

Applying traditional finishes to timber flooring

Heritage construction skills



Keystone
TASMANIA

APPLYING TRADITIONAL FINISHES

In this case study, Jon McCure (Heritage Builder) describes the process of applying traditional finishes to timber flooring.

Context

Jon is applying tar (for colour), linseed oil and beeswax polish to floorboards he has reinstated at a small cottage (circa 1870s) on the Oatlands Commissariat Site.



Jon at the cottage

Advantages

There are a few key advantages of applying traditional finishes to timber flooring:

- It preserves the floor
- It provides a renewable and repairable surface (all you need to do is apply more beeswax polish)
- It looks great!



Timber floor finishing

Challenges

There are a number of challenges associated with applying traditional finishes to timber flooring in heritage properties:

- Replicating original textures in reinstated floorboards
- Future-proofing floors
- Matching original finishes.



Replicating original textures

Solutions

There are a few handy 'tricks of the trade' when applying traditional finishes to timber flooring in heritage properties:

- If flooring needs to be reinstated and the original boards were rough sawn, leave saw marks in the upper face
- Incorporate a man-hole to allow access to services under the floor
- Use finishing materials that were commonly available in the dated period of the property (e.g. tar, linseed oil, beeswax)
- Use pale boiled linseed oil for faster drying times.

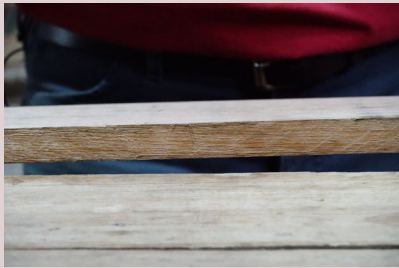


Timber floor finishing

APPLYING TRADITIONAL FINISHES

Step 1 - Planning

- Identify flooring characteristics (e.g. timber type, width & thickness)
- Photograph flooring in its original state for future reference
- Research any regulatory requirements and guidelines
- Confirm any specific project requirements from the client
- Obtain historical data, including finishes used in similar properties
- Determine an appropriate surface finish.



Planning for traditional finishing

Step 2 - Preparing floorboards

- Select tools for floorboard preparation, including a hammer, hand plane, hand saw, nail punch, power drill, ruler, sandpaper, scraper and spirit level
- Check boards for faults and repair in preparation for finishing
- If boards need to be reinstated, match like for like (i.e. ensure the new boards are prepared to the original width and thickness)
- Lightly sand or plane to remove splinters and sharp edges.



Preparing floorboards

Step 3 - Preparing finishing materials

- Cover surfaces with appropriate protections
- Wear protective clothing and gloves
- Select tools for finishing, including paintbrushes, rollers and rags
- Select finishing materials, including ormonoid (tar), mineral turpentine, linseed oil, gum turpentine and beeswax
- Prepare beeswax polish by melting beeswax and diluting with gum turpentine (approximately 50:50 ratio)
- Dilute ormanoid with mineral turpentine to obtain required stain colour and milk-like consistency
- Apply trial application of ormanoid to check consistency and colour.



Preparing beeswax polish



Applying a trial application of ormanoid

"There's joy in imperfection in these old boards"

Jon McCure (Heritage Builder)

APPLYING TRADITIONAL FINISHES

Step 4 - Applying finishing materials

- Apply diluted ormonoid to boards with a paintbrush or roller
- Work into all cracks and crevices to ensure a consistent stain
- Wipe off excess and allow to dry (between one and two days)
- Apply linseed oil to boards quickly and evenly with a rag
- Allow to dry (at least two days) to ensure a hard surface is formed
- Apply beeswax polish to boards with a rag
- Allow to dry (at least two days)
- Photograph flooring in finished state for future reference.



Applying beeswax polish to timber flooring



Result

- All details and imperfections in the flooring must be highlighted
- The original texture and lustre of the flooring must be replicated
- The flooring must maintain the authenticity, character, integrity and heritage value of the building
- The flooring must be fit for purpose.



Before



After

Background

This case study supports the development of heritage trade skills in Tasmania. It is part of a broader set of support materials that have been developed by Keystone Tasmania.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Jon McCure, Brad Williams, the Centre for Heritage at Oatlands and the Southern Midlands Council.

Want to learn this heritage trade skill?

If you are interested in learning how to apply traditional finishes to timber flooring, contact Keystone Tasmania to register your interest in a training course.

❖ 03 6223 7804

❖ email@keystone.com.au

❖ www.keystone.com.au