

Bulls Eye® French Polish

*Traditional Wiping Finish
for Woodwork,
Cabinets & Furniture*



*An easy-to-follow guide
for creating an elegant
Old World finish*



What is French Polishing?

Of all the furniture finishing techniques in the world, perhaps the one with the greatest elegance and mystique is French polishing – a finishing technique developed in Europe during the 19th century at a time when spray equipment did not yet exist. It was an effective process for creating a smooth, glass-like finish by applying super-thin coats of shellac with a tightly bound pad of cloth.

Before each coat was applied a few drops of linseed or mineral oil were sprinkled onto the surface to lubricate the pad and keep it from sticking to the fast-drying shellac. Pore and grain fillers were not readily available so rottenstone or powdered pumice was used. It was sprinkled onto the surface during application of the first few coats and then rubbed gently to abrade the surface and create a slurry of finely powdered wood and shellac that filled the open pores of the wood and made the surface smooth.

This process was repeated dozens of times to build up successive layers of shellac and create a lustrous finish. Although other finishing techniques are available today, few can reproduce the hand-rubbed glow of a traditional French polish finish.

Today, many people who would like to use the French polish technique don't because they are intimidated by the numerous application steps and the tedious nature of the process. Others just don't have the patience to build up the finish over a period of days or weeks.

Bulls Eye® French Polish was developed as a fast, easy-to-use, single-component alternative to tedious traditional French polishing. With **Bulls Eye® French Polish**, do-it-yourselfers and professionals alike can create an elegant, museum-quality finish in a fraction of the time it takes for the traditional method.

This guide provides step-by-step instructions to help you achieve a beautiful Old World French polish finish. The luster and depth of this finish is unsurpassed.

What is Bulls Eye® French Polish?

Bulls Eye® French Polish is a padding and wiping finish formulated from a select blend of dewaxed flake shellacs. It has a lubricating solvent in the mixture to eliminate the need for adding mineral oil or linseed oil to the application process. It can be applied in one or two wiped-on coats as a quick, hand-rubbed finish or it can be burnished in multiple coats to create a deep, mirror-like, museum-quality finish for antiques, cabinets, furniture and other fine wood creations. **Bulls Eye® French Polish** is easy to apply and, with a little bit of practice, anyone can do it. Although this technique does not require great skill, it does require some patience and a little elbow grease. If you are willing to invest a little time and effort, you will be rewarded with a beautiful finish that will dazzle everyone who sees it.

How to Achieve a Beautiful French Polish Finish

For this project you will need:

- **Bulls Eye® French Polish**
- **Bulls Eye® SealCoat™ or wood pore filler**
- **Wood stain (optional)**
- **Denatured alcohol**
- **Disposable natural bristle brush**
- **6"x 6" squares of lint free cotton cloth**
- **Cheesecloth**
- **Tack rags**
- **Sandpaper - 100, 220, and 320 grit**
- **Burlap cloth**



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Sand the Surface

1. Sand in the direction of the grain using successively finer grades of sandpaper until the wood is very smooth. Start with 100 grit and then use 220 and finally 320 grit sandpaper.
2. Wipe off the dust and rub the surface briskly with a wadded piece of burlap to burnish the wood and make it very smooth. Remove all dust with a tack cloth or vacuum.

Stain the Wood (optional)



If you wish to stain the wood before finishing it, do so after removing the sanding dust. Apply the stain according to directions using a soft, lint-free cotton cloth or a piece of folded cheesecloth, and let dry overnight.

Fill in Wood Pores

1. To achieve a glassy-smooth surface on open-pored woods such as oak and mahogany, use pore filler. Some pore fillers are neutral in color; others are formulated to match the color of the wood to be finished. If you stain the wood and wish to fill the pores, use filler that closely matches the color of the stain.
2. You can also seal the pores in the wood by applying a generous coat of **Bulls Eye® SealCoat™** with a brush, then wiping off the excess with a cloth. After an hour sand the surface of the wood with 100 grit sandpaper until all the shellac in the non-pore areas has been removed. Repeat the application as necessary to completely fill open pores.



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Make an Application Pad



Make an inner core pad from a 9" x 9" square of cheese cloth. Roll or form it into the shape of a small ball. Cover the pad ball with a 6" square of outer cotton cloth. Pull the outer cloth tight around the cheesecloth ball to eliminate any wrinkles. If the pad begins to wear out during application, replace the outer cloth with a new one.

Apply Bulls Eye French Polish

Position the piece you are finishing in such a manner that you can easily walk around it and access every area fairly quickly.

The French Polish technique is effective for large, flat areas. For moldings, carvings and other small detailed areas use the following technique:

1. Brush apply one or two coats of **Bulls Eye® SealCoat™** (or Bulls Eye® Shellac thinned to a 2-lb cut). Wipe off with a lint-free cloth so that shellac remains behind in carved or recessed areas, and let dry for 45 minutes.
2. Apply two or three coats of shellac to the carved or recessed areas using **Bulls Eye® Spray Shellac**. Note that spray shellac is dewaxed (like French Polish) and therefore will have the same sheen when dry. Lightly coat the surfaces; do not over-apply or drips and runs will occur.



