

# Simple Touch-up for all of Your Wood



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For about \$80 you can buy the right stuff for minor dent, dings, scratches, etc. Most of it's available at the hardware store or by mail order direct to your home. Did you know that most scratch-hide polishes permanently disfigure wood? Find out why!

Many people have asked me what, other than complete stripping and refinishing, is the most effective way to improve the look of their "tired furniture. TOUCH-UP!!! Even brand new furniture will benefit from touch-up IF it is done correctly. You see, even your new furniture has been damaged slightly in delivery and may have factory defects that detract from the wood's natural beauty. So, if it's 1 week old or 10 years old you can improve it using simple touch-up techniques. Here's the order in which most damage occurs over time, what causes it, a list of materials to fix things, and most important HOW YOU CAN FIX THEM! **Just remember, these techniques are for the do-it-yourselfer and don't even come close to skill sets that most touch-up professionals will possess.**

## New Furniture

### What happened?

I worked for a new furniture retailer at one time. People asked what I did. I said I touched-up new furniture. They said, "Why?, isn't it new?" I said, "Yes, but it has been damaged when it was shipped from the manufacturer and needs touch-up and it will be damaged again when the delivery people are through mishandling it!" It may also have defects that are just plain unacceptable to most customers. This company did about 20 million in retail sales per year and of all the thousands of pieces of furniture I saw less than 20% came in from the manufacturer without some damage or defect. So what are the most common things to look for in new damage from the factory? Most furniture arrives to the retailer in boxes. These boxes are cut away from the pieces with razor sharp box knives. You will see pencil thin lines cut down to the bare wood especially around the bottom of pieces, yes, this even includes most upholstered goods. After surviving the unpacking, the next thing that is usually seen is color worn through edges. If the pieces were tightly wrapped or packed the edge finish and color are worn off usually to bare wood in about a 1/16 inch line across some wooden panels and tops. Factory polishing of tops also can cause this effect. Packing marks are next. These can be simple scuffs in the finish to "wet pack" marks where an entire top surface has been packed while the finish was drying. They will appear as a patterning or texturing of the finish. They are often in the finish only and don't affect the stain. Factory defects can be as simple as off-color fillers to something more complex like sapping of knots in a more primitive wood design. If you are lucky or are dealing with a local reputable retailer these problems don't exist on your new furniture. The reason I include this section though is because a small portion of my customers are always bragging about how much money they are saving these days having furniture "direct shipped" to their homes. You know, eliminating the middleman. Well, it makes my touch-up business boom! What can you do with your new furniture?

First, if you did have it shipped directly to you or have picked it up in boxes carefully unpack each item and inspect it. Try to avoid using sharp knives and follow any unpacking directions on the boxes. If a factory direct company is delivering the items do not let the delivery people out of the door without an item by item inspection and subsequent notation on an invoice about the damaged item.

Hopefully you will be able to send back any pieces that you do not like, or the company will give you a dollar credit for accepting the damage “as is” or will agree to engage a touch-up professional like myself to contract the work for you. If you do accept the “as is” deal for credit or want to try a few things before a pro shows up keep on reading.

### **Furniture that is 2 to 10 years old-**

#### **Doesn't it need refinishing???**

So you've owned your furniture for a while. If you've taken good care of it, dusted it now and then, wiped up most spills immediately, didn't let the dog eat a chunk out of it, and kept your daughter from doing her fingernails on it every week your furniture probably doesn't need refinishing. At this age what you might be seeing is a general dulling or clouding of the finish especially if you are a habitual furniture polisher. Over polishing and waxing can indeed cause these problems. Too much polishing also causes the edge wearing that you saw in new furniture. You might now be seeing also wear areas on the backs of chairs where you grab them everyday. This is caused by the oils and soap residues on your hands plus the repetitive friction. The coating is wearing away a little bit everyday.

Did you leave a ice cold glass of water or a hot cup of tea too long on your table or dresser one time? You are now looking at a white ring in the area. This is a blush of moisture in the coating making the powdered soaps which are present in most furniture finishes show up.

