



# Seattle Floor Service: Refinishing Fir Floors

Wood Floor Installation & Finishing

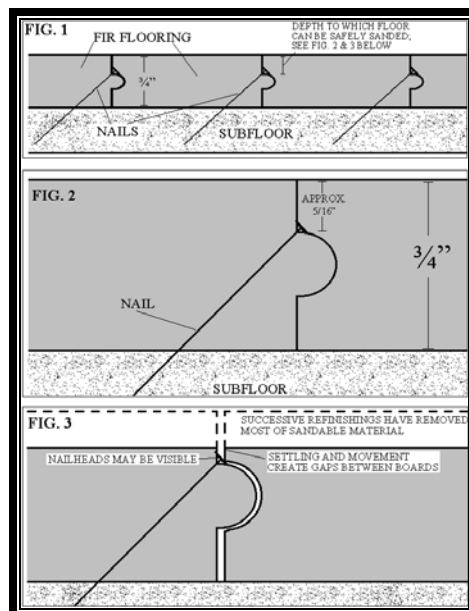
## Introduction

Fir floors have qualities and characteristics quite disparate from those of true hardwood floors (oak, maple, ash, etc.), and we feel that recognizing and understanding the nature of these differences is an important part of your ultimate satisfaction with the finished product. Fir is one of the softest of all woods used to manufacture wood flooring (see "Janka Hardness Scale"), and is about 100% more susceptible to impact damage than either red or white oak. This delicacy makes fir floors much more difficult and exacting to refinish, as much care must be taken not to remove too much wood during the sanding process. Older fir floors are often severely damaged and many require repair prior to refinishing.

It is important to note that Seattle Floor Service has successfully refinished hundreds of fir floors, and we have extensive references from satisfied customers. We have found that our customers are happiest when they are fully informed as to the limitations of the refinishing process. The purpose of this document is to make these limitations clear, with the goal being a shared level of expectation as concerns the finished product. In no way do we wish to discourage you from having your floor refinished, nor do we recommend installation of a new floor as a matter of course. However, due to the idiosyncrasies of fir flooring, we feel that your knowledgability is a key element of your ultimate satisfaction.

## Construction and Mechanics

Most older fir floors are constructed from 3 1/4"x 3/4" tongue and groove boards blind nailed to the subfloor (see diagrams). The head of each nail is approximately 5/16" below the surface of the floor at the time of installation. Over the course of the years, and with successive refinishings, the depth of the wood to the head of the nail decreases, and often the heads of nails begin to show between the boards. When fir floors are this thin, sometimes refinishing is not a viable option, and installation of a new floor may be necessary.



Fir floors are also more prone to movement and squeaks than hardwood floors. In high traffic areas the softer fir will often work loose from the nails, causing these areas to feel loose, and possibly squeak. When the house settles, the floor will try to change shape as well. Movement and squeaks in a floor are normal; attempting to repair this kind of movement often involves removing some of the existing flooring to expose the subfloor, and can be costly. Refinishing can be accomplished without these costly repairs, and the floors will look beautiful.

### *The Finished Product – What to Expect*

Due to fir's unique qualities, the appearance and performance of your floor will differ significantly from those of a hardwood floor. Fir floors often exhibit large gaps or cracks between the boards, and part of our process is to trowel filler over the entire surface of the floor, then sand off any excess. Because many fir floors move so much, the filler may not hold as well in higher traffic areas. The large gaps between boards often collect dirt and other residue over the years which further interfere with the bonding of the filler. As with movement, the filler failing to hold is very common, and we cannot unconditionally guarantee that the filler will hold. Filler is cosmetic; its failure to hold does not adversely affect the performance of the floor. For our customers who are concerned about the appearance of the gaps and cracks that remain, a maintenance program using painter's putty is an inexpensive do-it-yourself answer.

Fir, as well as some hardwoods, varies greatly from board to board with respect to color. Our filler manufacturers do their best to approximate the color of a finished fir floor, but no filler will match perfectly. Larger gaps will be much more noticeable, and our customers should be aware of this when choosing refinishing versus a new floor.

Refinished fir floors often exhibit another characteristic called 'mottling' or 'bruising'. In high traffic areas or near the perimeter of a room, the fir often shows darker, blotchy areas, caused by water, sunlight, or impact. These discolored areas often lighten with heavy sanding, but with the application of finish, they can be somewhat pronounced. The extent of this 'bruising' can vary greatly from room to room, and even from area to area within a single room. Again, this is very common, and installing a new floor is the only assurance that this 'bruising' won't occur. Seattle Floor Service cannot guarantee against 'mottling', 'bruising' or 'blotching'.

### *Maintenance and Upkeep*

Whether you choose Swedish finish or waterborne finish, maintenance of your newly refinished floor will be the same. Either finish requires only occasional cleaning with a lightly dampened mop, using a solution of one part white vinegar to ten parts water. We also strongly recommend the use of furniture pads placed on the underside of most items which will sit on the floor surface. We try to keep furniture pads in stock at our office; when we finish the job, please call or stop by to pick up a bag of complimentary pads. These pads may need to be changed occasionally, as the pads themselves can collect dirt and grit which will abrade the new finish. We also encourage the use of area rugs and runners in high traffic areas to extend the life of your floor. See our general information brochure or call our office for more information about when to put area rugs back down after we have finished.

Even with the most fastidious care, over time your floor will exhibit some wear. Everyday foot traffic, furniture moving around, and especially pets and children can make your newly refinished floor look not-so-new. We suggest that you contact us when these wear signs first show up, so we can determine whether your floor needs an additional coat of finish. This recoating process does not involve any sanding, and can often be completed in a day for average size jobs. If we can put an additional coat of finish on the floor before the wear reaches a critical point, we can avoid the unpleasantness and inconvenience of sanding the floor again. If your fir floor is older and

there are any visible nail heads, sanding again may not be an option, so attention to ongoing wear and scheduled maintenance coats is critical.

We understand the gravity of a decision like choosing to refinish your floor, and we hope that this information helps you to make the best and most educated choice. With more than fifteen years experience and hundreds of fir floors under our belt, we are uniquely qualified to help you make the very most of your floor.