

Making Synthetic Wood Part 2– Painting

By Dennis Ivison

This issue we're going to cover, as the title suggests, painting our "synthetic wood". When using real wood to build a project we already have the base color we are looking for, the wood itself, when we use plastic to make our wood we need to add the wood color, unless your goal is to end up with a white structure. When using wood products, as you've read in many articles, we use stains and washes to achieve the final effect we are looking for; when using plastic we need to use opaque paints at the beginning to cover up the white plastic, then we get into using washes. As a side note, even if I am looking to have a white finish on my "synthetic wood" structure, I still paint the wood with white paint first. I've found that flat paint takes washes and chinks better than bare plastic does.

Follow the photos and captions to see the techniques that I've used to get the finish I'm after when making "synthetic wood".



Photo 1

In the first photo we have our raw product, we've scratched and scribed the heck out of our plastic and are in the process of turning plastic into a wood deck. You'll notice that several areas are more heavily scribed than others, I really let loose with my Japanese rasp. This is going to be a loading dock for the current project I am working on. The vertical faces are not scribed with wood grain, here I'm looking for a painted surface at a well maintained business. The .250x.250 pieces in the upper left corner are braces for the walls of the cooper shop.



Photo 2

In photo 2 we have simply spray painted the deck surface with two different colors. Both colors are by Rust-Oleum, camouflage tan and primer gray; both colors are an ultra flat finish. You'll notice some areas are much darker than others, there have been no washes applied to this point, only spray paint; the dark splotches result from an extra heavy application of the Japanese rasp. The vertical surfaces are painted dark gray, the finished color I want for the lower half of this structure.



Photo 3: What the h*!# did you do! That looks terrible!

Not a lot of unfinished wood decking exposed to the elements remains a monochromatic color for long, so we need to add a little variety to our color range. There are at least half a dozen different colors brushed on to the deck at this point. The technique I use is somewhere between dry brushing and full color application, I'm aiming for a hint of color (weathering), rather than a weathered paint look. The paints used are inexpensive acrylic paints you can find at any art supply store.



Photo 4, That's a little better, but still a little splotchy don't you think?

Washes, you've read a dozen articles about washes, but they still work. This is the result after two very thin washes with black India ink, one overall wash, and one more directed at areas I thought needed a little more highlighting. That is the only difference between photo 3 and this one, the washes have brought out the wood grain a lot more and have blended the ugly blotches of paint from the previous photo together a little. The deck is still a little dark, but we're getting closer. The next step will lighten the deck and blend the colors together even more.



In this photo you can see the finished deck. After the India ink wash, I take a cotton swab and lightly dip it into alcohol and gently rub selected areas of the "wood". This bleaches out some of the color and helps to further blend all of the colors together. You don't want to get back to a monochromatic color palette, nor undue the effects of the India ink, so avoid a general wash and stout scrubbing, or you'll risk ruining all of your previous work. After the alcohol dries, a thorough dry brushing finishes the project. For the dry brushing I don't like to use white it is too bright, plus I'd like to stay with a color that you'd find on a weathered, well used piece of wood; for that reason I like to use weathered concrete. Now that the deck is finished it's time to work on the cooperage.

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