

7 TIPS FOR SELECTING A FLOOR FINISH



CITY FLOOR
— SUPPLY —



With so many options available in terms of **hardwood floor finishes**, it can be easy to become overwhelmed and not know which type to pick. Not only do you have to choose between matte, satin, gloss, and semi-gloss, but you also have to choose between oil-based or water-based polyurethane, penetrating oil finishes, acid cure finishes, and more.

So we've put together this guide to help you through the process of selecting the right type of finish for any project you come across.

First we'll cover the basics of wood floor finishes, outlining different types, application methods, and the pros and cons of each. Then, we'll dig into the different types of hardwood flooring and how finishing options can be affected by the type of wood you choose. By the time you complete this guide you should have a better idea of what type of floor finish is appropriate for your project and how to make sure it will be successful.



1 DO CERTAIN WOOD SPECIES WARRANT CERTAIN TYPES OF FINISHES?

The biggest thing you'll want to pay attention to when it comes to pairing finishes with certain species is gloss level.

beautiful character of the wood to show through rather than covering it up with too much sheen from the finish (see below for more information on sheen levels).

The biggest thing you'll want to pay attention to when it comes to pairing finishes with certain species is gloss level.

If you're installing something with strong graining patterns or some other quality that you would really like to show off, such as a [white oak character floor](#) or a species that has a strong graining pattern like [hickory](#), it's probably best to go with a satin or matte finish. This will allow the naturally



2 ARE DIFFERENT FINISHES RECOMMENDED FOR UNFINISHED SOLID VS. UNFINISHED ENGINEERED FLOORS?

Engineered floors offer more dimensional stability than solid wood floors. The engineered flooring platform can consist of a wood composite core that is typically made of recycled material and engineered wood fiber, or a multi-layer plywood core—in our case, extremely well-made 12-layer Baltic birch plywood.

In terms of finish choice, you have a lot of flexibility with unfinished floors whether they are solid or engineered. The platform of flooring doesn't matter as much when choosing a finish.

3

HOW DO YOU SELECT THE RIGHT SHEEN LEVEL FOR YOUR JOB?

How do you decide between different sheen levels: matte, natural, semi-gloss, gloss?

Getting the right flooring finish for your client's home is a big decision, and there are so many options. Some people prefer low gloss floors, while others favor high gloss materials. The trend over the last few years has been towards lower gloss finishes, such as satin and matte, as they are more practical because they are better at hiding signs of normal wear and tear, dirt, and dust.

Some situations will call for a high-gloss finish. Gloss is the brightest and most reflective flooring finish available. These floors are often found in retail stores, showrooms and commercial spaces because of their reflective and striking appearance. The sheen is very shiny and pronounced (think gym floor) compared to matte or even satin finishes, which have a more subdued appearance and little to no shine at all.



4

HOW DO CURING TIMES VARY BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF FINISHES?

Generally speaking, water-based poly finishes will dry and cure faster than oil-based poly finishes, meaning that you'll be able to put a floor coated in a water-based finish back into play more quickly (sometimes you can even walk on it as soon as 6-8 hours after the final coat), which might be important for commercial spaces or situations like finishing a gym floor.

An oil-based polyurethane finish will typically take 24-48 hours before you can walk on it.

All oil-based polyurethane finishes will take about 30 days for a full cure based on average temperature and humidity conditions, while typical water-based urethanes are fully cured in about a week.

Usually floors finished with most penetrating oil products can be put back into use 24-36 hours after application under normal conditions.

5

HOW MANY COATS DO YOU NEED FOR EACH TYPE OF FINISH?

One important factor that goes into deciding which type of finish to use: how much time you have to apply the finish.

