

## **Coating Veneer Technique**

Philippe Lafargue, Tryon Palace, New Bern, NC

### **Introduction**

Most of the traditional ways of recreating missing areas on varnished surfaces include the use of materials such as waxes and shellac flakes that require introduction of heat next to the surface to be treated, levelling excess with scraping tools and, most frustrating, the use of waxes and shellacs that do not match very well other surface finishes.

Another technique is the use of finishes in solution. This requires levelling with abrasives, multiple applications and drying cycles.

For the past couple of months, we have been working on developing a simple technique that uses dry coatings created from a wide range of finishes. It is a very quick technique and can achieve rapid build-up with less exposure to fumes.

In general, all of these coating veneers may be created on different types of support. Shellacs, because of their brittleness, work very well on wax paper support. The lacquers and acryloids work well on low density polyethylene plastics, teflon, and glass supports. (Polyethylene plastics are plastics marked LDPE, also referred to as category 4 recyclable plastics.)

The use of polyethelene supports to create a dry film has several advantages: they are easily available, inexpensive, some have a border that helps in controlling the flow of the finish before complete drying time, and they are flexible for removal purposes. Depending on the desired finish look of the treated area, the dry film can be used from both sides. Keep in mind that the side in contact with the support will be dull looking and the other side will be shiny.

With a little bit of practice the film can be calibrated to the desired thickness using a squeegee over wax paper, glass or teflon supports; a surgical syringe may also be used for calibration of the solution thickness on the polyethylene. The shellac veneer, if created on wax paper can be applied with its support intact to facilitate manipulation and adhesion. After drying, the wax paper is then peeled away from the treated surface.

If a glass support is being used to create a film, a minimum of ten minutes immersion in water is required for the finishes to begin to detach from the glass (some finishes may take longer).

Most of the dry films can be cut out to fit desired shapes with a sharp tool, and they can be applied horizontally, vertically, around turned pieces, and in upside down situations.

After appropriate drying time of the selected adhesive (and depending upon the film's thickness), the excess can be brushed off, or removed with a fingernail or thin spatula.

Following are details of a step by step treatment:

The object treated is an upright piano in the Pope-Leighey House, a museum property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. It is a grained cabinet grand piano manufactured by Malcom Love, NY. Ca.1880.

The loss area selected was on the fluted column in the foreground which rises from the keyboard cover to the sound lid, about breast high; its size was 3/8" long by 3/16" wide.

1-An isolation coat of B67/MS is applied over the loss.

2-The missing grained section part of the loss was duplicated using black acrylic paint to match the overall graining work.

3-A dry film made from B72/alcohol mixed with super blonde shellac/alcohol was created on a wax paper support ahead of time. The B72 and the shellac are dissolved separately in equal measure and then mixed together.

That same solution of B72/shellac was selected to be the adhesive between the B67 isolation coat and the B72/shellac dry film.

4-Wet application of the adhesive coating using a fine brush.

5-The dry film was positioned over the loss and pressed down with a finger.

6-After normal drying time, the excess was brushed off.

A week later, a little bit of xylene on a cotton swab was introduced over the treated area and the treatment was removed with no difficulty and no damage to the surrounding area.

### **Conclusion**

We think that the use of dried resins in a veneer form seems worth practicing.

This technique allows the use of original finish materials in restoring the aesthetic appearance of an artifact without damaging the integrity of its original finish, and allows replacement of missing areas of original materials without melting the peripheral edges of the loss.

The selection of the isolation or buffer agent is done depending upon the composition of the original surface to be treated. In the same manner, the wetting agent or adhesive is selected depending upon the composition of the dry film to be used.

Dried film of the selected finishes can be prepared in advance; the texture, the color, the shine and the thickness can be controlled easily.

Moreover, this is a technique that is fast, retreatable and relies on inexpensive recyclable materials to prepare, making it accessible to any Conservation practitioner.

By Ron Blank, Conservator in Private Practice and Philippe Lafargue, Conservator of the Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens.

### **Material suppliers**

Acrylics B67 and B72

Acrylic paints

Conservation Materials Ltd.

1165 Marietta Way

P.O Box 2884

Sparks, Nevada 89431 tel:702-331-0582

Shellacs

Behlem

Rt. 30 North

Amstredam, New York 12010

Lacquers

Mohawk Finishing Products, Inc.  
Rt. 30 North  
Amsterdam, NY 12010

Teflon

Skycraft Parts & Surplus, Inc.  
P.O. Box 536186  
Orlando, FL 32853

Low density polyethylene

Household kitchen  
Supermarket