Choosing the Right Finish for Your Tabletop

A Customer Guide by T. R. Roberts Furniture Restoration

Introduction

The finish on a dining table, desk, or coffee table performs two essential roles: it draws out the natural depth and character of the timber, and it protects the underlying surface against the demands of daily life.

At Roberts Restoration, we offer three distinct finishing systems. Your choice depends on how your piece will be used, the visual aesthetic you prefer, and how much hands-on maintenance you wish to undertake over the coming years.



Option 1: Hard Wax Oil (Fiddes Hard Wax Oil)

What It Is

A professional blend of natural vegetable oils and hard waxes (such as carnauba and candelilla) that penetrates deep into the timber grain rather than forming a thick synthetic film on top. Available in Satin or Silk sheens.

Look and Feel

Delivers a warm, natural feel where you can still feel the real timber grain beneath your hand, without looking plastic or artificially coated.

Best Suited For

Rustic oak, pine, country dining tables, solid-wood kitchen tables, mid-century furniture (such as G-Plan), and any piece where you desire a traditional, highly tactile timber character. Note that while hard wax oil can be applied to mahogany, dark brown timbers like mahogany are best suited to a deeper, grain-filled, high-gloss finish such as traditional shellac or a gloss lacquer.

Protection & Care

Provides good everyday water and spill resistance once fully cured. However, acidic spills (such as wine, lemon juice, or vinegar) and hot mugs should be wiped up promptly and kept on coasters or mats.

Maintenance Advantage

Exceptionally easy to spot-repair. Minor scratches, scuffs, or worn patches can be lightly sanded and re-oiled locally by hand, eliminating the need to strip the entire tabletop down to raw wood. High-use tabletops will typically benefit from a light revive coat every couple of years (or as the surface begins to look dry) to keep the wood nourished and protected.

Option 2: Morrells Pre-Catalysed Cellulose Lacquer

What It Is

A professional, trade-grade spray finish (Morrells 250 / 280 Pre-Cat) that cures into a tough, durable, crystal-clear protective film over the wood. Available in Matt, Satin, or Gloss sheens.

Look and Feel

Produces a smooth, refined, and uniform sheen with superb clarity. It beautifully highlights fine, figured timbers like mahogany, walnut, and yew.

Best Suited For

Formal dining tables, Georgian, Victorian, and mid-century furniture, writing desks, and busy family dining tables requiring strong, hassle-free everyday durability.

Protection & Care

Offers significantly higher resistance to water marks, alcohol splashes, and general daily wear than oil alone. Simply wipe clean with a slightly damp cloth and dry immediately. Heat-resistant placemats and coasters are recommended for hot cups, mugs, and serving dishes.

Maintenance Note

Engineered for long-term durability without the need for regular re-coating. Note that while minor surface marks can often be spot-repaired, deep damage cutting right through the lacquered film will require professional refinishing.

Option 3: Morrells Pre-Catalysed Lacquer + Silica / Ceramic Top Coat

What It Is

Our flagship maximum-protection finish. We spray-finish the tabletop with Morrells Pre-Catalysed Lacquer in our workshop. Once the lacquer has fully cured for 14 days, we apply a professional-grade silica/ceramic nano-coating (such as Gtechniq C1 Crystal Lacquer with EXOv5 or N3 Nano) directly over the surface.

Look and Feel

Preserves the exact natural sheen and beauty of the underlying Satin or Gloss lacquer while introducing a slick, ultra-hydrophobic barrier that causes liquids to immediately bead up.

Best Suited For

High-traffic family dining tables, commercial hospitality tables, and cherished pieces frequently exposed to red wine, coffee, hot tableware, and daily entertaining.

Protection & Care

Provides outstanding resistance against stubborn stains (including red wine, coffee, curry, and oils), water rings, mild heat, and fine surface micro-scratches. Spills wipe away effortlessly without penetrating the finish. Note that while the ceramic top coat dramatically improves resistance on dining and occasional tables, it is designed for tabletops rather than heavy-duty kitchen food-preparation worktops.

Two-Stage Handover

The base lacquer requires 14 days to fully cure and gas off its solvents before the ceramic top coat can bond properly. We deliver your table after workshop spraying, you can continue to use your table for light use only, then we return two weeks later to prep the surface and apply the ceramic top coat on site. Once the ceramic coating is applied, the tabletop should be kept dry and handled with care for a further 7 days while the top coat fully cures before subjecting it to heavy daily use.

Quick Guide: Which Finish Should You Choose?

- **Choose Hard Wax Oil** if you love a natural, tactile wood feel and want effortless DIY spot-repairs over the years.
- **Choose Morrells Pre-Cat Lacquer** if you want a classic, smooth, highly durable finish with strong all-round protection and zero routine maintenance.
- **Choose Morrells Lacquer + Silica Top Coat** if you require the highest possible defence against spills, stains, heat marks, and heavy daily family use. Note that while this is our most expensive finishing option, it delivers the strongest protection we can offer without moving to industrial two-pack coatings that require specialised commercial spray-booth equipment and ppe.

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We invite you to get in touch with us to discuss your piece and select the perfect finish for your home.