

Maintenance of Interior Teak

For the last decade or so, the majority of all production boats built in the U.S. have been trimmed above and belowdecks with teak. Teak makes abundant sense on deck. With resistance to weathering as its primary virtue, however, teak makes less sense for use as trim below. Nevertheless, the simplicity of finishing teak, the economy of a single variety of wood in inventory, and the ready acceptance by boat buyers, are all attractive reasons why boatbuilders use the wood for interior decor.

Typically, only the most expensive boats have interior teak that is varnished, usually with a satin-

finish varnish for a "hand-rubbed" effect. Such a finish should last for years if it is not abused or allowed to get wet. Maintenance can be no more than an occasional wipe with furniture oil or polish and another coat of varnish every decade or so.

Many boatowners wonder if it would be worthwhile to varnish the oiled teak trim in a typical production boat in order to take advantage of the easier maintenance. From the standpoint of reduced maintenance, the answer is, "probably not." At least three coats of varnish would be required (a Hinckley, for example, has six to eight). The time

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required to prepare the surfaces, and to sand and varnish the trim in a 30-foot production boat, could amount to a full winter's work. In fact, it is quite likely that the total amount of work would be more than the amount of effort required to maintain the oiled teak trim over the lifetime of the boat.

On the other hand, from the standpoint of aesthetics, a varnished interior has much to recommend it. After all, such an interior may be the best way to upgrade your boat's interior to resemble a Hinckley or a Swan. Of course, if the wood is anything but teak, the question is moot; oak, mahogany, butternut, birch, and ash must be protected with varnish, preferably with an epoxy sealer underneath.

The quality of the interior finish varies widely among boatbuilders. Some builders leave teak rough and bare, others (curse them) rough and oiled, and still others (to their credit) make a real effort to sand the wood smooth and oil it carefully. Despite the variation, however, almost any production boat with teak below can benefit from a reasonable amount of time and energy devoted to improving the look and feel of the wood.

Preparation

The key to finishing joinerwork is to start with a smooth surface, and that, of course, means sanding. Even some of the better boatbuilders sometimes deliver boats with trim that is only as smooth-or as rough-as it comes out of the planer. Others may simply have a helper give the interior trim a swipe or two with a piece of sandpaper the day before the boat is delivered. Well-finished joinerwork apparently costs more in labor than can be added to the price of some boats.

Fortunately, the boatowner can often take up where the builder left off with a minimum of difficulty. Before applying oil or varnish, sand the wood in the direction of the grain with the finest sandpaper that smooths it with a reasonable amount of effort; 120- or 150-grit should be about right. Oiled wood that is rough will take coarser paper and more work, since the oil both darkens and hardens the surface of the wood.

Avoid the use of power sanders, except possibly a high-speed palm sander, in order to prevent scars and swirl marks. Finish sanding should always be done by hand with 220- or even 240-grit paper for a first-class job. Again, be careful to sand in the direction of the grain and to get into tight corners.

At this point, your investment may be such that you actually consider a varnish finish (but sleep on the notion). Preparation of the wood is more than half the work of applying an oiled finish, but this preparation is only just the first step for a varnished interior.

Varnishing Interior Trim

If you do decide to varnish, give the wood a final **sanding** with fresh 240-grit paper (or whatever is specified on the varnish can) for an extra measure of satisfaction and smoothness. Then, give the wood at least three coats of varnish; five is better, especially in high-traffic areas.

Belowdecks, there is no need to use a marine varnish with an ultraviolet inhibitor. We suggest a good-quality polyurethane varnish such as ZipGard. We have found that polyurethane varnishes are durable, economical, easy to apply, and fast drying. A second coat can often be applied in two to three hours.

Varnish with a high gloss shows every surface irregularity, tends to hide the grain of the wood, and sometimes reflects light in an objectionable manner. For these reasons, we prefer a semi-gloss or satin-finish varnish which simulates a hand-rubbed surface. The traditional method for producing a hand-rubbed finish is to first rub down the final coat with powdered pumice applied with rubbing felt and water. This is followed by rubbing with rottenstone and linseed oil applied with a soft cotton cloth. Some of the modern rubbing compounds available at your local hardware store are considerably easier to use, however. We have used Duffy's Elbow Grease with good results. This is a Vaseline-like grease which is used with 0000 bronze wool. (The instructions call for steel wool, but tiny bits of steel wool inevitably end up rusting in a marine environment.)

Whether using pumice and rottenstone or one of the newer greases, the object of hand-rubbing is to rub out all the dust sediment, brush strokes, rough spots, and hairs. Hand rubbing produces a beautiful finish, but it is a lot of work. Try it on a small piece like a sextant box before deciding to hand-rub the entire interior. Better yet, use a satin-finish varnish.

