

Texture wood to highlight the grain

MODERN TOOLS MAKE IT EASY
TO MIMIC AN ANCIENT JAPANESE FINISH

BY GEOFF GUZYNSKI

I've always liked the textured look of weathered cypress. It reminds me of old playground equipment where the wood's texture has been polished by thousands of small hands. It turns out that traditional Japanese craftsmen loved this look too. They called it jin-di-sugi and created it by burying the wood in the ground and allowing it to decay for several years. I wasn't about to invest that much time, but I was determined to incorporate the look in my furniture. After some experimenting, I came up with a fast and simple technique using an angle grinder fitted with a wire brush.

The process works best on boards with a dramatic difference in density between the early and latewood growth rings. You should be able to run your thumbnail across the grain and leave marks in the earlywood but not in the latewood. I've seen pine, cedar, and fir boards that pass this test, but I've had the best results with cypress. Be sure to test each board individually, however.



The rough and the smooth. The hard, smooth, light-colored beech on Guzynski's credenza complements the soft, dark, cypress panels textured to resemble a classic Japanese finish.



Light or dark? Guzynski's texturing method looks great with a clear finish, but if you really want the pattern to pop, try an ebonized treatment (see p. 86).

Texture the wood in three steps

Dimension the wood in the normal way. It's not necessary to start with a board that's thicker than the intended final thickness, because only the softer early wood is removed. The dense latewood remains unchanged.

Begin removing softwood, keeping the brush's rotation in line with the grain and moving the grinder parallel with the grain. For a less aggressive cut, and to avoid snagging the panel edges, let the brush pull the grinder along the surface.

If you're going to color the wood, the stain mostly penetrates the soft early wood, so you need to adapt your grinding technique to the grain pattern. In areas where the grain is more flatsawn, use a very light touch with the brush or you will get rid of all or almost all of the early wood, and the surface won't absorb stain later. A panel with a flatsawn area adjacent to a more quartersawn section would then end up with uneven color. After the grinder, hand-brush the surface with a sparse, stiff-bristled wire brush. The final step is to smooth the panel with a nylon flap brush chucked in a drill.

You can stop here and apply the clear finish of your choice. Be careful to keep any film finish thin because a thick finish that fills the grooves looks really bad.

Dye and stain highlight the texture

Using separate dye and pigment stains allows me to manipulate the color balance between the latewood and early wood. I start with a very light dye stain in an acetone and water base. The acetone gives the dye a bit more bite on the densest parts of the latewood. I combine brown, red, and yellow dye concentrates from Sherwin-Williams until the mix is a little

Reveal the grain



You need a 4-in.-dia. crimped wire wheel (Milwaukee, part No. 48-52-5070; amazon.com) and a nylon flap brush (Weiler Vortec, model 36447; drillspot.com).

brighter than if it was the only color being used. If you are using TransTints, Homestead No. 6006 dark mission brown, No. 6010 red mahogany, and sometimes No. 6020 lemon yellow give good results, too.

Once the dye has dried, flood the panel with a black pigment stain, like Minwax ebony diluted with five parts of mineral spirits. Wipe off the excess stain almost immediately. The deep grooves really hold onto the pigment.

Since I spray-finish my work, I don't topcoat the panel before assembling it into the frame. If you are applying finish with a brush, I would definitely recommend a seal coat of shellac before brushing on a topcoat, because there is a lot of color you could pick up and drag to the frame. □

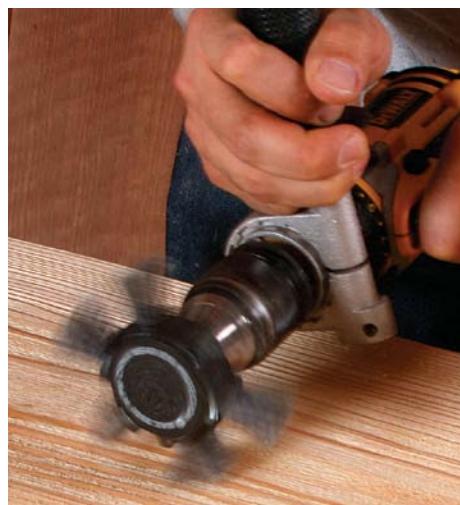
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Go lightly. Hold the angle grinder so that the wire wheel is parallel to the grain and just touching the surface. The goal is to remove the soft, early wood while leaving the harder, later wood intact.



Brush hard. Pull a stiff wire brush across the surface to define the grooves in the early wood. Use heavy pressure.



Remove the fuzz. A nylon brush attached to a drill removes loose wood fibers and leaves the surface ready for finishing.

Kick up the contrast with color



First dye the surface. Guzynski applies a dye with a slightly brighter color than the intended final look.



Then add a pigment stain. A diluted black pigment stain mutes the dye and also darkens the denser late wood.



A thin coat, please. The textured surface looks best under a minimal clear finish.