

# Ever had *your* sheen go a bit sketchy?

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**Sheen variance.** Sheen, lustre, shininess, gloss level, or for the fancy folk, 'patina'... Whatever you prefer to call it, the evenness of a floor finish is the icing on the cake with every floor finishing job ever.

It doesn't much matter whether it's the rarest or most expensive timber species, the best install, the flattest sanding job, the most beautiful staining effort or the most intricate parquet pattern, if your coating has a mind of its own, or your gloss is flat or your matt is shiny, you might just be in a spot of bother – well maybe! (it is a rare but welcome blessing when some folks just don't notice it).

Fortunately, on most occasions this is not a catastrophe (unless it's 500 metres of course) as in most cases it can generally be sorted by recoating the floor, which will hide or fix most of the probable causes of sheen variance. There is, however, always the risk of the most dreaded of all outcomes, which is when the recoat doesn't work and you get the same result, or some other issue becomes apparent that only compounds the problem and makes you look like a bit of a tool in front of whoever the client may be. So it's probably best to do a little more to avoid it in the first place.

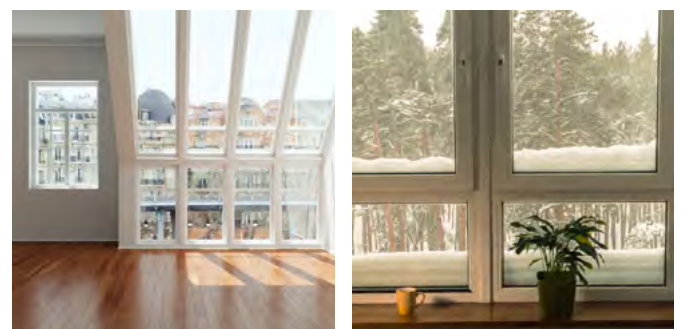
While I'm no *Tyler Henry* (he's a psychic from the telly) problems with sheen can mostly be predicted prior to their occurrence and if you're lucky avoided, with a little precoating review – *that's why hindsight sucks so much*. Most of the time it's not rocket science; just takes a bit of common sense, as most sander folk are likely to already know several of the more common reasons behind sheen level variance. The problem generally comes as many projects end up 'hurry, hurry, hurry', and it is the floor sander who is often forced to *roll the dice*.

The first step to enlightenment involves looking around and acknowledging any potential concerns present on site which *may* make a coating behave in a certain way – these can generally be pretty obvious and quickly dealt with and therefore easier to avoid. However, if you're still at a loss as to why this sort of thing may happen, hopefully the following may contribute to life's great learning curve and help to avoid, or at least minimise, the potential for such grief in the future – or at least help to identify what might have been a contributing factor to your own personal 'sketchy sheen'.

First up is **environment**, which is the most obvious and important consideration, as different site conditions can potentially affect different coating products in different ways.

Elements such as temperature and relative humidity are no brainers as just about every product lists the limitations for these considerations right there on the label. Just remember *there are gonna be times/situations that are just no good for coating*.

The slightly more subtle concerns can sneak up on you – such as direct sun exposure on a floor or a wet coat, or a very cool floor temperature provided by the site or a concrete slab, which can also mess up your finish – particularly the subdued ones. A quick hint is when your feet go numb it's probably too cold! General airflow and isolated drafts on site can also provide potential contributing factors to sheen variance – notoriously messing with solvent based satin finishes; however, even these can be avoided or minimised when coating can't be delayed. They just need to be identified and dealt with. Preheat the cold house, mask up the bottom of a large window, put a draft breaker at the top of the stairs or behind the bedroom door, maybe a shot of wet edge extender and **TURN OFF THE HEATING OR COOLING BEFORE YOU COAT**.



