

HAND RUBBED VARNISH FINISH

SANDING

Sand to remove any scratches, using 150 or 180 paper. I used 220 grit on the Pier Table.

FILLING THE GRAIN

I used the Behlen paste wood filler for woods such as oak or walnut. In the case of walnut, tint the filler with Vandyke brown oil color or mix with fine walnut dust. The pores should be darker than the base wood. I suggest that you blow the sanding dust from the pores using an air hose. The filler is then brushed on with the grain, allowed to dry to a dull appearance (usually 5-10 minutes) and then worked across grain using a piece of burlap or a rubber squeegee. Finally, lightly rub with the grain using a soft cloth. Allow to dry at least 24 hours.

SEALING

Use two wash coats of shellac (50% alcohol). Orange shellac for dark finishes and white shellac for light finishes.

APPLYING THE VARNISH

I generally use an inexpensive 3" natural bristle brush to apply five coats of a varnish that hardens sufficiently to rub. As late as the 80's, it was not too difficult to obtain cabinet rubbing varnish from local hardware stores made by Sherwin Williams. Since this has largely disappeared, I have used Behlen Rockhard tabletop varnish and more recently, McCloskey's Heirloom, high gloss varnish. I generally allow the varnish to dry three to five days before rubbing.

RUBBING WITH WET/DRY PAPER

I generally use 400 wet/dry paper over a rubber block to obtain a flat surface. Keep the surface wet with a sponge. If the surface is allowed to dry out, it will cause scratches. Frequently rub your hand across the surface to act as a squeegee to ensure you don't rub through. Rubbing requires good lighting to permit bouncing light off the surface for constant examination.

RUBBING WITH FF PUMICE

Following the 400 paper I use FF pumice to get out any shiny low spots that can't be rubbed with the flat rubber block. Pumice is also used on curved surfaces and in both cases is rubbed with burlap. Pumice is powdered volcanic glass. Grades vary from the coarse 1F to the fine 4F. I use the medium 2F. For carvings, I use a brush with bristles shortened to scrub the item with pumice. When the entire surface has a dull, satin appearance it is ready to go to the next step.

RUBBING WITH ROTTENSTONE

Rottenstone is powdered, decomposed limestone. It doesn't cut, but is used to turn the dull surface into a highly polished appearance. I use burlap to rub rottenstone the same as with pumice. This will bring the finish to a high gloss sheen.

Gene Earnest 2005