



Should I Refinish or Replace My Floors?

Hardwood Flooring is Prone to Aging and Damage

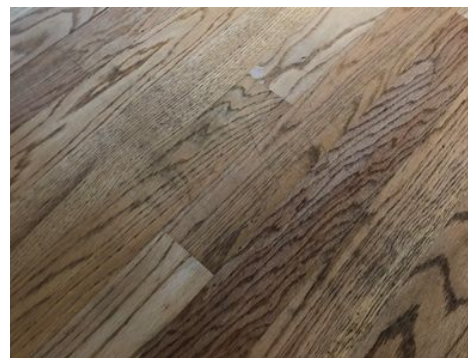
If you love the appearance and feeling of real wood yet your floors are looking worn, then the time has come to update them. Refinishing wood is a cost-effective means of renewing or changing the look of flooring entirely, but it can sometimes fail to adequately cover-up damaged areas and may lead to other unforeseen consequences. Replacement is a vastly more comprehensive project, offering many more design opportunities and long-term fixes for damages and aging albeit at a higher expense. Deciding which option fits your wants, needs, and budget is the first step in repair.

Refinishing with a Screen & Recoat

If your floors are in overall excellent condition and you just want a quick refresh for ongoing protection, a screen and recoat is the way to go. This is a very cost-effective option but is typically only recommended for maintaining the current condition of floors as they are. Screening and recoating is more of a maintenance for those who want to stretch out the time between refinishes since it roughs up the finish for a single coat of polyurethane to adhere rather than sanding down to the wood. If you have deep scratches or worn areas as shown below, this is probably not the option for you.



Deep scratches will not change



Worn floors with dirt ground-in will not improve



Refinishing

We find that most wood floors do not have extensive or serious enough wearing to justify a full replacement. Scratches, dulling, and discoloration can be selectively treated by sanding down the hardwood and filling any cracks with color-matched wood filler, applying the stain for color and capping it off with several coats of either water- or oil-based polyurethane. This will leave the hardwood looking refreshed while providing ample control over the color of the wood. Stain choice also provides the option to match the color of sections of the floor with another.



Some hardwood floors can be sanded down and refinished upwards of six or more times depending on board thickness, and if adequately maintained each refinish can last for up to 10 to 12 years. If you don't wear shoes or allow animals on your floors, they can last even longer than that. Regardless of longevity, you'll want to be sure you hire the right company with skilled refinishers to ensure the job is done correctly the first time.

Potential Problems with Refinishing

Some damages can be difficult to fix or cover up by simply refinishing. In cases of excessive warping, chipping, termite damage, or large stains, replacement is the only option to adequately restore the flooring. Despite this, even when refinishing can be used to remedy some issues, a refinished wood floor will never look totally brand new.



Issues that may Arise during a Refinish Job

- The drying process of stain and finish can sometimes cause knots to shrink and expand, leaving unsightly holes in the floor.
- When scratches are particularly deep in the wood, sanding won't be enough to remove them entirely.
- Deep scratches or gouges left in the wood for the staining process can be difficult to reach with the sanders and may become more visible if you are staining the floor a different color. If you want your floor to look perfect, we recommend changing out the affected boards.
- Flaker boards are not noticeable during the sanding process and happen after the finish is applied. They cannot be repaired without replacing the boards and sanding the whole floor again.



Knotholes more obvious



Doesn't remove deep scratches



Deep natural grooves appear



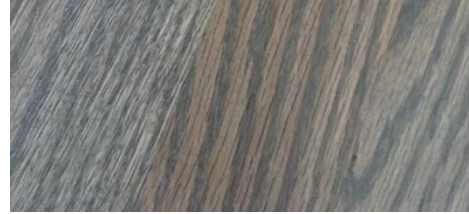
Flaker boards begin to show



Discoloration



Discolored: notice the darker spot



Fully stained, but not exact same color

Difficulties matching the stain to the surrounding wood can sometimes occur. Every piece of wood takes the stain differently and natural variations in the wood can cause color changes or what some people might consider discoloration. Maybe one board was drier than another or had too many natural variations. Regardless of the reason, discoloration is normal and part of the beauty in using a natural product, allowing each board to tell a different story. This can be painfully noticeable to some, and if you want a particularly even color tone you may want to look at changing to a prefinished hardwood.

Things to Consider in a Refinish

Refinishing a floor can take a good chunk of time, sometimes up to a week or more. During this time all furniture must be moved from the room, and the room will be essentially off-limits until the project is completed. Dust, stain messes, and the smell of finish will be your new best-friends amid the refinishing process.

Because of the toxic chemicals involved in refinishing you will need to move out of your house during the project if using an oil-based or Swedish finish. Water-based finishes are not as toxic, and with these you may choose to stay in your house if you are able to enter and exit the home without walking on the areas that are being finished. You will need to allow the floors to fully cure before walking on them with shoes or moving furniture back in. The time varies based on product used. A good rule of thumb is to wait between 3 and 5 days.



When Should I Replace?

While refinishing is the accessible, affordable option when trying to renew hardwood flooring, some situations demand replacement. If boards are moving around a lot, refinishing isn't an option. In many cases, boards that are damaged from deep scratches or have water damage can be replaced. Ask your consultant if this is a potential option for you. If structural concerns need to be addressed directly, ripping out the floor is usually a necessity. If your wear layers are used up, you will not be able to sand it down further. Also, if a floor has been refinished extensively already, excessive wear and sanding will begin to reveal the grooves in the planks and nails. At this point, replacement becomes more of a requirement than a choice.

In it for the Aesthetic

Most homeowners choose to replace their floors in order to change the overall look. Changing the type of wood and making it look pristinely new can justify the expenditure for many people. Replacement can be two to three times as expensive as a single refinishing job and many homeowners will likely never need to resort to this option.

Our Flooring Consultants will come out and evaluate your floors at no additional cost to you. Take the time to discuss all these options with your Flooring Consultant so you understand the pro's and con's in relation to your specific floor, and they will recommend what they feel is the best way to proceed.