

# So... how's your stain game going?

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Stain stash at home



Today's magic box



A bit of play at work

There is no doubt that staining can be one of the most challenging parts of the flooring biz, but when you have a win with a client who appreciates the effort and result it can be very rewarding. It can even be *therapeutic* as you watch the timber start to 'pop' as the stain first wets up the grain – and of course it's always a proud moment when you look down at your masterpiece and think 'nailed it'. Even in failure the upside is that it's pretty easy to sand off when all goes south. What's not to like?

Another impressive part of being a stain jockey is just how much stain you can acquire over the journey (example above). There's the *right stuff*, there's the *not quite right but really cool colour so I'll keep it stuff*, then there's the mountains of *leftover stuff* from when you mixed way too much to get your colour... And then there's the stuff that's *just wrong, very very wrong*, and even your local council won't let you dump it. You could throw it out – but you won't, as there is always tomorrow, and that stain will eat its way through the bottom of that can before you will even consider committing to such wastefulness!

In addition to the financial impact of being a 'stain boy' it also seems that staining provides more mental scarring within the flooring industry than even brushbox or high gloss finishes, with most having a horror story of sorts.

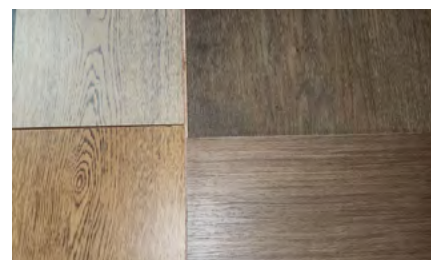
However, despite all this trepidation there's always loads of chatter when it comes to the staining of a timber floor, and it seems something that should be a relatively simple and potentially lucrative process divides the masses. Discussions suggest that flooring folk generally fall into one of three basic categories.

There is the 'not on my watch' crew who will never commit to even giving staining a go, or at least not a second go as 'it's too risky' – these are the folk that are usually front and centre at every event where staining is discussed or demonstrated. Deep down they want to have another go but they just can't 'jump in'. Then there are those smooth mid-range folk that 'paint' various concoctions onto a floor and have convinced the punters that it's 'staining' – which by the way does look the goods in most instances if you're not too fussy. For this group, there is generally only one stain in the back of the van – the one that they are comfortable with – and luckily it comes in many colours.

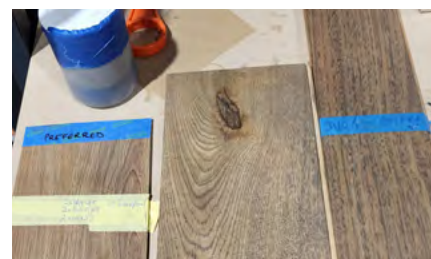
These folks are keepers, probably even marrying material, happy to *settle with a seven and a half* and very committed to it. And why not? I once knew a fella who only did stain jobs in variants of his one 'signature colour' – a very good salesman and he still did ok.

Finally there is the emerging group of what I like to refer to as the 'colour

nutters', the girls/guys that live for the excitement of jumping in the deep end and giving just about anything a go – often indulging in their own personal science experiments to get the win, whether matching a picture from a magazine or a sample of laminate flooring. This is the new generation, confidently flaunting their fancy finish combos, their mixed systems and their custom colours. These folks have swagger and it seems no fear of consequences. These folks even keep designers and architects' numbers in their phone – *and not so they can avoid them*.



'Rebirthing' prefinished oak



Matching real timber to a laminate?

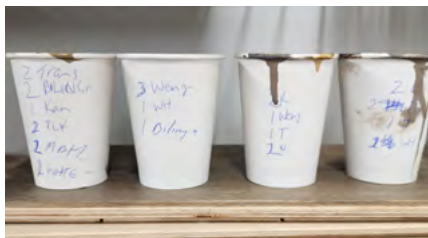
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This seems to be a growing group, possibly more through necessity than anything else as respective clients become less and less acquainted with the word NO. Everything is possible in 2023 – staining, bleaching, staining and bleaching, coatings that looks like there is no coating, a combination of all three, then there's wire brushing and two tone colour effects... All I'm waiting for now is a bleached floor with wire brushing and a two toned stain effect finished off with an invisible coating – which I'm pretty sure will already be in some designer's *wish book* right now.

