

Grains, Stains, and Rains

Dealing with wood that's not as good as it should.

BY JERRY RABUSHKA, EDITOR

When it comes to wood, everyone needs a “grain” of sense. The wood used in building a deck is going to affect how you coat it, and if you're in a position to talk with a customer before it's built, it can't hurt to pass on a bit of information about what wood would or wouldn't work as well. Not that you've always got a choice—budget and available product might dictate less than premium lumber, and you've got to be able to work with that customer's decision.

“Wood is not what it once was,” says Bill Gradisher, product trainer and field technical support for AkzoNobel's premium stain brand Sikken's. “Fifty years ago when trees were harvested, you would have a diameter of a log of say 24 inches with approximately 50 rings, or 50 years of growth. This made for very tight rings and a stable wood. Now, logs can achieve the 24-inch diameter in half the time, making for much wider rings. This can lead to dimensional instability when used in construction. In other words, the wood is more susceptible to cracking and warping.”

The best deck wood, he believes, is center cuts; they'll provide better stability. “I look for very tight grain on the wood I purchase, and also look for signs of cupping or warping.” So don't just run to the lumber department and grab the first board you can see. “Sometimes, you've got to search through a lot of boards to find the right ones or you can spend a little more and get grade A lumber,” says Bill. “Usually this will be old growth trees.”

Tim O'Reilly is director of marketing, wood care, with Rust-Oleum Corp., and he's speaking with us for the Wolman brand. He's also noticed a change in wood. “Today's wood is

more likely to be harvested from forests which were possibly planted with hybrid varieties that grow more quickly, producing lighter, less dense wood. Lumber is more likely to be purchased from a home center than a traditional lumber yard, and the retailer's supplier is more likely to be dictated by large contracts than carefully reviewed quality of the most recent shipment. Also,” he continues, “changes in 2003 to pressure treatment of wood away from arsenic based treatments to copper based treatments has changed how we deal with wood from the fasteners used, to how well wood holds up to rot and decay.”

So what if you've been at this for 30 years or so and you notice a difference? Well, you're right. This being the case, it's not the same surface you're used to, and you'll have to treat it a little differently.

A good thing to remember about wood is that it's dead. All the forces of nature are coming together to break it down, and your job is to keep that from happening.

“It's very important when selecting lower density woods from newer forests to avoid signs of warping, cupping & splitting and then protect them as soon as possible with a breathable product to allow the wood to reduce moisture evenly,” says Tim. This will help avoid warping, cupping and splitting after you've coated the wood.

Wolman has a couple products at the ready. “RainCoat water-base clear and toned finishes suit this need well while allowing most of the natural beauty of the wood to show through,” Tim suggests. “For more consistent coloring, choose Wolman's DuraStain solid or semi-transparent stain. To ensure long-term pro-

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tection from rot and decay, begin treating with Wolman Finish & Preservative (F&P) containing an EPA registered preservative that fights rot & decay. F&P is a traditional penetrating oil that tones the wood without leaving a surface film. When it needs refinishing, simply wash the surface well, let dry and reapply.”



Deck coated with Wolman RainCoat tinted cedar.

Cover your butt

Gradisher recommends a penetrating oil for newer, less stable wood. “These types of products penetrate into the wood fibers, preventing moisture from seeping into the wood. Of course, good prep and application practices are important here. Be sure to coat the butt ends of the boards where moisture can wick up (absorb) into the boards.” If you don’t seal the entire wood, moisture can get into the exposed ends. Once that happens, you’ll get all sorts of bad things—swelling, shrinking, cracking, cupping, all affecting the overall stability of the wood, and your reputation, which could shrink, cup, and crack as well!

Still, says O’Reilly, wood can last many, many years outside as long as it’s well protected. How long depends on a few factors—price and quality of your coating, the final appearance, and frequency of maintenance.

“It isn’t always the case, but usually, when you pay more for a coating, more goes into it. There are some pretty tricky resins out there today that will perform phenomenally if you can afford to put them into the bucket,” he says.

Also, remember that the more visible the wood, the less protection it’s getting. A solid is going to offer more protection than a clear—but if your homeowner wants to see his wood, or part of his wood, or a certain percentage of his wood, and chooses between clears and toners and semi-trans and semi-solid, it’s still all good as long as you agree on a maintenance schedule.

Maintain your image!

“If you like the clear look, plan on refinishing every other year or when the deck shows wear,” says O’Reilly. “If



you want to cut your maintenance schedule to a minimum, lean toward acrylic semi-transparent or solid coatings. These will give you the longest life before requiring maintenance. Remember, even solid-color stains will show the texture of the grain.”