You'll want to remember that water-based polyurethane will typically need more coats than oil-based polyurethane. Typically for water-based finish, you'll put down two seal coats and two top coats. However, water-based finishes will cure faster than oil-based products, with only about two hours needing to pass between

each coat of finish depending on conditions. Typically, a day needs to pass between each coat of oil-based polyurethane, but again, this will depend on the conditions of the jobsite. On humid days, you'll need to allot more time for the finish to dry whether you're working with an oil-based or water-based product.

Keep in mind that these are general pointers. Always check the finish label for specific instructions. You'll find application methods, dry times, and spread rates provided by the manufacturer.

6

WHICH TYPE OF FINISH SHOULD YOU SELECT?

When is it best to use oil-based vs. water-based finishes? Are these products comparable at this point, with so many water-based finishes on the market now exhibiting the strength and durability that used to only be seen in poly-based oil finishes?

Even with the advances in water-based wood floor finishes over the years, there are still some fundamental differences between water-based poly products and their oil-based counterparts.

Water-based finishes dry clear, while poly-based finishes can yellow over time. And water-based finishes will typically have lower VOCs and therefore less odor than oil-based poly finishes.

Besides the differences in appearance, oil and water-based finishes are also different to work with. Water-based finishes come in single or two-component systems. Solvent finishes can also be single or two-

7

APPLICATION METHODS

component systems. These finishes have a higher gloss level than water-based finishes. Even with matte and antique flat gloss levels in an oil-based finish, it's harder to achieve a fully matte look with these products. You'll want to go with water-based finish to achieve a true natural, matte look.

However, in terms of durability, oil and water-based finishes are quite similar. For example, the [Bona SuperSport finish](#) is a water-based finish, which can be used on gym floors, and it's not even the only water-based option for gym floor finish, which shows just how far this technology has come over the past few years.

Another type of oil-based finish that has become popular recently is [European hardening oil](#) finishes, also known as penetrating oil finishes. They're gaining popularity with homeowners because they provide a beautiful, matte look which allows you to preserve the natural look and feel of the floors.

Penetrating oil finishes are different from oil-based polyurethane finishes because rather than sitting on top of the wood, these products actually penetrate the planks and provide protection that way. A penetrating oil finish is perfect for situations where the owner of the house or establishment is okay with having to perform regular maintenance to re-oil the floors.

These finishes are natural and provide a deep, rich look to the floors while also providing good protection.

There are also colored penetrating oil finishes to choose from if you would prefer that over a natural look. We recommend penetrating oil finishes by Rubio, Woca, and Loba just to name a few. [Click here](#) to browse all of our penetrating oil finishes.

Ultimately this will depend on what the finish manufacturer specifies, but here are some generally used methods for each type of finish.

With **oil-based polyurethane finishes**: Make sure the floor is prepped, cleaned, sanded, and tacked according to [NWFA standards](#). Open time varies from product to product, but typically it's longer for an oil-based poly finish compared to other options. Methods of application are typically a lambswool applicator, a [Duratool applicator](#), or a roller. Remember to always work in the direction of the wood grain on the second and third coats.

Abrade the finish/floor in between coats, but do not buff the final coat!

With **water-based polyurethane finishes**, for best results, use a t-bar or roller. Usually you'll need about 3-4 coats to fully protect the floor, one or two seals, and two finish coats. Make sure to keep a wet edge while applying with a t-bar. Each coat should be ready to re-coat in about 2-3 hours with water-based finish and typically overnight for oil-based.

The beauty of waterbased finishes is typically you can recoat without abrading, known as chemical adhesion. Typically you don't need to abrade the floor unless you have grain raise. If you do experience grain raise, abrade the floor

for the smoothest finished product. [Click here](#) for our video tutorial on applying water-based finish with a t-bar.

Applying a **penetrating oil** finish is easy—simply apply it with a roller and buff off any excess in order to give you a good spread rate. You'll get less coverage on species with a coarse/porous grain like oak. Allow it to penetrate for at least 15 minutes (exact time may vary by manufacturer) before driving in with a pad and buffer to force the oil into the floor.

