Staining/Refinishing

Wood staining entails applying a coat of stain to a freshly sanded wood surface to enhance the color of the wood or emphasize the grain. The process of sanding and staining a piece of wood is known as refinishing. When you refinish a wood surface, you first strip the wood of any pre-existing stain or varnish, then apply a new coat of stain followed by a wood finish such as polyurethane.

Reminders for Wipe On Stains

1. Consider testing a few stains on a scrap piece of wood first to make sure you like the color. You can apply with a brush then wipe off with a clean rag or just wipe on.
2. Sandpaper: More than likely you will need 120, 180, and 220-grit sandpaper to complete the job. Start with 120, then sand with 180, then final sand with 220.
3. Pre-stain wood conditioner especially for soft woods.
4. Drop cloth: Place a drop cloth under your staining project to protect the floor from drips and oil stains.
5. Sealer: You don't have to seal your wood project, but a wood sealer will help protect it from scratches and wear. Consider finishing the project with a clear topcoat of polyurethane for the best results.

The Staining Process

1. **Start by sanding the unfinished wood** with 120-grit sandpaper, being sure to sand in the direction of the grain. This will open the pores of the wood. Repeat the process with 180-grit sandpaper. Wipe off the dust with a clean rag or tack cloth.
2. **Stir your stain**. Using a paint stick, stir the can of stain to fully mix in any pigments that may have settled at the bottom.
3. Apply the stain. Apply oil-based stains with a paintbrush or clean rag. Apply water-based stains with a foam brush or synthetic bristle brush. For deep grain woods, work the stain into the grain by working in a circular motion. Otherwise, apply the stain evenly in the direction of the wood grain.
4. Wipe off excess stain. **Allow oil-based stains to penetrate the wood for five to fifteen minutes.** Allowing the stain to sit for the maximum amount of time will result in a darker color. **Water-based stain dries quickly and should be wiped off within two minutes of application.**
5. Let the wood dry before applying a sealer. Let water-based stains dry for 2 to 4 hours and oil-based stains for 4 to 8 hours before applying a sealer. The best way to get a smooth finish is to apply the first coat of sealer, let it dry, and **then lightly sand the surface with 220-grit sandpaper before applying a second coat of sealer such as a clear urethane.**