

Help and advice



**Sid Bourne on sanding & finishing problems**

# Get off the marks, ask the experts. I do!

I WAS asked by a friend last year if I could help him out with a problem he was having with a sand and finish job.

This person is a highly skilled sand and finisher. This experience shows that regardless of the level of your experience things can occasionally go wrong.

When this happens you have to stay calm and logically look at every action you took before the problem occurred. By doing this you should be able to work out why it happened and what you can do to resolve it.

In the case in question, my friend was getting dull looking marks across the floor, alongside occasional shiny marks. He had assumed that these were stop marks, but he was unsure why they were happening and causing so much of a problem on this particular job.

Let's call my friend the contractor. He had applied a stain after sanding the floor. This he followed up by applying a polyurethane finish using a lamb wool applicator – his favourite method of administering finishes.

When he noticed these lines, he promptly decided to re-screen and to try again. But this same problem occurred a second time. That's when he phoned me to ask me to come along and have a look at the job – I agreed with him that these were, in fact, stop marks.

We then dissected the job from start to finish. I noticed the conditions were not brilliant; it was very hot; the stain was a deep walnut colour; and the windows were very low. All these factors can cause a disaster for a sand and finish job.

I asked him if he had talked all these issues through with the customer. The contractor admitted that he had not done so. The situation was complicated by the fact that the customer was the contractor's cousin.

He was determined to impress his cousin with his finishing skills. Unfortunately this intention had backfired and, to make matters worse, his cousin started kidding him about the quality of his workmanship.

So the contractor wanted this

sorted once and for all as soon as possible. His problem here was that he was using a matt finish and applying it with a lamb's wool applicator.

The facts are that when using a lamb's wool applicator with this type of finish, you should not push it halfway down the room and then rewet it. If you do this you will certainly cause you stop marks, especially in hot conditions where the flowing properties of the finish are considerably diminished.

We started to fix the floor, first by getting the temperature correct. Sometimes all that is needed is to block strong hot light by covering the windows.

The next day we went back to refinish. First we checked to make sure that the floor surface was in the right condition to start finishing.

I then observed as the contractor started to re-screen the floor, all the while paying attention to the marks. He was quite nervous at this stage, still worrying that it would go wrong yet again. This was not helped by his cousin continuing to give him some grief with a stream of banter.

I advised the contractor to go back to basics. This is where most issues arise. If you want forewarning of possible problems, do this from the word go.

In this case we wet the floor to check out the result. If water shows up any defects then so will your finish. In this case he heaved a huge sigh of relief; it was perfect.

The next step was probably the most difficult one for this contractor to undertake. I advised him to apply the finish using a roller.

But a word of caution here: Before using any applicator, first check with the finish manufacturer that the applicator is suitable.

At first this contractor was very sceptical about this advice. He is a member of the old school, a person who does not like change, especially when it comes to using applicators.

I had brought along with me

some rollers. So, after tacking the floor, we proceeded to apply the finish. When he had finished, the contractor was amazed. We ended up with a brilliant finish and the cousin was speechless.

When choosing your method of application, do not be a prisoner to your old preferences and prejudices. Try out different applicators and, with a little practice and, of course, the right conditions and amount of correct finish, finishing will be simple. Believe me.

To this day, if the conditions require I still resort to the practice of applying the finish with a high quality brush; especially in confined areas.

Also remember that if you use a lamb's wool applicator make sure you run it wall to wall without stopping in the middle of the room. But it is better doing certain larger rooms using a roller. However, unlike lamb's wools which 'push' the finish, rollers actually lay the finish onto the floor.

I find it strange how many people simply muddle through

problems rather than making a phone call to the finish manufacturer. Technical experts employed by most manufacturers will guide you through the choices of application methods.

My friend claims that he feels he is more of an expert than some people working in this trade. That may be so, but as I remind him, he is not the manufacturer and does not know all the technical properties of all the different finishes on the market.

My advice to you is not to be proud or stubborn, ask the technical experts. They have the necessary knowledge and are equipped to advise what applicator is best for a particular finish.

You may be thinking, do I ever ask these experts for advice myself, you bet I do. **CFJ**

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# Low odour latex can cause quite a stink

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They have to be considered a step forward with regard to air quality etc. Most of the impetus has been from European companies, but remember the UK flooring industry differs a lot from Europe.

In fact most manufacturers in Europe didn't have latexes until they moved into the UK market; this must say something about why we have them. Formulating natural rubber products is far from straightforward so the easiest option is to offer synthetic rubber alternatives rightly extolling the benefits.

It is important also to understand that using synthetic latex does not suddenly increase the coverage of the products as this is primarily determined by cement/sand ratios and the water content in the rubber.

However until we as an industry can get the sites improved to give you time to prepare floors thoroughly, have large areas to work and not have your allocated time impinged upon by other trades, then the trusty old 'smelly' latexes have a place.

In summary, there are many perceived and even promoted benefits to low odour smoothing compounds, which may some or all of the time be relevant.

But if you are in any doubt and trust the performance of what you currently use, providing you don't have to change as a result of Health & Safety, then maybe you should stick with what you know. **CFJ**

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