

NAKAMOTO FORESTRY

Please read this before using our products

Finish Information and Surface Maintenance

Yakisugi (shou sugi ban) can be a maintenance-free exterior siding, or a re-oiling schedule can be planned to keep the colors vibrant. This is an aesthetic choice each owner makes as the wood ages.

Cryptomeria (“sugi” or Japanese cypress) is a highly rot-resistant wood species, and the heat treatment improves wood longevity. However, color change from weathering is the same as any wood siding, and the rich patina that develops over time is valued in Japan. Traditionally, Suyaki- and Gendai-type yakisugi are installed unfinished and left that way for the lifetime of the structure. Generally only higher-grade residences or public facilities historically have had oil stain finishes applied and maintained. Today even in Japan most yakisugi (the statistic is 80%) is prefinished due to availability and acceptance of finishes and desire to maintain color consistency for as long as possible.

We generally recommend finishing of all our products with a high grade oil stain, and most of what we ship has a factory-applied oil finish. When installed outdoors the extra UV protection will slow down the weathering process and bond in surface soot, and when installed indoors enhances the wood grain and makes cleaning easier. Note the typical weathering due to lack of finish or finish maintenance in photos in the historical gallery on our website’s “What is Yakisugi” page. This is due to the lack of a repainting culture in Japan. Organic weathering is beautiful but many North American owners want the color to stay the same over time.

Weathering speed and pattern depend on finish spec, pigment content, and method of application, the nature of each individual plank, local exposure to weather, and maintenance. Sun-exposed surfaces will gradually mellow burnt orange as the soot erodes over decades, moisture-exposed surfaces will gradually turn silver, and areas with protection from both will stay the original color. Finishing with a UV-resistant oil and regular refinishing per manufacturer instructions will slow down the aging process and allow the siding to retain the specified color longer. This will also allow the maximum lifetime possible by preventing dimensional movement, checking, and UV degradation of the fibers. Basically yakisugi is similar to any other wood siding in terms of finishes and maintenance. The main difference is that due to the product being sooty we are not able to use a standard siding roll-coating line and therefore cannot apply oil stain to all sides of the boards.

After initial installation and within several years depending on conditions, minute hairline cracks will open on the surface of exterior planks and the color will start to change. At this point the owner should decide whether to embrace the Japanese patina aesthetic and enjoy how the wood ages, or re-apply the oil stain in a maintenance program to keep the color fresh over time. Refinishing as soon as color begins to change will fill in these cracks and make a longer-wearing surface. Each maintenance coat of finish will generally last longer than previous coats did due to oil build up. All exterior finishes we use are breathable for best thermal performance and longevity. Another important point on the finishes we specify is that oil stains erode gradually over time, different from paints that flake or peel.

Please consult with us for specific project requirements and our recommendation to match your spec.

On Finishes...

- All prefinishes will bond the soot to the surface and prevent it from coming off when touched. After installation the wall can be wiped down with a wet cloth or washed down with water, and there will not be a noticeable soot residue afterwards.
- For better wood longevity on exteriors, finish end cuts, ribs, drilled holes, or notches during installation.
- For best color longevity apply second or third coats of oil stain before or after installation.
- Some professionals think that back-oiling wood will increase longevity or dimensional stability in exterior applications. There are mixed opinions on this and it is never done in Japan. We therefore only oil the back side by special order. There is no reason to back-finish wood for interior applications.

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- Use a penetrating UV-resistant plant-derived finish for exterior. High pigment and trans-oxide load is the best UV-inhibitor available for maximum color longevity.
- Natural unmodified plant-derived semi-transparent traditional oils (oxidizing monomers) will show the grain best but will need more regular maintenance to stay vibrant than modern semi-solid alkyd (polymerized) oils. This is because solid stains have a pigmented UV-blocking surface residue that stays the original color until it erodes through exposing the wood color. Wood finished with traditional oils will fade gradually over several years. Alkyds will have more consistent color for the first several years, then wood grain will show through after the pigmented surface residue erodes.
- For maximum color longevity on exteriors we recommend alkyd-oil hybrids with an unmodified oil component for lux appearance and elasticity. Alkyds are plant-derived oils (safflower, linseed, soy, etc) that have been chemically modified into a polymer. They offer maximum UV protection and erode gradually instead of crazing and scaling off like paint.
- For interior applications petroleum- or plant-derived polymers (such as polyurethanes) make a good-looking, washable surface.
- It is important to follow finish manufacturer's instructions and to test when reapplying.

Maintenance Guidelines

- Cypress has premium longevity over other species partially due to a high tannin content (also since porous and quick-drying). Tannins may leach from the cypress within the first year or so and stain lighter colored surfaces below. These stains will generally wash away with rain exposure within the second year after installation. This is normal for all cypress or cedar species. See the photos on our FAQ page. If any tannin stains appear on the wood or lower surfaces and need to be removed, wash off with a mild oxalic acid product.
- To keep siding color consistent over time, apply a maintenance coat of finish when the wood begins to change color. Generally the first maintenance coat will be within 1~10 years for traditional oils, then additional maintenance coats will be needed further and further apart due to oil build-up. Alkyds normally last longer before maintenance is needed, and a general rule of thumb is a re-oiling schedule of 2~15 years.
- Before application of a maintenance coat, clean and prepare the surface as specified by the finish manufacturer. Wash with a soft brush or cloth, never with a stiff brush or power washer. A power washer will break open the wood cells and cause premature weathering. Never sand or scrape yakisugi.
- A very weak TSP or soap solution, commercial no-wash neutral pH cleaner, or simply clean water, can be applied with a cloth and residue removed to clean off pollen, dirt, dust, etc. It is best to use a product supplied by the finish manufacturer if any cleaning agent is used.
- Always clean and refinish a hidden test area before attempting the entire wall surface.
- Touch up of damage, such as scratches or dings, or local uneven weathering, can be done easily with the specified finish maintenance product. Suyaki or Gendai damage can be touched up with a black or dark brown stain, or the original prefinish. A small nick can be carefully dabbed with stain, bleaching can be lightly blended with stain and a rag, or for interior even a magic marker or grease pencil can be used for quick cosmetic touch-up.
- Scratches to our Suyaki with an interior urethane finish can be touched up with a waterbourne polyurethane pigmented black with universal pigment. Damage or scratches to the Suyaki soot layer on exterior applications can be touched up by carefully dabbing black oil locally then carefully wiping off any excess.

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