

Expert advice

DIY DILEMMAS

Big Strong Boys' Jake Robinson answers your questions and reveals how to sand a floor like a pro

ANY TIPS ON REVAMPING AN OLD CABINET?

Can you tell me the best way to paint an old, dated wooden cabinet? I thought spray paint might do the job, but there are so many types to choose from. What do you recommend?

Michael Tait, Bristol

Jake says To get a really professional finish, start by sanding the cabinet. If it's raw timber, use fine sandpaper, but if it's been previously painted or varnished, you'll need to start with a coarser grade. Next, prime the wood with a wood primer. Choose one from the No Nonsense range of quick-drying primers, available from Screwfix. To get the best finish, I would definitely recommend spraying the unit. There are various brands of paint you can use – I'm a fan of Humbrol Just Spray (get yours from decoratingdirect.co.uk). It's a hard-wearing, fast-drying spray paint and is available in 14 great colours. Just follow the instructions on the paint can regarding the distance to spray from, otherwise you'll get run marks which will spoil the overall look. Make sure you also lay down lots of newspaper around the cabinet before you start to protect your surroundings.



JAKE ROBINSON



IS THERE A WAY TO REPAIR THE PLASTER ON MY WALLS?

There are two areas in my house where the plaster has blistered – one next to the front door and the other on the wall leading up the staircase in a line. It's so bad the plaster looks like it's about to flake off completely. Is there anything I can do to stop it?

Maggie Brown, Sheffield

Jake says The line up the stairs suggests there may be movement in the staircase, which has blown the plaster away from the board. The only way to remedy this is to hack it off and replaster. To avoid in future, clad over the area with 9-12mm MDF using UniBond No More Nails and screw it to the plasterboard. Fill, sand, re-plaster and paint. The door patch may have been caused by damp, so check with a damp meter. If there are cracks in the exterior wall, fill them with damp-proof mortar mix. If there aren't any, but the meter indicates a problem, call in a damp specialist. It could be that the previous owners hid these problem areas from you to avoid the cost of fixing them.

CAN I REMOVE SCRATCHES FROM A GLASS SURFACE?

We have a glass-top table in our dining room. It has quite a few fine scratches on it, and I'm wondering whether there is a way to 'fill them in' or polish them out. Do you have any suggestions so we don't have to replace the glass?

Philippa Rogers, Sutton

Jake says Fine scratches can easily be removed. Wearing rubber gloves, add some polishing compound such as jewellers rouge or even whitening toothpaste to a lamb's wool buffing pad. Move over the sections of glass where there are scratches in a circular motion, occasionally wiping the polish away to check on the progress of the removal. Once happy, clean the glass surface with ammonia water and a clean soft sponge. Wear both gloves and goggles for safety when using ammonia water. Then finally, dry the glass with a lint-free towel. If the scratches have not cleared completely, they should at least be less apparent. If there is no significant difference, you may want to consider contacting a glass company to replace or rebuff the glass. ▶

TURN THE PAGE...
to read Jake's step-by-step guide to sanding a wooden floor



Send in your DIY queries to

Expert advice, Real Homes, 64 North Row, London W1K 7LL or email Jake at realhomes@hf-uk.com



DIY CONTINUED

Jake's guide to... sanding a floor

Sanding a floor can really make a difference to your house by giving it a fresh new look. It's also cheaper than installing new flooring, so it's great if you're on a budget.

YOU WILL NEED

Nail punch, belt sander, floor sander, edge sander, grit paper, dust mask, white spirit, goggles, ear plugs.

STEP ONE: PREPARING THE FLOOR

Empty the room as it will get very dusty. Then, using a nail punch, knock the nail heads until they're about an eighth below the surface (**fig. 1**). Make sure you are aware of the location of central heating pipes first. Sweep the floor and fill in any gaps with wood filler. You don't need to wait for this to dry, the heat from the sanders will blast it dry. But remember, when you varnish or stain the boards, the joints will come up a slightly different colour to the rest of the floor because they're of a different composition to the natural wood. Alternatively, lift the boards and push together so they are completely flush. Then fill the gaps using reclaimed timber or wood from another room.

STEP TWO: SANDING THE FLOOR

You can hire floor and edge sanders from HSS for £73.75 per weekend, or £118 per week, not including sanding sheets.

Start at one end of the room with your

back to the wall, making sure you don't lower the plate of the floor sander while standing still, as it will eat into the floor boards! When ready, lower the plate and push the machine at a steady pace in a straight line (**fig. 2**). Always go with the grain and never across it.

Once you've done one length, turn around before you hit the skirting board and make your way back to the other side. Don't forget to tilt the sander right off the floor when turning to avoid stop marks. Repeat until the floor has a uniform look. You'll need to use gradually finer grades of sandpaper to get a smooth finish.

STEP THREE: SANDING THE EDGES

The area at the extremities that have not been treated will need to be done in the same way to blend in with the rest of the floor. Use a small edge sander for this (**fig. 3**) to avoid damaging the skirting board. Repeat as above until smooth.

STEP FOUR: FINISHING TOUCHES

Allow the dust to settle in the room for an hour or so, and then vacuum or sweep. Wipe the edges with a damp cloth and white spirit, then apply a varnish to finish (**fig. 4**). These are available oil-based or water-based. Oil-based varnishes are hard wearing but crack easily, whereas water-based varnishes wear easily but won't crack. A semi-matt finish will look more professional than a high-gloss finish.

Above left You don't need to install a brand-new wooden floor to brighten up a room. Just sand the existing one until you have a lovely clean finish

TOP TIPS

- Keep all cables out of the sanding area at all times.
- Always use safety equipment to protect eyes, lungs and ears.
- Plug your sanding machine in through a circuit breaker when sanding.
- Empty the sander dust bags when they are a quarter full. Overly full dust bags reduce dust extraction efficiency.
- There is a metal bar that holds down the sanding sheet – this needs to be on tight or the sandpaper will only need to hit one little bump and it will shred.