
TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Wood Cladding Finishing and Maintenance

Natural Weathering

If Tropical Forest Products Cladding is left unfinished or isn't cleaned and refinished over time, it will naturally weather to a natural grey wood patina.

It is important to note that areas that do not receive direct UV rays, like soffits, will weather very slowly compared with vertical surfaces.

Finishing and Maintenance

A coating on all faces before installation with an oil-based finish is not necessary but recommended even if you intend to let the rain screen weather. Application of even an inexpensive oil-based finish slows moisture absorption and release during seasonal moisture transitions, reduces surface checking, and improves stability during the initial acclimation process. This can significantly improve project outcomes if you are in dry, arid conditions with direct sunlight. It is important to remember that you can apply water-based finishes over oil-based finishes, but you cannot apply oil-based finishes over water-based finishes, so take this into consideration when selecting finishes.

Preparation, Finishing, Maintenance, Cleaning, and Restoration

When specifying wood products for exterior construction, it is essential to have realistic appearance expectations. When used outdoors, wood products will not retain the appearance associated with their use in interior applications like furniture or flooring. Wood will not maintain its original color over time without cleaning and the reapplication of finishes. Wood, by its nature, will be subject to some limited amount of natural reaction as it cannot be predicted how a natural product like wood will behave in any given environment or conditions.

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New Cladding Preparation

Unless the cladding is provided pre-finished, clean your cladding using a sodium bicarbonate wood cleaner like TFP PRODECK Wood Cleaner to remove any dirt and debris from the wood surface. Following the cleaning of the cladding, apply a wood brightener to remove any stains or discolorations caused by weathering. Oxalic-acid-based wood brighteners like TFP PRODECK Wood Brightener also improve finish penetration. Make sure you allow the wood to dry thoroughly before and between any cleaner, brightener, or finish applications.

If you are sealing to maintain the color of your deck, consider using cleaners from the same manufacturer as the sealer. Caution should be exercised when using wood brighteners containing oxalic acid, and they should only be used if the cladding will be refinished after brightening. Oxalic acid converts lignin in natural wood species to sugar and can accelerate mold growth if left raw after cleaning.

Finishing

To maintain the natural color, use a high-quality oil-based outdoor finish with UV inhibitors, fungicide, and pigmented tint like TFP PRODECK Ipe + Marine Oil. Test the finishes on the cladding to determine their compatibility and appearance.

Before application, brush and clean the decking surface to remove dirt, dust, and other airborne contaminants.

Naturally durable hardwoods are dense, so apply thin coats and allow each coat to dry thoroughly. Over application will result in a sticky surface that will collect dirt and promote mold growth. Cladding that has been pre-finished with a first coat of penetrating oil may or may not be available in your market. Check with your supplier for the availability of this service. Grain, density, and moisture content can all affect finishing. Every piece of wood will accept finish differently, even pieces from the same tree. It is always advised to sample finishes before the full application.

Warranties, if available, are the responsibility of the finish manufacturer.

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Finished Cladding Maintenance and Weathering

Periodic cleaning and reapplication of finish (as needed) will enhance the appearance of your cladding. The lowest maintenance approach we have found is to treat your cladding like you would a piece of furniture in your home. Simply clean your cladding when it is dirty and wipe-on wipe-off a fresh coat of finish before the finish deteriorates from UV exposure and the greying out or other forms of discoloration begin to take place. We recommend you do this as needed. Light power-washing is an acceptable practice to remove dirt.

Spotting, Staining, and Discoloration

From time to time, we get calls asking about black spots that appear on wood cladding. These spots are caused by mold or a reaction between the natural iron in water and the natural tannic acid found in all wood. Mold or mildew can be cleaned with a deck cleaner containing sodium bicarbonate. Other stains can be removed with wood brighteners. Wood cleaners and brighteners are supplied in powder form, which is mixed with water. Multiple applications may be necessary to remove some types of stains.

If you wait for the finish to deteriorate beyond the capabilities of deck cleaner and wood brighteners, all is not lost. Simply remove the old finish using a finish stripper, followed by a cleaner, wood brightener, and oil-based finish, just like you did when you first installed the cladding. That's the beauty of wood. It can always be restored to its original appearance.

Use extreme caution when handling any of these chemicals and wear protective clothing and eyewear. Do not mix these cleaners with ammonia or household cleaners. We recommend tests in small areas on a few different boards before widespread use on the project. Always consult and follow the manufacturer's recommendations when using proprietary products.