

# Don't Overlook

Why these disposable spray guns belong in every woodworker's



## TOP FIVE TYPES, IN ORDER

There is an amazing variety of aerosols on the shelves of home centers and hardware stores. To help narrow your choice, here are five types of finish ranked in order of usefulness.

# #1

### DEWAXED SHELLAC

If you buy only a single aerosol finish, pick this one. You can use it throughout the finishing process from sealing bare wood to isolating individual finishing steps such as dyeing or glazing, and finally as a clear topcoat. As with any dewaxed shellac, it is compatible with all other finishes.

# #2

### NITROCELLULOSE LACQUER

This clear topcoat is more durable than shellac and dries faster. Unlike shellac, it is available in matte, satin, and gloss. There are many brands and it is widely available. The strong odor is a drawback.

# #3

### OIL-BASED POLYURETHANE

It's best used as a topcoat over brushed-on coats of polyurethane, combining a smooth topcoat with thick-film durability. It is available in satin, semigloss, and gloss.

# #4

### SPAR URETHANE

Since aerosol spray can only be applied as a thin coat, the three coats recommended on the can will not provide exterior durability. You'll need to apply eight to 10 coats for resistance to the harsh outdoors of any climate.

## Online Extra

For a video demonstration of the right spraying technique, go to [FineWoodworking.com/extras](http://FineWoodworking.com/extras).

# Aerosols

## finishing kit

BY TERI MASASCHI



### STAINS AND TONERS

These aerosol colors are great for touchups and repairs where the color can be blended in. Just don't try to get even coverage over a large surface.

### Get a handle on it

Using an aerosol for any length of time can leave you with a nasty case of "spray finger," a painful digit locked in a cramped curve. The solution is a can handle, which gives the aerosol more of a spray-gun feel. There are various models on the market for \$3 to \$5 and any of them will work on most spray cans.



Is there anyone who hasn't picked up an aerosol for some reason? Also known as rattle cans or spray bombs, they're used for everything from air freshener to knocking out wasps' nests. Yet when I tell woodworkers that I'm a frequent user of aerosols for finishing wood, most of them assume I'm either a bad finisher or somehow I'm cheating.

When finishing small projects such as boxes and picture frames, the canned convenience of aerosols is irresistible. It simply isn't worth getting a brush dirty or filling a spray gun—the cleanup alone will take more time than the finishing. Also, if you aren't set up to spray, aerosols are a cheap way to get a topcoat with that flawless, off-the-gun finish. And last, aerosols are available for almost every finish: solvent-based nitrocellulose or acrylic lacquers, shellac, oil-based polyurethanes, paint, stains, and toners.

### How to get the best from an aerosol

An aerosol can't compete with a spray gun in terms of flexibility, power, or endurance. However, if you select your projects carefully, you can get a flawless finish with an aerosol at a fraction of the cost of a spray gun and in a fraction of the time of a wipe-on finish.

You just need to understand an aerosol's limitations. Whether brushing or spraying, you must apply a strip of finish while the adjacent one is still wet so that the two flow together. But aerosols apply finish fairly slowly; when combined with thin, fast-evaporating finishes, this makes keeping a wet edge almost impossible when you have to do long strokes across a very large surface. If you try, you're very likely to get a striped effect where wet finish was laid down next to finish that had already dried. The top for a night stand is about the limit for fast-drying finishes such as shellac, solvent lacquer, and water-based

TIP

AVOID THE STRIPED EFFECT



### PROBLEM

Because aerosols lay down a narrow band of finish, it is more difficult to overlap adjacent strokes, but failure to do so leaves a striped effect on the surface.



### SOLUTION

Holding the can at around 45° to the surface creates a wider spray fan on the workpiece. This helps overlap strokes to achieve an even coating, but you need to move the aerosol more slowly.

finishes. You could probably finish a small coffee table if you use an oil-based polyurethane.

Some finishers recommend spraying across the grain and then immediately with the grain, a method known as cross-hatching, as a way of ensuring even coverage. I've found that unless you are working on a tiny surface, this technique will leave a checkerboard pattern when the finish dries. Instead, spray with the grain but overlap each stroke by 25% to let the wet edges blend together. Use back lighting to help you see this overlap clearly. You want to keep the can's nozzle an even 6 in. to 8 in. from the workpiece. Don't swing the can in an arc by pivoting from your shoulder or wrist; instead, move the can parallel to the



## 4 great uses for spray cans

### SMALL PROJECTS



**Seal with shellac.** It is a good idea to seal bare wood with a coat of dewaxed shellac. To avoid having to touch the piece or walk around it, place it on painter's pyramids that rest on a lazy Susan.

