

ColorTone Aerosol Finishing Set Instructions for Tinted Guitar Lacquers

Tips and instructions for achieving a professional finish

Keeping it Simple: The ColorTone® Finishing Sets let you finish an entire instrument without an elaborate spraying setup or equipment.

ColorTone products included in this set

- 1 - Powdered Grain Filler
- 1 - Vinyl Sealer
- 1 - Tinted Lacquer, options:
 - Cherry Red, Tobacco Brown, or Red Mahogany
- 3 - Clear Gloss Lacquer



Spray tips!

Nitrocellulose finishes should have a total of 6–12 (or more) coats — sealer, color, and clear coats combined. The total number will depend upon how thick your coats are, how much sanding you do, and what your final desired finish thickness is. Beginners should spray 10–12 coats to avoid sanding or buffing through the finish. As you gain experience, you'll find that fewer coats are required.

Spraying conditions are important. For best results, a low humidity environment is recommended. We suggest a spraying temperature of 70° F with 50% humidity.

Before spraying, we recommend placing your spray cans in a container of warm tap water. The increase in temperature helps the lacquer flow better and reduces unwanted spitting. When the can begins to feel cold during use, we recommend switching to a warmed can as chilled cans are more likely to spit. Place the chilled can back in the water so it can be warmed back up and used again!

To prevent runs and sags we suggest spraying light coats and lots of them. It takes a little longer but is less frustrating in the long run.

If you do get a run or sag, simply let the finish harden for 24 hours, then level-sand the blemish using 400-grit sandpaper on a backing block.

To clear the spray head, invert the can and spray for 2–3 seconds. Keep the spray tips clean by soaking them in lacquer thinner between coats. This helps prevent clogging and spitting.

Wood preparation

Sand the wood up to 320-grit with a silicone-free abrasive such as 3M Gold Sandpaper.

Use compressed air, a tack cloth, or vacuum to remove dust.

Filling the grain (optional)

Traditionally, the pores of open grained woods such as mahogany, ash, and koa need to be filled in order to achieve a level surface to build your finish on. This has however become an optional step. While many manufacturers still use grain filler on their builds some, including Gibson, are foregoing this step on some models in favor of a thinner finish. The choice is yours.

Build a level surface with Vinyl Sealer

Shake the can for at least one minute after the agitator rattles.

To prevent runs, don't spray too heavily. We recommend multiple thin coats, with the aerosol held 8–10 inches from the surface of your instrument. Spray 2–4 coats, allowing at least 1–2 hours between spraying.

Between sealer coats, sand very lightly using a sanding block with 320-grit sandpaper to remove any fuzz or lint that may appear. This is not the same as level-sanding: use a light touch, being careful not to sand through to the wood. Let final sealer coat dry for 24 hours before spraying color coats.

Tinted color coats

Shake the can for at least one minute after the agitator rattles.

Apply 1–3 color coats or until desired coverage is reached. Spray 2–3 coats a day, 1–3 hours apart.

Do not sand tinted coats.

Clear lacquer coats

Remember to shake the can for at least one minute after the agitator rattles.

As with the previous coats, we recommend spraying multiple thin coats, with the aerosol held 8-10 inches from the surface of your instrument for best results.

Apply 4–10 coats, 2–3 coats per day, allowing 1–2 hours between coats, let dry for 24 hours before level-sanding. After level-sanding apply 1–2 additional coats.

Cure the finish

This is very important: let the finish cure for 10–14 days before final sanding and buffing. A hard-cured finish will buff out well, while an uncured finish will drag and soften due to the friction of buffing.

Final sanding and polishing

We suggest starting the polishing process by wet-sanding with 800-grit Micro Finishing Papers. Starting with a higher grit reduces the possibility of sanding through clear the coats into color.

Wet-sand up to 1200-grit then apply medium and fine ColorTone Polishing Compounds with a soft cloth or foam polishing pad. Follow up with Swirl Remover for a high gloss finish.

Learn more

Use the Guitar Finishing Step-By-Step book (StewMac # 5095) to learn about materials, and equipment, and to expand your finishing vocabulary. This book gives beginners a solid base of knowledge, and also includes advanced techniques and recipes for professionals.