

VANCOUVER FLOOR INSTALLERS

---

# Floor Refinishing & Restoration

Hardwood sanding, staining, recoating, and repair services to restore aging or damaged floors in older Vancouver homes and heritage properties

14 Expert Answers from Floor IQ

[vancouverfloorinstallers.com/construction-brain](https://vancouverfloorinstallers.com/construction-brain)

# Table of Contents

---

1. How often should hardwood floors be refinished in a Vancouver home with average wear?
2. Can I refinish my 60-year-old fir floors in a Vancouver character home or are they too thin?
3. What's the difference between a full sand-and-refinish versus a screen-and-recoat for my Vancouver hardwood?
4. How long does a hardwood floor refinishing project take in a typical Vancouver home — can I stay during the work?
5. Is dustless sanding really dustless for refinishing hardwood in my Vancouver condo?
6. Can I change my hardwood floor stain colour during refinishing — going from honey oak to dark walnut?
7. How do I fix water-stained hardwood floors in my Vancouver home without refinishing the whole room?
8. Is oil-based or water-based polyurethane better for refinishing hardwood in Vancouver's humid climate?
9. Can pet scratches and dents in my Vancouver hardwood floors be fixed with refinishing alone?
10. What time of year is best to refinish hardwood floors in Vancouver — summer or spring?
11. How many coats of polyurethane should go on a refinished hardwood floor in a Vancouver home?
12. Can I refinish engineered hardwood floors or do they need to be replaced when they look worn?
13. How do I restore original fir floors hidden under carpet in my 1940s Vancouver bungalow?
14. What stain colours are trending for hardwood floor refinishing in Vancouver homes right now?

## How often should hardwood floors be refinished in a Vancouver home with average wear?

**Hardwood floors in a Metro Vancouver home with average wear should be fully sanded and refinished every 10 to 15 years, with a maintenance screen-and-recoat every 5 to 7 years in between to extend the finish life and delay the need for a full refinish.** This two-tier maintenance approach keeps your hardwood floors looking their best while maximizing the total lifespan of the wood.

A **screen-and-recoat** is the lighter, less expensive maintenance step. A professional lightly abrades the existing finish with a floor buffer and fine screening pad — without sanding down to bare wood — then applies one to two fresh coats of polyurethane. This refreshes the protective layer, fills in minor scratches and wear patterns, and restores the floor's sheen. The process takes one day for most homes, and you can walk on the floor within 24 hours. In Metro Vancouver, a screen-and-recoat costs **\$2-\$4 per square foot**, so a typical 800-square-foot main floor runs **\$1,600-\$3,200**. This is one of the highest-value maintenance investments a homeowner can make — far cheaper than waiting until the finish is completely worn through and a full refinish becomes necessary.

A **full sand-and-refinish** is the deeper restoration. The floor is sanded down to bare wood using a sequence of progressively finer grits (36, 60, 80, 100, and sometimes 120), then stained if desired and sealed with three coats of polyurethane or hardwax oil. This removes all scratches, dents, stains, and wear patterns, leaving a floor that looks essentially new. A full refinish takes 3 to 5 days for a standard Vancouver home and costs **\$3-\$8 per square foot** — roughly **\$2,400-\$6,400 for 800 square feet**. Solid hardwood floors (3/4-inch thick) can typically withstand 3 to 5 full refinishinges over their lifetime, giving a well-maintained hardwood floor a total lifespan of 50 to 100 years.

### Signs Your Floors Need Attention

**Schedule a screen-and-recoat when you notice** the finish looking dull or worn in high-traffic areas — hallways, kitchen paths, living room walkways — while the rest of the floor still has reasonable sheen. Water droplets no longer bead on the surface but instead soak into the wood within a few seconds. Light scratches are visible but the actual wood colour and grain remain intact beneath the finish.

**Schedule a full refinish when** the bare wood is visible in traffic paths and the original stain colour has worn away. Deep scratches expose raw wood. Grey or black discolouration appears — this indicates moisture has penetrated through the finish and begun oxidizing the wood fibres. The floor has multiple layers of old finish that are peeling, flaking, or yellowing. In Vancouver's humid climate, grey spots can develop faster than in drier climates if the finish is compromised, because ambient moisture accelerates wood oxidation.

