

Jack Lawton's Questions & Answers

Q: *Is it possible to remove drum finish from one vintage drum, and re-use it on another?*

A: Yes, it is possible, *in some cases*. There are several factors and risks to consider before undertaking this type of project. First, you should determine if there is enough usable material from the “donor drum” to do the job. You would think there should be more than enough material from one bass drum to wrap a snare drum, but usually, there’s not. Before you attempt to remove any finish, measure the distance between the rear lug holes. On a 1970’s Ludwig bass drum, that distance is about 6 inches. Then, measure the distance from the first seam to the second seam. You’ll need at least 45 inches to go around a 14” snare (which allows for one inch overlap). Next, make sure there are no holes in that section, such as tom holder mounts or shell mount cymbal holders. You usually don’t have as good of luck with 1960’s Ludwig, Rogers, Gretsch, or Slingerland bass drums, as the lugs are closer together, ranging from only 3.5” to 5.25”. For finishes from that era, a better choice would be a 16” x 16” floor tom. You generally have 6.5” between the rear hole of the top lug and the top hole of the leg brackets and over 50” in length.

The next step is to remove the finish *without wrecking it!* Easier said-than-done. If you’re real lucky, the finish will come off with no problem...if not, you may have to resort to using lacquer thinner, but be careful not to let the lacquer thinner mar the outside of the finish. During this operation, you may end up removing some (or most) of the outer ply of the shell, so, be prepared to sacrifice the shell if necessary. Once the finish has been removed, *carefully* remove any glue residue and/or wood from the back side of the wrap. Now you’re ready to trim the material to size and apply it to the outer shell. One thing to remember before starting a project like this, there’s always a chance you could ruin the donor drum *and* it’s finish, so be careful!

Q: *What is the best way to remove the yellow from aged white marine pearl?*

A: Unfortunately, depending on what caused the pearl to yellow, there may not be an easy way to get the yellow out. If the discoloration is just due to a build up of dirt, dust, grime, nicotine, or some other type of surface crud, it may be possible to remove much of the discoloration with a thorough cleaning. A good cleaner to use is Soft Scrub (without bleach). It has a mild abrasive that will cut through the dirt and grime without harming the pearl, and acts similar to a polishing compound. After using the Soft Scrub, go over the shell with a damp cloth or a little Windex or Glass Plus to remove any remaining residue. Immediately follow with some type of polish, such as Groove Juice SHELL SHINE, or Gibson Guitar Polish, or some other polish formulated for use on plastics. If after this cleaning process, the shell is still too yellow, then the discoloration is probably due to exposure to light over a long period of time. If that’s the case, then all the Soft Scrub in the world won’t get the yellow out. For that, you’ll need to resort to a



more radical method, which could involve using lacquer thinner, super fine sand paper or 4 x 0 steel wool, as you'll need to remove some of the top layer of the pearl. This can be rather risky and shouldn't be attempted by the faint-of-heart, as you could ruin the finish altogether. Depending on how aggressive you get, you will need to follow up with polish and wax, or possibly with one or more coats of clear or tinted lacquer or polyurethane. Of course, a lot of collectors prefer that yellowish or greenish tint that white marine pearl acquires over the years. Much like grey hair, it's a sign of age, which can be a good thing. Because of the different degrees of discoloration and the varied patterns of pearl, white marine pearl can be one of the more frustrating finishes to collect, especially if you're trying to piece together an outfit.

Q: *How can I tell if a Ludwig Supraphonic snare drum has a brass shell or not?*

A: This is a fairly common question of Supraphonic owners. Many try the magnet test, figuring that if the magnet doesn't stick, it must be brass. But a magnet won't stick to aluminum either. Another observation is that if the drum seems heavier than others, it might be brass, but the difference in weight might be due to the weight of the lugs, as the older Imperial lugs had thicker walls,



which made them heavier than later lugs. A good way to check if you've got a brass shell or not, is to remove one of the lugs, and, carefully scrape the chrome plating off the inside edge of one of the holes. If the exposed color is gold, then it's a brass shell. If it's still silver colored, then it's either aluminum or possibly steel, which you will be able to determine with a magnet.

In future issues of *VINTAGE DRUMMER* Magazine, we'll answer more of these types of questions. If you have a particular restoration problem or inquiry that you would like addressed, please submit it to *Jack Lawton's Questions and Answers* Column, c/o Vintage Drummer, 770-438-0844, fax # 770-437-9044, email billy@vintagedrummer.com.

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