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This striking Quadrille border and floor from Oshkosh Floor Designs is composed of undyed maple, wenge and purple heart woods, allowing their true, rich colors to show.

Adorning Floors

Stumped on how to make a drab floor look like one-in-a-million without spending a fortune? Luckily, the possibilities are practically endless. Marble floors and wood floors edged with inlaid designs are making a comeback, and faux-paint finishes are duplicating the elegant and expensive looks associated with natural stone and detailed wood patterns. "With paint, people can do things that would be too expensive to do otherwise," explains Tobias Freccia, founder and president of Artsparx.com, an art, interior design and lifestyle Website.

Freccia, an artist and decorative painter in San Francisco, also feels that faux finishes can add a distinctive personal touch to a home. He has even worked on the same floor over years, adding on patterns to reflect the personality of new owners. The options are unlimited with faux finishes, he says.

You can choose wood inlays and borders or opt for paint treatments; either approach gives a floor a burst of excitement and allure. Medallions and star bursts look beautiful in a foyer, as do marble patterns laid out in large squares.

A checkerboard look is particularly attractive on a porch, and painted or stained borders work well almost anywhere. "Borders help separate space when there's a huge expanse of floor," says Kass Wilson, an artisan at the Atlanta-based firm Wallstreat, who specializes in faux finishes. Borders also work well in kitchens and foyers. In a living area, she adds, borders can set off an area rug.

"The furniture and accessories in a room are what drive the design that goes on the floor," says Wilson, whether you choose the traditional look of a checkerboard or the elegant style of a Greek key pattern. For those who are not sure about painting their floors, floorcloths are a great way to start. "If you're considering a design, lay it out on a floorcloth or on a large sheet of brown paper," she says. "That way, you can live with it before you make it a permanent fixture on your floor. It's your best form of insurance." If you make the effort to do this first, it will also help with measuring and figuring out the exact placement of the design while providing the opportunity to experiment with the painting process.

Floor Maintenance

This popular Greek key border is a classic. Oshkosh Floor Designs creates its version in Red Oak and Walnut (shown) and in White Oak and Mahogany.



The experts at Glitsa American, which manufactures a Swedish floor finish that is used by professional contractors, suggest these tips to keep a wood floor looking its best:

- Cover high-traffic areas like doorways with mats or area rugs.
- Use floor protectors on furniture, keep high heels in good repair and trim pet claws to minimize scratches.
- Wipe up spills immediately, using a clean damp cloth or paper towel.
- Use an untreated dust mop or soft bristle brush vacuum attachment to clean.
- Use residue-free wood floor cleaners that don't contain wax or oil.
- Recoat the floor with polyurethane when it begins to show wear, but never use wax on a floor with this type of finish because it will lift off.



Three shades of Benjamin Moore paint transform a plain floor into this pretty gem.

Preparing to Paint

The ideal time to paint a floor is when a home is newly built or when the floors are being refinished, says Kass Wilson. "Once the floors are sanded," she says, "that is your license to paint."

A crucial step is to sand to the bare wood if the floor has been waxed because polyurethane, which seals the wood before painting, won't adhere to a waxed surface. To test for wax, find a small spot that has little traffic and use a fingernail to scrape the surface. If waxed, the residue will scrape up easily; if the floor is only polyurethaned, it will come off in tiny flakes.

It's also important to know if the floor's polyurethane finish is oil or water based. Oil-based paint can be applied over both types, but water-based paint won't adhere to oil-based polyurethane. Wilson advises checking under a rug that has covered a portion of the floor to tell which type was used. If the area underneath is lighter than the exposed floor, the polyurethane is probably oil-based, because it tends to turn somewhat darker or amber in color over time when exposed to light. Water-based finishes remain relatively stable in color. ➤



Border Project

Joe Boone Jr., who owns Woodfloorsonline.com in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, has developed a technique for adding a border on floors with a polyurethane surface that relies on painter's easy-release tape. He suggests two parallel lines for the border with a Greek key pattern in each corner.

What appears to be a wood inlay border is really a beautifully stenciled floor protected with Glitsa American's Gold Seal System (comprising two seal coats and a top coat).

Directions

- 1. Decide on the design,** do the math to arrange the layout, and prepare a practice sample first. Find paint colors that match the light and dark shades of the wood you want to replicate in the border. Choose latex or oil paint depending on the type of polyurethane that is on the floor (See "Preparing to Paint" on page 47).
- 2. Following the manufacturer's directions,** use a wood-care product that doesn't contain oil or wax to clean the floor. Plot the design on the floor. Use a chalk line to ensure straight lines and tape off the design using easy-release painter's tape.
- 3. Lightly sand between the tape** with 200-grit sandpaper. The light sanding roughs up the polyurethane a little so the paint holds and ensures that the tape will stay firmly in place so paint won't seep underneath. Wipe off the dust with a tack cloth.
- 4. Paint between the tape using the lighter color.** Allow the paint to dry 24 hours.
- 5. Working ahead a couple of feet,** use a sponge to lightly dampen the paint that is already in place. Apply the darker color, then use a dry, coarse bristle brush to streak through the wet paint, pulling off some of the dark paint in the process to expose the lighter color. Wipe paint off the brush to keep it as dry as possible and work around the perimeter. Pull off the tape, make any touch-ups and allow the paint to dry for 24 hours.
- 6. Brush polyurethane over the paint.** Use oil- or water-based polyurethane depending on the kind used on the rest of the floor. Choose a finish with less sheen than is on the rest of the floor to give the border some depth. Lightly sand off any air bubbles using 220-grit sandpaper and wipe off dust with a tack cloth. Brush on two or three additional coats of polyurethane; let dry 24 hours between coats. ■