Excess oil can be buffed off or trowled off. Allow 24 to 48 hours for the finish to cure. This will create a beautiful, rich finish. [Click here](#) to watch our video on applying a Rubio Monocoat penetrating oil finish to a hardwood floor.



HERE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVORITE FINISHES WE WOULD PRESCRIBE FOR CERTAIN SITUATIONS.

Situation 1: A gym floor refinishing job. Humidity is high because it's the middle of summer.

We recommend you use [Bona SuperSport](#) & [Bona SuperSport Paint](#) for this situation.

[Bona SuperSport](#) is a tough, high-build urethane finish that provides phenomenal protection and maintains its clear, non-yellowing appearance even after several coats. Courtlines can be paired with this for excellent, crisp, colorful lines. There are 15 vibrant colors available, which are all intermixable.

Make sure to clean the floor with the NaceCare auto scrubber first to ensure the best adhesion and overall finishing experience possible.

Let the finish dry overnight in between coats. If the humidity is too high, add fans into the room to try and speed up the drying process. Continue taking moisture level readings and monitoring the moisture content in the room before proceeding to any next step. The room should be maintained at about 65–80 degrees Fahrenheit if at all possible — any higher and you risk brush marks showing up in your finish.

Situation 2: You're completing a residential install. The family has two young kids and two dogs. You'll want something extra durable.

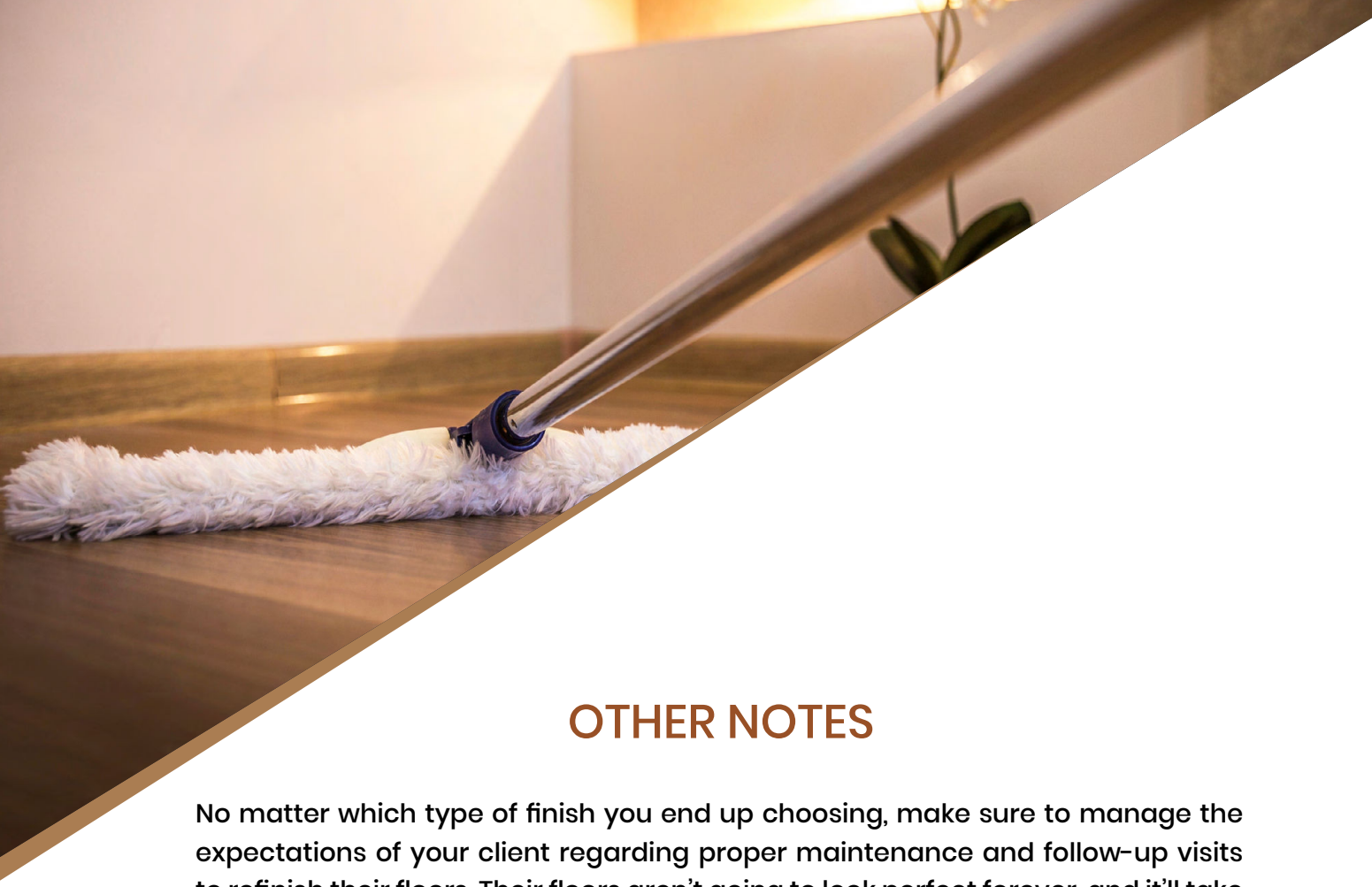
One product we would recommend in a situation like this is [Basic Coatings StreetShoe NXT](#). This is a long-wearing, environmentally-friendly hardwood floor finish. You'll also love the odorless and low VOCs that make this a safe, healthy choice for families. This is a 2 component mix professional product— you'll only want to mix what you need and can apply within 2 to 3 hours. As you apply the finish coats, abrade between coats if necessary. Select an abrasive that's consistent with project requirements. You can use the roller or snow-plow pull method, whichever is more comfortable. Bona recommends the roller.



