

# ShellacFinishes



## Vijay Velji

Proprietor

7740 Goldfish Way  
San Diego CA 92129

Website:

[www.shellacfinishes.biz](http://www.shellacfinishes.biz)

ShellacFinishes

The Shellac source for  
the classical woodworker

Phone: 858-780-2865

E-mail: [sales@shellacfinishes.biz](mailto:sales@shellacfinishes.biz)

## Highlights of today's demonstration:

### Step 1: Preparation

First and foremost it is imperative that the surface to be finished should be well planed, super flat and sanded with 320 grit sandpaper. This preparation before the application of shellac is of utmost importance. A well prepared surface will save time and produce an excellent surface for the shellac to be laid on. There are no shortcuts here. The preparation process is as important as the application process!

### Step 2: Pore Filling

Many open grained woods like Oak, Mahogany etc. need pore filling. The reason for this is to create a flat surface for the shellac to be laid on. It also helps the finished surface to be smooth with little or no undulations. Pore filling is not needed for closed grained woods like Maple, Cherry and Walnut etc. However a lot of French polishers still prefer to fill as much as possible. The best pore filler is pumice. Apply it with a pad charged with alcohol in circular motion. A quick guide to know if the filling is complete is to run your finger nail against the grain. If the travel is smooth with little or no resistance, you are done.

### Step 3: Intermediate sanding

Once the pores have been filled with Pumice stone, a very thin layer of shellac is applied to seal it. Once dry, the surface should be lightly wet sanded with 600 grit sandpaper in a circular pattern. Water is a good lubricant for wet sanding.

### Step3: Bodying

This is the process where the polisher lays down coat after coat of shellac, thus building the finish to the desired color and thickness. There are no set rules on the thickness. As long as the pores are filled and the surface appears to be smooth, is all that matters. Color of the shellac used on the type of wood is also controlled at this stage. What is most important is that the shellac is laid down in very thin and even coats. The easiest way to achieve this is to always use a 1lb cut to charge the pad and further diluted with the same amount of alcohol. If a thick layer of shellac is applied, it will leave a wavy surface that may be difficult to get rid off later.

### Step 4: Burnishing

After the desired color and thickness has been achieved, the burnishing process starts. This requires elbow grease and plenty of patience. Burnishing is required for stretching the shellac evenly over the surface as well as to get the final mirror finish. During this stage shellac is seldom used. The pad is charged with alcohol only and the surface is swept with even motion. As the surface appears to even out and look smooth, alcohol is discontinued and with a bit of pressure the pad is moved around in an even motion. At this time the pad is almost dry to touch.

**Important;** keep the pad moving at all times to avoid burn marks.

## Facts about shellac:

Shellac is 100% natural. It is produced by bugs that live in Northeastern India. Shellac is also harvested in Thailand and Sri Lanka. Shellac is 100% non toxic and is FDA approved. Therefore it is widely used in the cosmetic, drug and food industry. It is the only finish that should be used on children's furniture due to its non toxicity!

### What is a shellac 'cut'?

The so called 'cut' of shellac is best described as the ratio of shellac flakes in relation to denatured alcohol. A 1lb 'cut' means 1lb of shellac flakes dissolved in 1 gallon of denatured alcohol. However this is a large quantity for most woodworking shops. Moreover most shops do not own a weighing scale either. Hence a smaller amount can be mixed for a 1lb cut by taking 1oz. of shellac flakes and dissolving it in 1 cup of denatured alcohol. If a 2lb cut is required, simply increase the weight of the shellac flakes to 2oz. For a 3lb cut increase the weight to 3oz and so on for heavier cuts. Since a cup holds 8 oz, divide the cup into eight equal parts for measuring 1 oz. now you don't need a weighing scale, only a cup from your kitchen.

### **How do I make the shellac solution?**

Take a clean glass bottle with a tight fitting lid that will hold the amount of alcohol that you intend to use. Use the above measurements for the shellac flakes and alcohol depending on the cut and quantity that you want to make. Pour the shellac flakes and alcohol into the bottle and close the lid tightly. Give it a few shakes from time to time. The shellac will dissolve in a few hours. Run the solution through a paint sieve, that can be found at any paint store, to remove impurities. You are ready to apply shellac.

### **Can shellac be used as a stain?**

Absolutely! As a matter of fact it is a stain and a sealer all in one. You can't ask for more! If you wish to use shellac as a stain, simply take Super Blonde, which is the clearest of all grades, and mix the required alcohol based aniline dye till the desired color is achieved.

### **Can shellac be used as a sealer?**

Shellac is an excellent sealer. Always apply a coat of shellac on the insides of cabinets and drawers. If the wood has been finished with any kind of oil and the odor needs to be rid off, use shellac as a sealer. Ever tried applying a coat of paint over pine wood? Over time, the sap leaches out and ruins the look. Use shellac as a sealer coat before applying paint.

### **What is the shelf life of shellac?**

Shellac flakes have a finite shelf life unknown to most users. Even if Shellac flakes are stored in a cool, dark and dry place, but older than 3 years, it will not dissolve in alcohol overnight when compared to fresh stock. When applied, it will be sticky and slow drying. If used for French polishing, more than the usual amount of oil will be required for lubrication.

Once dissolved in alcohol, shellac does not last more than 6 months at the most. Store mixture in a cool, dark and dry area of your workshop. The ideal temperature is between 65-70 degrees F.

Always dissolve shellac as and when needed.