

Top tips on saving old floorboards



How to save old floorboards

Lots of care and elbow grease can help old floorboards gleam again

Thursday, 21 February 2008

Mrs Danvers

**Oak Floorboards** Dear Mrs Danvers, When refurbishing a bedroom in our Suffolk house, we found some beautiful old oak floorboards under layers of floorboards. They probably date from the early 17th century, and are about 12in wide. Over the years, they've been painted over. I've scraped off most of the paint to reveal a warm honey colour. Could you please advise the best treatment for renovating them? I don't want to sand them down mechanically for fear of losing the character. Some of the boards have separated by as much as an inch, so could you also advise on how best to fill in the gaps? I don't want to fill them with new wood.

Curiously, we've gone through the same process at our house, so I can advise from experience. First, give them a good Hoovering, especially into the gaps, to remove all dust (and have a look at the dust bag in case you've collected early coins or nails). Then, if there are still remains of paint or varnish, try really vigorous sweeping, tackling greasy bits with a detergent based industrial floor cleaner. When they're as clean as you want remember, they're supposed to look old, so don't tidy them too much polish them with a good clear wax.

We recommend Classic Wax from Flat Paints, Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex (01621 785173; [www.flagfinishes.co.uk](http://www.flagfinishes.co.uk)). This gives a quick action shine and is just as good on walls and furniture (it's used by antique dealers who want a quick effect). To fill the gaps, look for old planks of oak in reclamation yards, which will be tough as iron. If you have to use new oak, stain it first before cutting. Watered down black ink is good for this, rather than official stains, which tend to accentuate the grain.