So, whether you fancy yourself as part of this elite and unmedicated group of thrill seekers, or have just wandered into a job and found yourself in a bit over your head with an architect or designer, why not give it a go? Who knows it may end up being something too hard to refuse or that attracts the sort of coin usually only reserved for folks like plumbers and electricians. But where do you start?

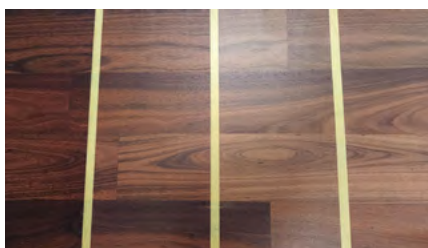
First rule for punters is to remember never go it alone – like all misadventure, it's always more fun with friends. Get as much advice and assistance as you can possibly get (after all you don't have to use it – it's just advice). It may just plant the seed that helps you along, or there may be products out there that do the job that you just haven't heard about. Someone else may have recently pulled off a similar effect – you just don't know unless you ask around. Just have sample in hand and ask the hard questions and you can avoid a lot of stress and save a lot of time.

Also don't feel special if you find matching colours or effects a little frustrating and a time-consuming process, some of us are just a bit colour blind. Besides, it's pretty hard sometimes and some stuff just can't be done 100%. You may find that you get near the colour or tone but not the 'effect', or everything may look okay until you apply some sealer or finish – this happens on just about every sample I do – that's why it's important to keep your working samples formulated and small.



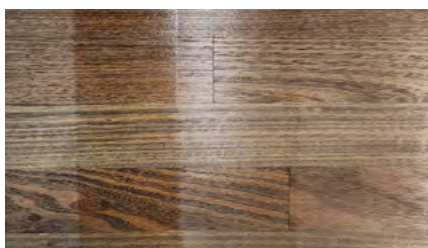
It will also be helpful to have a basic understanding of stain types and how they work or are intended to work visually – not an intimate understanding, nobody is expected to know the ins and outs of every brand of stain – just the very basics. Couple that with a general understanding and consideration of the way a type of finish will affect the colour and you will be halfway there. The following may help.

Here's a guide to how coatings will also contribute differently to the colour:



Poly      Solvent Sealer      Invisible Finish      WB Sealer

**Same timber, same stain, different coatings**



Raw Stain      Poly      Waterbased      Invisible

Once you 'do a few samples' you can develop an understanding of how the stain and finish will interact with the timber. This is not something I think can be taught – I think you have to DO, even if it's on a few sample boards. This will definitely help get your eye in.

Fortunately, I have developed an easy way to better identify basic **stain types** and what their particular benefits may be. Firstly, consider all the undies on the

washing line below (now stay with me)... They are each very different to the naked eye but all essentially perform the same purpose – these represent all the so called *different* stains you can buy. Take it one step further and you'll find that despite the six different items there will only be evidence of two basic types of stains – ones from liquids (transparent) and ones from solids (muddy). Wees and poos or *dyes and pigments* – these are the two basic 'types of stain' *within all the different brands*. While it may seem mildly inappropriate, you should never be able to forget this method – *even if you want to*.



Why would I use one type of stain over another?

The dye type stains provide a predominantly transparent or *see through* effect while simultaneously providing a change in colour – just like putting cellophane over the surface (google it) – which is great for altering the base tone of a timber floor, especially on some Australian and New Zealand timber species that are very dense and minimise penetration and offer little discernible surface texture for grain enhancement, i.e. spotted gum etc. These stains can essentially change red to brown or pale to dark if required, with the only limitation being that they do little to enhance the grain appearance of the timber. For the 'colour nutter' these types of stains are also effective for providing the base colour required in a multilayer jobby, or for providing an adjustment via a tint or even a post works touch up!

