

Preserving Your Project

Apply the proper finish so you can enjoy your woodburning for years to come

By Lora S. Irish

Careful consideration of what finish to apply to your final piece is essential. You want the burned texture to show through the finish, not be covered up by it.

If you rub your hand across the finished burning, you will feel the coarseness of the burned fibers that were raised during the burning process. Using very fine-grit sandpaper, lightly go over the entire work to remove this roughness. I use foam-core emery boards. They can be laid flat against the wooden board and gently moved across the wood without disturbing the burned design. Foam-core emery boards come in a variety of grits. They are readily available at your local drug store and are inexpensive.

After the emery board, I use a white artist's eraser on the entire woodburned design. This removes any remaining pattern lines or guidelines from the work. Use a lint-free cloth or large drafter's dusting brush to remove the eraser rubbings and the sanding dust.

Once the surface is prepared, it's time to seal the project. This protects the woodburning work and seals the wood from dirt and oils. I use the following techniques frequently because they result in exquisite finished woodburnings.

Spray Polyurethane

Spray polyurethane is a quick and easy way to seal any woodburning that has been colored, no matter what color medium was used—colored pencils, oil paints, or watercolors. Because the sealer is applied through an aerosol spray, it does not disturb or move your color work with brush strokes. High gloss, gloss, and semi-matte formulas are available. Build up your finish in light layers, allowing each layer to dry thoroughly before adding the next. Polyurethane also comes in a liquid version that is applied with a soft, clean brush. Follow the directions on the can for application. As with the spray, several light coats work best.

Polyurethane, Danish oil, and paste wax are all excellent sealers for either wood or gourd projects.



Oil Finish

Oil finishes give a durable finish to any woodburning work and bring out the natural grain in wood. Tung oil and Danish oil are two common types of oil finishes. Follow the directions on the can or jar. Most oils are applied by brushing one coat of oil finish on the entire project. Allow that coat to set for ten to fifteen minutes. Then, with a clean lint-free cloth, wipe the excess oil from the wood. Allow the first coat to dry overnight, and then apply a second coat in the same manner.

Paste Wax

Paste floor wax is a third type of finish you can give your woodburning projects. As with the other types of finishes, follow the manufacturer's directions. With a clean lint-free cloth, rub one light coat of paste wax on the entire piece. Allow this coating to dry for several minutes. When it starts to dry to a cloudy appearance, use a new clean soft cloth to rub the polish, buffing it to a soft sheen. Several coats of paste wax can be applied. If you apply too much paste wax and your project has a milky look to it, scrub the milky areas vigorously with an old toothbrush to rub off the extra paste wax.

UV Inhibitors

Sunlight can fade pyrography. If your work will be exposed to strong direct artificial or natural light, consider varnishes containing UV inhibitors. A marine varnish or a heavy-duty varnish with UV filters is a good choice if the work is intended for outdoor display.

For more information on Lora S. Irish, see page 8.