



## PHYSICAL DISTRESSING

From *The College of Wood Finishing Knowledge*  
by Ron Bryze

Most distressing can be broken down into three categories.

### NORMAL WEAR

I like to use files and rasps to wear-in areas and break edges. It is easier to get slightly irregular results, which look more natural. Sometimes you can just rub an edge with a block of wood to get a good effect.

### RANDOM ACTS

These are the bumps, dings and rubs that a piece will encounter. Ball peen hammers, keys, or even a cloth bag full of screws will work. Just make sure that it is random and don't overdue it. Most of this type of distressing will be applied before staining or glazing so that the color can catch in the crevice. I also like to do a little after the finish is applied. These are usually the rub type of marks. Use the rounded corner of a block of wood or something similar to give the piece a scrape or two, without breaking through the finish.

### MARKS OF THE MAKER

A couple of well placed hand saw or chisel marks can do the trick. Use a knife or scratch awl to imitate the cross grain lines a hand plane would leave. Drag an old handsaw blade across an edge.

The trick is to put the distressing where it most naturally would occur. Make it a little bit random and once again don't over do it.



## LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

In real life few items are found that have only one type of finish or physical damage, so you will usually need to incorporate a few different distressing techniques into your projects.

I approach distressing as if the finished piece will be telling people a story. This story will give the viewer clues about how the piece was made and the struggles it encountered in its journey thru time. This is show biz and you are the director of this show. You choose the story and how many of the details you care to reveal along the way. Show enough to be convincing but not so much as to make it overwhelming.

As stated earlier "less is more". You may make a sample panel with all kinds of effects on it and it looks really great, however if you were to reproduce those effects on every panel in the project it would probably ruin the job. A great piece of advice once given to me was to stop before you think you're done, you can always add more later.

Look at the project as a whole. Envision which areas would get the most wear and which the least. Remember that beyond the functional wear, such as the wear found around features like handles, there is a randomness to distressing. If every door has the same effect in the same general area you will not present a convincing story.



Breaking edges with a rasp or file is faster and gives a less "rounded" look than sandpaper.



Use a chisel or knife to cut in "cracks"



Use a chisel or knife and a straight edge to cut in cross grain plane marks.



An awl will make good worm holes. To be convincing group your holes together and have a few follow the grain. Occasionally flick the awl sideways to recreate a hole that has been cut into.



Apply a dye stain.



Apply a light coat of vinyl sealer and then glaze.



Wipe off excess glaze.



Spot crackle and then top-coat.

I like using files and rasps for wearing in edges as they produce a more natural random effect. Using a block of wood or the side of a screwdriver to dent and crush an edge is also a great effect.

Don't forget to save some distressing for after the finish is applied. These represent the real life dents and dings a piece gets in everyday use.



Hand plane some surfaces and edges



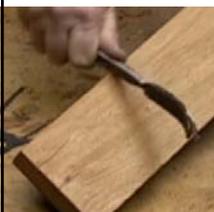
Hold plane on wood and move sideways to create pane marks.



Rasp edges. Hold at different angles to create irregularities.



A knife is used to create cracks on ends of board.



Use smooth side of a file or even the side of a screwdriver to bend over and wear-in edges.



Hammer edges and corners. Hammers and rasps give the edges little irregularities. Sandpaper tends to make everything uniformly smooth.



Apply paste wood filler.



Use a cabinet scraper to remove excess. Don't let filler dry too long before removing.



After filling rub edges with smooth steel or even a block of hardwood.



Stain and seal.



Dab on some black vinyl paste.



After topcoating add a few surface dings and edge burishes. In real life most damage gets done after a piece is finished, not before.

