

How I refinished Mr. Robert's Mandola

By John Mosconi – String King Lutherie, Akron Ohio stringkinglutherie.com



Prep sand and Sealing

Sand bare wood to 320 grit paper. Apply 3 to 4 clear coats Enduro Waterbased Lacquer then sand level with 600 grit dry paper. Inspect, drop fill any low spots or dings that are too deep. Level sand them, and then clear coat once more over entire instrument.

To Sunburst

I mask off the binding with 1/8" and or 1/4 masking tape, available from an auto body supplier. After masking I apply the amber coats. I make the amber toner as follows. I take 10 oz of Enduro lacquer and add 8 oz water. To this pint (16 oz) add 6-7 drops Honey Amber TransTint. **It is very important that the lacquer has been run through a strainer.** I spray until the color is where I want it, using light coats. Any debris can be sanded but you can also end up removing more color than you want and cause a blemish which can be hard to blend.

To spray the tobacco brown use the same ratio of Enduro Lacquer and water as above and add ½ oz Dark Mission Brown TransTint (Tobacco Brown) and 2 drops Black. The gun should be set with higher air flow and less material. Adjust the tip for a round pattern and aim for the outer edges. Before spraying the perimeter and sides you should clear coat the amber twice to seal it. Again, you want to use full strength (no dilution) but thin coats so that the blend from amber to brown is a nice fade. After that is done you can spray a light coat of tobacco brown over the amber to give it a richer antiqued appearance, that's what I did with the mandola.

Applying Clear Coats

I then clear coat over the entire instrument. It brings out any blemishes or imperfections that may need blending before removing the masking tape. After removing the masking tape I scrape any over spray. I then apply about a dozen thin to medium coats of clear, using 600 grit dry paper, sanding every 3 or 4 coats to remove imperfections. This is done normally over 2 to 3 days.

Leveling and Sanding

After curing about 4 to 5 days I sand for the last time in order to buff. I dry sand first by hand with 1500 grit dry sanding paper such as Mirka. This comes in a 5" disc and is sold by Homestead Finishes. I use a semi stiff rubber sanding pad that you can wrap the paper around. Most auto body suppliers have them but the Mirka Double Density sanding block can also be used but it has to be cut down a bit in size to around 2 x 3 x 5/16. The purpose of dry sanding is so you can see what you're doing. Since the waterbased lacquer powders nicely, wet sanding isn't necessary.

After that you can then wet sand with 1500grit wet/dry paper, dipped in soapy water. Follow that with 2000 grit.

An alternative that you can use if you can find it is to dry sand only with 1200 grit 3M Hookit finishing film (part #952) and go directly to the buffer. This high-end industrial sandpaper eliminates the intermediate wet sanding steps. With this product I normally get a scratch free glossy finish with little fuss and can go directly to the buffer.

Final Rub Out & Polishing

I then buff with a pedestal buffer using Menzerna medium and fine compound and a pedestal buffer. If you don't own a pedestal buffer you can substitute Menzerna #1 and #2 paste compounds, using a cloth or buffing pad. Debris can be cleaned with any pump spray light polish/cleaner (Behlen OZ polish is an example).

Finishing Materials from Homestead

General Finishes/Enduro Waterbased Gloss Lacquer

TransTint Tobacco Brown (Dark Mission Brown)

TransTint Vintage Amber (Honey Amber)

TransTint Black

Mirka Royal 5" dry sanding discs

Mirka Double Density Sanding Block

3-M or Mirka wet/dry sandpaper

How it compares to the EmTech 6000

- I noticed for one that it seems to cure faster. By a couple of days. You can leave water drops on it after 48 hours and they don't eat into the lacquer. The EmTech still can show marks at this point
- Also I can polish it with a cream polish like Novus 2 and it buffs to a gloss like Nitro would. EmTech would actually get cloudy. Which means a customer can safely polish and clean a guitar with most quality polishes and it should be fine.
- After it cures it has a look very similar to nitro lacquer it doesn't look like there are that many coats on it. It looks like most any quality factory finish. Not too thick not too thin.
- And lastly it seems about as hard as nitro and a little softer than EmTech. It sands with the 3m finishing paper and buffs scratch free noticeably faster and easier than the EmTech. So of course the final steps go much faster.