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3. After the detailed surfaces have been finished, you are ready to finish the large, flat areas. These can be either horizontal or vertical (usually the side panels or door facings of a cabinet or similar object).
4. Soak a clean applicator pad (see opposite page) with denatured alcohol and tightly squeeze out most of the liquid until the pad is barely damp.
5. Hold the applicator pad face up with the twisted portion in the palm of your hand. Pour French Polish onto the application surface of the pad, being careful not to overload it. Tap the pad against the palm of your hand to disburse the liquid evenly in the cloth. The pad should feel wet but not runny.



6. Hold the pad in the palm of your hand with your thumb and fingers pressing tightly against the sides.



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7. Move the pad to coat the surface of the wood evenly, using light pressure. For the best results move the pad in circles or figure-eights. Recharge the pad as necessary with French Polish to ensure that an even coat is applied. Use light, consistent pressure. Never stop padding in the middle of the surface or abruptly change direction. Apply less pressure as the bottom of the pad begins to dry. Continue moving until the bottom of the pad feels dry.
8. Now lift the pad from the surface while moving it, like an airplane taking off. Don't stop the movement and then lift the pad or you'll leave a mark on the surface. Don't worry if the finish appears blotchy or uneven – this is only the first coat and uneven areas will even out as successive coats are applied.
9. Replenish the pad with more French Polish and apply two more coats. At this point, stop and let the finish cure for an hour before applying the next coat. Place the application pad in a jar or plastic container and keep tightly closed to prevent it from drying out.
10. After another hour has passed apply another coat and then allow it to dry.

There is no rule as to how many coats to apply over what length of time or how much time to wait between coats. This depends on air circulation and weather conditions and the size of the working area. If the pad leaves streaks on the surface that don't disappear, the existing finish is too soft or the pad is too wet or both. Stop at this point and allow the finish to cure before applying another coat.



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The tabletop on page 7 was made from 3/4" thick Bloodwood (*Brosimum rubescens*) and finished with eight applications (three coats per application) of **Bulls Eye® French Polish** over a two-day period. *Butcher's® Wax* was applied and buffed to a high shine. The lustre and depth of this finish is unsurpassed and worth the effort.

Correcting Mistakes and Damage

If you make a mistake or somehow mar the finish during the application process, don't panic or become discouraged.

1. Let it dry overnight and examine the finish the next day. If it can be fixed by applying another coat of French Polish, then do so. Otherwise, lightly sand the entire surface with 600 grit sandpaper or 0000 steel wool until a smooth, dull but uniform sheen is achieved. Do not press too hard or rub too briskly or you will burn through to the wood underneath. Remove all the dust and continue the application process as before.
2. If the finish is badly damaged (i.e., all the layers of shellac are penetrated by alcohol or ammonia or if they are scratched or scraped down to the bare wood), it must be removed, either by sanding with 120 grit paper or mopping the surface with a rag soaked in denatured alcohol. After removing the finish, sand the surface smooth with 320 grit sandpaper and reapply French Polish.

Caring for a French Polish Finish

Although **Bulls Eye® French Polish** dries to a very hard and durable finish that will resist water-spotting, it is not as durable as other finishes made for high-traffic areas or surfaces subject to considerable abuse. Shellac can be damaged by contact with alcohol or any alkaline or ammonia-base household cleaner.

1. To improve durability and increase water-resistance, apply one or two coats of clear paste wax to the finish and buff thoroughly to a high shine.

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2. Clean the surface when necessary with a damp rag. If the finish gets damaged, remove the paste wax with mineral spirits and re-apply **Bulls Eye® French Polish**. When the finish is dry, reapply the paste wax and buff to a high shine.

An Easy Wiping Finish

Bulls Eye® French Polish can also be used as a fast, simple one-coat or two-coat wiping finish for bare or previously sealed wood. It's great for doors, trim, baseboards, wainscoting, paneling, molding, etc., as well as cabinets, shelves, furniture, wood toys and craft items.

1. Sand the surfaces as you would for French polishing and remove all dust.
2. If you wish to fill in open pores or stain the wood prior to applying the finish, follow the directions on page 4 of this booklet.
3. Pour a generous amount of French Polish onto a piece of soft, lint-free cloth folded into a pad large enough to fit into the palm of your hand.
4. Quickly wipe the surface in a gentle, back-and-forth motion to evenly distribute the French Polish and continue wiping until the finish is dry. To avoid lap marks, finish paneling and trim in sections that have crisp and definite borders or edges. Although you can apply as many coats as you like, in most cases only one or two are needed to achieve a simple, hand-rubbed effect.



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Bulls Eye® French Polish
or other shellac products, write to us or ask
your Zinsser dealer for a copy of
*The Story of Shellac.**

*On the Internet you can learn more about
shellac and how it is used at
www.zinsser.com*



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