

Understanding Your Handcrafted Wood Sign

Facts About Wood:

As is true with any natural product, no two pieces of wood are exactly alike. Grain pattern, density, natural flaws, and color are a few of many variables, each contributing to the character of the finished product.

Expansion and Contraction:

Fluctuation in temperature and humidity cause wood, as well as many other materials, to expand and contract. You may notice how the doors and windows in your home have a tendency to stick in the summer when the weather is hot and humid, but open and close freely in the less humid winter. The amount of expansion and contraction caused by temperature and humidity is generally related to the density of the material that is exposed to it. Steel is more dense than aluminum, mahogany is more dense than cedar, but all expand and contract to some degree. Because wood is more susceptible than metal to the changes in temperature and humidity, a finish must be chosen that will work with the material and the properties associated with it.

Facts About Finish:

Primers, paints, stains, sealers, and clear coats are available in a multitude of colors and finishes. They are also available in different bases such as latex, alkyd, urethane, and epoxy to name a few, but all serve two essential purposes: first - to make whatever it is that they're applied to look attractive, and second – to protect it. Our experience has proved that the longer a product takes to dry, whether it's primer, paint, or clear coat, the better it seals and protects, and the longer it will last.

We at Wilkins Signs do not recommend, nor do we use automotive primers, paints, or clear coats on our wood signs. These finishes are formulated for use on metal substrates. They dry too quickly to seal wood properly, and when cured, the finish is too hard to allow for expansion and contraction, which, as stated earlier, are properties that are natural to wood.

All varnishes, primers, and paints will raise the grain of the wood. Dark colors and glossy finishes will show the natural flaws in the wood more than light colors or satin finishes. Some natural characteristics that will commonly show up in the darker, glossy colors are areas of inconsistent density in the wood and raised grain fibers that appear as fine specs in the finish. If you've chosen a dark, glossy finish for your sign, you can expect to see these natural characteristics more so than if you had chosen a lighter color or satin finish. If you have any issues with these or other visible natural characteristics, our response is "We told you so."

Hand Tooling:

All work from rough stock to finished product is done in-house at Wilkins Signs. Although our carved wood signs are designed with the aid of a computer, we do not use computer automated machinery to produce the signs. All carving is done the old fashioned way using hand-held chisels, knives, and the occasional wooden mallet when necessary. Though this method might not produce computerized perfection, we're proud to attest that it is a welcome addition to the handcrafted character of our signs.

Maintenance:

Ownership of a handcrafted wood sign bears with it a certain amount of responsibility. Maintenance is key to the longevity of your sign. As was stated earlier, one of the jobs of the finish is to protect the wood. Any break in the seal will allow moisture to seep into the wood. Whether it's due to a chip in the paint, a thumbtack, a staple, a hole drilled for hardware, etc., if that broken seal is not repaired, your sign will begin to deteriorate. When moisture gets into a break in the finish, the wood will absorb it. The moisture will then spread beyond the entry point and when it tries to escape it will push the finish away from the wood causing the finish to blister, crack, and eventually peel. We recommend using 100% silicone sealer for all fasteners that are attached to the sign. Metal brackets and fasteners other than aluminum or stainless steel should

be painted or clear coated, and refinished as necessary. Chips or cracks in the finish should be sanded smooth, and either re-varnished, or primed and repainted.

Keep your sign clean. Salt, dirt, auto exhaust, and a host of other contaminants will harm the finish of your sign. Wash it regularly using any mild, non-abrasive household cleaner. Solvents and abrasive cleaners, pads, or brushes are not recommended.

Whenever possible, keep your sign dry. If your home or office has an irrigation system, avoid installing the sign in close proximity to a sprinkler head. The finish on your sign will protect the wood from normal weather conditions for a long time if maintained properly, but to water it daily is not good practice. Once a piece of wood has been separated from its root and its bark, water becomes its enemy... and it will eventually lose the fight.

Something to watch for as time moves on is what is known as oxidation. It appears as a white powdery substance on the finish. This is evidence that the finish is beginning to break down. At its early stages, the oxidized finish can be polished and the luster restored. However, if left unchecked, the finish will continue to break down and eventually get to the point where the sign will have to be stripped down to bare wood and refinished. This is costly, but avoidable if oxidation is taken care of early using one of two methods: car wax or a similar product and elbow grease, or call us... but maintenance is not a free service. Neither is stripping and refinishing, but it's a lot cheaper.

Exterior signs with a natural (varnish) finish require more frequent maintenance. One of the major reasons for this is that the varnish serves a dual purpose as both primer and finish, and has a tendency to break down sooner than a painted finish. Varnish also cures harder than alkyd or acrylic enamels and, because of that, is more susceptible to chips and cracks over time due to the expansion and contraction of the wood. We recommend that exterior signs finished in this manner be re-varnished on a yearly basis. It's an easy process of buffing lightly with a Scotch Brite ® or similar pad and applying a thin, even coat of spar varnish.

In Closing:

We hope that you've found this information helpful. Keep a copy of this handy for reference. If your sign has been purchased as a gift, or if it is to be passed on to another party, please include a copy of *Understanding Your Handcrafted Wood Sign* along with it.

Thank you for your patronage,

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Name

Date