



Don't Cover it Up! How to Keep Your Natural Wood Looking Natural for Life by Travis Baker, Boodge Company

Natural Wood Appearance \ 1: that which shows the natural inconsistencies of wood grain and wood color variations.

In my 20 years in the wood restoration and preservation business, I have seen the struggle to maintain a natural wood appearance be fought relentlessly, and surrendered to the forces of nature, leaving homeowners frustrated and disappointed. Their pocket books drained and their wood covered in impervious (hard) solid finishes, most endure the sentence of ugly paints and stains, dark finishes when they would prefer light and natural, and the nightmares of ugly black mold and mildew, bleached-out sun and water marks, and the eventuality of having to replace the wood at a huge expense. The following is a discussion pertaining to my observations of the typical lifecycle of applications to an exterior natural wood surface. It is my intent to show you how and why these common misconceptions occur and offer you a solution to maintaining your natural wood appearance for life.

The Natural Wood Dilemma

The natural wood homeowner faces a two-fold problem:

- 1.) How does one protect their natural wood from the negative effects of weathering, and
- 2.) How does one protect their natural wood from the negative effects of weathering while at the same time maintain the desired natural wood appearance?

The solution to the problem is very easy for a short time span but becomes increasingly difficult as time wears on. There is also a perception that it is impossible to restore or maintain a natural wood appearance once the desired appearance has been compromised by weathering, or multiple products applications, or both. Having said this, the following discussion will present the typical lifecycle of a residential structure with a natural wood exterior.

TYPICAL APPLICATION LIFECYCLE: From Clear To A Solid Color

Stage One

Most often a homeowner who opts for a natural wood look on their house wants it to remain looking exactly like it does when the siding is fresh and new. The best way to maintain this look while still applying a protective layer is to apply a clear product to the surface. This satisfies the homeowners' need to keep the appearance of the wood as close to like new as possible. Secondary to the appearance is the concern of protecting the siding against weathering. The weathering process will slowly rob the wood of its like-new appearance and will do so in many different ways. The problem is that clear products do a very poor job of both maintaining appearance and protecting the wood. Consequently, one would need to refinish the exterior on an annual basis or every two years in order to keep the wood and clear finish from degrading to a point that it isn't on a rapid decline in both ability to protect and maintain the desired appearance. By most people's standards and ability to afford the cost of the labor, an application cycle of every year or two is out of the question. Labor is usually the most significant cost in treating a house. Also, many homeowners believe that for the cost of some of the clear products on the market they ought to last better than they do. For the purpose of this discussion, we will call this clear product application Stage One in the typical application lifecycle.

Stage Two

Stage Two occurs 2-4 years down the road. By this point, there are noticeable signs of degradation. The house no longer has a fresh, like-new appearance. The appearance has darkened significantly. It may be showing water spots or streaks in the form of very dark lines, caused by the tannins (natural wood oils) in the wood bleeding to the surface or oils from the clear product on the surface. If there are areas of heavy exposure to

water, these areas may appear bleached out or silver/gray in appearance. The siding may have areas that look extremely dull and have no luster whatsoever. This appearance is most typical in areas that have a great deal of exposure to the sun. The overall presence of wood grain is substantially diminished as well. There may also be a splotchy appearance developing because some boards or areas of the wood are retaining a luster, while other boards or areas are dull. At Stage Two, the typical homeowner decides to do something about maintaining the wood, however, at this point, their focus has changed from that of wanting to maintain a new appearance to that of concern with protecting the wood from further damaged from weathering. Now, the homeowner is willing to accept the use of a pigmented product (stain), in order to even out the appearance and mask some of the imperfections, as long as it doesn't hide the wood grain too much or darken the siding even further than it already is. At this point, the use of transparent, yet pigmented products is commonly used as well as semi-transparent products. Semi-transparent products achieve their transparency essentially by the dilution of a solid color product. The application is critical to achieving the transparency as well. Semi-transparent stains are often just a misted coating on the surface of the wood. They inherently do very little to protect the wood but provide a very short-term solution to the ever-declining appearance of a once very beautiful natural wood home. Towards the latter half of Stage Two, the house is nearing an ugly appearance and the homeowner is disappointed with the appearance. By this point in time they have long forgotten the original appearance of their home and no longer have the emotional attachment they once had to their house looking exactly like they would like it too.

