

wood floor ID

You cannot clean your floor until you know the chemistry of the finish. The water bead test distinguishes sealed poly surfaces from penetrating oils.

The Wood Floor Protocol: Identification and Maintenance

Identify your finish chemistry first, then clean with the correct system to avoid haze and moisture damage.

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Floor ID

FINISH IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

You cannot clean your floor until you know the chemistry of the finish. The water bead test distinguishes sealed poly surfaces from penetrating oils.

Once identified, use the protocol below to prevent haze buildup, swelling, and premature refinishing.

Asset card

Baseline material data before any intervention.

MATERIAL

White oak, walnut, engineered hardwood

VULNERABILITY

Moisture saturation and haze buildup

TOOLS REQUIRED

Dropper, white cotton rag, vacuum with soft bristle attachment

CRITICAL WARNING

The forbidden list

These products damage the finish or trap grime.

NEVER USE OIL SOAP

This leaves a sticky residue that attracts dirt and makes future refinishing impossible.

NEVER USE STEAM MOPS

Driven steam forces moisture into the grain, causing cupping and warping.

NEVER USE VINEGAR

The acid dulls the sheen of polyurethane over time.

The diagnostic: the water bead test

You cannot clean your floor until you know the chemistry of the finish.

1. Find an inconspicuous corner or high-traffic area.
2. Place a single drop of water on the surface.
3. Observe for 2 minutes.

RESULT A: THE WATER BEADS

The water sits on top like a bubble.
Diagnosis: surface sealed
(polyurethane or UV-cured
aluminum oxide).

RESULT B: THE WATER SOAKS OR DARKENS

The wood turns darker or the drop
flattens. Diagnosis: penetrating oil or
wax finish.

The step-by-step protocol

Match your cleaning system to the finish type.

Protocol A: Surface sealed floors (poly)

1. **Dry clean:** Vacuum with a horsehair attachment to remove grit (which acts like sandpaper).
2. **The solution:** Use a residue-free cleaner (for example, Bona or a simple water/alcohol mix).
3. **The mop technique:** Mist the pad, not the floor. Damp mop with the grain.
4. **No shine:** Do not use "polish" or "restorer" products. They add acrylic layers that eventually flake.

Protocol B: Penetrating oil floors (oiled oak)

1. **Dry clean:** Sweep or vacuum thoroughly.
2. **The solution:** Use the specific soap intended for oiled floors (for example, Woca Soap). This soap contains fats that nourish the wood.
3. **Two-bucket method:** Use one bucket for the soap solution, one for rinse water.
4. **Buff dry:** Oiled floors should never be left wet. Buff dry with a cotton towel if necessary.

Maintenance schedule

MAINTENANCE NOTE

Poly floors: "Screen and recoat" (light sanding plus a new topcoat) every 3-5 years.

Oiled floors: Apply maintenance oil every 12-18 months in high traffic areas.