

H O U S I N G The Portland Observer

Preserve Wood By Keeping Clean, Dusted, Polished

Whether fine antiques, heirlooms, contemporary pieces or tables, chairs and bureaus from flea markets, furniture will look better and last longer with proper care.

The best way to protect and preserve furniture is by keeping it clean, dusted and polished. Cleaning, dusting and polishing seems so obvious that most people are not aware that they may not be doing the job properly and may be damaging their furniture.

Before trying any product or technique, it is a good idea to look carefully to determine construction, age and condition. A product that works well with one piece may be unsuitable for another. For example,

silicone-based polishes are fine for modern furniture that has a lacquer or urethane finish, but they are not suitable for surfaces with more traditional finishes.

Read all labels carefully and when in doubt, experiment on an inconspicuous part. With valuable antiques, it is always wise to consult professionals beforehand.

Start with cleaning. Most people make the mistake of trying to remove dirt and grime by dousing the furniture with copious water and detergent.

Excessive water can cause wood to warp, veneer to dislodge, leather to stretch and padding to mildew.

The best way to clean leather is

by washing it with a good saddle soap. Follow the directions on the can and use as little water as possible. Wipe it off with a damp rag and dry the surface as quickly as possible with a clean, dry cloth.

Clean upholstery often with a vacuum. Remember that surface dirt has a way of working into the cracks and crevices. You can also use a whisk broom to dislodge loose dirt.

Sometimes spills cause unsightly stains. The best time to attack stains is as soon as they occur. It helps to have a stain-and-spot remover on hand for emergencies. You can make your own by mixing an absorbent powder like fuller's earth, talcum or French chalk with a clean-

ing fluid like naphtha.

Remember that cleaning fluid may affect the upholstery color. Always test it on an unobtrusive part.

Very dirty upholstery can be cleaned with special commercial formulas. Read the directions carefully. In general, the technique consists of applying the shampoo and letting it set for a specified period before working it into a thick foam. It is really the foaming action that lifts the dirt. Remove the foam with a coarse sponge or stiff brush. Let the upholstery dry completely

before using the furniture. Be careful when cleaning wood surfaces. For slightly soiled surfaces, dip a chamois in a mild detergent

and squeeze it to free excessive moisture. Wipe the wood and remove detergent residue by wiping with clean water. Again apply this rinse with a damp, not dripping, chamois.

That technique will not, however, remove built-up layers of wax.

It may be necessary to use a solvent to dissolve the wax. Some authorities are quite cavalier about using solvents. With careless abandon they suggest using anything that is available like naphtha or alcohol. They can harm your furniture many ways.

Naphtha will quickly remove any wax build-up but it can penetrate beneath thin sheets of veneer. That can dissolve the adhesive and curl

the veneer. Alcohol can destroy a shellac finish.

The best solvent to remove wax is turpentine. People who are sensitive to its smell can buy odorless turpentine from art-supply stores or use mineral spirits.

Fine furniture should be waxed two to three times a year, with additional applications for heavily used pieces.

It is important to dust furniture often. Use a clean cotton cloth and apply a little elbow grease to keep the wax buffed.

Dusting aerosols are helpful. But read the ingredients to make sure that they are compatible with your furniture finish.

Oregon Sees Trend Of Larger Houses On Smaller Lots

Big homes, small lots. The latest trend at several Eugene subdivisions leaves some buyers scratching their heads. They wonder why the mammoth Victorians, Tudors and colonials are packed together like so many dollhouses on a toy-store shelf.

But residents in those neighborhoods say they've found just what they're looking for: a country estate, minus the country and the grounds to maintain.

The homes typically cover 2,500 square feet to 4,000 square feet on a 10,000-square-foot to 20,000-square-foot lot.

Love 'em or hate 'em, such homes are coming on strong.

Some builders and real estate appraisers said all the new construction has saturated the market with homes that list for \$250,000 to \$1 million. They wonder how many high-end homes the market can bear and who can afford to buy them.

"I've appraised dozens of \$500,000 to million dollar homes," said Roger Reich, president of Reich, Broughton & Associates appraisers of Eugene. "There just can't be that

many people to buy those kind of houses."

