

Furniture and Cabinet Making

FINISHING OF WOOD FOR PIANOS, ETC.

The workman in the finishing-room of the piano factory has problems in his work that the man in the furniture finishing-room never meets. The number of experiments that are made in the piano finishing-room will bear out this statement. The chief difficulty arises from the fact that piano finishing is done on split veneer and not on sawed stock as formerly prevailed. The uneducated public are under the impression that the piano is solid wood, but the poor, distraught finisher knows much better than this.

The finisher in the piano finishing-room, in order to be able to cope with all the difficulties of his calling, must know something about the peculiarities of the different woods that he comes in contact with. The principal ones that he uses are the three leading varieties of walnut, namely, Circassian, Blister and Italian. All these woods are walnut, of course, yet no two are alike, and each requires a different treatment. Each must have its own kind of filling and its own particular form of rubbing. And the same is true of the various sorts of mahogany. And there is quite a list of other woods, each of which has its individuality, and none used to any extent in any other trade. This leads to the thought that there is another source of trouble to the piano finisher, in the continual trying of new woods or veneers, in the effort to meet the popular demand for something new or striking in the wood and finish line. I regret to have to say that a piano is sold mostly upon its good looks. If it is a "good looker," it goes, regardless of its musical qualities. Hence the maker endeavors to make his instrument as attractive as possible, and this means more work for the finisher and more exacting work. His work must be flawless in every respect, the figuring of the wood must stand out clear and distinct, with just the exact light and shade shown. Now, this is one of the hardest things to accomplish. The effects are obtained from stains, and stains do not give the needed immediate effects nor reveal their true color or nature for hours or days, perhaps. The work demands patient labor and a high degree of skill upon the part of the finisher, such as is not required of the finisher in other branches. Some woods look best when their every feature is brought out by filler and stain without altering the entire surface; quartered oak is such an instance. To make the figuring show up well and not at the same time destroy or detract from the surrounding surface requires artistic skill of the highest order.

What is known as wood finishing is simply the process of applying to the surface of the wood after it has been properly prepared by planing and smoothing, a thin coating of varnish or similar suitable substance to render the surface wear-resisting or durable and to enhance the natural beauty of the wood. This may be accepted as an encyclopædic definition of the term or the art so familiar to finishers and in its completed state, familiar to the general public. There are many and varied methods of wood finishing, with a variety of materials or substances employed in the process of filling and finishing, the varnishes being the principal ones used. In their natural state all woods are more or less porous, and consist of hard fibers, whose interstices are filled with a softer substance. According to the arrange-

ment of this cellular tissue, the wood is hard or soft, close or open-grained. It is the wood finisher's art to properly fill this cellular structure for a little distance from the surface with a suitable filler, so that when the varnish is applied it will not sink into the wood, but will be held up and allow of rubbing and polishing. I told in a previous article how formerly the wood was filled by successive applications of clear varnish, which was pressed into the wood, after drying, at least three coats being necessary to fill the wood. Then the surface was made smooth with sandpaper, after which the finishing coats of varnish were applied. This operation involved the use of a great deal of varnish, and at that time the varnish was of a good quality, as I well remember, for North Carolina copal had not been introduced to the attention of users of fine (?) varnish. Now, fillers are used, and some of these are of very poor quality, but suitable, however, for cheap work. For the finest grade of work it is undoubtedly better to use the best stock for filling, for rosin in the filler will not give the same wear as hard gum. Rosin is easily acted upon by water, alkali, etc.

Every finishing-room should have a brush cabinet in which to keep brushes safe from dust, etc. Instead of throwing a brush into a can or tub of water or other substance, as the case may be, there to remain until again needed for use, it should be cleaned out with benzine and be laid away in the cabinet. If cleaned properly by this method, the brush will not need to be put in any liquid, but will be clean and in good condition for the next job. A cabinet was invented some few years ago for this purpose. In the upper part of it there was a tin vessel with perforated bottom and resting in another vessel. Benzine being placed in the upper vessel high enough to allow of the washing out of a brush therein, the paint, etc., settling through the perforations in the upper can into the lower can, from which they could be removed and the clear liquid drawn off, the sediment being used for rough work of some kind. Thus there was no loss of material in the cleansing operation, and the brush came out perfectly clean, and was hung in the lower part of the cabinet, I think, or was laid down on a slatted frame in the upper part. This method has very much to commend its use to all finishers, and, as the cabinet is not to my knowledge being made and sold, for it did not seem to go through, as good a thing as it was, anybody might make something of the sort for shop use. When a brush is thus cleaned every night before quitting, it is in good condition next morning for service. It will wear longer, too. It is not a pleasure to work with a dirty, ill-kept brush, nor can good work be well accomplished with it.

Speaking of brushes and their keeping, let me say a word for the care of stock in general. Two important things are accomplished when you take care of materials and tools, namely, saving and keeping in better working condition. The first has to do with the profit and loss question, a vital one, and upon the healthy equilibrium of which depends your job. The more saving, the less loss and consequently the more profit. That means much to the employee. Secondly, when tools are in best condition you can do more work and better work in the same time. Therefore, keep the cans or barrels of liquid material covered. Volatile