

This is not a warning about a problem with [Milk Paint](#). The purpose of this article is to alert the users of milk paint to avoid Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler. As currently formulated, this stuff will have disastrous consequences on your finish and my well destroy all the hard work you have put into your project. Read on and I will explain...

Milk Paint Users Beware!



I was recently commissioned to build a piece of custom furniture. The project was to reside in a home with a *country look* filled with many antiques. The customer wanted the finish to have a dead flat sheen that would be consistent with the character of the top which was to be made from planks resawn from an antique heart pine timber reclaimed from an old distillery in Kentucky. Milk paint was the obvious finish choice. My customer selected Oyster White from [The Old-Fashioned Milk Paint Company](#).

Work went well and the project was completed, needing only the finish. As I was inspecting the piece prior to applying the milk paint I noticed some minor tare-out in three of the thru mortice & tenon joints. My go-to wood filer on painted pieces has always been Famowood. However, the cure time is several hours, and I was eager to apply the finish (I



think there is a lesson here); so, I opted to use some *Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler*. (I had a small amount left over from a repair project where I used it to fill defects in a table surface that would be covered with veneer.)

Well, as you can see in the photo, things soon went very badly. What on earth (I edited that just a bit) is going on? Is my brush contaminated? Was there something in the container used to mix the milk paint? If I hurry

can I wipe it off? No, No and NO! Whatever has caused this ugly stain, it is here to stay! But what is it and what is its cause?

In short order I realized that the stain was associated with one of the mortise-and-tenon joints to which I applied filler. But the size of this purple blob is infinitely larger than the tiny area I filled. It can't possibly be the filler, can it? It's time to set aside finishing my custom piece and do some testing. This is no time to move forward and only make matters worse.

In the following series of photos, I:

1. Created a test defect,
2. Applied the suspect filler,
3. Sanded the filler when dry, and
4. Applied milk paint to the filled area.



The Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler is clearly the problem...

As the photos attest, the filler is the problem. The stain in the milk paint is obviously related to the *Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler*. But why is the area of the stain so much larger than the area of the defect that was filled? The filler was only applied to the small defect I carved into the test board (photo 1). Yet the purple stain has expanded over an area several times larger than the defect (photo 4). Two observations are apparent:

1. First, the defect to which the filler was applied is clearly visible in photo 4. It is the darkest area of the stain and the shape perfectly defines the defect. This clearly points to the filler as the source of the stain.
2. Second, the spread of the stain to the area surrounding the filled defect can only be explained as resulting from sanding dust containing the filler being packed into the pores of the adjacent wood. The stain was not carried by my brush. It was produced when

the milk paint was applied to the filler, both the body of the filler in the defect and the filler dust created and spread over the area when the filled defect was sanded.

It should be apparent from this test that some component of the *Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler* is reacting with the milk paint to produce this most undesirable result.

So, what do we do to solve the problem? Based on my experience, if milk paint is your chosen finish, the problem is best solved by not buying *Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler* in the first place. For me, that advice came a bit too late.

My first attempt at a fix was to simply apply a second coat of milk paint hoping that a second coat would cover the stain. It didn't! The stain was just as prominent in the second coat as it was in the first.

My next attempt at repair was to "seal" the stain by applying a topcoat of a film forming finish. I tried both Mohawk Pre-Catalyzed Vinyl Sealer and General Finishes High Performance water-borne acrylic. This attempt also failed. The Vinyl Sealer did an excellent job of preventing the colorant in the filler from bleeding through into the milk paint. But because milk paint is intended to be applied to bare wood for proper adhesion, it did not adhere well or look proper when applied to either "sealer".

At this point I surrendered to the inevitable and physically removed the *Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler* by carving the filler out of the defects. This, of course, left an even larger defect than I had filled the first time around. I then filled with Famowood, sanded, and applied the milk paint. Problem solved, right? Well, almost... There was still the matter of the filler dust left from the previous sanding. The stain was reduced but still not gone. Anywhere that sanding dust from the *Color-Changing Wood Filler* remained the stain again rose its ugly head.

Looking again at my test board I saw that the stain had *somewhat* faded. (Compare photo #5 with photo #4 above.) The key word is "somewhat". The stain had not disappeared. It was still far too obvious to be ignored. I would not, for a moment, have even considered delivering this piece of custom furniture with so obvious a blemish in the finish. But what I want you to see is the small dots of color that surround the defect. It is this pattern of colored dots that I now see in my finish. Even though the filler was physically removed the contamination remained. Yes, the offending filler was replaced with Famowood, sanded,

and a new coat of milk paint applied. But there was still enough of the Minwax Color-Changing Wood Filler sanding debris left on the surface to result in an unacceptable finish. The "ghost" of Minwax past is still with me.



Once again, I removed the damaged milk paint. This time, however, I thoroughly wiped the area down with acetone hoping that the offending chemical in the Minwax filler would be neutralized. It worked. After the acetone completely evaporated, I was able to apply the milk paint with no stain caused by the Minwax *Color-Changing Wood Filler*.

One final observation, if I may. Look again at photos #5 and #6. Photo #6 is the result of an *I-wonder-what-will-happen-if* on my part. Specifically, what happens if this stuff gets wet in daily use? Not possible you say. Not so fast. Many finishes are "water-proof"; liquid water cannot penetrate the finish film. But no commonly used finish is "moisture-proof"; water-vapor can and does pass through the finish film. It moves in both directions. This is major reason why wood continues to move. It expands and contracts across the grain with changes in seasonal and local humidity. What you see in photo #6 is the result of a few drops of water applied to the finish in photo #5.

Do you really want to use this stuff?