Pigment type stains seem to work best in partnership *with the timber*, especially timber with texture, as it enhances the grain structure providing a cleaner more defined pattern and incorporating the natural timber colour as part of the overall package – the limitation being

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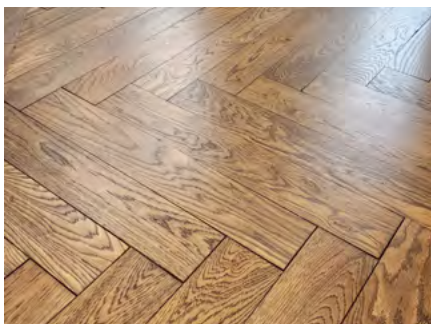
## So... how's your stain game going? continued

that pigment stains will not generally darken the timber significantly (in the absence of water popping) and will generally enhance the variance between floorboards – which can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on the client and the effect required.

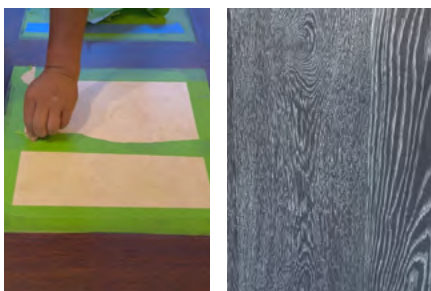


Black Dye Stain

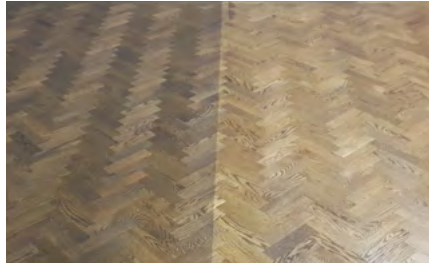
Black Pigment Stain



Buffed pigment stain

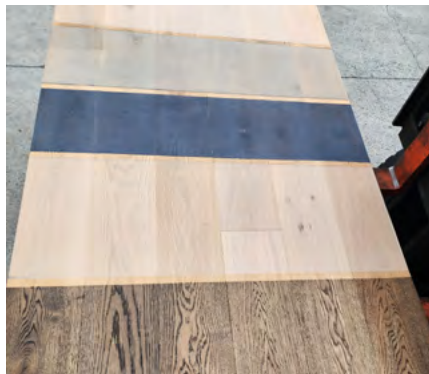


- Pigment type stains are also easier to use if you have masking detail as they don't 'bleed' as much as a spirit or dye stain.
- Pigment type stains are better for two tone effects – and also come in white – which is handy.



Nothing different here, same sanding same timber same stain just water popped and not water popped prior to application of a pigment stain.

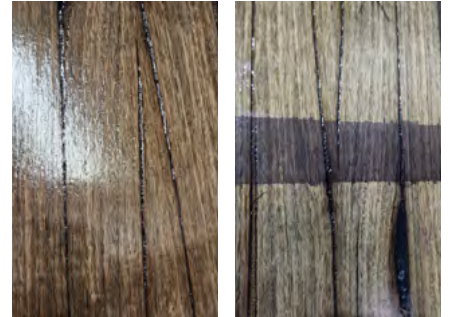
This can provide a variance in the effect that may help develop and get your sample over the line.



Pigment stains have huge colour potential and provide varied effects.



- Spirit or dye stains are often cleaner to apply.
- Spirit or dye stains can do very strong colours and reduce the colour contrast between boards.
- Spirit stain is generally easier to repair.



Spirit stains are more effective on some timbers where pigments achieve limited traction and provide minimal colour change – and as a bonus will also 'bite into' finishes for sneaky repairs.

There's not enough time to get into anything really adventurous, but hopefully being able to identify the different stain types; knowing their strengths and the finish combinations required to get different effects; will help you save a bit of time and get those difficult to match colours over the line.

If you're hesitant to provide a staining service, get onto your distributor and see if you can get some pointers – who knows, one day staining and special effect finishes may attract the sort of coin usually only reserved for folks like plumbers and electricians. 📌