How about dents, dings, gouges, and scratches? I am sure that you have more than a few of these by now! Why don't we just strip and refinish away all of this damage? Consumers assume that finishing wood consists of a stain coat and finish coats but it's much more complex than that. Let me show you something rather startling about furniture that has been made even as far back as the 1920's. This is a typical factory finish schedule for a medium brown “pecan” finish on a moderately priced dining table.

- Sizing Conditioner- 1 coat to prepare wood for sanding
- Bare wood sanding- machine sand with various grits
- Sanding Sealer- 1 washcoat to even stain application
- Bare wood stain- 1 coat of alcohol based stain “equalizer”
- Sanding Sealer- 1 washcoat to seal in alcohol stain
- Bare wood stain- 1 coat of oil based stain
- Sanding Sealer- 2 full coats
- Sealer Sanding- Sand and level back off half of sealer
- Scuff highlighting- Scuffing with steel wool or sandpaper
- Stain glazing- Glaze of harmonizing color applied to scuffs
- Sanding Sealer- 1 coat to seal in glaze
- Finish Topcoats- Application of 2 to 3 topcoats
- Final Sanding- Leveling with 600 to 800 grit paper
- Compounding and Polishing- Air machine polishing

**Seem a little more complex** than a coat of stain and finish? That's why your local hardware or paint store can't just match that stain for you. This is why we should touch-up this furniture. Our touch-up will leave the original coating and effects intact and undisturbed. Our touch-up work will keep the human eye from being drawn to the missing color and irregular defects that now stand out. Even after you touch-up the wood you can still make the decision to refinish knowing that you have spent little money or time attempting to save that original coating. Let's move on to older furniture.

## **Furniture over 10 years old**

The realm of professional touch-up and restoration.

If your furniture is over 10 years old the coating is going to be much harder to touch-up with just consumer products. Why??? You will not have the professional experience it takes to know coatings can be touched-up or are beyond simple cleaning and repair.

If you are looking at a piece of furniture that you care about consider having 2 to 3 local professionals come in and give you quotes on refinishing (this is usually stripping and refinishing in the customer's choice of stain & coatings), refurbishing (this is cleaning, re-sealing, coloring, and adding more topcoat), or restoring (this is strip to bare wood and replicate all the original finish colors and steps as close as possible.) A real pro will offer these options and explain the difference between them. If they can't move on to the next company in your search. Next ask for 2 to 3 current (about 1 to 3 months) references from each and go look at their work. Ask the customer if they thought the company did a good job and use your own two eyes to inspect their work. You could also visit their shop but some work out of their homes and there may not be much to see! You'll figure it out and remember if you were shopping for a brain surgeon you surely wouldn't settle for the cheapest would you??? Wood restoration can be very complex and the cheap guy may only stain and finish like you could do yourself. Remember all those steps we listed?



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## **Our Shopping List of Touch-up Materials**

You need most of this stuff to do your touch-up but you can shop around for better pricing and better color selection on many of these items. I'll also give you a list of specialty suppliers at the end of this publication.

**Wax Sticks, Putty Sticks-** Available in a variety of colors from most hardware and paint centers just about anywhere. Minwax makes a great assortment of colors. Buy 2 or 3 colors nearest to the color of your wood.

**Artist Chalk-** You've seen people doing sketches with this stuff. Again get a few colors nearest the color of your wood at an art supply shop.

**Artists Brushes-** While you are at the art supply store pick up some sable artist brushes in sizes from 0000 up to a number 1 or so.

**Quality Touch-up Markers-** They may look like Magic Markers but when used correctly can do a great job of hiding many glaring defects. Minwax now sells an excellent line of consumer grade touch-up markers again available wherever Minwax stains and finishes are sold. Buy a few colors similar to your woodcolor.

**Spray Can Clear Shellac-** Good old shellac. Been around for centuries and seals off minor damage. Easy to use for the consumer. Again pick this up at the paint supply store or hardware store.

**Naphtha, Denatured Alcohol, Lacquer Thinner-** This may also be referred to as VMP Naphtha (Varnish Makers and Painter's). It's the same stuff. Just buy a quart of each of these items. We'll talk about their use later. The paint supply store or home center has them. Read all label warnings carefully and use proper ventilation in the work area.

