



## The Two Tone Stain Job Made Easy

By Sherwood Heggen

Applying stain and varnish to a wooden boat is pretty basic. Getting it done correctly is another step above that. This is especially true with two tone stain jobs of dark walnut color covering boards/king plank or blond decks along with the typical mahogany color. It seems it shouldn't be that difficult to do, but apparently it is, as I have seen some pretty sad attempts at both. I know it is all a matter of preference as to how dark, how brown, or how opaque the walnut color is, or the hue of the blond, etc, but when done poorly it detracts dramatically from the otherwise nice finish of the boat.

This Gadgets and Kinks article is going to offer a workable process of creating that "correct" look by giving some valuable suggestions.

Many years ago my first attempt at doing dark walnut covering boards was on a 1948 Chris Craft Deluxe Runabout. I bought Garwood dark walnut stain which was water based. Applying the stain to the wood caused the grain to raise, plus it came out nearly black. That color combination on the Deluxe just did not bring out the smart elegance of that boat. Some might have liked it that way, but it was not my personal preference. That winter, I stripped the decks and somehow lightened the color using the same stain and the boat looked much better with a more gentle brown against the mahogany color.

The next effort at walnut was to use Sandusky's dark walnut stain with varnish directly over it. The more varnish I applied, the greener it became. Apparently the color of the varnish and the color of the stain fought each other and created a green hue. Maybe I just didn't know the technique of using that particular kind of stain. Though I have never tried it, I heard the idea to

thin black paint to create the dark color. Another method tried was dark walnut gel stain over the mahogany stain which worked okay but then I found out how Chris-Craft actually did it. What I learned came from a Classic Boating magazine article which many of you have probably already read. The information they passed on was from a dealer instruction book from 1932. The kinds of materials they used 70+ years ago are still available to us today. They are dark walnut dye, mahogany stain, and varnish.

Trying the method described provided a color that was warm and elegant looking and helped to produce an award winning boat. Since then, guys wanting this look for their boats have asked how it was done. So, here it is:

First, as with anything new, do a trial run of the process on a piece of scrap mahogany of the same color, density and sanding prep as the covering boards/king plank to be finished. I have no recipe for the correct color as you might want it lighter or darker to suit your eye. The products I use are Dark Walnut dye from Rockler Woodworking Store, Interlux 573 Chris Craft Mahogany stain and Epifanes varnish. The dye comes as a liquid concentrate in a two ounce bottle and must be diluted with water or denatured alcohol.

Alcohol should be used instead of water to avoid raising the grain of the wood. The two ounce bottle of dye makes a quart of stain, but by mixing half of the dye in a pint of alcohol, there will be some latitude for darkening or lightening the color by diluting or concentrating the dye/alcohol solution. Tape off a section of the scrap piece to make color separation line as would be on the boat deck.

Apply the dye with a foam brush and wipe off the excess immediately with a clean cloth. Af-



**Trial board to experiment with**



ter the alcohol has evaporated, remove the tape and apply mahogany stain over the dyed section and adjacent unstained wood to get an idea of the contrast of the two colors. After it is dry, apply a coat of sealer to bring out the final color. The stain test scrap will end up looking like that in the picture above. Now, if the walnut color is too dark add alcohol to the stain, or if too light, add dye until you are comfortable with a lighter color. Keep a record of what proportion dye to alcohol you mixed in case you would want to do another stain job with equal results.

Before you apply the dye mix to the areas you want colored dark walnut, mask off the areas that are to remain only mahogany with painters' tape and paper such as seen in the picture below and to the right.

It is amazing how easily the thin alcohol/dye mix will splatter to unwanted areas or wiping smears happen. Those little oops's won't remove easily. After protection is in place and with your hands protected from the dye with rubber gloves, apply the dye with a foam brush, wiping off the excess immediately with a clean cloth. If the dye appears streaked in spots, dampen a rag with alcohol and wipe through that area. After the dye is dried, remove the painters' tape and masking paper.

What you might notice is that the tape will remove some fibers of the wood and create a difference in the surface from the adjacent wood surface. If the taped area is not sanded with the same grade paper as was used to initially prep the surface, it is likely the tape line will appear after the mahogany stain is applied. Vacuum up and tack rag the dust, and apply the mahogany stain to the walnut stained area and to the area to be mahogany stained at the same time. Let the stain dry for a day or more and then apply a coat of sealer. After that, start the varnish and sand routine until the finish is as smooth as glass.

The other two tone finish is that of blonde and mahogany. The trick here is to make the blonde have that creamy golden hue, if that is describing it correctly. That is to say it shouldn't be yellow, washed out white, or have a brown

tone to it.

Here is the method I have used successfully. The wood must be bleached to kill the color of the wood. As with staining with dark walnut, mask off the area to be stained to protect the area of the other color from being blemished. Apply at least two coats of Klean Strip two part wood bleach to the area to be stained blonde. This is available through Rockler Woodworking Store. Wear protective gloves and safety glasses as the spatter of this bleach can cause painful burns. Have some water and some paper towels around to wash away any spatter on your skin. After the bleach is thoroughly dry, sand the fuzzy wood surface lightly with 220 grit sandpaper backed with a pad. Then apply thinned Sandusky Cordova stain. I prefer to thin the stain to the consistency of milk with naphtha and then add another 5% of Interlux 333. The Interlux 333 will keep the stain from drying too quickly, allowing even color throughout the blonde area. To protect the blonde from being smeared with mahogany stain when the rest of the hull is stained, carefully apply a coat of Pettit sealer to the blonde area. Then, painters' tape and paper can be applied to mask off the blond area with no risk of damaging the wood when the tape is removed. Then do the varnish routine. You will be pleased with the good looking blonde stain you did all by yourself.

That is all there is to it. Experiment with scrap wood until you feel comfortable with the color and make yourself proud with the end result.

If you are working on a boat, I would love to hear what is happening on that end. I am sure there is a lot going on that can be shared to better the effort and knowledge of amateur to professional restorers. I would love to put your experience in print. Or, if you are just looking for an answer to your restoration question, contact me at 715-294-2415 or [Heggensj@Centurytel.net](mailto:Heggensj@Centurytel.net). I will be glad to help.

In the meantime, I think I hear your boat calling. Better go do something with it.



**Chris-Craft ready for Walnut dye**

