

# BLEEDING PADAULK PROBLEM

by *Mike Stredwick*

At our November 11th 1990 workshop meeting, I was asked by one of the members if I could write an article on the problem of darker woods bleeding into the lighter woods when sanding and finishing a picture. Now it so happened that I was cutting a picture of the Welsh flag at the workshop meeting. For those unfamiliar with the flag, it is a red dragon on a green and white background. The veneers I had chosen were padauk, holly and green poplar.

I knew from past experience with padauk, that you have to seal it before you do any sanding or scraping, but I thought I would do a little research and see what other marquetarians had to say on the matter.

Shortly after the workshop meeting, I received my Winter 1990 copy of *The Marquetarian* from the U.K., and there to behold was a paragraph about bleeding padauk. Here's what Ernie Ives had to say about the problem:

"There are several courses open to you.

- 1) Give the individual padauk pieces two coats of sealer and let them dry thoroughly. (If applied too quickly, the second coat will dissolve the first.)
- 2) Apply the first general sealing coat sparingly. (never pour on the sealer)
- 3) Use a shellac sealer (or white French polish) to initially seal the padauk and use the cellulose sealer for the general applications.
- 4) Brush coat or spray with a clear aerosol lacquer before using the padauk. N.B. Bright red padauk will change if exposed to strong light and will probably be a darkish brown mahogany in a couple of years."

Next, I looked up an article by Peter L. Rose on finishing marquetry from *Fine Woodworking* on Marquetry and Veneer.

"Always buy the smallest can of shellac available - you only need a small amount on a piece of scrap. It should be dry within two hours - if it isn't, it will remain gummy and should be discarded. The shelf-life of white shellac is about six months to a year. Mix the shellac with an equal amount of denatured alcohol and apply to the picture. Let dry and apply another coat. This seals the wood and keeps the lighter woods free of the dust of darker woods when sanding. It also seals in the oil of veneers such as rosewood and teak."

This article mentions scraping the picture flat before sealing. I have found, however, that even scraping padauk can cause it to bleed into lighter woods. I therefore seal the padauk first and

then the rest of the picture before using the scraper. I then re-seal the picture, padauk first and then the lighter woods - at least two coats, and let dry before sanding.

Finally, my research lead me to an article by William A. Lincoln in his book *The Marquetry Manual*. In this article, the first coat of sealer is called the fixative coat. Here are parts of that article.:

"The objectives of the fixative coat are to partially fill the open-pored woods to protect them from staining, and to completely fill the pigmented woods to prevent discoloration. It is also to raise and stiffen the grain of the veneers to facilitate the subsequent block-sanding of the surface without clogging the open-pored woods."

"It is important that the fixative coat and the following base coats of sanding sealer dry invisibly and prevent the penetration of subsequent coats and the suction caused by the finishing coats of polish. This also cuts down on the number of finishing coats as it fills the pores with a tough film which will permit the minimum grain shrinkage."

"The fixative coat is not 'flowed on' like a wash coat, but carefully applied with a fine camel hair or squirrel hair mop brush. Many marqueterians prefer to rub it into the pores with a fingertip protected with a disposable vinyl glove making sure that the open-grained veneers are treated first. (The sealer solvent can be injurious to your health if in contact with the skin.)"

"Pick out the whitest woods first, such as sycamore, horse chestnut, obeche, etc., to seal them, Then work over the highly coloured woods painting each of them within their outline. Do not sand after this coat. Allow to dry and check if the grain is sealed on whether there are patches of veneer still open."

"Have a small quantity of solvent handy to dip the brush in between coating each veneer, to keep it clean, and wipe the brush off each time. Do not go over parts already treated while the sealer is wet. When the whole picture has been protected with this fixative coat, allow the surface to dry thoroughly. Do not sand at this stage. You can then apply three or four coats of full-strength sanding sealer in rapid succession again without sanding between coats."

"The picture should now be left in a warm dry place to allow for drying out and grain shrinkage. After a week or two, the picture should be ready for sanding."

Well, after reading all these articles, you would think my 'dragon picture' would have come out perfect, wouldn't you? Not so. On close inspection of the picture, I discovered a very slight discoloration of the holly by the dragon's mouth. All right, so the dragon was breathing fire, right? Well, whatever, it just goes to show you have to be very careful with padauk.