

Bleach mahogany for a unique look

BY SEAN CLARKE

Rich red tones are the colors most associated with mahogany, but you can also achieve a light golden-amber color by bleaching and then dyeing the wood. Honduras, Philippine, and African (khaya) mahogany all respond well to bleaching, but Cuban mahogany will darken if bleached and is therefore not a good choice (in any case, you are unlikely to want to bleach this rare and pricey wood).

While bleaching flatsawn boards produces a unique-looking wood, bleaching quartersawn boards with ribbon-stripe figure is a great way to imitate satinwood. Cut into thin, narrow strips, it can be used as a border or inlay and is a great deal cheaper and more easily available than genuine satinwood. □

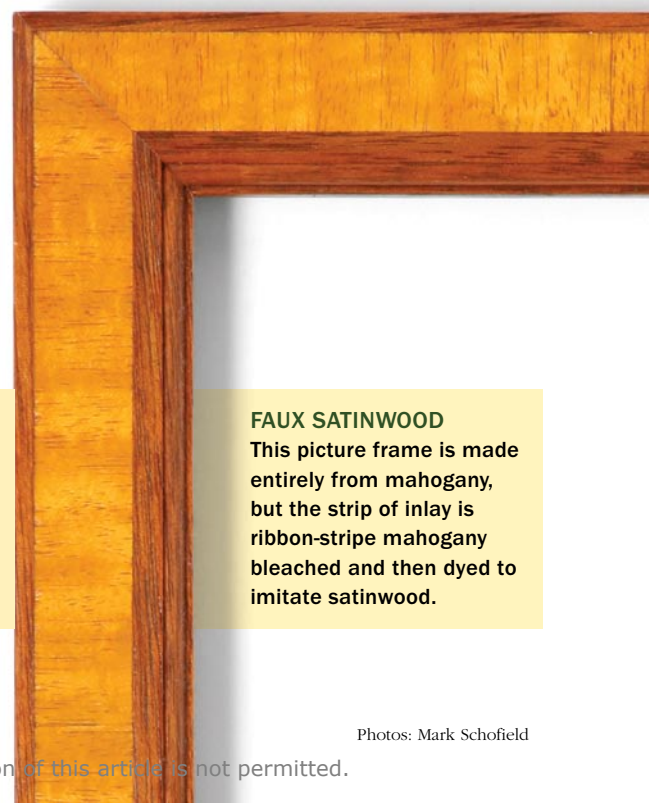


BLEACHED AND DYED MAHOGANY

NATURAL MAHOGANY



EYE-CATCHING CONTRAST
You can make an entire project from bleached mahogany or use it for part of a piece of furniture. The bleached wood stands out beautifully against ebonized wood.



FAUX SATINWOOD
This picture frame is made entirely from mahogany, but the strip of inlay is ribbon-stripe mahogany bleached and then dyed to imitate satinwood.

Photos: Mark Schofield

RAISE THE GRAIN

Bleach will raise the grain. Excessive sanding after bleaching may sand through to unbleached wood and result in uneven color. To avoid this, pre-raise the grain. After sanding the surface up to P220 grit, wipe the entire surface with lukewarm water (shown) and allow it to air dry. Re-sand the surface lightly with the P220-grit paper.



1

EVALUATE THE COLOR

With a white cotton cloth, wet the surface with lukewarm water to evaluate the color and neutralize any active bleach. If you like the color, let the surface dry, lightly sand with P220-grit paper, and move to finishing. However, one coat of bleach usually leaves areas with a pinkish tone. If so, re-bleach the whole piece, wait eight hours, and re-test the color.



3

USE THE RIGHT BLEACH

Use a two-part bleach designed for wood, such as Klean-Strip (www.woodworker.com). Mix equal parts A and B in a plastic container. Wearing gloves, apply the bleach with a brush or a clean white cloth. The brush should have synthetic bristles, which will not react with the bleach. Apply it evenly, soaking the surface. Then remove any excess with a white cotton cloth and let it dry for eight hours.



2

NEUTRALIZE IT

While water will neutralize a single coat of bleach, for two or more coats you need to apply diluted white vinegar (two parts water, one part vinegar). This prevents blistering in the topcoat. Apply the vinegar solution with the same brush used for the bleach and wipe off any excess. Let the piece dry for at least eight hours and then lightly sand again with P220-grit paper.



4



5

WARM UP THE WOOD

You could finish the mahogany in its bone-white state, but Clarke prefers to warm it up slightly with a water-based golden amber dye (Lockwood #144; www.wdlockwood.com). Mix 1 teaspoon of dye with 8 oz. hot water, and apply evenly with a cloth or brush. Let it cool, wipe off any excess with a clean cotton cloth, and allow the piece to dry overnight.



6

SEAL THE SURFACE

Brush on a 1- to 2-lb. cut of super blond shellac, such as SealCoat, or if you'd prefer a deeper amber tone, use button or garnet shellac. Once the shellac has dried for two to four hours, lightly sand with P320-grit paper and apply a topcoat of your choice.