If you choose to varnish interior wood, we suggest that you avoid the use of waxes and furniture polishes on the finish. Modern polyurethane varnishes are so hard they do not need the additional protection of wax. Moreover, wax complicates any future recoating with varnish, in that all traces must be sanded or washed off in preparation for revarnishing. With a thick enough varnish finish, only a damp cloth should be needed for routine maintenance and cleaning.

Oiling Interior Trim

If inclination and inertia tell you not to varnish but rather to finish the wood with an oil or dressing, choose a top-quality furniture oil. These are usually linseed oil- or tung oil-based, both of which seal the grain of the wood and harden the surface over time. One major difference between linseed oil and tung

oil is that linseed oil tends to darken more than tung oil **as** it oxidizes; otherwise they share essentially the same virtuous characteristics. Incidentally, we would not use any of the teak dressings (including Deks Olje) intended for on-deck use. Most are high in penetrating solvents and low in oils and are not intended to produce a smooth surface on the wood.

Wipe on the oil liberally and rub it into the wood thoroughly. Use a polyfoam brush to apply the oil and a soft terrycloth pad to rub. A small amount of turpentine added to the oil (for the first coat only) should increase penetration. All traces of excess oil should be rubbed off; rub well into corners and crevices. Let the first coat dry for a day or two and follow up with subsequent coats. No excess oil should remain on the wood surface after the rubbing is completed; it will remain sticky, collect dirt, and may stain clothes and upholstery. After a day or so, if you find that the surface feels oily, give the whole surface a final hard rub with a clean piece of terrycloth dampened with turpentine.

Treatments for exterior teak are usually only available from marine outlets, but most neighborhood hardware stores carry a number of oils that are suitable for interior trim. We have used both Minwax "hand-rubbed" effect oil and Watco Danish Teak Oil in the "original" finish on belowdecks teak, and have found them both to produce a pleasing and long-lasting finish. Both can also be used on interior mahogany trim if it is unvarnished. Lighter oils such as Scott's Liquid Gold produce a nice finish and are easier to apply, but do not last nearly as long. These oils are better for an occasional sprucing up, rather than an original finish. A light coat of Liquid Gold, incidentally, does wonders for the appearance of bulkheads covered with the "wood-grain" plastic laminates such as Formica.

If you want an absolutely smooth finish, let the first few coats of oil harden for a few weeks, then apply another coat of oil and rerub. This time, however, use 600-grit wet-or-dry sandpaper or fine bronze wool rather than a terrycloth pad. Use the oil instead of water with the sandpaper as a "wetting agent" and continuously wipe away the residue with a clean cloth as you work.

Since wax will not adversely affect future coats of oil the way it would with varnish, you may want to apply wax or furniture polish to an oiled surface. A good quality carnauba paste wax such as Butcher's Wax gives the surface a glowing patina that rivals a hand-rubbed varnish finish, and protects the wood from grease and dirt.

A Few Words About Other Woods

Some of the most impressive-looking modern yacht interiors use light-colored woods such as ash, butter-

nut, spruce, and white oak for bulkheads and cabinetry. These woods pose problems that teak does not. Specifically, they are more liable to damage and discoloration from water. As a result, they must be well finished to prevent moisture from soaking into the wood.

Ash and oak are especially sensitive to water, almost instantly turning gray where they are exposed to a combination of air and water. This gray may be bleached out, but bleaching is a frustrating job and not likely to restore the wood to its original light yellow color. From the outset, even with a brand new boat finished in one of these woods, we would add a couple of coats of varnish wherever there is a chance that the wood may get wet. These areas include the area around the companionway, the deck hatches, the galley countertop, and berth risers close to the cabin sole. Also, plan to revarnish every couple of years or whenever there are signs of moisture penetrating into the wood.

Smooth, well-finished wood is easier to keep up than wood treated with low-effort finishes. An annual wipe-down with furniture polish should be enough, but watch for worn spots and water stains that may need some special attention. ■

Care of a Teak And Holly Cabin Sole

The combination of teak "planks" and strips of holly has become a favorite of boatbuilders for cabin soles. The combination is handsome and looks "traditional," even if its place in traditional boatbuilding is questionable.

Most teak and holly soles are just a thin veneer on a sheet of plywood. Left unprotected, the sole won't last long, nor can it be easily restored. The thinness of the veneer and its location inside the cabin usually precludes the use of either a liquid teak cleaner or a power sander.

Unfortunately, there is no simple way to both assure protection for the wood, and to give a secure footing when the cabin sole is wet. Varnish suitable for protection does not have good non-skid characteristics.

Faced with this dilemma, we would use a satin-finish polyurethane floor varnish with just a small amount of nonskid grit (usually pumice or finely ground sand) added in areas such as the base of the companionway and outside the head, where wetness is apt to be a problem. And then don't ignore the wear on the sole during annual maintenance; it may need an annual touching up with varnish.