



# Finishing Reclaimed Lumber

A mix of dye and stain techniques matches fresh-cut edges to the face-grain patina of salvaged wood.

**B**uilding a project from reclaimed lumber creates a piece with instant character, not to mention the green benefits of salvaging some wonderful material. But freshly cut edges and ends lack that time-worn patina and stick out like a sore thumb. With a little trial and error, plus a mix of finishing techniques, you can have your reclaimed-lumber projects looking good as old.

To demonstrate, we built the chairside chest from issue 229 (November 2014) using pine shelving rescued from a shut-down, century-old shoe store.

## UNCOVER HIDDEN TREASURE



Despite obvious defects and the risk of an occasional nail, reclaimed lumber offers both tight grain and widths not easily found in new lumber.

When building with reclaimed lumber, start with plenty of extra material, as you may need to work around large defects in the boards as you build. Test-matching finishes also requires plenty of scrap stock. In fact, it's best to test finishes *before* you build so that, if necessary, you can

stain fresh-cut ends and edges as you go to avoid getting stain on adjacent patina surfaces later on.

To further protect the patina, spray on the topcoats—brush strokes could dislodge embedded dirt or lift the existing finish and cause streaks to appear.

### BEFORE



Fresh-cut surfaces

Here's the chest with the fresh-cut edges and ends. Note how the drawer fronts appear darker than the sides—reclaimed stock can vary greatly.

### AFTER



Dye and stain helped blend the fresh-cut edges. Topcoats of shellac darkened the pine, and evened out the contrast between the drawers and sides.



## Plan on trial and error

Even with a clear shellac or lacquer topcoat, expect the stock to darken considerably once finish is applied. (See the before and after photos of our chest on the *previous page*.) So prepare at least half a dozen sample sticks. You can try a different stain on each edge; just be sure to label them.

**Quick Tip!** Some manufacturers sell stains in small packets (above) for less than 50 cents each. These make it economical to try several colors without investing in pints of stain you may not use up.

Initially, we used an antique knotty-pine aniline dye (see **Sources and More Resources**, page 4) and it appeared to match fairly closely, *below*. But once we sprayed on lacquer, the face of our test piece was much darker than the freshly cut edge, *below right*.

## Find finish at the source

Another technique worth trying is to create a finish from the original stock. Consider this option if you're building a small project with minimal fresh edges to blend in because it requires pulling up the patina and finish from several "donor boards" (cutoffs from your reclaimed lumber).

Start by thinning an oil-based natural-tint base stain 50/50 with mineral spirits. Apply a liberal amount of the mix to the face of a donor board and use 220-grit sandpaper to create a slurry of old finish. Then use the sandpaper to transfer the slurry to the edge of the board. It may take a couple of coats to get the color to match.

### SAND UP A SLURRY



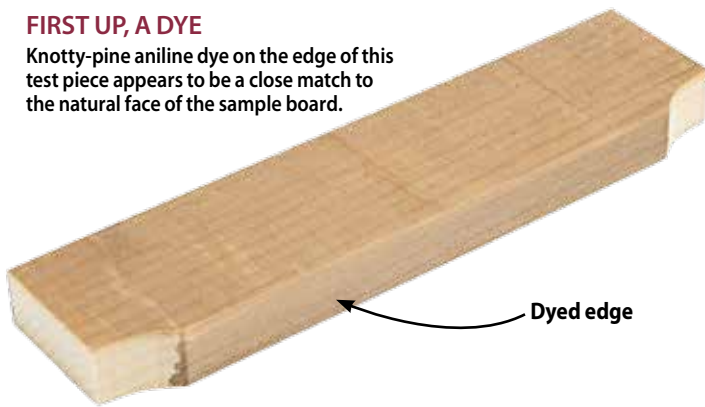
Apply some thinned oil-base natural-tint stain and loosen up the old finish by sanding in a circular motion. Add more stain and keep sanding until you've created a rich slurry that you can apply to the raw edges with the same piece of sandpaper.

So on a fresh sample stick, we applied a driftwood oil stain for a grayish base coat, then tried several brown stains on top of that base. Again, it looked close

(*bottom*) until we sprayed on the lacquer. We finally settled on a mix of the two techniques, starting with the knotty-pine dye to create a gray-toned base.

### FIRST UP, A DYE

Knotty-pine aniline dye on the edge of this test piece appears to be a close match to the natural face of the sample board.



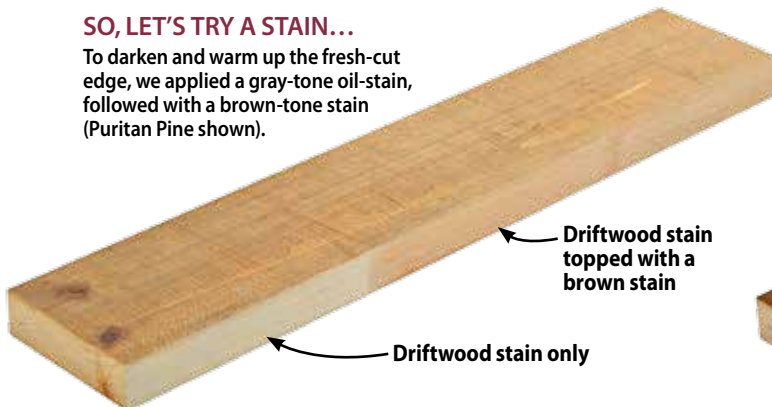
### A TOPCOAT CHANGES THINGS

Spraying on a lacquer topcoat, however, turned the face of our sample much darker and warmer than the dyed edge.