**China bowl marker-** They look like pencils and are available in many colors at most office supply stores. Get an assortment of colors.

**Deft Spray Stains and Deft Clear Wood Spray Finish-** You may have to call around the home centers, paint centers, or even hardware stores to find a Deft dealer but it will be worth it. You see most factory pieces are finished with some type of lacquer. These Deft Spray Stain colors will melt in to the original finishes to add color to an area. The Deft Clear Wood Finish will additionally repair and seal the missing finish in these areas. Again get an assortment of stain colors that are close to the woods you will be working on. Just buy 1 can of the Deft Clear Wood Spray Finish for now. Read all label warnings carefully and use proper ventilation in the work area.

**3M Brand Line of Imperial Rubbing Compounds-** Your local automotive autobody supply shop will carry this line of rubbing compounds. Just buy the smallest bottles they carry in a medium and fine compound. Some of the auto parts stores are also carrying these products as well.

**Miscellaneous Stuff-** You can get this at home centers, hardware stores, and even large grocery stores. Buy a bag of 0000 steel wool, buy 2 9 inch by 11 inch sheets each of gray or black silicon carbide sandpaper in the following grits- 400 and 600. That will give you 2 sheets of each grit. Buy some cheap non-stick cooking spray and while your at a grocery store also pick up some cotton Q-tips and some new cloth baby diapers. Take a 4 inch by about 4 inch piece of scrap window glass to a local glass shop or hardware and have them polish the sharp edges so the glass can be safely handled. This is going to be our "artist's palette." How about some craft sticks (popscicle sticks) while you are at an art supply store?

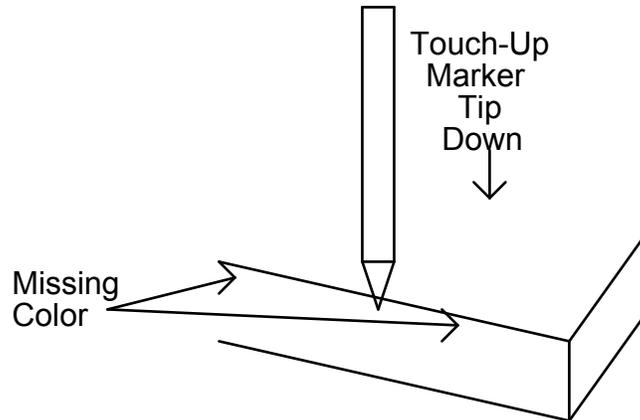
Well, that's enough supplies to take care of 90% of the touch-up I feel you can handle at home. If you are having any trouble finding a few of these items in your area just go to my ending list of specialty suppliers now and come back to the our Touch-up Techniques Section. Oh, by the way did you notice that I did not tell you to buy any type of "scratch hide" liquid polish??? Most of those products contain permanent dyes (some even use iodine) that get down into a bare wood scratch, everything looks great until you refinish the piece. After stripping all those scratches show up again in their new permanently dyed color! What a mess! The techniques that I am going to illustrate do not do this and can be removed by any future restoration. Let's get started.

# Touch-Up Techniques



New or old, worn edges make you think a piece is aging. This is even done on purpose to fake “new” antiques and reproductions. An easy way to correct worn edges is with quality touch-up markers. Pick a color that is close to your woods color.

If you error try to make the color a little on the light side at first as you can always mark back over with another darker color. If you are going to do the top front edge of a table hold the marker like this...



The marker must be held up like this as you slide it along the edge. If you don't the color and finish materials inside cannot flow and feed down to the tip!