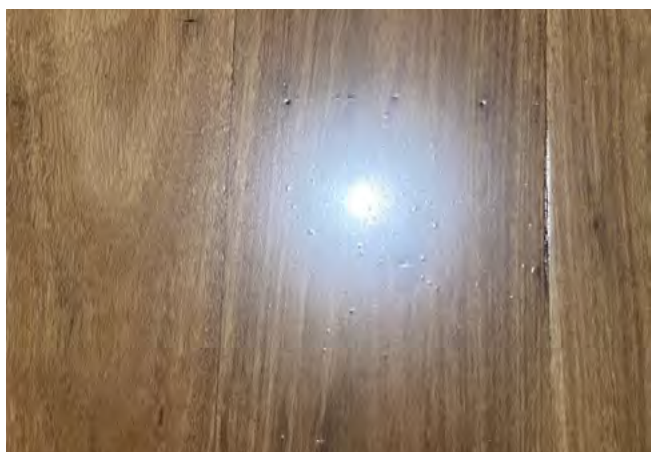
*Also note that if a variance has already happened check your excitement levels and that of the client. Sometimes you just gotta wait as site conditions are many and varied and coatings can all respond a bit differently – more so with any solvent based satins/matt finishes (poly/hardwax/oil modified). I'm sure we have all witnessed some inexplicable recoveries, so hang five and grab an extra 24 hours if you can as some stuff just fixes itself.*

**Preparation** – substrate or timber. While most only think of the last coat applied as the cause for any sheen variance issues, it's not so unusual for the surface itself to produce the odd dodgy contributor to be mindful of. Most may have already had the

pleasure of a brushbox, spotted gum or tallowwood timber floor, or a previously oiled surface that just keeps throwing up patches of 'foggy' or bloomed finish, which affects the evenness of the sheen and looks less than ideal. This opaque appearance also gives the appearance that the sheen may be lower or varied in the affected areas. This is normally one of those hindsight disasters, as it could potentially have been at least moderated with that old chestnut 'kerosene'; but this is only useful if you suspect or identify a concern at the time of sanding.

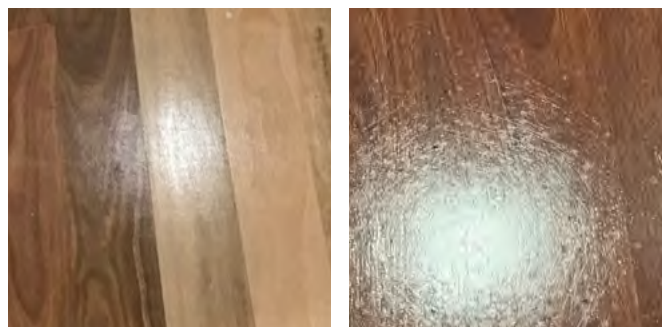
Once the horse has already bolted and you are the proud owner of foggy patches in your finished floor, you may find that they wash off only to return after a few minutes. The sort of good news here is that this effect may eventually stop coming up after a little extra curing time and some washing – cross fingers. The hardest part maybe convincing your client of this.

In the instance that the foggy culprit is trapped in the coating and appears as an opaqueness under lighting, it may just be worth trying a little teeny bit of tint in the topcoat, as this may effectively *hide* the concern without changing the colour of the floor (check with your coating folks for suitability of course). It's a dubious practice but it sure beats re-sanding if you can pull it off.



When it comes to the moment of truth prepping for the final coat it often seems that less is more. There are many stories of meticulous preparation resulting in horrible coats and conversely stories of no real preparation resulting in fantastic coats. Every floor sanding contractor should have a routine that gets them over the line most of time – life would be pretty stressful if you didn't. Therefore, the only advice that can be offered to the professional floor sander is to listen to the little man on your shoulder telling you everything you already know – especially if it looks like a turd and smells like a turd, a taste test is rarely a good course of action. .

If it's oily looking or *bloomy*, wash it (with water). If the coat feels a bit green assume it's green... cutting it back too soon will likely result in an aggressive cut and you may end up with a duller or varied sheen, scratchiness or cobwebbing to some or all of the floor. This is more prevalent in glossier finishes but still applies to the lower sheens – even if they hide most of it.



