

Cabinet Renewal – Restoring an existing finish

Level of Difficulty – 2

If you generally like your cabinets, but the finish is showing some wear, with a little time and elbow grease, you can restore the finish to look close to the original. This procedure works well, assuming that your cabinets are in pretty good shape, with only minor flaws such as a finish that is thin or wearing through.

Here's what you'll need:

- TSP (Trisodium Phosphate)
- Oil-based stain the color of your cabinets
- Minwax wipe on poly (or other oil-based finish)
- Gloves
- Scotch-brite pad
- Buckets, scouring sponge, rags

Step by step instructions:

1. Remove the doors, drawers and all cabinet hardware (hinges, pulls, etc.)
2. Clean the doors and cabinet frame with TSP.
 - a. Follow the directions on the package for mixing instructions.
 - b. Clean doors, front and back, paying special attention to the edges and to the edges of any raised panels where grime tends to build up.
 - c. Clean using a scrubbing sponge, taking care not to scrub through the finish, disturbing the stain color.
3. Rinse the cabinet, doors and drawers with clean water. Dry with towels and allow to air dry before staining.
4. Scuff the existing polyurethane finish with a scotch-brite pad. Keep your scotch-brite pad flat against the surface, taking care not to round the edges, which will scour through the stain.
5. Wipe away all sanding dust with a tack cloth, or with a rag dampened with mineral spirits.
6. Touch up the existing stain

Hint: Test your stain color and application time by applying it to the back side of one of your cabinet doors. Determine how much time is required to get your desired color/coverage and use that time on the front of the cabinet and doors.

- a. Use an oil-based stain that is as near to the original stain color as possible.
 - b. Apply the stain to the entire door (one side at a time) and allow it to sit the amount of time that you determined from your test.
 - c. Wipe all stain from the door. Be sure to get it wiped out of small details and spots where stain can collect.
 - d. If you are happy with the appearance of the stain, allow it to dry completely before applying the finish coat (polyurethane).
 - e. You can repeat the staining procedure if you wish for better coverage or a darker appearance.
7. Apply the finish coat
 - a. Using a soft, absorbent cloth, apply a thin coat of minwax wipe-on poly.

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- b. It is critical that whether wiping or brushing a polyurethane finish that you apply it in only one direction and do not repeatedly go over the surface to level it. Wipe-on poly levels nicely, but only if it is still “wet” and can flow to level itself.
- c. Moving quickly, apply the finish to the edges of the doors and edges of any raised panels first. Finish by applying the wipe-on poly to the flat surfaces.
- d. Allow the finish to dry based on the manufacturer’s instructions.
- e. Depending on the condition of your original finish, you will need one or two coats of polyurethane.
- f. If you are satisfied with the finish, allow the poly to dry, then re-install the doors & drawers.
- g. If you desire a second coat of finish, sand your cabinets using the scotch-brite pad. The poly should powder up as you sand. Try to achieve a smooth feel before applying a final coat.
Be careful not to be too aggressive in sanding because you risk sanding through the stain that you just applied. Scotch-brite pads are preferred for beginners over sand paper.
- h. Wipe away all sanding dust with a tack cloth, or with a rag dampened with mineral spirits.
- i. Apply a second coat of wipe-on poly. Allow to dry per the manufacturer’s instructions, then reinstall the doors, drawers and hardware.