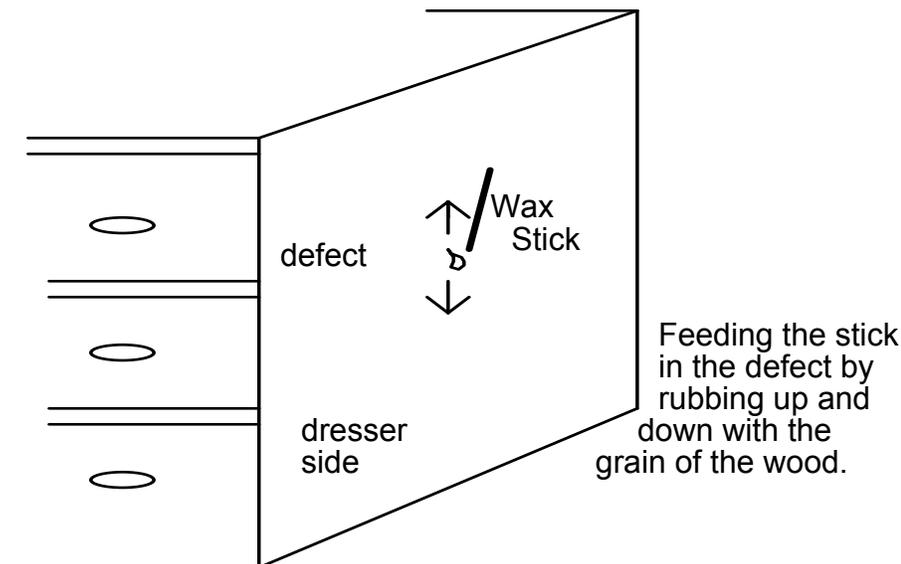
If the piece is older or a larger band of wear is appearing at an edge consider “sealing” the wood first. Why? If a great deal of raw wood is exposed it is going to wick up too much color quickly and make the edge too dark. Just pick up your can of spray shellac, shake the can for about 30 seconds and spray a little into the can's cap. Use one of those sable artists brushes in a size no larger than the widest area of exposed wood and dip it into the liquid shellac. Brush on 1 light coat along the edge and let it dry about 45 minutes. Now try your marker again. You will find that the color does not darken instantly and you now can control how much color is going on the edge. Now let's take this one step further, saying you see dents and gouges along this edge also. Here is where wax or putty sticks are helpful. Before you seal with the shellac try running a putty stick along the edge in much the same way you use your marker (again pick the closest color erring on the side of too light) but put pressure on the wax so it is pushed into the defects. Don't worry if you get a little too much in the defects. You can level the wax by rubbing with the paper backed side of the silicon carbide sandpaper you bought! You heard it here! **USE THE BACK SIDE OF THE SANDPAPER WITH CONSTANT PRESSURE AND FRICTION.** With some practice you'll see that this can perfectly level these fills! Finish off with the shellac on the artist brush like before and use your markers.

Now you've probably just figured out that if gouges and defects in an edge are filled and leveled in this manner that most other dents, dings, box knife cuts and scratches can be handled about the same way. Your right! Here are the steps.

1. If you are working on any area except an edge I would recommend cleaning the area with Naphtha. (Hey! My wife wants to know why I don't clean edges? There is little or no build up of wax and dirt at an edge since the color and finish are gone down to the bare wood.) (WARNING: It is a good idea to test the Naphtha on an inconspicuous spot first before continuing. If a coating is in poor condition it could remove your finish.) Naphtha is a dewaxer. It will remove any build-up of polishes or wax which would interfere with adhesion of your new repair patch. Just use some of the Naphtha on a small section of the cloth diaper. Let it dry for about 5 minutes.

2. Now if you run your fingernail across the area and it does not catch you may find it very difficult to get a wax or putty stick to "hold out" in the area. Here is where the artist chalk can sometimes be useful for shallow defects. Just lightly rub it into the defect and level again with the BACK SIDE of one of your sandpapers. (Are we ever going to use the front side of this stuff???) Blow off any excess dust and lightly "seal" the area with some of the canned spray shellac. Just a light, moist but not soaking wet coat of shellac will seal your repair. Let it dry about 45 minutes and you can still add a little touch-up marker get closer to your surrounding color.

3. If your fingernail did obviously catch in the defect get out the your putty or wax stick again. Just like you did the edges apply constant pressure and friction to "feed" the stick material into the defect like this



and level with the back side of your sandpaper again. Seal with shellac as you did before, wait 45 minutes and use your markers if you need them.

