

Fiddling with Sticks

David Oakes is surprised by repair sticks from Mohawk he expected to be just a gimmick for 'van drivers'

Originally, when these Blendal Sticks arrived from Mohawk I thought they were just a gimmick, just another crayon, which are usually pretty bog standard and very soft. Most of them are a van driver's quick fix, but these 12 sticks in a pack are more complicated. The sticks comprise earth pigments in a semi-hard wax. Crayons, in contrast, are just a dye in hard wax, which means that they don't build up colour in the same way.

Pigment is a solid colour, not translucent. The Blendal Sticks, which cost £41 inc.VAT, offer all the versatility of a palette of earth pigments but in a much more user-friendly form. If you have a badly matched repair you won't get the same density with a crayon, whereas the pigment will camouflage the substrate. A palette of earth pigments, as I've got balanced on the top of a table pedestal here, is difficult to work with, and it can be time consuming blending the pigments with shellac or cellulose. You dilute it and then use an airbrush to apply for subtle toning, or you stipple it on with a brush or a quill. You can also try dabbing and blending with a finger tip. You then have to spray on a sealer or roll on French polish with a rubber so that the pigment doesn't lift from the surface.

It is difficult to get the perfect colour straight away, though it's easier with the darker colours.

Working with sticks

You also have to seal repairs with these sticks as the wax binder is not enough to hold permanently onto the surface. You start with the lighter colours and work your way towards the colour you want to achieve, dragging the waxy substance across the repair. It's like colouring in a picture.



Repair A dent like this on the pedestal table is an ideal candidate for some work with the Bendal Sticks from Mohawk



It is pretty much impossible to do an invisible repair because wood reflects light in such complicated ways. Normally you are looking at the end of a bundle of tiny straws, but with a wax filler like this the surface will be different.

If you apply too much you can cut back with turps or meths, or you can just wipe it off and start again. It's a good way to start experimenting with colour. Applying the repair does take an element of skill, but the product will help. You can seal the repair with sanding sealer if you don't want a high gloss finish. The kit comes with a sharpener, but I prefer the nice sharp edge square

across, cut with a knife. That gives you a sharper edge, and more of it as you can rotate the stick to find a new point repeatedly. The point that's sharpened in a pencil sharpener tends to wear too quickly and is more rounded.

I wouldn't keep them for long in the blister pack in which they arrive, but I'm sure I'd use all the colours. I'd pay the £35 (+VAT) begrudgingly, but know that they would last me well and save me time.

Details 12 Blendal Sticks from Mohawk (mohawk-finishing.co.uk, 0115 973 4032); costing £35 + VAT.



French Lessons



Smith & Rodger, the polish manufacturers in Glasgow, run French polishing courses for beginners every six weeks at their factory. The courses, which are run by two local professionals, start in the morning with an introduction to sanding through the grades to prepare a surface. People attending the courses are recommended to bring with them a piece of furniture or a box, but it must already be stripped back to bare wood.

After sanding the piece you are shown how to use dry spirit stains to colour the wood, and after lunch (provided by Smith & Rodger), you get to make a rubber and learn how to fill the grain and build up a finish. "We've been running them for two years now," says Ian McAslan of S&R. "We've done about 11 courses so far, and they are always good fun."

The course costs £117.50, and the next date is 29th June. For more details of dates visit frenchpolishes.com or call 0141 248 6341.

