

# The Hardwood Floor Refinishing Process

## - The 21 Steps

By Ward Braun

**Y**ou may be interested to know how we'll go about restoring your hardwood floors. Below is our detailed 21 Step procedure we use:

*(This assumes existing carpets are removed and any repairs needed are already completed by us or another competent tradesman.)*

**1 Seal off all areas and set up the dustless equipment.** Whether you choose to use our 99.5% Dust Free System or not, we always seal off the surrounding areas with plastic sheeting and cover any wall or floor vents. This not only protects the other rooms from dust... it also protects our work area from any contamination.

If you choose to invest in the 99.5% Dust Free System, we set this equipment up at the beginning too.

**2 Sweep and vacuum your floor.** We like to start off with a clean area so we can see what we have to work with. This greatly helps us to do the next step properly.

**3 Inspect your floor carefully looking for any protruding nails and countersink them.** Almost every floor we work on in Vancouver has nails sticking up from the floor boards. If we run over them they can do extensive and expensive damage to our equipment.

Not only that, if we don't countersink them properly, when we run over them they score the sandpaper and this leaves lines in your floor that

can be hard to remove with subsequent higher grades of paper.

**4 Removing the existing finish.** The purpose of the first cut is to remove the old existing finish and waxes and get down to the bare wood. We use two different machines in this process. The big belt sander sands in a straight line, up and down the length of the room.

The smaller sander – called an edger - sands in a circular motion around the perimeter of the room.

The number of sanding passes required will be largely determined by the condition of the old floor. If the surface is in *very good* shape (worn through areas, light scratches and a few dents) and has little build-up of old finish and wax, one pass with a medium grit paper is usually sufficient for this step.

Most floors we work on have been sanded previously – some are at their very last sand. Because of this, we try extremely hard to remove as little wood as possible.

### **Extra Step:**

If there is a huge build-up of wax, finish or tar paper, or the floor has been badly abused or damaged, we may need to do more than just one cut for this process. In these cases we drop down to a coarser grit of sandpaper for the first cut.

Depending on how bad the floors are, we may need to go through many belts and discs as they gum up or dull. Once the worst of it is removed, we now need to take out the coarse marks left behind. To do this we gradually increase the grits on the sandpaper until it's ready for the next step.

The extra labor and materials will be included in your estimate so you'll know ahead of time exactly how much it will cost.

If badly scarred and damaged boards have not been repaired, it may be advisable to leave some blemishes in the floor otherwise too much wood will need to be removed which will greatly shorten the life of your floor.

**5 Countersink all the nails.** After the first passes with the sanders and a layer of wood is removed, there will be nails showing on or close to the surface.

In older floors that have been refinished many

We try extremely hard to remove as little wood as possible

times before, they can number into the hundreds. If we don't countersink them properly, then just like in Step 3, when we run over them they score the sandpaper, ruining it and more importantly it will leave lines in your floor.

They will also show up as 'shiners'. We call them shiners because the metal head gets sanded and ends up shiny. By hitting them down, the filler will get into the hole and cover them during Step 7 below.

**6 Vacuum.** This is the second of many vacuums to come. This time we're vacuuming to remove any contaminants on top of or in-between the boards so the next step will go as smoothly as possible.

**7 Trowel fill the entire floor.** Every square inch of the floor will be covered with a matching colored commercial grade putty. We call it 'filler'. We apply it with trowels so it gets squeezed into every crack and gap. This greatly enhances the look of the floor and blends all of the joints together.

Once the filler is applied we position our fans around the rooms to speed up the drying time.

Please note that on old fir floors that have large gaps and a lot of movement, this step is usually skipped. Please read our

Information Sheet titled: "*Refinishing Fir Floors - Important Information You Must Know*" for more advice.

**8 Final cut with the belt sander and edger.** This final sand is done with fine grit sandpaper and serves two purposes. First it removes the filler sitting on top of the floor that didn't go into any cracks and second it eliminates the coarser sanding scratches from the previous sanding.

**9 Hand scrape and hand sand all the corners.** The belt sander and edger aren't able to get right up to the walls in the corners,

around the door jambs or under and around the radiators so we need to do this by hand.

The time spent in this step is one of the factors separating a good refinishing job from a great refinishing job. If the rest of your floor looks great but the corners still have remnants of the old finish or the floor under the heaters or old radiators aren't sanded properly it will catch your eye and annoy you every time you walk into the room.

One of my big pet peeves in this industry is the guys that quickly rush through this step... and for obvious reasons - it's hard, painstaking, tedious work.

We spend a lot of time in this step as we believe a great quality job is in the details. The extra effort is always worth it.

**10 Vacuum.** We need to thoroughly remove all of the shavings created from hand-scraping so they don't interfere with the next step.

**11 Buff the floor.** We use a rotary buffer with an abrasive screen to blend the difference between the belt sander's straight sanding marks and the edger's circular marks. If this is done properly, when the finish is applied the difference in sanding patterns are barely visible.

### Extra Steps:

If you want to change the color of your floors, you will need to stain them. This adds quite a few extra steps to the process from this point forward. You can read about the extra steps we need to take for staining in our Information Sheet titled: "*Staining Hardwood Floors - What is Involved?*"

**12 Walk through to completely check of every inch of the floor.** We carefully examine the floor for anything we may have missed during the last few steps. If anything needs attention it's looked after.

*continued over...*

We believe a great quality job is in the details. The extra effort is always worth it

**13 Vacuum.** This is the final vacuum before the first coat is applied so it needs to be done extremely thoroughly.

*Your floors are now ready to be coated!*

**14 First coat.** We now apply the first coat of the finish system you've decided to use – either oil or water based. The dry time between coats will depend on your choice of system.

The first coat always looks ugly for either system so don't let that worry you if you happen to see it before the second coat is applied.

**15 Buff and hand sand.** The next day we return to prepare the floor for its second coat. We use the buffer with an abrasive screen to lightly abrade the main area of the floor and we hand sand the perimeter of the rooms where it can't reach.

**16 Vacuum and tack.** Again we thoroughly vacuum the floor to ensure no contaminants are left between coats and this time we also tack the floor with a special terry cloth mop to make sure we've removed absolutely everything.

**17 Second coat.** The second coat is now applied and left to dry overnight.

**18 Buff and hand sand.** The following day we return to prepare the floor for its third and final finish coat. We follow the same procedure as in step 15.

**19 Vacuum and tack.** This is the final vacuum. By this time we've vacuumed your floors at least six times. As you can tell, we like to keep an extremely clean jobsite.

We'll also do a final tack on your floors with a micro-fiber cloth to make sure we get every

piece of dust off your floors before we're ready for the next step.

**20 Third and final coat.** Well this is it, what all the previous steps have been leading up to. We carefully apply the final coat and then ask that nobody walks on them for at least 24 hours.

**21 Final walk through.** We like to come back the following day to make sure everything looks great and the floors meet up to our high standards.

If you've invested in the 99.5% Dust Free System we do a dust check and make sure you're blown away by the absence of dust. If for any reason you're not – the cleaners are called in immediately.

During this time, we'll also go through the cleaning and care procedures and leave you with your supply of felt pads, cleaning solution and a detailed cleaning guide for future reference. We square up the remaining balance and leave you absolutely ecstatic about your brand new beautifully restored hardwood floors.

---

*Ward Braun is the President of Woodsmith Hardwood Floors Ltd.*

*Visit us online at [www.WoodsmithHardwood.com](http://www.WoodsmithHardwood.com)*

We leave you absolutely ecstatic about your brand new beautifully restored hardwood floors