

Achieve a
NATURALLY AGED
Finish with this
Sanding
Technique



Entri Ways

*We are homemakers, decorators,
business-women (and men), and
volunteers. We cook, clean, raise a
family, design a cozy home, create and
build businesses, educate, fundraise,
and plan events.*

Entri Ways is all about showing you
ways to manage these different areas of
your life – all while staying on budget.
I love having you here and promise to
share information that's useful,
inspiring, and motivating.

- Vicki

By Vicki Blazejowski | EntriWays.com
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Welcome!

Today, I'd like to speak to the *decorator* in you. This is the part of you that creates a cozy home for yourself and your family. It's the part of you that shops for the furnishings and home décor items, chooses colors, styles, and patterns, and ensures each room functions well for your family.

Many of you may say that you are not “decorators”; but no matter how experienced or educated you are in this area, if you have a home, there's a decorator in you.

While we don't all have the same style or budget, we all have the potential to create a home that functions well and is comfortable for our families. When my children were young, our decorating budget was virtually non-existent. For almost 10 years, we had rooms that sat empty because I would not spend money on such expensive pieces. There was just too much risk involved.

What if I didn't like that dresser in my own home as much as I liked it in the designer's setting on the furniture showroom floor? What if that wood doesn't complement the other wood pieces in the room? What if that shade of blue isn't quite right? There was always the “what if” risk.

After 10 years, I figured out a way to try different pieces of furniture in my home, without spending a lot of money and in most cases, just pennies. It was at that time that I began refinishing furniture.

Over the years, one of my specialties has become recreating the naturally-aged, style furniture from pre-owned solid wood pieces. This is a refinishing technique I've developed over time and one I'm sharing with you today so you too can create these amazing pieces yourself.

Naturally-aged, rustic, and even Old World furniture has been sought after for decades. Furniture retailers like Arhaus, Restoration Hardware, and Crate & Barrel specialize in it. They design and finish furniture to appear as though they're a hundred years old sometimes by adding layers of paints, stains, and glazes only to distress them back to give a newer piece of furniture an aged appearance. They're beautiful and I absolutely love them, but they're also very pricey.

There's an easier, less expensive, and more realistic way to achieve the look of aged wood without any of those products. Here is the Entri Ways' process...



