

# **Hand-Scraping Hardwood Floors in Residential Homes:**

**A manual for the hand-scraping process**



**Marshall McKee**



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## Hand-scraped Floors

### What are hand-scraped floors?

Hand-scraped is a style of hardwood floors which creates a rustic and beautiful antique look. The style brings out the natural beauty of the wood, which is scraped in varying depths either with the grain or across the grain. Hand-scraping provides a texture to the floor and makes typical wear and scratches less noticeable. It is a very labor-intensive process to create hand-scraped floors.

Therefore, the cost for this style is usually near double the cost of finishing with machines.

### Popularity

Since the 1990s, Hand-scraped floors have become widely popular in the United States. The southern United States is where most hand-scraped floors are found as the rustic look often suits the southern lifestyle and décor. One Texas hardwood flooring contractor states that at least 90% of his jobs today are for hand-scraped floors (Rickie McKee, president of McKee Flooring Service, Inc.).

### Problems

Customers enjoy the rustic look of hand-scraped floors. However, most want their floors to look somewhat uniform. The challenge with creating uniform hand-scraped floors lies in the fact that it is a process done by hand. If several workers are scraping the same floor, they could have different looks in each of their sections. For example, if two workers are scraping side-by-side, one may be scraping harder than the other which will cause a noticeable difference once the floors are stained. Another problem that workers face is missing some spots of the wood leaving strips that are not scraped. This causes a problem that can also be overlooked until after the stain is applied. The strips that are not scraped appear much lighter in color. Too many missed strips will create a “tiger striped” appearance which is not usually desired by customers. If a customer is unsatisfied with the hand-scraping, the floor has to be completely sanded back down and scraped and

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stained again. This causes a huge loss in profits due to how much  
labor is then required at the company's expense.

### **Creating a uniformly hand-scraped floor**

The key to creating a satisfactory hand-scraped floor is to have every worker using the same method. Having a universal method lowers the risk of inconsistency and having to redo a floor resulting in a huge loss in profit. This manual will provide a universal method for hand-scraping hardwood floors and is intended for use by both experienced and inexperienced hand-scrapers.

# **Chapter One:**

## **Supplies**





## Using the same tools

There are several different brands and styles of scrapers on the market. Most are capable of scraping any type of wood. Though a different brand or style may get the job done, it is not guaranteed that two scrapers of different brands or styles will produce scrapes that look the same. Scrapers may differ in weight, blade size, blade material, and handle length. Each of these differences can cause a difference in the look of the scrapes. The brand or style chosen does not matter as long as every worker is using the same type on the same job. In addition to the main scraper, you will need a small scraper for scraping around walls and corners (refer to figure 1 and figure 2). Also necessary is a metal file for shaping the blade and keeping it sharp and a small water bucket and rag for wetting the floor.



*Figure 1 Basic scraper*



*Figure 2 Small scraper*

### Shaping the blade

Out of the package, blades are sharp but they are straight and squared off. With a straight blade, the corners can catch and dig too deep into the wood causing unappealing dark lines in a floor once stained. In order to avoid this problem, a new blade must be rounded off with a file. Small scraper blades should be left straight and squared to allow access to corners.

To round off a blade, first attach it to the scraper and place the handle between your knees. Hold the back of the scraper head with your non-dominant hand and round the corners off approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch using the metal file in your dominant hand (refer to figure 3). Be careful to avoid slipping off of the blade and cutting hands.



*Figure 3 New blade vs. rounded blade*

While scraping, you will notice that it may become harder and harder to dig into the wood and remove strips. This is because your blade has become dull. To sharpen your blade, assume the same position as described when shaping the blade. Once the scraper is in position, hold the file parallel to the angle that the blade is already tapered to. Repeatedly drag the file along the blade starting from your body working away. Do not drag back and forth on the blade as this will not allow the blade to sharpen (refer to figure 4).



*Figure 4 Sharpening the blade*

Keep your blade sharp at all times in order to maintain consistency with other workers. A sharp blade will also increase efficiency and require less energy while scraping.



