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weatherproof DOOR FINISH

One of the most durable finishes you can use for an exterior door is a high-solids alkyd finish. This type of finish is more flexible than spar varnish, so it moves with the wood as it expands and contracts rather than flaking or chipping off.

Surface Preparation — Although it's extremely durable, an alkyd finish won't last without proper surface preparation. That starts with scraping as much of the old finish from the door as possible. Carbide-tipped scrapers do an effective job of removing finish without gouging the wood (*Fig. 1*). A detail scraper works good for corners.

Once you've scraped off as much of the finish as possible, the next step is to sand with 60-grit sandpaper. Most of the sanding can be handled with a random-orbit sander (*Fig. 2*), but a sanding block helps in the edges and corners.

Weather Marks — Even after sanding, the door may have gray streaks from weathering. What I found worked best for removing these was a two-part Teak Cleaner and Brightener system that I purchased from a marine supply company.

Before you use Teak Cleaner, you'll want to take a few precautions. First, test the cleaner on an inconspicuous area to make sure it will be effective without doing damage to the wood. Also, the cleaner is okay to use on a tight-grained hardwood like your oak door, but you wouldn't want to use it on a softwood such as cedar, as it could damage the fibers. For cedar and other softwoods, try a different wood cleaner, such as oxalic acid (also known as wood bleach) or Trisodium Phosphate (TSP).

With these precautions in mind, brush the cleaner on with a foam brush, and scrub it into the pores with a plastic bristle brush (*Fig. 3*). Then use a sponge and several water rinses to remove the cleaner. The Teak Cleaner darkens the wood, so follow up with the Teak Brightener to bring it back to its original color. Here again, brush the brightener on, scrub it in (*Fig. 4*), and then rinse

it off several times with water.

After allowing the wood to dry for three days, follow up with another round of sanding with 100-grit and then 150-grit sandpaper to smooth the wood. Then you're ready to apply the finish (*see page 2*).



▲ To get the longest-lasting exterior finish, I chose a high-solids alkyd finish from Sikkens. It can withstand three to four years of exposure to harsh weather without needing another coat.



▲ For quick removal, use carbide scrapers to remove as much of the finish as possible (*see Sources, page 2*).



▲ After scraping, remove the rest of the finish from the wood by using 60-grit sandpaper on a random-orbit sander.



▲ To remove the gray weather marks, scrub on a 20-percent solution of Teak Cleaner and water, and then rinse.



▲ This Teak Cleaner darkens the wood, so I also scrubbed Teak Brightener into the wood to restore the natural color.

tips for applying AN ALKYD FINISH

Outdoor projects have a lot of enemies, like extremes of temperature and changing humidity levels. As a result, wood expands and contracts more outdoors than indoors, causing the finish to lose its bond. And sunlight further contributes to finish losing its grip on wood, as well as causing it to fade.

The Sikkens Solution — One finish that's specially formulated to handle all these challenges is Cetol Door & Window, which is manufactured by the Sikkens Company. It's available in four colors, along with satin and gloss clear finishes, for around \$20 a quart.

As I mentioned earlier, this finish is a high-solids alkyd resin finish. This formulation is flexible, so it moves with wood as it expands and contracts. And the finish also has iron oxide pigments that block UV rays. (These rays make a finish lose its bond with wood.) The result is a durable finish that can last three to four years without any need of refinishing.



▲ Iron oxide pigments make alkyd finishes (*left*) darker than spar varnish (*right*).

These iron oxide pigments make the finish look a good deal darker than spar varnish (*Photo, below left*). Even so, you'll find that the clear alkyd finish has the appearance of a standard clear coat once applied.

On the other hand, each subsequent coat of colored finish will darken the wood more than the coat before. As a result, a combination of colored coats followed by clear coats is the best approach to getting the look you want from three coats of finish (the required number of coats). To make sure you get it right, try some test pieces first (*Photo, below right*).

Applying Finish — As you start to apply this finish, you'll notice it's heavy-bodied, almost like a paint. This makes proper brushing technique very important. Put on an even coat with a natural-bristle brush, and hold your brush at a 45° angle to "tip off" the surface as you apply it (*Photo, above*). Then, once you're satisfied with the look of the first coat, wait 24 hours between subsequent coats. 🛠️



▲ Since Sikkens goes on thicker in some areas than others, use wide strokes at a 45° angle to "tip off" the finish.

PRODUCTS WE USED

SCRAPERS

Bahco Carbide Scrapers
Rockler
800-279-4441; www.Rockler.com

WOOD CLEANERS

Teak Cleaner & Brightener
800-783-7507; www.NauticalEase.com

DAP Wood Bleach (Oxalic Acid)
888-327-8477; www.DAP.com

Savogran TSP & TSP-PF (Trisodium Phosphate & Phosphate-Free)
800-225-9872; www.Savogran.com

SIKKENS FINISH

Cetol Door & Window ("Natural" first coat & two "Clear Satin" top coats)
866-745-5367; www.Nam.Sikkens.com



▲ Three coats of alkyd finish are needed, and each coat of colored finish darkens wood more than the coat before. It's best to use a colored finish first, followed with clear finish on top. Use test pieces to achieve a color combination you like.