START WITH SOLID WOOD FURNITURE

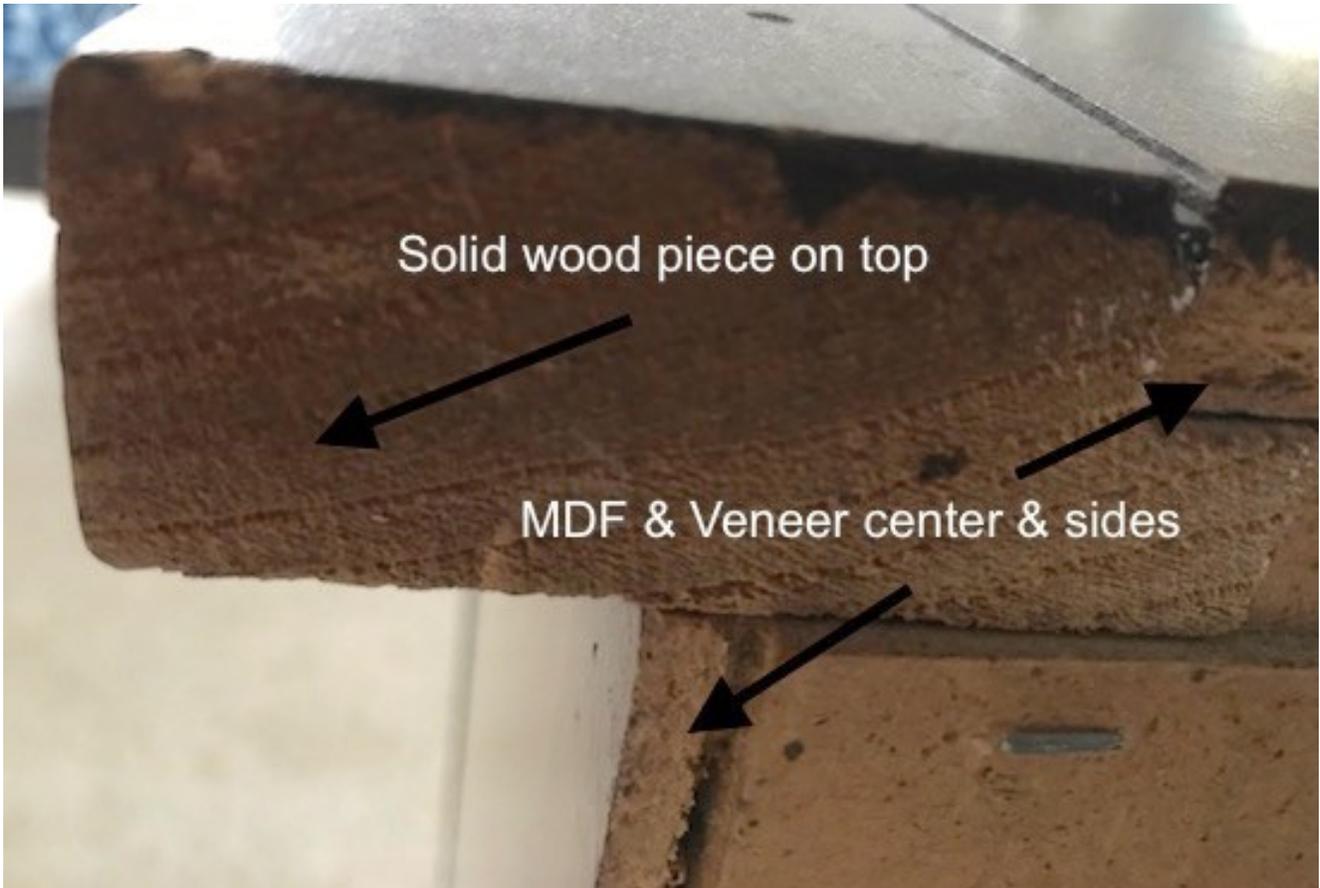
If you'd like to transform your stained dresser, sideboard, or table into an old world masterpiece using my sanding technique, you have to start with solid wood furniture. No veneer and no MDF (manufactured) wood. It has to be *solid* wood through and through because you'll be sanding back layers of the wood. Neither veneer nor MDF can withstand the amount of sanding required for this project.

To determine if a piece of furniture is solid wood, first remove the drawers. Often times the drawer boxes are solid wood, but the body of the dresser itself is not and you can clearly see the MDF inside. MDF most often has an unfinished side that looks like a cork board.

