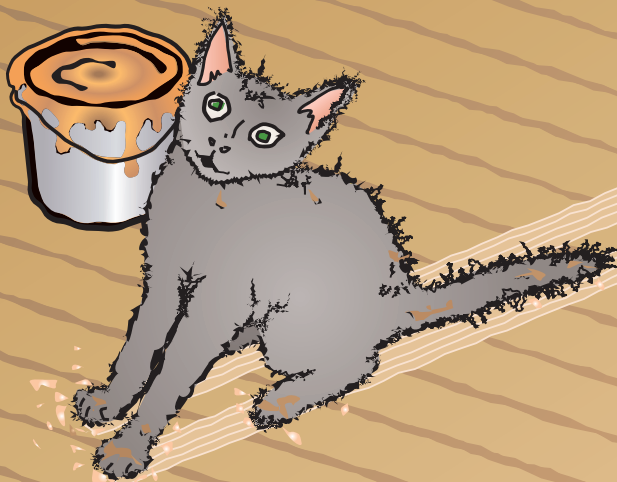
Pets aren't the only ones who need to be confined while you're working, however. The humans need to know exactly when and where you'll be working on which parts of the house, and how long it will take those areas to dry. Take extra precautions, too. Even if you tell the head of house that the finish in the foyer will be wet on Tuesday afternoon, she may walk in the front door out of habit and get seriously hurt. Put signs around the house and on outside entrances to remind the inhabitants. Because of the vapors involved with some finishes, it may be necessary for the family (and any pets) to move out during the whole process.

No matter which finish you are using, carefully explain the dry time, leaving yourself some room for unexpected delays. Also factor in the extra time necessary before furnishings and area rugs can be put on the floor. Put all the information in writing, as well.

Finally, make sure the customer realizes that the floor will not look brand new forever. Explain the necessary maintenance procedures and the expected recoat schedule.

If you've followed all these steps, it should help make the entire finishing process as positive as possible for both you and your customer. — *K.M.W.*

CUSTOMER EDUCATION



THE FINISHED PRODUCT

Gone are the days when all wood floors were simply coated with wax and home owners buffed them, week after week. Today's wood flooring market offers consumers easier maintenance and increased durability, as well as several types of finishes. Unfortunately, lingering misconceptions about finishes and the options available can make this a confusing issue for consumers — but it doesn't have to be. Following are some of the most commonly asked questions about finishes:

Q. *I talked to my contractor and he listed the types of finishes I could have. How do I know which is the best?*

A. The finish you choose is a matter of your personal preference and those finishes with which your contractor is experienced. The most common finish is **oil-modified**, which gives floors a somewhat golden hue, or patina, that some customers prefer. Others like the look of a **water-based** finish, which dries with a clear color, leaving the natural color of the wood. (Water-based finishes are frequently preferred for use with light floors, such as white floors, or with lighter species such as maple.) Products called amberizers can be added to give water-based products a look closer to that of an oil-modified finish. **Acid-cure** finishes (sometimes called "Swedish finishes") and **moisture-cure** finishes also dry to a golden patina. In some areas a **seal-and-wax** system is still preferred. All the finishes today are durable; ask your contractor to explain which he recommends for your needs.

Q. *How long will it take my finish to dry?*

A. Finish dry times vary widely depending on type of finish used, temperature, humidity and air flow in the house. After the last coat of finish is applied, it typically takes from 24 to 48 hours to dry (it can take longer in extreme conditions). Keep in mind that when the finish feels dry to the touch, it may not be dry beneath the surface. Only when the finish is totally dry (typically 48 to 72 hours) can furniture be moved onto the floor (be sure to use pads on the bottom of all furniture legs), and manufacturers may recommend waiting even longer before placing area rugs.

Q. *How many coats of finish do I need?*

A. Most floors should be finished with three to four coats — recommendations vary according to manufacturers and type of finish.

Q. *Will the finishes hold up to the wear in the kitchen?*

A. Wood floors work well in the kitchen. The only finish that should not be used there is a wax finish, which turns white on contact with water (wax also should not be used in other areas likely to get wet, such as entryways). Other finishes can be used; however, you need to wipe up spills as soon as they occur to prevent moisture damage to the wood.

Q. *Will the color of the finish change?*

A. Finishes darken to a certain degree over time. Even non-ambering water-based finishes will darken somewhat, although they will not take on the yellow cast of a typical oil-modified finish. (Keep in mind that some species of wood, such as cherry, darken or fade as they are exposed to light.)

Q. *Will my finish have bubbles in it?*

A. Assuming the finish is applied properly, bubbles, streaks or other markings over the entire floor should not be visible from a standing position.

Q. *How long will my finish last?*

A. The long-term durability of your finish is largely dependent on the type of wear and maintenance the floor receives. Proper cleaning and maintenance can add years to the life of a finish. A typical residential floor that is well maintained will last for about five to seven years before it needs to be screened and recoated. Many floors can last decades before they need to be totally sanded down and refinished. Waxed floors need to be buffed when they lose their luster, and when buffing doesn't work, they need to be stripped and rewaxed — typically once or twice a year.