

keep it up

Answering your burning questions about maintaining your midcentury ranch and its furnishings ...

Smearly Windows

Q: As I stare outside at what should be an amazing view, I can't help but be disappointed. We recently purchased a wonderful midcentury home with amazingly large windows.

We started replacing the exterior pins that hold the storm windows in place, and when doing this we decided to clean all four sides of glass. Now our framed views of exterior foliage have become panes with ghost-like strokes and smudges.

Do you have any suggestions, tips or tricks? Midcentury = lots of glass in general, so I can't be the only reader asking this question. Thank you in advance for

any help you or readers may have to offer.

Mike & Ann Dudek

A: We were Windex and paper towel people prior to buying our ranch house, but have since seen the light. Smearied panes can mar your view and are an issue on photo shoots as well, leading to painstaking Photoshop retouching.

What's worked for us is old-fashioned ammonia, 1/2 cup in a gallon of comfortably hot water, applied with a clean rag and squeegeed off. The squeegee is key to avoid streaking, and change your water when it looks dirty, roughly one bucket per exterior side of the house.

Avoid washing windows when the sun is directly striking them, and I'm paranoid about warm water on cold panes, so we wait until the weather warms up. Wear rubber or latex gloves, as the mixture is drying to your hands. The aroma is bracing, a bit like smelling salts, so if you're a delicate flower, this may not be the product for you.

A good quality squeegee does a much better job than a cheap plastic model from a big box store. You'll need to patronize your local hardware store, where they'll have the ammonia in big jugs as well, or try a janitorial supply or online. A pro line of window cleaning tools like Ettore will offer handy options like an extension pole to reach those clerestories, and you'll be using this equipment at least annually for years, so don't cheap out. (We also use a squeegee to clear the condensation on our single-pane picture windows during the winter.)

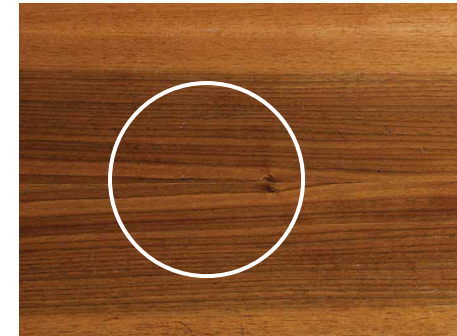
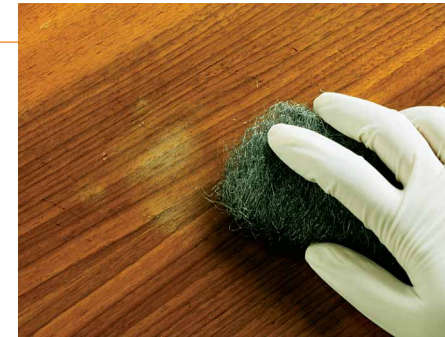
Wipe up the drips on the window frames as you work. Now that you're done with the exterior, go inside and do those surfaces as well. Martha would be so proud.

Wood Woes

Q: I have a great vintage hope chest, but its central location in my house means the top is also a popular spot for our cats to hang out. The lid now has multiple surface scratches and a hazy white spot from a hot laptop/heat-seeking cat combo. I know scratches are fixable, but all I've found online looks like wood colored crayons. How can I fix the scratches and mar? I just hate the thought of ruining vintage furniture; it's not a collector's piece, but it was 60 years old when I got it (and in better condition!) and I'd like it to continue its useful life.

Lucinda McBee

A: We get it. You wake up in the morning to discover that your cat has barfed on top of your beautiful



teak coffee table. What do you do now? Get a hungry, non-discriminating dog and put a tiki mug on top of the stain. Or, actually roll up your sleeves and fix the problem with these tried-and-true techniques.

I'm a sucker for beautiful oiled wood furniture; unlike paint, varnish or polyurethane, oiled wood has a porosity, depth and natural feel that other treatments can't match. There's a downside/upside to oil, however. While it's more fragile and subject to scratches and stains, it is renewable right at home and the list of possible furniture injuries is matched or even exceeded by the remedies. A little research for today's topic of a milky-white

to medium to fine. This advice only applies to oil-finished woods.

As the steel wool cuts into the wood, the oil will darken with dirt, wood and bits of steel; wipe with paper towels and add more oil. Eventually graduate to the next finer grade of wool until the finest, softest #0000 is reached. Finish the cleaning with fresh towels and a bit more oil. The resulting surface will be rich, lustrous and scratch-free. An important safety note: bunched-up oiled towels and steel wool will self-combust on a hot day (personal experience) so let them air dry and then soak with water before discarding.

For seriously deep, dark stains, a high-speed finishing sander and plenty of sandpaper may be necessary prior to using the techniques above. (Check the edge of your piece of furniture to see if it's solid wood or a veneer; if the latter, you don't want to sand down too far and expose the base wood.) Allow the sander to skate over the surface—don't apply excessive pressure. Initially the sandpaper will load up with oiled wood and look 'freckled.' Discard and use fresh sandpaper until just wood dust comes off the sander. Again, progress from coarse to fine sandpaper and then transition to oil and steel wool.

Renewing the luster when the wood looks a little dry or dull only requires an application of oil or wax. Be sure to wipe the surface multiple times so you don't end up with a sticky finish. Some of the products we've used with success are 'Restor-A-Finish' and 'Feed-N-Wax,' both from Howard, and Watco's Danish Oil Finish.

Send your queries and photos for our authorities' review, along with solutions that others may benefit from, to editor@atomic-ranch.com.



heat mark turned up the unexpected technique of a medium hot household iron buffered by an old tee shirt. I'll save confirmation of that method for some other time; for now I'll stick with rubbing and oil.

Surface problems with wood, such as scratches and water stains, will require a thorough approach to gently, smoothly removing the damage to reveal fresh wood. While the particulars change, the basic action is always to hand rub with a wetting solution of oil and ascending grades of steel wool, progressing from coarse (#3)