## **Chapter Two:**

### **Scraping the Floor**



## Scraping the Floor

### Wetting a section

Dry wood is hard to scrape and does not clearly show a difference between the parts of the wood that have and have not been scraped. In order to make the wood softer and easier to scrape, water must be applied. Dip your rag into the small water bucket and lightly squeeze off excess water. Wipe a square section of the floor with the wet rag (refer to figure 5). Be sure to keep the size of your section manageable so that the water is scraped off before it is allowed to soak deep into the wood (a 4 ft. by 4 ft. section is recommended).



*Figure 5 Wet section of floor*

### Angle at which blade is held

When scraping, the blade should be held at the angle that achieves optimal cutting. The curved blade should be against the floor and the handle should be lifted to an angle of approximately  $30^{\circ}$  (refer to figure 6). If the blade is not at the proper angle, then the blade will not scraped deep enough into the wood.



*Figure 6 Angle of scraper*

## **Pressure applied**

The amount of pressure applied has the biggest impact on the appearance of the scraping. If all workers on a floor do not use similar pressure, then a noticeable difference will appear once stained. The customer may choose from either light, medium, or heavy scraping. Each of these styles are dependent on the amount of pressure put on the scraper head when scraping. Samples of each style should be shown to the customer, and from them a preferred style is selected. All workers on a floor must strive to match the heaviness of the scraping as shown in the chosen sample. You may wish to practice on spare wood in order to find the correct pressure.

## **Density of scrapes**

In order to avoid the “tiger striped” appearance after staining, it is important to scrape every bit of the floor and not leave any untouched strips. This is where the water is helpful. Applying water on a section will darken the wood to be scraped. In order to make sure you scrape every inch of the floor, you just have to make sure that there are no dark wet spots left. This will allow you to achieve the perfect density of scrapes and guarantee no strips are left unscraped.



## Putting it All Together

After a section is wet, it is ready to be scraped. Be sure to confirm with the customer the desired direction at which the floor will be scraped (with the grain or across the grain). Place the blade at the edge of the waterline on the floor and hold the handle at the proper 30° angle. With one hand holding the end of the handle and one hand pressing down on the scraper head with the correct pressure according to the desired style, drag the scraper straight back towards your body. Do not drag the scraper when moving away from your body. If scraping with the grain, you should have long curly shavings that come out of the wood. If scraping across the grain, the shavings will be small, fine, and jagged on the edges (refer to figure 7). Scrape the entire wet section making sure to remove all of the dark wet spots from the floor (refer to figure 8). Continue to wet and scrape sections until the floor surface is scraped. Use the small scraper for corners and any hard to reach areas.



*Figure 7 With the grain shavings (right photo) vs. across the grain shavings (left photo)*



*Figure 8 Scraping all dark, wet spots*

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Cleanup**



## Cleanup

### Disposing of all shavings

When scraping is complete, it is important to dispose of all shavings. Sweep the shavings into a pile and scoop them into a garbage bag. Use a vacuum if necessary to pick up remaining shavings. Dispose of the bags in the dump area on site or take them to a dumpster. Do not leave the bags of shavings in the home as they are highly flammable. This oversight can damage the professional reputation of the flooring contractor.



# **Chapter 4:**

## **Preparing for Stain**





## Preparing for Stain

### Screening the floor

After disposing of all shavings, the floor is ready to be screened. Run the wood floor buffer over the entire floor with a screen attached to the bottom (refer to figure 9). Screening the floor removes any hanging shavings and flattens the jagged surfaces. The smoother surface allows for an easier job when staining. It also ensures that all parts of the wood that will be visible get stained. Once the entire floor is screened all that is left is vacuuming. Vacuum over the entire floor to pick up any remaining shavings and to remove dirt and grit.



*Figure 9 Buffer with screen attachment*

After being cleaned, the hand-scraping stage has been complete and the next stage may begin. Enjoy the craftsmanship.



## References

### Photo Credits:

Cover photo: <http://www.jcsfloors.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/handscape1-415x359.jpg>

Figure 1:

[http://www.reddevil.com/index.php?l=product\\_detail&p=1411](http://www.reddevil.com/index.php?l=product_detail&p=1411)

Figures 2-9: Photos taken and provided by Rickie McKee, president of McKee Flooring Service, Inc.



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