4. This step is optional and should be practiced quite a few times on some finished wood scraps first. If you want a better blending of your repair consider adding a few light spray coats of the Deft Clear Wood Spray Finish to the area. It will increase durability over your patch and help to blend together the existing "sheen" of the coating. Once you've sprayed the are determine if it is too glossy (shine too much) or dull (flat and lifeless) compared to the surrounding finish. If it's too glossy just take a piece of the 0000 steel wool, dip it in some of the denatured alcohol and let it dry for 10 minutes or so

( this gets rid of the motor oil that helps keep it from rusting on the store shelves), next spray the steel wool with the non-stick cooking spray (hydrogenated vegetable oil) and lightly stroke with the grain reducing the gloss slightly with each stroke. Just stop when it looks close!

If the area is too dull get out the Imperial rubbing compounds. Use a piece of cloth diaper and apply some medium grit compound first according to the directions for hand polishing on the bottle. If the gloss still doesn't begin to match just take another piece of diaper and apply the finer compound with more pressure and a faster stroke to create more friction. It should gloss up fast now! Too glossy??? Just knock the gloss back down with the steel wool and cooking spray!

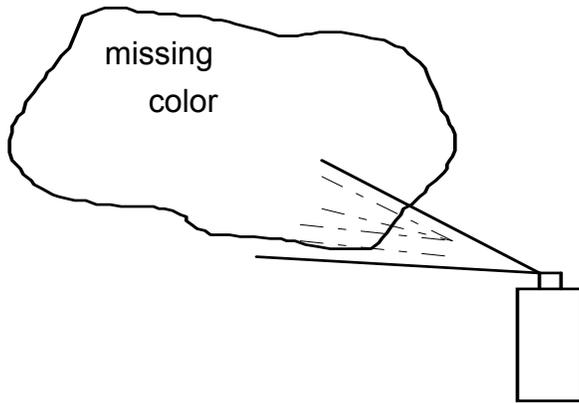
So what are the China bowl markers for??? We affectionately call these "grease sticks." Gotta a party tomorrow night? Neighbors coming over to play cards. You can even show most teenagers how to help you quickly touch-up minor defects in color with these markers. No, they are not permanent unless you put a finish over them but they can get you by in a pinch and they are easy to use.

Packing marks, new wet packing marks, scuffs, and other marks that only affect the clear finish. Get out your Naphtha and clean the marks or area. Next, here it comes, we are going to use the FRONT SIDE of our sandpaper, finally! Cut 1 sheet of 400 grit silicon carbide sandpaper into 4 equal sized small sheets. Spray some non-stick cooking spray onto the grit side of the sandpaper. If you working on a large flat area consider wrapping the sandpaper around a small dry kitchen sponge as a flat flexible "backer block". Keep the sandpaper well lubricated and sand the area for about a minute. Take some Naphtha on a diaper and clear the area every minute or so to watch the finish "level" as you continue. Sometimes this alone will pull out shallow packing marks. If the sanding process has dulled the "sheen" too much just use the compounds like you did before to increase the gloss. If it seems like the marks are just too deep to level out you may need to spray a coat or two of shellac on the area, sand leveling with the 400 grit paper again, and apply a couple of the Deft Clear Wood Finish spray coats over top. If the coating needs further leveling when done, use the 400 grit paper with the cooking spray again and follow with an equal sized sheet of the 600 grit paper also lubricated with the cooking spray. Now switch to the Imperial compounds to bring the gloss back. Were the packing marks so deep they took some color too? Or is it the case of the worn finish on the chair backs we mentioned before? Most people would say why can't I just touch in some oil stain in these areas? No! No! No! First, any mark that has been made in this fashion has been compressive enough to "burnish" the wood pore structure shut.

Bottom line, the areas won't accept stain penetration. Your best bet is to get some type of colored material to lay over top of these areas and seal them in with additional finish coats to protect the color. Deft Spray Stains. These are lacquer based spray "toners." With each successive light coat you spray in any color it intensifies that color thus letting you blend a color back into an area gradually. Yes, this takes a little practice.

