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## Exterior Wood Finishing GUIDE

Enhancing Outdoor  
Living Spaces



# Enhancing Outdoor Living Spaces

By Dick Wolfe

Exterior wood finishing trends focus on bringing the indoors out.

It is no secret that there is a movement to create — or upgrade — residential outdoor living spaces. As a direct result of this outdoor living trend, more attention is being focused on decks. Perhaps the most demanding exterior area to maintain because of its exposure to harsh outdoor elements, the deck is the centerpiece for alfresco entertaining, and busy homeowners want to rely on their contractor to provide a multitude of quality decking choices in stains and finishes.



## Upgrades Abound

The deck is not just a square plot of wood anymore, and today's design-savvy homeowner knows that. The use of exotic woods, such as teak, ipe and mahogany, has increased over the past couple of years and is now an option that is often chosen in the upscale marketplace. Durable, strong and beautiful, many exotic woods are even rot- and insect-resistant. Some environmentally conscious homeowners may initially shy away from specialty woods, but it is important to note that many species are being sustainably harvested. The United States alone has imported more than \$2 billion worth of tropical woods in 2005, and today there are almost 800,000 residential decks constructed of exotic hardwoods.

Since these species are strong and dense, they are easier to maintain than pine, the popular cost-effective alternative. Over time, specialty woods do not require periodic staining. However,

because they do present a challenging surface, they require a premium initial coating, a cost most homeowners do not mind investing in to guarantee long-term enjoyment with minimal routine maintenance. Traditional water-based finishes are oftentimes unable to penetrate the extremely hard surface of exotic wood, and oil-based finishes do not last very long. Furthermore, oil-based products have the side effects of odor, difficult clean-up and flammability while providing a food source for mildew. To treat these challenging surfaces, it is recommended to use a high-end coating that contains ultraviolet (UV)-absorbing transoxide pigments that will saturate, seal and stabilize the wood to minimize cracking, warping and other damage caused by moisture and sun.

## Color Trends

Many homeowners are moving away from clear finishes and bringing their

Decks have become the centerpiece for alfresco entertaining.  
Photo courtesy of Wolman, a division of Zinsser Co. Inc., Somerset, N.J.



sense of style and passion for color from the interior of their home to the exterior. Hence, the use of color stains on exterior wood, including decking, wood siding, furniture and fences, has become more prevalent.

Stains, semi-transparent stains and transluents have pigments in their formulations that change the color tone of the wood while still allowing the grain to show through. These types of coatings offer good UV protection, which results in better long-term performance. However, note that all stains are not the same. Be sure to choose a product that contains iron oxide or trans-oxide pigments as it will offer enhanced UV protection. Also, consider a hybrid alkyd/acrylic formula that is specifically engineered to provide the advantages of a quality oil-based coating with the ease-of-use in a water-based solution.

Many homeowners are also choosing to go the two-tone solid-color route — coating their railings one color and finishing

the floor another. Solid coatings provide the best protection against UV rays and are a good choice for older decks because they mask weathered wood more effectively than a transparent stain. Choose a product that does not require a primer and goes on uniformly with just one coat. This will result in reduced labor and will save money.

Being aware of the options that are out there can be a business and reputation booster for the contractor. Recommending colors and other design options can increase your margins while marking you as a knowledgeable professional.

It is important to offer a complete package of high-quality products that will adequately prepare exterior wood for a premium finish that will provide durability and minimal maintenance for years to come. Be cautious, particularly when using products to cover up deck imperfections. Be careful to counsel your customer to not purchase an inexpensive product to save a few dollars. If a product

is not properly opaque, it will need to be applied more frequently, thus costing more in the long run.

### Conclusion

The merchandising of exterior wood options and maintenance products often revolves around knowledge and choice. A quality, well-researched project using premium finishes can yield a significantly reduced number of callbacks and also result in a satisfied customer who will not only rehire you but gladly recommend your services to friends and neighbors. **APC**

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