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Nitrocellulose LACQUER

care and maintenance

Over the past 100 years, most Gibson guitars, banjos and mandolins have been finished with nitrocellulose lacquer. (The alternatives are varnish, polyurethane or polyester.) Although nitrocellulose is the traditionally preferred finish, it is not the most durable. It scratches fairly easily, and without the proper care, it can crack or discolor.

With the proper care, a nitrocellulose lacquer finish will retain its beauty and functionality for decades. Here are the Do's and Don'ts

DO...

- Wipe off the finish with a 100% cotton cloth after every playing session. The guitar polishing cloths that come with some instruments and are available at most dealers are 100% cotton, but soft flannel is what repairmen use. This is the most important thing you can do for a lacquer finish. And while you're at it, wipe down any metal parts if needed.
- Protect the instrument with a quality case. Hardshell is the best.
- If you want to polish your instrument, use a high quality guitar polish only. Polishes vary in their chemical composition, and some have a reputation for damaging a finish, but the great majority of finish damage allegedly done by the polish is actually the result of using a cloth that is not 100% cotton. Be sure not to leave any excess polish on the instrument.
- Check the climate where the guitar is kept or stored. To prolong the life of the finish and the guitar, humidity should remain a constant 45-50%. The rule of thumb for heat and humidity is, if you're comfortable, the guitar is comfortable.
- When shipping or storing the instrument, tune down the strings a step.

DON'T...

- Never wipe down the instrument with anything other than a 100% cotton cloth. Anything else will scratch and dull the shine.
- Never put the instrument away with moisture, sweat, grease or anything else on it. Human sweat will quickly oxidize, dull, and destroy a lacquer finish if it is not wiped away before it is put up. Human sweat will also pit and tarnish metal parts if it is not wiped off after use.
- Never open a cold case in a hot room, and vice versa. If you do encounter extremes in temperature and humidity, leave the instrument in its case so that it can slowly acclimate to the change. Opening a case in a heated room after it's spent a few hours in the unheated trunk of a car could have the same effect on lacquer as pouring boiling water into a cold glass. It will crack right before your eyes. The proper acclimation time depends on the severity of the change. When you decide to remove the instrument, gently crack the case open for a time to allow for a gradual change in temperature.
- Don't let your belt buckle scratch your instrument. Prolonged belt buckle scratching will eventually remove the finish in that area.
- Do not leave the instrument in direct sunlight. This will cause a colored finish to fade. Shades of red fade the fastest.
- Do not use furniture polish or automotive polish or any abrasive polish. It may remove or destroy the finish.
- Don't try to touch up scratches or dings. Your guitar will look as bad as a car with "factory touch up" paint dabbed on it. Some types of damage can be touched up without refinishing, but this work should be done only by an experienced repairman.
- And finally, watch out for guitar or music stands that are not "lacquer friendly." The rubber tubing on many stands will eat through lacquer and stain the guitar through the finish into the wood.

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