

## Splash color on wood

BRIGHT PIGMENTS BRING ENERGY  
AND EXCITEMENT TO FURNITURE

BY SCOTT MCGLOSSON

I've been splashing pigment on hardwood since my earliest days as a furniture maker. The instructor and old-timers at the vo-tech where I took night classes were aghast—I was skewering a sacred cow. But I kept it up, and now it's second nature to me. Color can do so much: It can energize a simple form, it can be edgy and iconoclastic, or it can be playful and add an element of surprise.

I worked my way through college as a painter and finisher on my way to

an English degree.

After a half dozen years working in education, I fell hard in love with woodworking and brought my painting and finishing knowledge to full-time furniture making.

I use a lot of different finishes to get color on my furniture. To achieve an opaque coating, I'll often spray pigmented lacquer. This is essentially like paint—the color is in the finish, not in the wood. I usually mix the colors myself using lacquer-based colorants, or TransTint, a type of dye you can add to clear lacquer. But you can get pigmented lacquers professionally color-matched to just about anything. Lacquers need

to be sprayed in a controlled environment with proper ventilation and good spraying skills, but they level like nothing else and are very durable.

Alternately, especially for white or

black pieces, I'll use dyes or stains to color the wood directly, and then spray a clear or slightly tinted topcoat.

To color some of my turned pieces I like Rubio Monocoat, a modern, oil-and-wax finish from Belgium with no VOCs (volatile organic compounds). It was invented for flooring, but it works well on furniture. The color selections are limited and it's expensive, but it's easy to apply and doesn't require a spray booth.

Ash is the quiet workhorse behind showier species such as





walnut in my painted furniture. Ash is dense, stable, and inexpensive. And with its deep, open grain it is the perfect wood for opaque finishes. Light flickers across its distinctive texture, and even if the finish is thick, you'll always be aware there's wood underneath.

I use ash for the stack-laminated bodies of my turned pieces—stools, side tables, lamps, and vessels. To prepare the turning blank I'll glue up a stack of 8/4 disks of ash with one 4/4 disk of walnut at the top. Once I've turned the basic shape, I texture these pieces with grooves cut with a skew chisel. Random patterns of the open grain intersect with the controlled grooves, and when an opaque finish is applied the appearance almost mimics the glazed surfaces of ceramics.

To apply color to one of my stools or benches, I'll flip the piece upside down on my finishing table and coat the entire underbody with black, blue, white, or red, leaving the top as a single plane of clear-coated walnut or cherry. When I



turn it right side up, I gently ease the edge of the pigment with sandpaper and then spray a clear topcoat on the whole piece.

Some of my forms are riffs on traditional utilitarian furniture, taking influences from Scandinavian and rustic pieces. Adding splashes of color, while framing and enhancing the natural wood, brings my pieces to a modern place. □

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*Scott McGlasson designs and builds furniture in St. Paul, Minn.*

