

Extreme Brightwork Part I

As Vice Commodore, I initiated a resource directory project as a way to help new members get acquainted with the considerable depth and breadth of knowledge that is available to them through their fellow members. The first edition of the directory will be in this year's roster,

I'm signed up for Brightwork Maintenance, and I quickly found a "client" when I announced the project last fall. Saurev Sengupta ('07) is anxious to restore the teak on Irish Mist. Rather than work one-on-one with Saurev, I thought I would share the experience here and suggest others called upon in a similar way to do the same so we can all benefit.

The subject, shown here in its initial state, is a piece of Irish Mist's cockpit trim.



Yes, this is a color photo. It's just that the wood is pretty beat up—as gray and grainy as the proverbial handle on the outhouse door. It also has a split going from the edge at the lower left and extending about four inches to the right through the lower screw hole. Also note the square pattern of four holes where something was mounted. This is a worst-case subject (sorry, Sengupta), which actually makes it ideal for the purpose at hand.

I must caution that what follows reflects my somewhat labor-intensive approach and is tailored to the work piece at hand. There are other approaches, but I prefer to varnish once every five years or so to cleaning and sealing a couple of times a year. Or you can simply embrace the gray. Contrary to popular opinion, I don't obsess over brightwork, it's just that I find the process to be therapeutic (and I like the way it looks).

Day 1: My first step was to fix the split by pulling it open gently and forcing some epoxy in from the back. I set the piece on-edge and let it cure overnight with a little weight on it.

Day 2: I sanded the front and back (mostly the front, because the grain on the back was not raised much) with 80-grit sandpaper to get rid of the weathered grain. Next I used a one-part teak cleaner and stiff brush to get rid of the gray the sandpaper didn't and to make sure the wood was free of any contaminants.

Day 3: I sanded both sides of the piece, again mostly the front, with 150-grit, this time saving the dust. For a very

weathered piece like this, you'll never get a glass-flat surface because teak has both soft and hard grains. At some point you just have to declare you're done. Even Righting Moment's coamings are pretty lumpy. I vacuumed off the last of the dust and cleaned the piece with paint thinner and then a tack cloth. The thinner gives you a rough idea of how the piece will look when coated.

Saurev said he doesn't have whatever went into the four little holes, so the next step was to fill these. I made a thick paste out of a little tung oil and some of the sanding dust I saved from the 150-grit sanding step and forced it into the holes. Using this approach guarantees a match you can't get with off-the-shelf fillers. I let this set overnight and then gave the piece a couple of swipes with the 150-grit to knock down the filler and cleaned again.

Days 4-6: The next sequence calls for three coats of tung oil. I have a bunch of screw hooks in various diameters to handle situations such as this where I need to coat both sides of something and then hang it on a string suspended from my basement ceiling to dry. I gently screwed a hook into one of the screw holes in the teak from the back and used a synthetic bristle brush to apply the oil to both sides. It's OK to brush across the grain to drive the oil in, but always give the piece some finishing strokes with the grain to obtain an even coating.

I applied two coats this way, letting it dry overnight. It's the third coat that makes the difference between a nice job and a really good one. For this coat, I applied a thick coat of tung oil to the front of the piece and immediately wet sanded with 320-grit wet-or-dry sandpaper. As I sanded, I added oil to keep the resulting slurry in a viscous state. Then, just before the oil started to set, I rubbed the piece down with cheesecloth to remove the excess and drive the slurry into the grain. I then put a third coat of oil on the back, but without wet sanding. Here's a shot of the piece after this step.



If this were an interior piece, I would stop here and coat it with sealer because I prefer the satin finish belowdecks. Actually, I will stop here anyway to give you all time to get your teak to this stage and finish in the March issue.

Barry Meehan