

LIFE WITH LESLEY

REASONS TO  
USE PRIMER  
WHEN  
PAINTING FURNITURE

## WHEN TO USE PRIMER

This comes up a lot, especially with Furniture Painters.

In my opinion, you should always use primer. Primer has more than one function and with most furniture, there is usually at least one reason, if not more, to use it.

If you want a good, hard wearing, professional finish, then primer is the way to go. A lot of paints claim they have a primer in them but when you understand the function of primer, you will understand why that really can't work.

## 7 REASONS TO PRIME

1. To block stains and tannins
2. Improve paint adhesion
3. To seal porous surfaces
4. To reduce odours
5. Cover dark colors
6. To create a smooth painting surface
7. Enhance the durability of the top coat.

### I. BLOCK STAINS & TANNINS

Often a piece of furniture is made of wood that bleeds. Or has been stained with a strong dye or stain that will come through your paint. Or has stains that are not visible until you paint it.

This is when you need to use a white pigmented shellac primer. Zinsser BIN is the most well known but there are other makes. If you only have one primer, this should be it.

There is one caveat! If the piece you are priming was French polished, shellac based primers will not work. You are putting shellac over shellac. Use an oil based primer.

## 2. IMPROVE PAINT ADHESION

Some furniture is difficult to paint because of the material it is made from. This includes laminate, veneer and thermo-plastic.

Again, a shellac based primer will help with adhesion. There is also Whitson's Primer which was specifically made for factory finishes. This gives an excellent surface to paint on and smells nice. Brushes can be washed in soap and water making it highly desirable for this purpose.

### 3. TO SEAL POURIOUS SURFACES

Some furniture due to age or the wood it is made from, can be very porous. This can affect the finish and also increases the amount of top coat used.

Any primer will help with this. Oil, shellac or water based. I like oil as it fills in the pores and smooths the surface but you may well have already used shellac to stop tannins.

## 4. TO REDUCE ODOURS

Some furniture holds strange odours.  
Thorough priming will often get rid of this.

Shellac based primers are good for sealing in odours you haven't been able to get rid of by other means.

## 5. COVER DARK COLOURS

You may be painting something that is dark in colour, with a lighter colour. Primer will save you using many layers of top coat, thereby saving money

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If the furniture is dark because it's the type of wood that bleeds then you'll already be using a shellac based primer. If it's painted a dark colour then any white primer will do to block out the dark colour before top coating.



## 6. CREATE A SMOOTH SURFACE

When you are painting something made of wood with very open pores.

This is a situation when a primer/undercoat is useful. A primer that is heavy bodied will fill in pores and create a smooth surface which improves the look of the top coat. Oil based primers are good for this.

## 6. ENHANCE THE DURABILITY OF THE TOP COAT

Furniture may have a myriad of problems, some you can see, some you can't. Primer will seal those problems in, it will create a smoother, less absorbent surface and help to keep moisture out. All these things will improve the durability of your top coat and keep it looking good, longer.

So whatever primer you use and for whatever reason, it will always end up improving your paint job. That is why it is so worthwhile to use a primer.

I hope you've found this guide useful.  
Please use my contact page if you have any  
questions and I'll do my best to answer.

## My favourite Primers

Zinsser BIN a shellac based primer

Zinsser Aqua BIN

Zinsser 123 a water based primer

Zinsser Coverstain an oil based primer

Whitson's Primer a hybrid primer