

# Tips and tricks for a perfect finish: from the manufacturers

There are a number of issues that can potentially arise when applying the finish to a timber floor. We asked a few ATFA members with expertise in this field to discuss some of the problems associated with staining and finishing and to offer practical advice for avoiding common pitfalls.

One of the most important aspects of any timber flooring job, according to Brett Scarpella from **Loba Australasia**, is sanding and finishing. "It is the grand finale or the final step in the whole flooring process," says Brett. "And it's the coating that enhances and beautifies timber flooring and gives it the protection it needs to survive daily wear and tear."

Brett, who looks after the ATFA coatings hotline, says that it is important to remember that coating is merely a mirror of your preparation. "It won't hide much, so be sure the floor is ready to go before you start applying the finish."

It is also really important to properly understand the

product you are using and Brett's advice is to speak to the manufacturer or your distributor when using a new product.

"Manufacturers can only fit so much on a label and it's possible they might have some valuable information that will help you achieve the desired result," says Brett. "It's also important to use the recommended application system and technique as different coating products can vary greatly in performance depending on the application process. There is no 'one size fits all'. This applies to rollers, brushes, abrasives and to following instructions on coverage rates and drying times."

Brett advises using a spotter if there is more than one person on the job. "A second pair of eyes can pick up a miss, or a fly or a hair in the finish, which are better avoided in the first place than having to be repaired later."

Brett also recommends the use of anti-rejection additives

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to reduce the effect that site contaminants or oily timbers may have on the final coating. Brett cautions that these must be used as per manufacturer's instructions as incorrect use may cause problems.

If a silicon or wax based rejection has occurred, Brett suggests washing the affected area with a degreaser such as turps or white turps, prior to a meth wash. "Turps has a better chance of removing the contaminant, whilst metho will clean up the oily residue from this practice. It sounds like hard work but rejection is hard to overcome once it has occurred. If you experience rejection with a solvent-based coating it can sometimes be more successful to restart the process using a waterborne product as these don't necessarily reject from the same contaminants."

It can be overwhelming to keep up with all the new products and associated techniques that are continually hitting the market, says David Meyer from Lagler Australia.

"Firstly, there are spirit/ethanol-based dye stains that have been quite popular for a number of years," says David. "With these stains, the sanding needs to be very even with a minimum of a 120# screen finish to avoid scratches showing up in the end result. Originally these stains were used for

'tint' staining where the contractor would put up to 10% stain in his second coat of solvent-based poly. This method served its purpose at the time but with more advanced products on the market, is outdated now. These stains are still very popular among contractors but are mainly used directly. They can be wiped or rolled straight on, then wiped off. Most contractors using these stains today will be using some kind of solvent or wet edge extender that will allow them to just roll it on and leave it, this by far being the most popular method with such ease of application.

Some of the pitfalls of this method can be extended drying times along with the washing out of some colours, depending on the amount of thinner/reducer used. With blacks in particular, the more they are reduced, the more they begin to appear purple, straying from the desired black.

"Next we have the oil-based pigment stains," says David. "These stains have been around for a number of years, growing more in popularity in the last five or six years. With these stains you have to be very particular with your sanding, finishing up to a 150# screen, and being careful not to leave any sanding scratches in the floor."

Before applying, "water pop" the grain with water and

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methylated spirit, which allows more pigment to penetrate the grain for a darker end result. Some contractors will apply these with a slow speed buffer, which helps on large jobs, while most jobs can be ragged on and ragged off.

Angela Petruzzi from **Livos Australia** says that some of the issues that may occur if sanding and oiling are not carried out to specifications include the appearance of chatter marks or swirl marks, highlighted by the pigment. "If excess oil is not removed, the floor may become sticky or tacky. Further problems may occur if the floor is completed too early in the building or renovation stage and becomes scratched or damaged."

To avoid and rectify these issues, Angela has the following recommendations: "If the oil has been left on too long, apply more oil to the floor, work it in with a white pad and remove the excess with a cloth underneath a Canterbury or Polyvac. If the oil has been left overnight or longer, go over the entire area with a maroon pad and re-oil, remembering to wipe off the excess. If it is necessary to complete a stained floor prior to other trades having finished, cover the floor area with POP paper or reschedule to do the floor last."

"The third common group of stains are the water based stains," says David from **Lagler Australia**. "These can be dye stains, pigment stains or a mixture of the two, and have been around for just as long as the oil based pigment stains, if not longer. They were first used in the flooring industry six to eight years ago and have gained in popularity over the last few years. The sanding requirements for these water based stains are much more forgiving than the previous finishes mentioned. Even with an 80# screen finish, minor sanding marks don't show up at all. Different methods are used for the application of these stains, ranging from rolling on, rolling on and padding off, pad on and leave, pad on and pad off, or rag on and off. Drying times are much quicker with these stains, with most being recoated within 2 - 4 hours." *f*

## Tips and tricks to remember

- Coating is a mirror of preparation so take care with preparation
- Speak to the manufacturer if you are unsure about a product
- Always apply coats as close as possible to the manufacturer's recommended coverage rates
- Where possible use a spotter to make sure nothing has been overlooked
- If you have to load up a floor with a thick coat only risk it on the first coat allowing a couple more coats to make amends if required
- Don't be afraid to use additives provided by the manufacturer
- When applying satin coatings or tinted stains, use a wet edge extender and coat along the boards from skirting to skirting where possible
- If you have a silicon or wax based rejection, wash the affected area with a degreaser such as turps or white spirits prior to a metho wash
- Always observe the recommended dry times and allow extra time in colder weather
- Vacuum after using a tack rag as part of preparations for the final coat