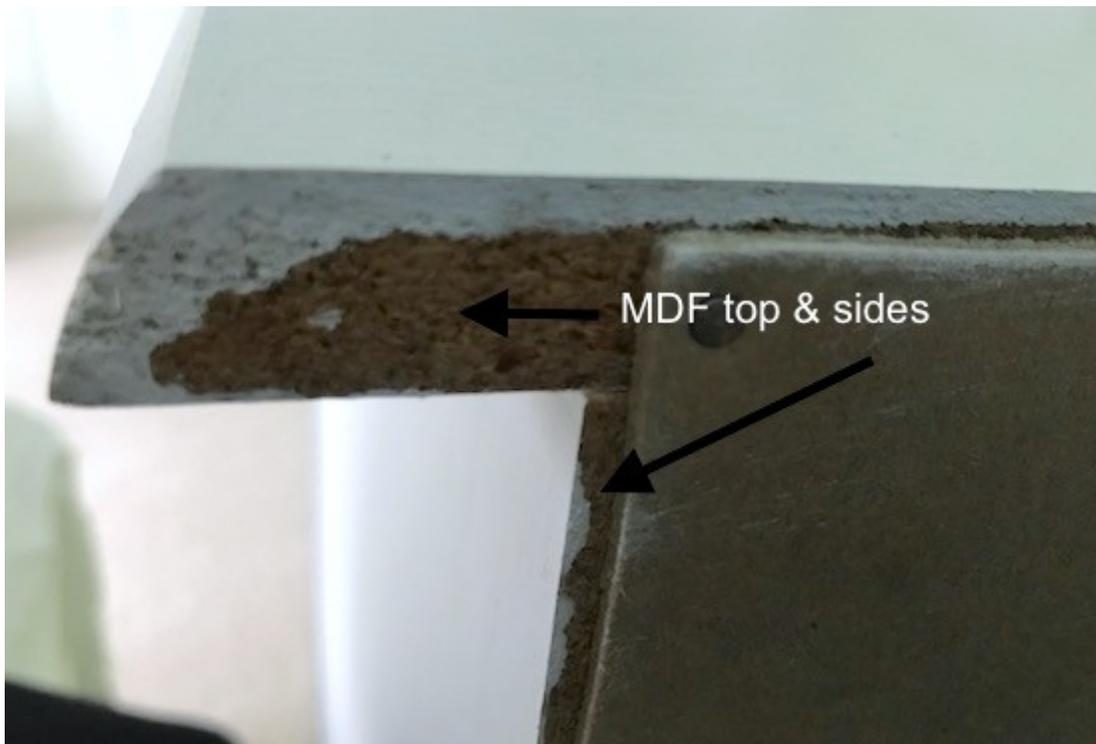
Second, walk around to the back of the dresser and look at the top corner. Solid wood will be one solid piece with a very tight, smooth wood grain.



Sometimes furniture will be made up of a combination of solid wood, MDF, and veneer. Veneer is a very thin slice of wood, so from the front you may think it's solid wood; but looking at the backside, you can see the cork board texture of the MDF.



And then you have furniture that's made up totally of MDF and has a thin laminate glued to the front surface to make it appear as though it has a wood grain.



It can sometimes be more difficult to determine if a table is solid wood. Generally you'll see thin seams along the edges if it's veneer and a cork board texture from underneath if it's MDF.

Next, lift the furniture (preferably with the drawers removed). If the furniture is rather light, it's likely solid wood. Soft woods are light-weight. MDF is extremely heavy. Many hardwoods are also very heavy though, so do not determine if it's solid wood by weight alone.

Here's a dresser that was made of a very soft, light-weight wood that was transformed into a sideboard. It went from 1970's brown stain to a natural rustic wood.



One final warning... There are some hardwoods and MDF used by big-name, mass-producing furniture stores that do not sand well and often leave tiny scratches all throughout the wood after using sandpaper on it. Avoid these and stick to the more common woods like pine, oak, maple, birch, and walnut.



Each of these examples above started off with dull brown stains covered in layers of polyurethane which were rather flat finishes that appeared dated (and not in a good way).



Instead, what this sanding technique gives you is a *naturally-aged* appearance. Notice the color variations and how the stain is still settled in the crevices. These are the color variations you will be aiming to achieve. An aged piece of furniture will look as though the finish has worn away unevenly from naturally rubbing up against it. That's why the stain still remains in the crevices.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT STYLE FURNITURE

The naturally-aged, rustic finish should coincide well with the actual style of the furniture itself when it's completed. Choose furniture that has more of a chunky appearance, rounded edges, and those with grooves where the old stain can settle.

The best furniture styles to look for if you'd like to try this naturally-aged sanding technique are Rustic, Cottage, Tuscan, Country, Colonial, and even Industrial. Stay away from straight-lined styles like Contemporary, Modern, Mid-Century, Transitional, and Traditional.



Here's how this sideboard looked when I first found it...



