

finish & floorcare

As a floor covering, wood combines natural beauty with good durability. But to retain these properties, it needs to be properly sealed or finished. This finishing or sealing treatment has to perform a number of different functions: it must repel moisture; be resistant to wear; prevent deterioration of the wood owing to abrasion and heat; assist in maintaining the wood's proper moisture level; and, finally, preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the wood.

Finishing products can broadly be classified either as (1) surface finishes, usually a coating, such as a lacquer or varnish that forms a thin hard film that bonds to the surface fibres of the wood; or (2) as penetrating finishes, usually a fluid such as an oil that penetrates and saturates the wood fibres.

Surface finishes

The main disadvantage of a surface finish is the need to sand and refinish the floor every three to five years. Apart from the accompanying mess, noise, odour and disruption – you won't be able to use the floor for about a week because of the various sanding stages, and finish-product drying times – the sanding process simply destroys the floor. Every time you sand it, you get closer to the tongue and groove; once you are within 1–2mm of it, the floor will lift and fail. And if you choose not to refinish the floor every three to five years, the surface finish will crack owing to the expansion and contraction of the wood, or will simply wear away with use. Consequently dirt and liquids begin to get into the wood and the floor deteriorates at an accelerated rate: a typical lifespan is ten years. Almost all surface finishes also involve the use of toxins. For all of these reasons, Element7 prefers penetrating finishes.

Penetrating finishes

Many would argue, quite properly, that a natural material should be protected with a natural product. Natural oil is regarded as the most bio-compatible finish treatment for hard- or softwood floors, and as the majority of oils are derived organically from plants or trees, it is also the most ecologically attractive option.

There are both practical and aesthetic advantages to an oil finish. The oil becomes part of the wood and offers a finish that cannot be matched by superficial surface seals and finishes, which in effect coat the wood in a layer of plastic. Penetrating finishes are absorbed into the wood fibres and cells, hardening in a short time and creating a strong protective barrier that will not flake or peel off. Moreover, unlike surface finishes, penetrating finishes are easy to maintain. And, unlike a cured lacquer, an oil finish is also surprisingly resistant to shock – witness the ability of linseed oil to protect a cricket bat that is called upon to withstand the impact of a solid ball bowled at 70mph and more.

Unlike a surface-finished floor, an oiled floor will not require re-sanding. A three- or five-yearly application of fresh oil followed by a light buffing should restore even the most heavily trafficked of floors. Oiled floors last not for ten years but for several generations.

Element7 oils are applied in the factory and again immediately after installation. The oiled boards can also be polished, enabling you to achieve the sheen of your choice, from matt to a lustrous shine.