Why are lots shrinking while homes are growing? Escalating land prices, mounting regulatory requirements and homebuyer's preferences are driving the trend, builders and developers said. As the costs of land, and of preparing it, continue to soar, developers squeeze profit from their parcels by creating more lots per acre.

"It now pays to cut parcels into smaller pieces just because of the high costs of developing them in the first place," said Max Vollmer, executive vice president of the Lane County Home Builders Association.

The city of Eugene encourages high-density building in town to reduce urban sprawl, but it sets no maximum lot size or minimum density requirements for single-family residential construction, city planner Jerry Jacobson said.

City codes allow lots as small as 4,500 square feet for single-family homes. The city lowered that minimum from 6,000 square feet in the early 1980s.

Lot sizes in Eugene range from 4,590 square feet to 98,229 square feet, according to a survey taken last fall of single-family residential subdivisions built over the past five years.

On average, the largest lots are in the southeast hills, where forests and sloping land preclude construction on much of the lot, Jacobson said.

The city sets general guidelines about how large homes can be relative to the size of their lots, and how close they can be to neighboring homes.

Single-family homes can be as close as 10 feet to each other, and a dwelling cannot cover more than half of the lot, under city code. But the trend toward bigger homes is "market- or builder-driven," Jacobson said. Builders said they're constructing larger homes because that's what buyers want.

"(Buyers) want the same kind of feel of a big house in the country but they want the convenience of being in town," said Chris Wolgamott, advertising director for Valley River Village, a 166-acre development.

Linoleum Is Making A Comeback

It's hard to imagine the first half of the 20th century without linoleum, the flooring of countless kitchens, bathrooms and recreation rooms. And it's almost equally hard to imagine linoleum as a hot floor covering in the '90s.

"It came in 15 shades of brown," said Scott Hyman, an owner of Town and Country Flooring in New York, recalling the classic linoleum of the Lucy and Ricky era.

But linoleum, real linoleum made with linseed oil, is back, turning up everywhere from restaurants to residences. The latest linoleums come in contemporary colors - raspberry reds, eggplant purples, mustard yellows - as well as the muted, marbled grays, greens, aquas and browns of linoleums past.

Not surprisingly, a big part of linoleum's current charm is its retro quality, making it the flooring of choice when vintage houses and apartments are restored.

But interior designers are also treating linoleum with new respect. Hermes Mallea and Carey Maloney, partners in the M (Group), a New

York architectural firm, devised an elaborately patterned floor of hand-cut linoleum hexagons for an elegant dining room in their show house in 1993. They particularly like linoleum in entryways, sitting rooms and other formal settings.

"We use linoleum because it is great-looking, practical, durable and unexpected," Maloney said. "The colors are great and can be very subtle, all shot with different colors."

Many homeowners also appreciate the natural ingredients that make up real linoleum - wood flour, rosins, ground limestone, powdered cork, pigments and linseed oil on a jute backing.

The name, coined in 1863 by linoleum's inventor, Frederick Walton, comes from the Latin words *linum* (flax) and *oleum* (oil). Besides acting as a binder - and providing linoleum's distinctive scent - linseed oil oxidizes over time, creating a hard surface.

Linoleum's popularity faded fast in the 1960s, eclipsed by newfangled vinyls that were easier to install and maintain and were available in more

colors. In 1974 Armstrong Floors shut down the last linoleum plant in the United States.

Genuine linoleum is now imported from Europe, where it never fell from favor. And a handful of antiques stores carry unused rolls of the real thing from the 1920s through the 1950s.

Today's linoleums cost about the same as top-quality sheet vinyls.

Linoleum can be vacuumed, dusted with a dry mop or damp-mopped with a neutral detergent.

New linoleum should be sealed with at least four coats of an acrylic floor finish like Taski Ombra, which provides a matte finish. If a buildup occurs, it can be removed with a low-pH stripper designed for linoleum.

For all its beauty, linoleum is still a challenge to install. Unlike vinyl tiles, which are often laid by do-it-yourselfers, linoleum usually requires professional installation, particularly for custom-patterned floors.

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