PREP THE FURNITURE TO BE SANDED

So you've found the perfect piece of solid wood furniture. Before you begin to sand it remove all hardware, move the furniture outside (I only sand outside), and gather your safety supplies. I wear **splash goggles** and a **respirator mask** rated with the highest P100 rating.

NATURALLY-AGED FINISH SANDING TECHNIQUE

Instead of adding product (paint, stains, and glazes) to create color variation and a naturally-aged appearance, we are reverse-engineering the process and sanding away the color unevenly. There is a trick to it though.

Begin by sanding as much of the old finish as you can with an electric rotary sander. I use **60-grit sandpaper** and this **DeWalt rotary sander** and highly recommend it.

Do not use an orbital or belt sander for this technique. Both move the sandpaper in a straight-line motion back and forth. The rotary sander (aka random orbit sander) moves the sandpaper in a circular motion for a more random pattern, which is what you want.



The goal is take off all of the old clear protective finish and as much of the stain as possible, but not all of it. This first round of sanding will take 2 to 3 hours on a standard sideboard. By now you'll be exhausted, so let the project sit for a day or two. This will also give you a chance to step back and evaluate.



After that first round of sanding, the wood will still look spotty from stain patches you missed. It's now time for round two of sanding. Go over the entire piece again with the rotary sander, focussing on the darker spotty patches to even out the tones.

Then you'll need to sand by hand closer to the the groves where the electric sander couldn't reach. Be sure to feather and blend the areas that were sanded with the electric sander and those that were hand sanded. **When you sand in the deep grooves only remove the clear finish to dull the shine but leave the stain there.**

Use **60-grit sandpaper** to get through the tough polyurethane, but leave the stain in the crevices. This is very labor intensive and will take at least another hour.

The wood should look like this when you're finished sanding...



Leaving some stain in the groves adds to the naturally-aged appearance. Many furniture refinishers actually re-create this look by applying glaze to these crevices. You're doing the reverse and sanding off the stain on the flat areas and leaving the stain that's naturally in the groves.



ADD A CLEAR TOPCOAT TO PROTECT

Once you're satisfied with the color tones, it's time to add a topcoat to protect the wood. [General Finishes Flat-Out-Flat](#) is a water-based topcoat that's perfect for natural wood surfaces.

If you were to apply an oil-based polyurethane to natural wood, it would turn the wood yellow and that's not the look you want. Many brands of clear water-based polycrylics will also change the natural color of the wood.

After much experimenting, I've found that [General Finishes Flat-Out-Flat](#) is a very flat clear coat that will maintain the natural color of the wood the best. It enhances the shades in the wood without adding an overall change of color. It also makes the wood feel buttery-soft and hand-rubbed smooth.

Each of the furniture featured here has three coats of [GF Flat-Out-Flat](#) clear topcoat brushed onto them. Apply the topcoat with a soft natural bristle brush.



Absolutely gorgeous isn't it! Not only is it much more durable than a painted surface, there are natural color variations (heavier in the crevices) without the hassle of multiple layers of stain and glaze. Trust me I know as this [this 7-layer stained dresser](#) and this [driftwood dining table](#) each took two weeks to achieve their finishes.

ADD RUSTIC HARDWARE

The final hardware you choose will add to the authenticity of your naturally aged piece. Choose hardware that's in line with the old-world, rustic, or even southwestern feel. Browns and blacks work perfectly. Stay away from gold and silvers.

I chose a rubbed bronze handle purchased at Lowe's. It's a dark brown, almost black, metal that looks as though the edges were naturally worn away over time to reveal a touch of golden tone – just like the sideboard wood. You can also find similar handles on Amazon [HERE](#).



FINALLY

Remember, not every piece of furniture needs to be painted, nor should it be. As a matter of fact, natural wood can be even more beautiful (and durable) than a painted or stained finish and will last decades longer! And as you can see, it is possible to achieve a naturally-aged finish on furniture that's only a few years old.

For even more instructions and inspiration on exactly how to refinish furniture, visit EntriWays.com.

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