Start by cleaning the area with Naphtha on a clean diaper again. If the area is smooth to the touch just lightly dry sand with some of your 400 grit sandpaper. Now spray on a light moist coat of your spray shellac. Don't skip this step. The shellac will seal off any contaminants not removed by the Naphtha. Don't sand the shellac!!! Allow about 45 minutes of dry time. Pick a Spray Stain color that is close or slightly lighter than the wood your want to match.

You should try to bring your color spray mist in as a “rolling fog” into the area. Like this...



Come into the area from the edges with gentle misting strokes.

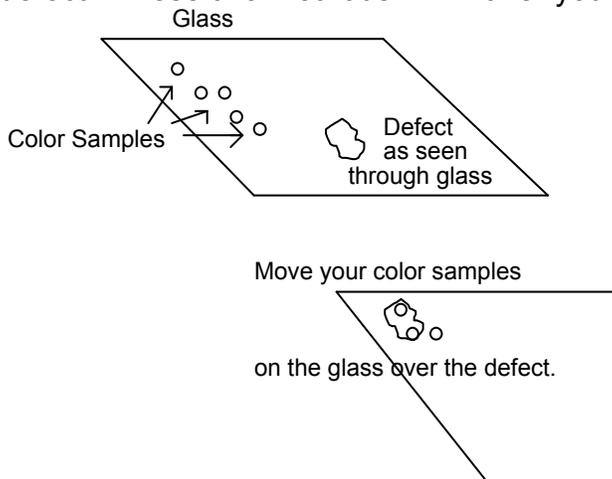
If you are now satisfied with your color, let the area dry for about 30 minutes and finish off with the Deft Clear Wood Spray Finish. You should use 2 to 3 coats to seal in your color properly. If you think you are going to need the Imperial compounds over this consider even a 4th coat. This will reduce the chance of cutting into your color coat.

Speaking of that! Don't like what you see so far? Get out the Lacquer Thinner and put it on a clean diaper. Just wipe off what you've done and start all over again. Really! The lacquer thinner will remove everything including your shellac sealer. Lacquer thinners are a very “hot” solvent blend and will dissolve almost any clear finish except some varnishes and polyurethanes.

Difficulties getting the “right color???”

Get out that piece of window glass that the glass shop made safe for you to handle. Get out those clean clear wood craft sticks you bought. If you are working on edges, the knicked, colorless edge probably resembles the look of the raw wood in the craft stick. Seal a stick with shellac, let it dry and try some of your markers on it. Place the stick up against the edge of the furniture.

Simple, huh? Just keep fooling around with the stick until your close and write down the colors you used. Now if you are working out in the middle of a panel or top try this. Put your piece of glass over top of a nearby unaffected area and start using your markers on top of the glass and look through to the wood color below. Now move the glass over the defect and “see” how the colors work over the defect. These two methods will “hone” your ability to pin down colors



Still got out your piece of glass? Try this for more

exact color touch-up. Spray a few of the Deft Spray Stain colors on different Q-tips and quickly swipe each color on the glass. You'll have a wider variety of colors for touch-up and you can easily intermix them on the glass! When you figure out the final color just spray a little into a small paper cup, pick the right size artist brush for the defect, and color it just as you would with a marker. Tip: You can easily clean the glass anytime with lacquer thinner and start fresh!

Hey, don't put the Q-tips away yet. Let's talk about that white ring from the cold or hot drink. It's trapped moisture. Try this first. Take some of your 0000 steel wool, clean it with alcohol as you did before, dry it, and lubricate it with the non-stick cooking spray. If the moisture is mostly toward the top of the coating a light stroking with the wood grain may remove the blush from the outside. You can follow with the Imperial compounds to bring the gloss back as we have said before. Still white??? It's deeper, which means something hot has caused moisture to be drawn up from the wood itself.

Take a Q-tip and dip it in lacquer thinner. Just lightly stroke it across the top of the area with the grain. This should open up the coat and allow the moisture to evaporate with little damage to the finish.

