

exceptionally engineered wide-plank wood floors

There's no denying that wood is a durable and attractive flooring material that combines natural beauty with good wear characteristics but, to ensure the floor retains those properties, it must be properly sealed or finished. The finishing or sealing treatment has to perform a variety of functions: it must repel moisture; be resistant to wear; prevent deterioration of the wood due to abrasion and heat; assist in maintaining the wood's proper moisture level and, finally, preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the wood colouring and grain figuring.

To cater to these requirements the industry has developed a wide range of finishing products that can be classified broadly as surface finishes - a coating, such as a lacquer or varnish that forms a thin hard film that bonds to the surface fibres of the wood - or penetrating finishes - a fluid such as an oil that penetrates and saturates the wood fibres.

Surface Finishes

The main disadvantage of a surface finish is the inevitable need to sand and re-finish the floor every three to five years. Apart from the accompanying mess, noise and floor downtime (probably one week because of the initial sanding followed by the fine sanding and drying times between coats), what you are actually doing is destroying the floor.

Once you have sanded your floor to within 1-2mm of the tongue and groove it will lift and fail. If you do not re-finish the floor every three to five years the surface finish cracks as the wood expands and contracts or wears away due to the long period of use. The result is that dirt and liquids get into the wood and the floor deteriorates. Inevitably this approach to floor maintenance dramatically shortens a floor's lifespan.

Furthermore, almost all surface finishes involve the use of toxins.

Mafi is firmly in favour of penetrating finishes for a number of reasons, not least because there is little point in buying an expensive wood floor if, by having it varnished or lacquered, you promptly turn it into a floor that looks and feels like plastic. Save money and buy a low budget artificial wood floor instead.

Penetrating Finishes

The alternative to a lacquer or surface finish is penetrating oil. Many agree, quite rightly, that a natural flooring material should be protected with a natural product. Oil is regarded as the most naturally compatible finish treatment for hardwood floors and, as the majority of oils are derived organically from plants or trees, it is also the most ecologically attractive option.

Oil becomes part of the wood and offers a finish that cannot be matched by superficial surface seals and finishes. Penetrating finishes are absorbed into the wood fibres and cells. They harden in a short time and create a strong protective barrier that will not flake or peel off. Unlike surface finishes, penetrating finishes actually harden the wood to a considerable depth and are easy to maintain - just add a little more if necessary. With penetrating oils you can still feel the wood, not just a plastic layer of surface finish. Unlike a cured lacquer, the oil finish is also surprisingly resistant to shock and impact loadings. Witness the ability of linseed oil to protect a cricket bat that withstands, without damage, the impact of a solid ball bowled at some 100kph, with the bat swinging at the same speed, within an impact area of only 3 square millimetres.

The oil based floor finish contains no formaldehyde or solvents and does not cause side-bonding - an effect that can exaggerate the problem of gapping by cumulative shrinkage. This problem occurs when lacquer type finishes penetrate between the joints in boards or parquet and effectively glue the flooring elements together. When this happens the 'glued' elements behave as a single entity, any shrinkage appearing as an accumulation of the individual units, thus creating a concentrated large movement and shrinkage gap. In parquet floors this often shows itself as a zigzag pattern of gapping called a 'lightning strike'.

Unless there is mechanical damage to the wood, the oiled floor will not require re-sanding to restore it to its original condition. Application of fresh oil and then a light buffing will, more often than not, restore the most heavily trafficked of oiled floors. 100 square metres can be done in less than two hours and, left overnight, it is ready for use the following day.

Mafi oils are applied at the factory and once again immediately after installation. Our linseed oils are also polishable. This enables the end user to buff the floor with or without applying further oil to the sheen of choice, from matt to a lustrous shine.

Maintaining a new oiled floor

1. Do not touch the floor for 24 hours after the installation oiling. During these 24 hours it is essential to ensure that a room temperature of 20 C is maintained.
2. Furniture should be carefully lifted into position never dragged or pushed. Furniture rests should be placed beneath castors and felt pads attached to the bottom of furniture legs. Minimise the possibilities of spillages, food and dirt from coming into contact with the floor during the first few days. Do not damp clean the floor for the first 14 days, dry clean only.
3. Wood floors will not withstand sharp objects, paints, chemical cleaners or solvent based products.

Regular cleaning

1. Ideal for everyday maintenance is the Mafi care Mop, it can be used to damp or dry clean the floor. Sweep with a flat mop or regular brush, ensure that vacuum head brushes are engaged to avoid unnecessary scratches. Spillages, dirt and food should be wiped away as soon as possible with a damp not wet cloth.
2. To clean the floor with mafi wood floor soap, dilute 1 capful of soap per 2 litres of warm water. Soak the Mop head in the soap solution, wring it out, re-attach it, then mop the floor. When the mop head becomes dirty rinse away the worst of the dirt, re-soak and then carry on. When very dirty the mop heads should be washed in a washing machine.
3. After damp cleaning, the floor may appear slightly dull. To restore the sheen, dry buff the floor. This can be done manually or by using rotary buffing machines.

Tough dirt and scratches

1. Tough dirt should be cleaned with the blue pad attached to the flat mop using a solution of Mafi intensive cleaner. Dilute 1 capful of intense cleaner per half litre of warm water, then clean the relevant area. After cleaning, re-oil the area manually by dampening the tip of a 100% lint free cotton rag with Mafi Oil and gently rubbing in (or by machine with green pad). NEVER pour Mafi Oil directly onto the floor. Leave the oil to dry for 30 minutes before dry buffing it to match the rest of the floor.
2. Stains that cannot be removed by the blue pad and Mafi intensive cleaner must be sanded out. Sand the stain initially with a 80 to 100 grit sandpaper, then lightly with a 150 to 200 grit sandpaper. After sanding, re-oil the area manually by rubbing in Mafi Oil with a 100% lint free cotton rag. Leave the oil to dry for 30 minutes before dry buffing it to match the rest of the floor.
3. Scratches should have Mafi oil gently rubbed in using the technique above. Leave the oil to dry for 30 minutes before dry buffing it to match the rest of the floor.

Wood floor re-oiling

1. The most important factor when maintaining an oiled wood floor is the frequency of re-oiling the whole floor. The frequency is dictated by the volume of traffic and type of use the floor is subjected to.

An average domestic floor will need re-oiling once every 3 years and an average commercial floor once every 12 to 18 months.

Re-oil more frequently the more heavily used areas of the floor; stair treads, exits-entrances, around cookers and sinks etc.

2. Whole floor re-oiling is not as intense as the initial post installation oiling. 100sqm can be done in 2 hours, no noise, no mess and no fumes. Well heated and ventilated, the floor can be used again within 5 hours. The same brand of oil as originally applied should be used.

N.B. OILY RAGS CAN SELF-IGNITE. ALWAYS REMOVE THE USED RAGS FROM THE PREMISES OR PLACE THEM IN WATER AFTER USE. DO NOT USE OIL NEAR FIRES OR HOT OBJECTS.