

Waxes for Furniture

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I only recently started to pay attention to wax. I had a can of Butcher's Wax in my workshop that was at least 40 years old – probably purchased when I bought my first house, or maybe it dates from the time Nixon was president. So I started to pay attention since I thought I needed to purchase a replacement, although in all honesty I wasn't sure why. Wasn't a Danish oil finish or boiled linseed oil routine sufficient, and what if I added poly on top of that? Exactly what was the benefit of wax, and why are there so many types of wax offered by the woodworking industry?

A Witch's Brew

After a little bit of research I concluded that waxes for furniture (I didn't look at floor wax) are a mix of wax (beeswax, carnauba, paraffin) with different oils (linseed, mineral, and maybe tung), dyes for color, and thinners (turpentine, mineral spirits, toluene, and others).

Wax can be applied over bare wood, or any other finishing product including shellac, BLO, Danish Oil, and polyurethane. The options are endless.

An Excellent Read

Eventually, I came across an article by Mark Schofield in the July/August 2016 issue of FWW. While the article was written more than six years ago, rendering irrelevant the prices quoted and possibly some of the products covered, the author compares the performance, appearance, smell, and differences between 20 different brands of wax. (He used cherry boards finished first with shellac and then three coats of wipe-on poly and waited a day before applying the second coat of wax). Here is a summary of Schofield's conclusions.

- While the majority of waxes produced a good result, the effort required varied enormously.
- You must apply several coats before you get a modest sheen.
- On a high-gloss finish such as rubbed-out lacquer or a French polish, wax is superfluous and can detract from the finish.
- Wax can reduce the size of open pores and yield a smoother surface in woods like cherry/oak.
- The ease of spreading and removing wax varied widely between products.
- There was not a substantial difference in final appearance for most of the waxes, but not all. There were a couple of winners and a couple of real losers.
- In the end, it was the elbow-grease commitment, price, and odor that should influence your decision.
- His personal favorite was the Renaissance Wax; he disliked Odie's Wax; Johnson paste wax (near the bottom of his price comparison) was almost as good as the best waxes.

My Situation

I'm almost always game to try something new in woodworking, if it doesn't cost too much or entail a high level of risk. As a result, in my shop today I have the following inventory of waxes:

- Osmo wax #3164 oak: I bought this after seeing some magazine article on Osmo and took the plunge because I cut down a black oak tree two years ago and will be building furniture from oak for quite a while. I haven't actually used it yet. I wasn't aware that other wax vendors also offer products optimized for different woods.
- Liberon Black Bison wax in Tudor Oak: Don't remember when or why I bought this but I use it on dark woods if I use wax at all. I see online that Liberon as well as Briwax are available in a variety of tints. Presumably these eliminate the need for stains although I am not sure of this.
- Renaissance micro crystalline clear wax polish – solvent based: I think I bought this after seeing a demo by Christian Becksvoort. It is the smallest can on my shelf; I think they sell this by the gram. I've used it once or twice but have to admit I'm not convinced my results were any better than the finish I achieved with much less expensive products. According to an article in FWW (see below) microcrystalline is, like paraffin, derived from crude oil but has finer crystals and a higher melting point. I guess this makes the wax more expensive (also see below)
- George's Club House Wax: This is marketed as "food safe;" if you are making cutting boards and trivets for friends and family you want to sleep well at night knowing you aren't poisoning them. The most common finish for cutting boards is, of course, mineral oil generally available in grocery stores and pharmacies for much lower cost than what you would pay for mineral oil specially marketed for woodworkers.

Some Current Offerings

For this article I did a quick survey of what was available online for woodworking waxes. I don't claim that this was a comprehensive exercise, and I didn't look for all the products compared in the FWW story, but I wanted to see what the price range might be as of the end of Summer 2022. Note that many of these products are sold in different sizes so I calculated price per ounce. This is not to suggest that you can buy a single ounce of any of them. But you can see that the most expensive product in my chart is roughly 7x the cost of the least expensive.

	Price/Oz
Howard Neutral wax citus shield	\$0.94
Sam Maloof oil/wax finish quart	\$0.94
Minwax paste finishing wax	\$1.06
Trewax 887101016 paste wax	\$1.13
Doctor's Woodshop clear microcrystalline	\$1.25
Mylands clear furniture wax	\$1.25

Staples clear furniture bowling alley wax	\$1.44
Sam Maloof oil/wax finish pint	\$1.44
Howard butcher block conditioner	\$1.75
Briwax clear (other flavors -\$22-\$35/pound)	\$1.75
Liberon Neutral Black Bison Wax	\$1.96
S.C. Johnson paste wax	\$2.19
George's club house wax	\$2.75
Walrus Oil Wood Wax	\$3.33
Christophe Pourny Clear paste wax	\$3.33
Atiquax original wax (England)	\$5.43
Renaissance micro-crystalline	\$5.71
Odie's Wax -clear	\$6.67

Prices from on-line search August 26, 2022