Gradisher agrees that maintenance is important. If you are using a product that a customer’s invested some

money into, they’ll probably want to invest more money into keep that product looking fresh. Not only can it extend the life of the coating, but the deck as well. “Proper maintenance starts with visual inspection,” he says. “Cleaning and recoating a deck, for example, may be every 18 months to two years on the horizontal portions of the deck. Vertical applications are a little different. You may need to inspect it every 2-3 years on the western and southern exposures and every 3-4 years on the northern or eastern exposures.”

So, suggests, O’Reilly with Wolman, talk to your customers and see what they want to see. A wood deck is not “Fixodent and forget it,” so whatever you put on is going to need some kind of maintenance at some point. “For the homeowner wanting the longest lasting finish, a solid color acrylic like DuraStain Solid would be the answer,” says O’Reilly. For the homeowner wanting to highlight every bit of wood grain, a transparent finish like RainCoat or F&P are more appropriate. DuraStain will last longer but require more preparation to refinish.” It’s likely that the remainder of the coating will need to be removed before a new one is applied. “The right choice is decided from what the customer wants to see and what they’re willing to commit to in the way of a maintenance schedule,” he recommends.

It’s a tricky balance—an easier to apply product might need less maintenance but more frequent reapplication, for example. So more or less, something’s going to have to be done one way or the other.

“Our stains are premium at their targeted performance level,” O’Reilly factors. “In some respects, the easiest product to use is a lightly toned water repellent or penetrating oil that only needs

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Etching For More Business?

Duckback manufacturers stain products for both wood and concrete, so we figured—hey, what happens when you've got both in the same yard? Say you already sign on to stain a deck, but you suggest staining the concrete to a somewhat matching or contrasting color. More work for you, and more "beauty" to go around. While "beauty of the wood," is a long-time cliché phrase, there's no such luck with "beauty of the concrete."



homeowner, you can always decorate your way out of it. "With a concrete stain," McGarr suggests, "you can use our blending technique to put a couple different colors together. By doing that, you are enhancing the variegation a little bit and showing some different looks in the concrete. That would probably work its way to matching or working with the color of the wood stain better."

It will take a more prep to get it ready, though. After it's clean, you have to etch. "With concrete you have to profile the surface, or roughen it up a little bit, so a penetrating stain can penetrate or so a solid color stain can grab on or adhere properly," says Steve McGarr, VP sales and marketing at Duckback, makers of Superdeck® products for wood and Mason's Select® products for concrete. "We make an etching product that will roughen the top layer of the concrete. We also have a transparent stain in our Mason's Select line that gives an acid stain look, but with an acrylic stain formula. It shows off and highlights variations in concrete," he says. "Plus, you can blend some colors and give it a bit of an accent stain look in a safe and easy-to-use acrylic latex." So now you have a variety of ways to make the concrete look cool next to the deck, or in its own right.

Just like a wood surface, you have a couple options as to how much of the original concrete you want showing through. The company makes a solid concrete stain product called Epoxacryl™, which is a blend of epoxy and acrylic latex. "It combines the durability and strength of the epoxy with ease of application and colorfastness of acrylic," says McGarr.

One thing to consider if you're planning to coat both wood and concrete is the influence your surface will have on the final color. If you're going with a semi-transparent, the color of the wood and concrete is going to influence the final color more than if you're going solid, so an exact match with a semi-trans might be difficult.

If it's a problem for a

While some manufacturers... well okay, most manufacturers, want to sell as much product as possible, there are times when enough is enough. On both wood and concrete, you don't want to put down so much product that it can't absorb into the surface. "More is not better in the case of stains," says Steve. "Transparent stain is a one coat product. Give that one coat as much product as the wood will absorb. By using multiple coats you're just going to build up oil on top of the wood." Which, to misquote Martha Stewart, is not a good thing.

Look for some new branding and labeling from this company in the future. Many of these changes are to help your customers make a better emotional connection to these products and their results—to realize they can look outside at a nicely stained patio or deck and feel some peace of mind. "It's to give them confidence as part of our outdoor lifestyle campaign," says McGarr. That way, people will want to live outdoors as well as in, and feel their outside is as protected as their inside. So you're not just staining a deck, you're creating a lifestyle! If you can help give your customers peace of mind—help them enjoy an expanded, improved, protected living space, that makes a stain job much more than a stain job.



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“It isn’t always the case, but usually, when you pay more for a coating, more goes into it.”

washing before reapplication, but reapplication will be much more frequent. It could be easier to use a solid-color stain that hides imperfections and provides long term protection, making maintenance more infrequent, but when it comes time to refinish, more work may be required.”

