

# Creating an Antique Painted Finish

*Two days and a dozen steps to a centuries-old look*

by Kirt Kirkpatrick



*No, it wasn't made by the conquistadors. Though it looks like it's been in a Spanish Colonial mission for several hundred years, this hall table is really less than a year old.*

I started experimenting with painted finishes that look old because I live in a very old region of the country. The Native American and Spanish Colonial cultures are still very much a part of the look here in New Mexico.

In collaboration with my friend Dwayne Stewart, who's a painter and professional finisher in Kansas City, Mo., I've developed a method that makes even new furniture look like it's been around for a long time.

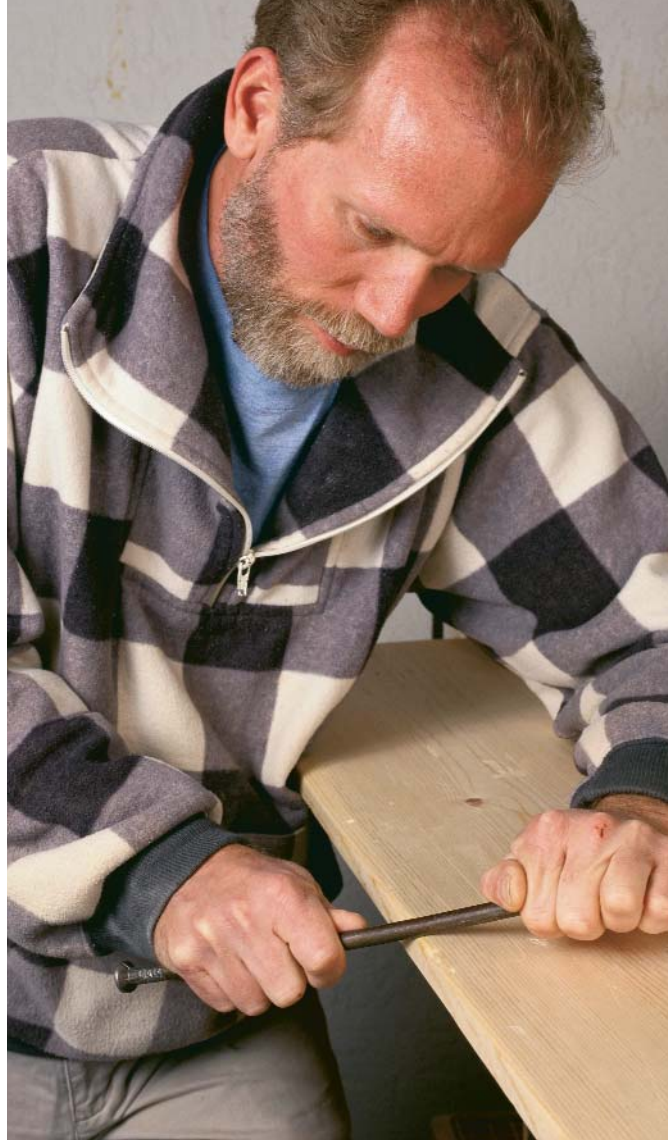
### Selecting and preparing the wood

I use old wood whenever I can, but new wood can be stained dark to make it look older.

Tool marks make a big difference, too. I eliminate machine marks with hand tools, and I gouge the wood intentionally. A 17th-century Spanish craftsman here in the desert Southwest might have had an adze, a drawknife, maybe a handplane (but likely not) and not much more. And he certainly didn't have any fancy sharpening stones. So the surfaces you see on most old furniture around here is kind of rough. I achieve a similar effect by planing against the grain in places (especially near knots), causing tearout, skewing the blade on my plane so it gouges the surface, keeping the blade intentionally dull and burnishing sharp edges. This may run counter to everything you've learned, but the results are convincing (see the photo at left).

Once I'm happy with the surface, finishing begins. Because I use latex paint and a quick-drying clear coat, I can complete the process in less than two days (see "An antique finish in 12 steps" for a thorough description of the process). Not bad for a finish that looks like it's seen some history. □

*Kirt Kirkpatrick lives in Albuquerque, N.M. He carves and builds furniture and doors.*



## AN ANTIQUE FINISH IN 12 STEPS

**1. Burnish the edges.** Furniture doesn't age, or wear, evenly. Sharp corners, edges and other crisp details soften first. The author uses the shank of a large nail to round over the sharp edges on a tabletop.



**2. For a light wood like pine, use a dark stain.** Because wood changes color as it ages, the author uses a pigmented oil stain (Minwax Early American) to darken this tabletop made of ponderosa pine. But any kind of stain will do. Then he lets the stain dry according to the manufacturer's instructions.

**3. Seal in the color with a clear coat.** The author brushes on two coats of lacquer, but other clear finishes will work as well. Just be sure to use something with a low sheen.



**4. Scuff-sand the clear coat.** A quick once-over with 220-grit dulls the sheen and gives the clear coat enough tooth to hold a coat of paint.







**5. Wax prevents paint from adhering**, which lets the stained wood show through. Rub a bar of paraffin lightly over the edge and a bit on the top. Let the bar skip along, so the pattern will be uneven. Wax the edge more heavily, but still intermittently.



**6. Apply a first coat of flat latex paint.** Coverage doesn't have to be perfectly even, and it's probably better that way. Choose a color that contrasts well with the topcoat. Give it an hour or two (or whatever it says on the can) to dry.



**7. Brush on a coat of hide glue.** The author uses pre-mixed liquid hide glue, but hot hide glue also works. If the pre-mixed glue appears too thick to brush out, thin it slightly with some warm water. Mix well before applying it. A thicker coat will give you fewer, bigger cracks in the next layer of paint; a thinner coat will give you smaller cracks but more of them. Don't worry about laying down an even coat (variations in the size of the cracks look more realistic), but apply the glue in only one direction. If you're haphazard with your strokes, the crackle pattern won't look right. This is the only step you really have to be finicky about. Give the glue half an hour or so to dry.





**8. Apply a second coat of flat latex.** Make sure that the paint is flat; semigloss or gloss paint won't crackle. Keep a wet edge, move quickly and don't go over your previous strokes, or you'll fill in the cracks. This second coat starts to crackle almost immediately. Let it dry thoroughly, preferably overnight.



**9. & 10. Scrape and then sand the top and edges.** When the second coat of paint is dry, use a paint scraper to remove paint sitting on top of the wax. The scraper also will dislodge loose chunks of paint to reveal the first layer below. Mist the surface with water, and then rub with your fingers to create an even more authentic look. Sand lightly to soften sharp edges.



**11. Apply a coat of medium- or dark-tinted liquid wax.** The author uses Watco dark-satin finishing wax. This wax seeps into all the cracks and recesses and gives the whole piece a darker, almost dirty look—instant patina. Temperature affects drying time. The author usually waits about 10 to 15 minutes.

**12. Remove most of the tinted wax with a clean rag.** If the whole piece or just some areas are too dark, you can remove some of the color. Apply a clear coat of paste wax and rub vigorously. The solvent in the wax lifts the excess color from the surface. The paste wax protects the surface, too.

