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Introduction

The appearance of the finish on a solid surface countertop is something that can vary dramatically. A variety of factors including equipment, abrasives, techniques, lighting conditions and even material color can influence the final look of the countertop finish. It is the responsibility of the fabricator to develop the finishes and processes that they offer and to educate their customers about the details and expectations about those finishes. Although finishing can be thought of as an art form, there are procedures and techniques that can help to ensure finishes that are efficient and consistently high quality.

Traditionally, the industry has established three categories of finish level – matte, semi-gloss and gloss. Although there are many variations, the typical steps of sanding are outlined here:

- Matte Finish - 180 grit; maroon buff (sometimes 180; 280; maroon buff)
- Semi-Gloss Finish - 180 grit; 280 grit; grey buff (sometimes 180; 280; 400; grey buff)
- Gloss Finish - Semi-Gloss Finish followed by increasingly finer grits and polishing compounds

Keep in mind that these steps are just one suggestion of how to achieve the desired finish. The type of paper, style of sander, dust control, operator proficiency, and other factors will contribute to the ultimate finish.

Wet sanding, particularly during use of the buff pads, can aid in achieving a good finish.

Here are some pointers for finishing solid surface tops:

Establish a uniform procedure used by every finisher in your company. Define a process that works for you and always use the same process with all your employees.

Use the right equipment. In the first one or two stages (coarser grits) use more aggressive sanders with a rigid backer pad. As the grits get finer use more gentle finishers like the random orbital finishing sanders with a flexible backer pad.

Use engineered abrasives with uniformly controlled particle size to reduce random scratches and pig-tailing.





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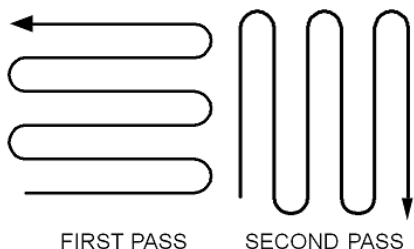
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Examples are micron finishing papers and “P” grade abrasives that are engineered for solid surface and manufactured with controlled particle sizes. Typical “P” grade papers used in woodworking contain poorly controlled particle sizes for the type of finishes required for solid surfacing. They contain relatively large random particles that scratch the surface and produce visible scratches and cloudy areas.

Be sure your abrasives are designed for solid surfacing.

Minimize the use of papers coarser than 180 grit. Although commonly used, abrasives with 120 grit and 100 grit can result in cloudy areas that are difficult to remove.

Use “pattern sanding” with proper overlap techniques to assure uniform coverage at each stage of the finishing process.



Check your sander pads. Wear-and-tear and abuse can lead to damaged pads that can result in a poor finish. Also, firmer pads should be used in the beginning steps, but softer back-up pads can help achieve a better look with the finer finishing steps. Use sanders with dust extraction. This will keep the surface cleaner and allow the sandpaper to work more efficiently.

Carefully clean the surface between grits. Dust can get trapped and result in scratches in the surface. Water in a spray bottle, with just one drop of liquid detergent added, will do the trick.

Keep heat of friction at a minimum. Let the tools do their job without the operator pressing down excessively. Sanders will do their best job at design speeds. Pushing down to cut more results in uneven scratching and unwanted heat build-up as well as pre-mature wear and tear on the equipment.

Always use abrasives engineered for solid surface.

Use “pattern sanding” to ensure uniform coverage.

Use dust extraction while sanding.

Clean the surface with water between grit steps.

Use good-quality random orbital sanders.



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