It might help your customer make a choice if you talk through all the differences in all the coatings. What are the benefits and maintenance requirements of each? If they understand what, exactly, they are putting on the deck now, there won’t be any surprises later. “The cost of materials is typically around 10% of the cost of the job, so delivering what’s right for the customer shouldn’t vary so much on product cost as it will on preparation, double coating where necessary and long-term maintenance costs,” O’Reilly concludes.

And why not give your customer a choice? Different stains do have different final looks. They might pay more

for a premium look on the initial project, but save a lot of money on a longer lasting product. “Premium stains, interior and exterior, are all about optimum performance and a distinctive appearance of the finished product,” says Gradisher. “In Sikken’s case, it is the translucent finish—that ‘Sikkens look’—as a result of the extensive manufacturing and milling process.”

And how do you leave your customer with the best finish possible? Your finish is based on your start. “Surface prep is the first and most important part of the application of a stain,” says Gradisher. “Follow all directions on the label or call for technical assistance.” Don’t just “forget” to prep, or take the short cut. “Wood that has not been prepared correctly will not allow a stain to penetrate, which will diminish the overall appearance and performance of any finish or stain.”

Anyway, more work isn’t necessarily bad, especially if someone is willing to pay you to do it!

How to Successfully Select and Protect Wood for DIY Projects

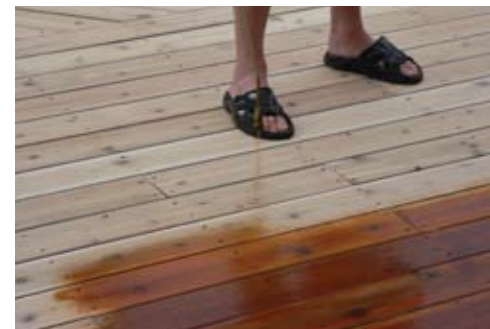
Wood as beautiful, durable and inherently “green”. Chances are you won’t be building the deck, so why are we talking about picking out wood? Because just like any paintable surface, the more you know about wood, the better you can protect it. Plus, if you can influence your customer to buy quality wood, you’ll have an easier time coating it and maintaining it! Thanks to the folks at Sansin for providing us with these tips.

Spring is here, and summer’s on the way! That means so are home improvement projects that require better weather conditions. Wood decks and exteriors can indeed last long and wear gracefully, but you need to select the right wood and then protect it in the right way, says Sjoerd Bos, Vice President of Sansin, a manufacturer of environmentally-friendly wood protection products based in Strathroy, ON.

Bos mentions that wood is not only beautiful, but it is also strong, durable and kind to the environment. “In a time when it’s all about ‘green building,’ wood is about as green as it gets,” he says. “Wood feeds the atmosphere as it grows and nourishes the earth at the end of its lifecycle. It is our only truly renewable resource and should be the go-to element for any building project. It just takes a little planning to ensure a desirable outcome.”

When wood is carefully selected and properly protected, it can compete with any other building material on the market in terms of durability and easy upkeep, according to Bos. He offers these tips for selecting and using wood in building projects to ensure an end product that is both beautiful and easy to maintain.

1. Protect wood from moisture: Wood needs to remain dry and have minimal exposure to rainfall to



naturally prevent decay. Design techniques – such as using overhangs – can be utilized to preserve the life of the wood. If this isn’t possible a deep-penetrating preservative or pressure-treated wood might be the best bet, according to Bos.

2. Consider performance when selecting wood type:

Rather than letting the look of the wood dictate your choice, Bos suggests selecting the type of wood for your project based on its performance characteristics. For example, Spruce is a very strong, long lasting wood, making it a good candidate for wall construction. Teak, on the other hand, holds up well to wet environments and is resistant to decay and traffic, making it a solid choice for marine use.

3. Protect deck wood from the inside out:

Bos says decks offer unique challenges because they are typically high-traffic areas, completely exposed to the elements, and have a horizontal orientation. Additionally, moisture content fluctuates with the seasons, making decks particularly challenging to protect. Bos

recommends deck protection that has a penetrating, non-film-forming finish. These coatings tend to wear or erode rather than peel, allowing a quick recoat to bring back the original beauty and protection.

Consider low VOC finishes: Wood is an inherently “green” building material so why not protect it naturally? Look for low VOC (volatile organic compound) finishes that penetrate wood. Penetrating, non film forming finishes are far easier to maintain, especially on decks, as these coatings will tend to wear or erode rather than peel. And, water-borne alkyd, penetrating stain formulas are also less toxic, protecting from within for longer lasting protection.

So there you have it: using better products all the way around give you a better finished project and happier customers. **TPC**

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