The over-polished, uneven, milky, blotchy, finish coating. We've all seen it. You wet it down with your favorite polish on Friday and by the time Sunday's company sits down to eat the table looks terrible again. What's wrong? Too much wet polishing, too often, and with the wrong stuff. I can't mention brand names here but your average spray polish works by removing a microscopic layer of your finish each time you dust. Even worse they can leave a siliconized oil behind that looks great until it evaporates. Either way you are prematurely wearing out your coating each time you polish. Want to try and stop this madness? If your finish is a flat or low luster coating try a thorough cleaning with Naphtha on a cloth diaper first. It will remove most polish residues. Prep your steel wool again with alcohol and make sure it is dry before spraying with the non-stick cooking spray. Rub with the grain in long straight handed strokes. This should make for a nice "rubbed effect" finish that you see on Shaker style furniture. Simple dusting with a lamb's wool duster will maintain this look without additional polishing. If you have determined that your coating is more of a satin or semi-gloss sheen consider the same Naphtha cleaning followed by the medium grit Imperial rubbing compound on a cloth diaper. Again long strokes with the grain increasing the friction with pressure as you go along. There is an easy way to maintain this finish. First dry dust with the duster mentioned above weekly but monthly use a cloth diaper that has been treated with about 5 to 6 drops of a lemon oil polish. Use this same rag every month. Keep it in a ziploc bag and add the 5 to 6 drops of oil after you are done dusting and just before you re-bag the cloth. High gloss table tops. They sure keep me in business. They are the hardest to maintain and begin to deteriorate from the day they are produced.

I'll tell you how to do this but honestly I don't think most consumers have the time or strength to do this properly. If you have a top like this and it looks cloudy or milky you've got your work cut out for you! You'll need to clean with Naphtha as above (maybe twice) and start with a thorough rubbing out with the medium grit Imperial compound on a cloth diaper. Long strokes with the grain, increasing the friction with pressure as you go along. Next do the same thing again with a new cloth diaper and the fine Imperial compound. It takes me about 2 to 4 hours to do this to an average dining room table top and two leaves.

Maintaining it once you are done??? How??? Keep it dry dusted, only, if possible. More wet

polishing or even most lemon oils will bring you right back to where you started. You might as well plan on using at least the fine Imperial compound at least once a year to maintain this gloss.



## Sources of Specialty Supplies

These are some special companies that you need to get catalogs from. You'll find better products and they can ship direct to your door. In most cases you can order directly from their branch stores or ask them for the toll free 800 numbers for the mail order operations. Get their catalogs as soon as possible. None of these companies have paid us to be on this list.

**Woodcraft, Rockler, Woodcraft Supply, Van Dyke Restorers, Michael's Arts and Crafts-** Just do a Google search for these web sites and you will find a wealth of supplies just for wood restoration.

## And now for our exclusive Disclaimer...

I really didn't want to do this but I see every night on the news about the latest stupid thing that a person does to himself in the pursuit of "a hobby" or craft. Read labels, follow warnings, don't smoke while you work, use common sense and read all of the rest of this disclaimer very carefully...

**Although Furniture Physicians and Darrel Kestner Restorations is providing you with information about furniture structural repair we in no way can warranty or guarantee any specific results with your particular furniture. The consumer should understand that practice and repetition combined with our information is a good starting point for mastering these techniques. You or even professionals can further damage furniture if carelessly applying these techniques. Experimentation on scrap furniture and woods is advised. Furniture Physicians and Darrel Kestner Restorations assumes no responsibility for the health or safety of any individual using any of the products listed in this publication.**

About Darrel Kestner and Company...

Mr. Kestner along with his wife Annette and daughter Lora run the Furniture Physicians Company and Darrel Kestner Restorations. This material is taken directly from company files and classes taught by the Kestners over the last 32 years. Although we recommend products that we feel work, no solicitation from product manufacturers is accepted. These publications are in response to many e-mails we have received about these topics. We are so flooded with questions in our business it would be impossible to answer each one. Here's something novel for you, too.

A personal Thank you, from the desk of,

Darrel D. Kestner  
Master Craftsman  
Furniture Physicians Co.  
Darrel Kestner Restorations