**Sand the sealer.** The first coat almost always causes some raised grain, so lightly scuff-sand it with some P320-grit sandpaper and then remove the dust.



**A durable topcoat.** For lightly handled objects, three or four coats of solvent lacquer give plenty of protection and the finish can be done in a day. Spray the inside of the box first and the outside last. In this way, any overspray is on the less-visible surfaces.

### INTRICATE OBJECTS



**Don't fear the fretwork.** Finishing this pierced corbel with a cloth or an artist's brush would be tedious. But an aerosol gives a flawless finish in no time at all.



**Highlight carved surfaces.** Using a brush to finish carved surfaces can leave pools of finish in recesses. Aerosols give an even finish.

workpiece, keeping your wrist stiff. I can't give you an exact speed to spray at because different brands spray different volumes. Instead, go slow enough to just get an even, wet, shiny surface but fast enough to avoid puddles or runs.

If you don't have any kind of spray booth, it is a good idea to have a fan adjacent to you set on low to push overspray away from the project. It is also a good idea to cover any surface within about 8 ft. of the workpiece to protect it from overspray.

### Top off a table or finish off a box

A good example where selective use of an aerosol can be really helpful is a bedside table. While a low-build, wipe-on finish is fine for most of the piece, the top should have a more durable coating. On this area, brush on three coats of a durable film finish such as lacquer or polyurethane, sand away any brush marks or dust nibs, and then use an aerosol to add three or four flawless coats to the tabletop. If you can't detach the tabletop, mask off the rest of the table. Be sure to use the same product line for brushing and spraying, such as Deft brushing lacquer and then Deft aerosol lacquer, or the two versions of Minwax's oil-based polyurethane.

If an aerosol coat ends up a mess, sand it with P320-grit sandpaper, remove all the dust, and then try again.

For many small projects or components, an aerosol finish is ideal. A small box, for example, doesn't need much finish so cost isn't a factor, and keeping a wet edge is no problem. Handling such a piece while brushing or wiping a finish is awkward, but with an aerosol you simply place the box on a nail board or painter's pyramids and walk around the piece as you spray. Better still, use



## SEALING IN COLOR

**Don't ruin your dye job.** Wiping on a sealer coat of shellac can reactivate and remove some of the dye you are trying to protect.



**Perfectly protected.** You can spray a sealer coat of shellac over even an alcohol-soluble dye and not cause any blotching.



a lazy Susan. These fast-drying finishes aren't a magnet for dust and debris, and you can apply two or three coats in a day. Just don't try to apply one fat coat, or all you'll get are drips and runs.

### Other handy uses

Another use for aerosols is to seal the surface during a multi-step finishing process. Sprayed shellac seals or "sets" the color without smearing it. Later, if the surface has been glazed, a spray coat of shellac or lacquer seals the color work before topcoating.

To clean up, simply invert the can and squeeze the trigger for a couple of seconds to clear finish from the nozzle. There's no brush or spray gun to clean laboriously, and no oily cloths to worry about. □

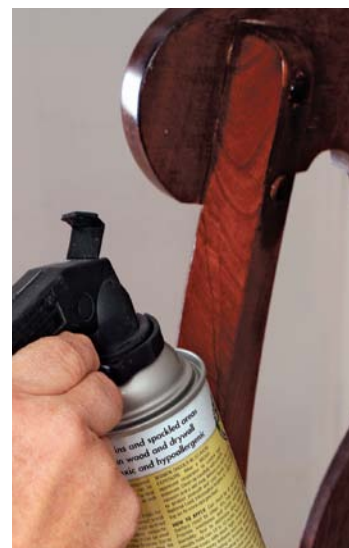
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## A refillable aerosol

An alternative to aerosols is a system made by Preval, which gives you roughly four times the spraying capacity as a regular aerosol can for about the same price. Pour any thinned material into the 4-oz. glass jar, screw it to a replaceable power unit, and then start spraying.



## INVISIBLE REPAIRS



**Apply the ground color, then seal it in.** Wipe on a dye that closely matches the predominant color of the undamaged areas (left). Spray on a coat of shellac to isolate the base color (right).



**Fine-tune the tone, and add a topcoat.** Use an aerosol toner to blend the color of the repair into the rest of the piece (left). Spray on a clear topcoat to complete the repair (right). Aerosol clear finishes come in different sheens. Apply the color and the clear coat in light bursts while holding the can farther from the surface to blend in the repair.

The power unit can spray at least 16 oz. before it needs to be replaced. The reusable jar can also be capped and the material stored for another time. The spray isn't as fine as a typical aerosol, but it's good for sealer coats. You can also spray a greater range of finishes such as custom-tinted clear finishes or darker grades of shellac.