



An antique painted finish

Duplicating a 200-hundred-year-old painted finish is a goal for many woodworkers, but the obstacles can seem overwhelming.

Many antiques have several coats of paint, often of different colors, because period furniture was updated to follow the fashion of the times: A typical Windsor chair of the 1790s generally would have been painted green; in the Federal period it may have been repainted red or white; while from Victorian times onward, black

was the color of choice. Then there is the problem of matching 18th-century lead paints, with their imperfect tones and subtle color differences. Finally, the paint must have a weathered and oxidized appearance with marks from generations of use and abuse.

The dilemma is how to create all of this history via a reasonably simple procedure. The process I follow can transform a project in a few hours from raw wood to an antique ready for use.

Sand the wood, then dye it

A painted finish needs far less surface preparation than a clear finish. First, make sure all of the excess glue has been removed, then lightly sand the surface with 150-grit paper.

Apply a brown, water-based aniline dye to all surfaces, including the underside of the seat. Adjust the strength of the dye to match your color preference. The maple legs and stretchers, the pine seat, and the oak spindles absorb the dye to different degrees, highlighting the diversity of the woods used in a Windsor chair. However, because most of the surfaces will be painted, the mismatch will not be noticeable.

Alternate layers of wax and milk paint

Next, consider where the piece will receive the most wear. A table has heavier wear on the edges of the top. A stool's stretchers are a natural resting place for shoes, while a chair's seat and crest rail show the most wear. Sit in the chair, and see what your body does. Look at where your shoulders hit and your feet end up. These are the main places where layers of paint are worn away. To achieve a worn look, generously apply paste wax to these areas.

Prepare all of your milk-paint colors ahead of time. Combine each dry powder and water in a one-to-one mix in a large-mouth lidded container. Shake the container for about a minute, leaving the paint frothy and full of air. Let the paint stand for at least 20

AGE THE SURFACE BEFORE PAINTING



Color the wood. Brush the whole chair, including the underside of the seat, with a brown, water-based dye.



Wax the wear areas. Rub paste wax onto those areas of the chair that get rubbed the most during normal use.

Apply the first coat of milk paint. Paint the legs and then the back green, leaving the seat until last. Don't worry about perfect coverage.



Rub off the loose paint. Use a green abrasive pad to smooth the whole chair and remove loose paint from areas that were waxed (above). Rewax the same areas as before, but allow the wax to cover a slightly larger area so that some of the green paint will be revealed under the second coat of paint.



APPLY ADDITIONAL LAYERS OF PAINT



Apply and flake the second coat. The second coat of paint, red, flakes away from waxed areas to reveal the green.



Secret to making an ancient-looking cracked finish. Apply hide glue or Antique Crackle to small areas only. Then apply wax and the last coat of paint.



FIRE OXIDIZES THE LAST COAT OF PAINT



Set fire to your finish. Prepare a 1-lb. cut of shellac (above). Brush it on and have a friend immediately set it on fire (top right). The alcohol will burn off in a few seconds and leave the paint oxidized and aged-looking. Then rub a mixture of paste wax and roofing cement over the whole chair (bottom right) to complete the aging process.



minutes so that the air can escape, then gently stir in more water until the mixture has the viscosity of a warm milk shake.

Many antiques were painted only where the eye can see, so leave the underside of the seat unpainted. Because some of the paint will flake off and because you will apply additional coats, don't worry about getting perfect coverage. The milk paint will not adhere to the wax, leaving the stained wood exposed through the first coat of paint.

First apply Lexington green; when dry, wipe down the piece with a green abrasive pad to smooth the surface and to remove loose paint. Rewax the same areas as before, and extend the wax farther to reach the first coat of paint as well as the stain. The second coat, barn red, is applied and then rubbed with a green abrasive pad in the same way as the first coat.

The third and final coat of wax goes on now. But if you want a crackle finish, apply either hide glue or a glue-based product called Antique Crackle. Apply the glue in feathered brush strokes, bearing in mind that the more glue that's applied, the greater the amount of crackle you'll end up with. Concentrate on small areas such as the base of the spindles, parts of the crest rail, and the edges of the seat.

When the glue has dried, wipe on more wax to cover the stained wood and portions of both previous layers of paint.

Two more steps in the aging process

Apply the last coat of paint, black. After it has dried, firmly scrub the surface with a green abrasive pad to remove the loose paint.

Matching the old, oxidized paint found on antiques can be a challenge, but I use a method that is quick and effective. Create a roughly 1-lb. cut of shellac (if using Zinnser's Bulls Eye brand, combine it with denatured alcohol in a 1:2 ratio). Brush the shellac onto a small area of the chair and light it on fire. The alcohol will burn off within seconds, leaving the paint with a dull, oxidized appearance with slight texture. Gradually brush and burn the entire piece. To minimize risk, the following precautions should be taken: Always work outside; because the alcohol evaporates fast, have an assistant ignite the liquid using a lighter; keep a fire extinguisher handy; and make sure the flames are out before applying

shellac to another part of the chair.

When the whole piece has been treated, rub the surface with a green abrasive pad and remove the dust. Combine some paste wax and 10% roofing cement (not roofing tar, which won't dry), and wipe the mixture over the whole chair, including the unpainted parts. The subtle sheen of the wax evens out the complexities of the layers and textures of the finish. Adding the roofing cement will imitate 100 years of dirt and grime. □

SOURCES OF SUPPLY

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www.woodworker.com;
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