



A Guide to Hardwood Flooring Finishes

Understanding the look, feel, care, and trade-offs of common finish options

The finish is one of the biggest factors shaping the appearance and day-to-day experience of a hardwood floor. It influences sheen, texture, how color reads, how wear appears, and what maintenance may be needed. No finish is completely scratch-proof or maintenance-free; the right choice depends on the home, lifestyle, desired aesthetic, and the flooring manufacturer's care instructions.

UV-Cured / Factory-Applied Finish

Applied and cured at the factory—often in multiple controlled coats. This describes how a finish is applied, rather than one single chemistry; factory finishes may be urethane, oil-based, or other systems.

Advantages	Considerations
• Consistent, controlled application and a ready-to-use surface after installation (subject to product instructions). • Often offers strong everyday wear and stain resistance, depending on the finish system. • Typically avoids the disruption of applying a finish on site.	• Touch-ups or spot repairs can be more difficult to blend invisibly than with some penetrating oils. • A damaged area may require a flooring-specific repair approach; compatibility matters. • Performance varies significantly by coating chemistry, number of coats, and manufacturer.

Often a fit for: Busy households seeking a finished, convenient floor with predictable factory quality.

Polyurethane (Water-Based or Oil-Based)

A film-forming surface coating that sits on top of the wood. Water-based products generally preserve a lighter, less amber appearance; oil-based products tend to add warmth/ambering. Factory and site-applied systems differ.

Advantages	Considerations
• Creates a protective surface layer and is generally easy to clean with approved products. • Available in different sheen levels; water-based systems can keep oak looking more natural. • Can provide good resistance to everyday spills and abrasion when properly specified and maintained.	• Scratches, dents, or worn-through areas can be noticeable; localized repairs may show. • Oil-based systems can amber over time and may take longer to cure; site application can involve odor and downtime. • Recoating requires proper preparation and compatibility with the existing finish.

Often a fit for: Clients prioritizing practical surface protection and straightforward routine care.

Hardwax Oil

A penetrating oil-and-wax system that enriches the grain and leaves a natural, tactile appearance with a relatively low-sheen look.

Advantages	Considerations
• Emphasizes grain and texture with a matte, natural feel. • Many systems allow targeted maintenance or repair of small worn areas. • Can be refreshed with the manufacturer's maintenance products rather than always requiring a full film replacement.	• Usually needs finish-specific routine care and periodic maintenance. • May be more sensitive to standing liquids, harsh cleaners, or neglected spills than some film finishes. • Spot repairs and sheen can vary if the correct product or technique is not used.

Often a fit for: Design-focused spaces where a natural look and maintainability are priorities.

Penetrating Oil

Oil that penetrates the wood and enhances its color and grain rather than forming a thick, continuous surface film. Product systems vary and may include a protective top treatment.

Advantages	Considerations
• Rich, natural appearance that highlights grain and texture. • Small areas may be repairable or refreshable, depending on the system. • Often suits matte, aged, or understated European-oak aesthetics.	• May require more frequent care or periodic re-oiling than a robust film finish. • Can be vulnerable to stains or water marks if spills are left unattended or maintenance is missed. • “Oil finish” covers many formulas; care and performance are not interchangeable across brands.

Often a fit for: Clients who value a lived-in, natural character and are comfortable following a care routine.

Wax Finish

A traditional surface treatment that gives wood a soft, low-luster glow. Wax may be used alone or as part of a specified maintenance system.

Advantages	Considerations
• Soft, classic appearance and pleasant tactile quality. • Can be refreshed by buffing or reapplying compatible wax, where the system allows. • Works well with traditional, historic, or patinated design styles.	• Generally less resistant to water, stains, and heavy wear than modern film-forming systems. • May require regular buffing and upkeep; can show marks or traffic patterns. • Wax can complicate future coating or refinishing unless fully removed and the next system is compatible.

Often a fit for: Lower-traffic or heritage-inspired spaces where the traditional look outweighs upkeep demands.

Unfinished / Site-Finished

Flooring is installed unfinished, then sanded and coated on site. This is an installation/finishing approach; the final protection depends on the selected site-applied system.

Advantages	Considerations
• Can create a continuous, custom-finished appearance across the installed floor. • Offers flexibility in color, sheen, and finish system, subject to the wood and contractor's capabilities. • Future sanding/refinishing may be more straightforward with a suitable solid wear layer and adequate remaining thickness.	• Adds jobsite labor, time, dust-control needs, and potential odor or curing downtime. • Results depend heavily on site conditions and installer skill. • The home must be protected from dust, moisture, and traffic during finishing and cure.

Often a fit for: Projects requiring a highly customized color or a continuous site-finished look.

At-a-Glance Comparison

Finish type	Overall look	Typical upkeep	Repair approach
Factory-applied / UV-cured	Varies; consistent	Routine, product-specific	Often specialist / board replacement
Polyurethane	Smooth, coated	Routine cleaning; periodic recoat as needed	Can be visible when spot repaired
Hardwax oil	Natural, matte	Periodic product-specific care	Often allows localized maintenance
Penetrating oil	Rich, natural	May need re-oiling	Often localized, system-dependent
Wax	Soft, low-luster	Frequent buffing / refresh	Refreshable; coating compatibility matters
Unfinished / site-finished	Fully customizable	Depends on chosen topcoat	Depends on coating and wear layer

Important: Finish names are not standardized across manufacturers. Two products labeled “oil,” “UV,” or “matte” may perform differently. Confirm the exact finish system, warranty, approved cleaners, maintenance schedule, and repair procedure for the selected Bois Chamois product. This guide is a general comparison, not a product-specific performance or warranty statement.