



Which Onsite Finish Should You Use on Reclaimed Wood?

True Oil Finish vs. Polyurethane – Explained by the Experts

Experience Leads to Different Conclusions Depending on Your Finish Goals

Universal Hardwood Floors in DC, says, “We put on four coats of ‘tungoil’ and buff it in.” By ‘tungoil’ they mean Waterlox, “a varnish with tung oil in it,” says Howard Brickman, Brickman Consulting. Another old-timer, Bill Price, www.floormasters.com, says, “I like oil finish. Polyurethane looks the best it will ever look the day it’s applied! Oil looks better every year *if you are willing to touch it up and buff it as needed.*”

What About Maintaining Your Floor’s Finish?

We asked about ‘penetrating hardening oils’ such as Rubio MONOCOAT, WOCA or Carver Oil. Sprigg Lynn from Universal says, “Each has their selling points. Waterlox is a satin sheen that can be made to shine some more with thin coats and extra buffing. If the traffic isn’t real heavy it’s fairly easy to touch up. MONOCOAT, WOCA and Carver are easier for the homeowner to repair scratches. All are filling the grain and putting some finish in the wood, not on top. These are ‘low-’, not ‘no-maintenance’, finishes.”

Bill Price adds, “Waterlox has drying agents that make it harder to buff. If you put it on too heavy it stays soft and retains **a smell for a while**. MONOCOAT interacts only with the cellulose in the wood cells and is easiest to apply and repair. The natural look of MONOCOAT, WOCA or Carver is a matte finish; however you can increase the sheen by using one of their maintenance products such as “High Traffic Protection.”

The Finish of the Future

Lynn summed it up by saying, “MONOCOAT, WOCA or Carver are *the ‘finishes of the future’ with no VOCs. They give a very natural, flat and beautiful looking floor.* They wear the best of the oil finishes we’ve used, however require some regular maintenance. Residential jobs may work out better with Waterlox if the owners don’t want to do any maintenance. However, the other oils are much easier to repair. With any penetrating oil be careful of spontaneous combustion.”



Wild Black Cherry with Curly Heart Pine Inlay, finished with water based poly for a lighter color.

What If You Want Polyurethane?

What about the folks who want polyurethane to avoid doing anything besides cleaning until it's time to call the professionals to ‘screen’ and recoat? Water-based polyurethanes give a clear finish, have low odor and you can recoat them in a couple of hours. Oil-based polyurethanes leave an amber glow, but have a much longer wait time between coats. We’ve had success in achieving a fairly natural look with some newer water-based polyurethane sealer/ finish systems. Call Goodwin or ask your wood floor expert for details.

What Matters Most...

Wood floor finishes are complex chemicals that require someone who applies them regularly to get a good result. Each brand has different application rates, drying times and conditions and different maintenance. This information may help explain the basics and provide some references. What matters most, in general, is your wood floor professional’s experience with the finish you choose. Best wishes for a great looking and long lasting wood floor!

References: National Wood Floor Association, <http://www.woodfloors.org/consumer/whyFinish.aspx>
Wood Floors Online, <http://www.woodfloorsonline.com/products/finishes.html>