

Information Note for Hanika Guitars with a French Polished Soundboard

Shellac, also known as gum lacca (rubber lacquer) and lacquer resin, is a resin secreted by the female lac bug (*Kerria lacca*) after they have sucked the sap of certain trees in India and Thailand.

French Polish (Shellac polish) is the surface treatment of wooden surfaces with shellac dissolved in ethanol. The shellac solution is repeatedly applied and polished to create an extremely thin, mirror-smooth and high-gloss surface coating on the wood. The lacquer coating supports the vibrations of the wood with minimal dampening.

French polish has its disadvantages however. The resins and waxes, which favor the flexibility of the varnish, when compared with other finishes have a greater heat sensitivity (melting point 60-100o C), lower abrasion and scratch resistance and higher sensitivity to acids (e.g. skin sweat).

Shellac takes about 3-4 months to reach working hardness and only becomes really hard over several years. It is very sensitive to mechanical stress, sweat and thermal stress, even the body heat of a guitarist will soften it. Direct permanent contact of bare skin with the finish should be avoided. It helps to put a soft cloth under the playing arm . Be careful with (shirt) buttons, zippers, belt buckles or the like, as well as coarse textiles as these can leave marks and scratches.

Cleaning should only be done with a dry, non-scratching, at most "slightly damp" soft cloth; this will readily remove minor marks. Wet cleaning should be avoided. No further maintenance is necessary. Under no circumstances should any other agents be applied to the polish. In particular avoid silicone oils which can seriously damage the polish. A reworking of the polish called "polishing up" (which can be done relatively quickly by the guitar maker with a thin shellac polish every few years) can restore the surface to "new" condition, but this is not essential.

Important: Never expose shellac polished surfaces to direct sunlight, as the wood can fade and the surface can become brittle with cracking, and avoid using any other finishes, polishes or other surface treatment.

(Original text copyright Hanika Gitarren Germany 2021. English version translated by Google translate with a few minor edits and stylistic changes, Hanika Guitars UK, <https://hanika-guitars.co.uk>)