Situation 3: A small cafe wants a rustic look and they have character white oak flooring. They don't want the hassle of replacing their hardwood flooring with new wood, but want to add some rustic appeal to their floors. The client is considering a penetrating oil finish due to wanting the wood to be the focal point of the restaurant. However, there's concern they'll be unable to maintain this finish and are debating on whether or not this finish is worth the time and expense.

You can reassure them that this is a good finish to choose because it penetrates the surface of the wood to protect it from within and that its matte appearance will allow the natural character of the wood to really shine. An added benefit is that floors coated with penetrating oil finishes usually don't need to be refinished, just re-oiled every so often. We would likely recommend using [Loba HS 2K Impact Oil Transparent](#) for this job. It's simple to apply and will maintain the natural appearance of the wood rather than covering up its beautiful character markings.





OTHER NOTES

No matter which type of finish you end up choosing, make sure to manage the expectations of your client regarding proper maintenance and follow-up visits to refinish their floors. Their floors aren't going to look perfect forever, and it'll take some work to keep them looking in tip-top shape! Leaving them a [floor care guide](#) and a [floor maintenance kit](#) might help to manage their expectations, instill good practices, and prevent callbacks.

Make sure to remind your clients to put down walk off mats in the entrance and exits to keep debris from scratching the floor.

Regardless of what we say or suggest in this guide, it's important to follow the finish manufacturer's instructions and guidelines above everything else. Every product is different, and the manufacturer knows best when it comes to applying their products.

Another great resource to have in your arsenal is a set of [NWFA guidelines](#). They provide in-depth, technical information on a range of topics from finishing floors to taking moisture measurements and much more.

If you have any questions about applying finish to a hardwood floor or general inquiries about the products listed in this guide, call us at (800) 737-1786 or email info@cityfloorsupply.com to speak with a wood floor expert.





CITY FLOOR
— SUPPLY —

☎ (800) 737-1786

✉ info@cityfloorsupply.com

🖱 www.cityfloorsupply.com