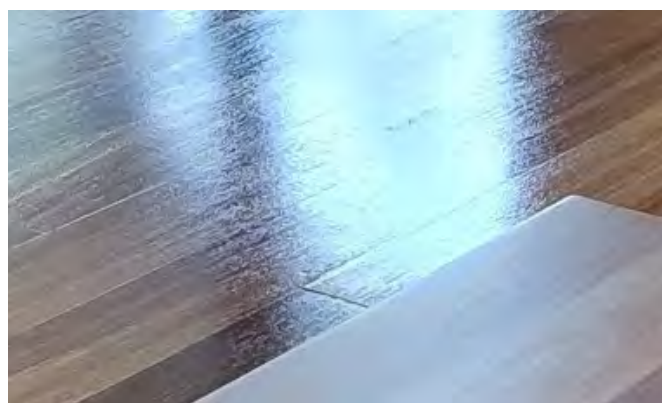
Dull

and scratchy

Tack or surface preparation washes can be risky business unless they are suitable for the coating type and actioned correctly and thoroughly. If it is not absolutely necessary, or you're not doing it yourself and the coat isn't staying soft, 'old' or dirty, try to avoid washing the floor with anything in between coats unless it's necessary and the "doer" is totally *committed to it*. A half-arsed wash or tacking of the surface is a perfect way to gather all the crap into one area and if not done properly it can potentially create issues not just with lumps in your finish, but also with drying and/or patchiness of the sheen levels.

**Coating Application** – should be a no brainer but sometimes life gets in the way.

*Mixing* – shouldn't really need too much discussion but remember to mix all your bits individually; and also after you mix them together – when there is more than one bit to mix. When doing satins or matts the stuff that makes things not glossy can settle and may need a bit of help to mix back in. Things that need hardeners need the hardener to be well dispersed; if additives are involved give them a good stir, making sure all elements are well dispersed. This will minimise any little surprises and generally ensure an evenness to the appearance and good drying behaviour. *Ever put two sugars in your coffee and not stir? Horrible! That little stir can make all the difference.*



Mixy mixy...

**Drying of the final coat.** Just like the second coat the final coat may not be on the same schedule as you, your client or the other trades. Try and wait a bit before using it or recoating it. Especially where variances are present in solvent bases in cooler or low ventilation conditions, the coat may improve sufficiently if not completely, and it will save the additional risk and effort. Besides, if the conditions aren't likely to change, why should the result from another coat?

continued »

## Technical article...

# Ever had *your sheen* go a bit sketchy? continued

**Age** – You didn't hear it from me but if you're using up your old stuff (*and you will*), make sure it dries okay on something unimportant before you go whack it on a floor. Then when you whack it on a floor do not use it on a last coat. Who knows what's gonna happen.

Make sure you have a suitable roller cover and it's clean. Solvent, thinners or water residues left in the roller will have some impact on the coating appearance and even performance – even if it's only for the first few metres, that's still enough to earn an unwanted recoat.



Water coming out the edge of the roller cover can produce an intriguing but still unattractive *snail trail* effect.

Mixed coating systems and the recoating of new, old and prefinished floors can also cough up some interesting outcomes relative to sheen levels and general expectations. Not all results are bad; they just need to be considered before they become problematic. Firstly, putting water-based over gloss poly is how a lot of folks introduced themselves to water-based finishes; however, it always provides a slightly higher sheen finish – not patchy, just higher – which is fine as long as it's expected. Care needs to be taken as any repair or additional coat, or second application of water-based over another surface, will reflect whatever the 'true' sheen level is meant to be (usually flatter).

Thus some repairs may not dry as seamlessly as first hoped. Similarly, recoating (doing a fourth coat) or adding additional film build to older coating (re-coats) can result in a variance from the original sheen level – not necessarily bad, just different. Recoats on prefinished flooring however almost always ends up a tad shinier and sometimes varied if the preparation is uneven. These variances are not necessarily a bad thing – unless your viciously wire-brushed oak comes up shiny (yuck) – it's just a difference that is probably better when it's expected.



Glossy wire-brushed oak – thanks but no thanks.

These are only the most common causes of sheen variance, but they are also the most likely to be successfully managed. So, if you can treat the preparation for every last coat like that last walk around a motel room before you check out (I can't be the only one who does it) it stands to reason that you won't leave your undies behind and won't have to do too many avoidable recoats. **t**