Sometimes people hang out at Stage Two for a couple of application cycles by just going to a darker colored semi-transparent the second time around in this stage. Typical appearances associated with this stage are accentuated splotchy appearance which is visually exacerbated by the existence of color and sheen where stain is built-up in multiple layers coupled with adjoining surfaces that are colorless or turning very dark and have no sheen or luster. In addition, it becomes very apparent that, as the house is weathering, the most recent application of a product is a temporary solution to the downfall of the appearance. This is evidenced by all the imperfections that may have been masked by this application showing through, and showing through, worse than ever. It is extremely common that a product contains linseed oil and especially products intended for use on natural wood surfaces. It is probable that by the time a house has had two or three applications of a product on it that at least one, or all of them, contained linseed oil. With this comes a common side effect, and that is that linseed oil is a natural source of nutrients for mold and mildew growth, coupled with lack of sunlight and enough water, it will induce the dreaded blackening of wood that is often seen on neglected natural wood surfaces. With clear or transparent stains or pure linseed oil, this is readily seen. With semi-transparent stains it is present but less detectable to the ordinary eye and significantly contributes to the otherwise darkening appearance often associated with stains.

Stage Three

Now comes Stage Three (The Point Of No Return)! Stage Three occurs when a homeowner is compelled to do something about treating his home primarily because it looks out-and-out bad.

Now is when they will seek the professional to find out what might be done about making their house not look like an eyesore. Secondly, they are concerned about protecting the wood. At this stage there are many who put aesthetics aside, figuring they can't do anything to reverse the affects of time on the appearance and then make the protection or preservation of the wood their primary concern. Professional painters most often recommend at this stage of a houses life cycle that an oil-based or hybrid water-based solid color stain be used. Oil-based because it will not peel like a straight water-based paint typically will and solid color, to completely cover up the ugliness that has evolved over the years. So the bottom line is, at this point, the house is painted and far, far from the original natural wood it once was. Once a house has been solid-color painted; there is very little chance of restoring it to the original appearance.

The WoodCare Professional Series by Boodge Company Solves the Dilemma

The good news is that the products from Boodge Company are specially formulated and developed for the purpose of preserving your wood's natural appearance for the entire life of the wood with low maintenance and reapplication requirements. Your natural wood really can stay looking new with proper treatment using the WoodCare Professional Series.



Things to Consider When Choosing a Natural Wood Stain or Paint

The point of this discussion is to alert and to educate those who are homeowners and those who are service contractors as to the likely plight of natural wood. This applies to all types of exterior natural wood surfaces from siding to decks to fences and so on. Here are some key considerations when choosing a product or process.

- Consider the effects of a plant oil based product and its propensity to mold or mildew (turn black).
 1. How quickly will the product turn black?
 2. How difficult will it be to remove?
 3. What methods of stripping might be necessary?
 - A. How effective are these methods?
 - B. Does it have to be sanded?
 - C. Does it need pressure washing?
 - D. Does it need pressure washing and sanding?
- Consider the effects of multiple applications of the product.
 1. What will it look like?
 - A. Will it look like new?
 - B. Does the manufacturer NOT recommend layering or double coating?
 - C. Is sanding out of the question because the surface is rough?
 - D. What might pressure washing do to the surface? Is this acceptable?
- Can I continue to re-use this product and expect it to look the same each time?
- Am I willing to accept the possibility that I might NOT be able to keep my wood natural?
- What are the effects of a water-based stain versus an oil- based stain?
- Can I do this myself?
- How often does it need to be done?
- Look at examples of products having been on for 2- 5 years?
- What is the sheen of the product?
 1. Does the sheen stay the same?
 2. Will the sheen be difficult to keep the same?
 3. What will happen to the sheen in direct sunlight exposed areas?
- What happens to the color over time?
- Do I need protection primarily against the sun?
- Do I need protection primarily against water?
- Is my #1 concern aesthetics or function (protection of the wood)?
- How do I know if my wood is protected?
- Does my wood have severe exposure to sun, shade, water, etc.?
- Are some products better in some areas than others?

For help answering these questions, check out our other articles and Tips from Travis at www.Boodge.com

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