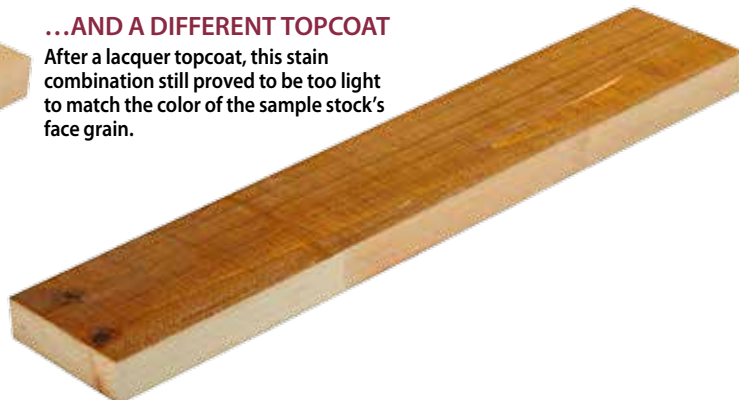
### SO, LET'S TRY A STAIN...

To darken and warm up the fresh-cut edge, we applied a gray-tone oil-stain, followed with a brown-tone stain (Puritan Pine shown).



### ...AND A DIFFERENT TOPCOAT

After a lacquer topcoat, this stain combination still proved to be too light to match the color of the sample stock's face grain.



Over this, we tried different brown oil stains from Old Masters. (See **Gallery of Stains**, below.) We also switched to spraying a blonde shellac topcoat, which gave a warmer look than clear lacquer.

If the proper color appears to fall somewhere in between two samples, try

mixing the stains together. For our boards, both Puritan Pine and Pecan were close matches. We ultimately settled on a 50/50 blend of the two.

Because the faces of reclaimed boards will likely vary some in color, creating a uniform color match can be tricky. To

help even out these variations, we switched the topcoat again, from a clear blonde shellac to garnet shellac. The added orange color provided the even, warm tone we were looking for. With the trial and error complete, the actual finishing can begin.

## GALLERY OF STAINS

**Puritan Pine** comes close but is a tad light.



**Fruitwood** looks a little too brown.



**Provincial** turned out somewhat muddy looking.



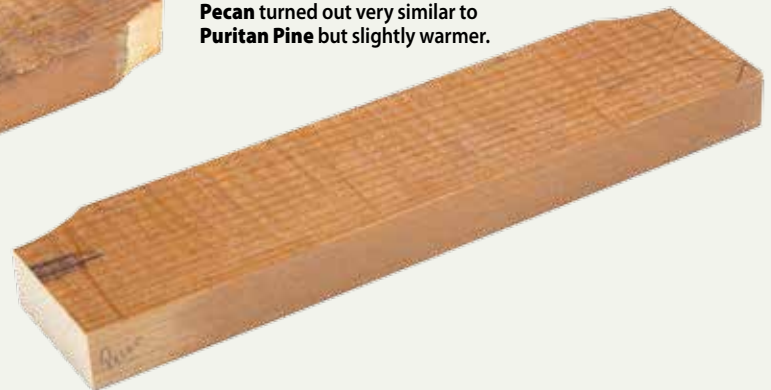
**Early American** was slightly muddy and a bit dark.



**Maple** was a bit light and too orange.



**Pecan** turned out very similar to **Puritan Pine** but slightly warmer.





### PERFECT BLEND

A mix of Puritan Pine and Pecan stains applied over a base coat of knotty-pine dye, with a sprayed-on garnet shellac topcoat, gave us just the right combination of brown and warmth to match the face grain.

### Keep it off the face

To preserve the stock's face-grain patina, take care to apply the dye and stain only on the freshly cut edges and ends. Don't try masking off the edges; the tape will

damage the face patina on the boards (*below left*).

We applied both the dye and stain with a foam brush (*below right*) to avoid stray bristle marks a regular brush may

leave on the face of the stock. To prevent drips and runs, avoid overloading the brush, apply light coats, and hold edges horizontally. Recoat as necessary to get uniform color and coverage. 🌳

### DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME



Masking tape will lift old finish from the face grain. You're better off carefully applying stain to fresh-cut edges/ends with a brush and a steady hand.

### APPLY THE DYE, THEN THE STAIN



Aniline dye, mixed with water, goes on first (*opening photo, page 46*). Once the dye has dried, apply the chosen stain (*above*) and wipe off the excess.

### Sources

Knotty Pine, Gray Antique aniline dye: no. 462, W.D. Lockwood, wdlockwood.com, 866-293-8913.  
Oil-base wiping stains: Old Masters, myoldmasters.com/store-locations.htm, 800-747-3436.

Produced by Kerry Gibson with John Olson

### More Resources

- Learn more with these free online articles:
- ▶ New to aniline dyes? Find out how simple it is to mix and use them at [woodmagazine.com/aniline](http://woodmagazine.com/aniline).
  - ▶ Take the mystery out of determining which blend of stains yields which color: [woodmagazine.com/matchstain](http://woodmagazine.com/matchstain).
  - ▶ Discover how to finish projects with shellac by downloading an article at [woodmagazine.com/shellac](http://woodmagazine.com/shellac).

