

# BLEACHING WOOD

*by Bruce Fairchild*

To darken an area of a picture we can use sand shading to give depth and detail. To lighten an area of a picture we can use bleaching. Not all woods react the same to bleaching, and you must experiment with the bleach you are using on the type of wood and the time of exposure to bleaching before neutralizing. When experimenting, an accurate time of exposing the wood to the bleach must be recorded, and then after drying observe the effects. All bleaching must be neutralized or the reaction will continue until the wood is dry.

I tried hair bleach (Hydrogen Peroxide), without neutralizing with water and this bleach did not take much if any pigment out of the veneer. Laundry bleach (Sodium Hypochloride) did a fair job of bleaching the wood and the effect was related to time exposed to the bleach before neutralized with water. Oxalic acid crystals are said to be the next strongest bleaching agent and are neutralized with water and borax. I did not experiment with Oxalic acid and can offer no advice.

The strongest wood bleach is a commercial wood bleach consisting of two bottles Part A and Part B, (Sodium Hydroxide and Hydrogen Peroxide). A ten second exposure to this bleach without neutralizing will remove most of the pigment from a piece of mahogany. This bleach is also neutralized with water after the desired bleaching time.

My advice to you if you plan to use bleaching is to experiment first and keep an accurate record of the exposure times per type of wood.

There is an article in the Spring issue of the British Marquetry Society's journal The Marquetarian, which deals with a problem on bleaching. A Mr. Basil Heath-Brown use laundry bleach cut with 5 to 10 parts water. He claims that washing with water did not neutralize the bleaching action, in his case.