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Shellac, Linseed Oil, & Paint - Traditional 19th Century Woodwork Finishes

Stephen Shepherd

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This is a landmark publication. For the first time someone has collected, tested, and explained traditional finishes and materials with the attention to both science and tradition that the subject deserves. From both a practical finishing standpoint and a need to understand traditional finishes for conservation purposes this book has no equal.The book beings with explaining how a wood surface is prepared for finishing using traditional methods of smoothing wood. Then author Stephen Shepherd delves into shellac. What it is, how to mix it, how to apply it using French polish and other methods, and that serves as a springboard to various other types of spirit (alcohol) based finishes, finishes that don't use shellac, and ones that do but are alcohol soluble. There is also a useful discussion on using shellac sticks for repairs. Then comes equally comprehensive sections on linseed oil and oil based varnish finishes. In the past 50 years varnish has always meant some modern petrochemical concoction and oil finish has become three coats of Watco. Nothing could be further from the truth and this book tells us what we are missing. Presented for the first time here is a mass of never before published information on 19th century and earlier oil finishes. The finishes, the different properties of different types of oils, the various formula for mix up an oil finish, are all presented in practical detail with both information on the materials and how to mix and apply the finish. Finally we have a section on paint, painting and graining finishes. Again Shepherd goes back to a combination of original sources and experimentation. What really makes this book shine is that it isn't about just finishes that work or finishes that the author happens to like. We have here a document on all the permutations and tradeoffs you get with the different finishing materials used throughout history, many of which are still practical and when applied can result in a truly magnificent end result.T

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