**Several factors specific to Metro Vancouver affect refinishing frequency.** Homes with pets — particularly larger dogs — may need a screen-and-recoat every 3 to 5 years rather than 5 to 7, as claws create fine scratches that compound over time. Families with young children in the active toddler-through-elementary-school years often see faster finish wear from toys, spills, and general energy. Homes in rainier communities like the **North Shore, where annual rainfall exceeds 2,000mm**, experience more moisture being tracked in on footwear, which accelerates finish degradation near entryways. A good-quality entry mat that captures water and grit — and the habit of removing shoes at the door — extends your finish life more than almost any other single measure.

**Finish type also affects longevity.** Water-based polyurethane is the most popular choice in Metro Vancouver for its fast drying time, low odour, and clear finish that does not yellow. It typically lasts 7 to 10 years in moderate traffic before needing a recoat. Oil-based polyurethane is slightly more durable and water-resistant but ambers over time and takes 24+ hours between coats. **Hardwax oils** like Rubio Monocoat have gained popularity in Vancouver for their natural matte appearance — they are easy to spot-repair but require more frequent maintenance (reapplication every 2 to 5 years in high-traffic areas).

For solid hardwood floors, refinishing is one of the best-value home improvements available — it costs a fraction of replacement and dramatically refreshes the appearance of your entire home. If you are unsure whether your floors need a recoat or a full refinish, a professional assessment takes minutes and can save you thousands by catching wear before it damages the wood itself. Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with experienced local refinishing professionals for a free evaluation.

---

Q2

## Can I refinish my 60-year-old fir floors in a Vancouver character home or are they too thin?

**In most cases, yes — 60-year-old fir floors in a Vancouver character home can absolutely be refinished, and the results are often stunning.** Douglas fir was the standard flooring material in Vancouver homes built from the 1920s through the 1960s, and those original planks were typically milled at 3/4 inch thick. Even after one or two previous refinishing, there is usually enough wood remaining for another careful sanding.

The key factor is how much material has already been removed. A full sand-and-refinish takes off roughly 1/32 to 1/16 of an inch per pass, so a floor that started at 3/4 inch can handle several refinishing over its lifetime. Your flooring professional will measure the remaining thickness above the tongue-and-groove joint — if there is at least 1/4 inch of material above the tongue, the floor is a strong candidate. In homes across Kitsilano, Mount Pleasant, East Vancouver, and the older neighbourhoods of New Westminister, refinished fir floors are one of the most

sought-after features in the real estate market.

**Fir is a softwood, which means it behaves differently from oak or maple during refinishing.** It dents and scratches more easily, and aggressive sanding with a drum sander can leave visible waves and swirl marks. An experienced refinisher will typically use a lighter touch with the drum sander and may finish with an orbital sander to achieve a flatter, smoother surface. This is not a project for a DIY approach — fir's softness makes it very unforgiving of inexperience with heavy sanding equipment.

One consideration specific to Metro Vancouver's climate is that 60-year-old fir floors have been expanding and contracting through decades of seasonal humidity changes. You may see gaps between boards, especially during drier summer months. A skilled refinisher can fill smaller gaps with a wood filler mixed with sanding dust to match the floor's colour, though larger gaps (over 1/8 inch) are often better left unfilled since filler will crack as the wood continues to move. Some homeowners embrace the character gaps as part of the home's heritage charm.

**For finish, water-based polyurethane is the most popular choice for fir refinishing in Vancouver.** It dries clear without the amber yellowing that oil-based poly produces — this matters because fir already has a warm, golden tone that deepens with age. Expect to pay **\$3.50 to \$7 per square foot** for a professional sand-and-refinish on fir, with costs toward the higher end if extensive board repairs, gap filling, or staining are involved. A typical 800-square-foot character home main floor runs **\$2,800 to \$5,600**.

Before committing, have a refinishing professional inspect the floors in person. They will check for thickness, nail integrity, water damage, and any areas where boards may need replacement. In some older Vancouver homes, sections near exterior doors, kitchens, or bathrooms may have moisture damage from decades of Metro Vancouver rain tracked indoors — those individual boards can often be replaced with salvaged fir to maintain the original look. If your character home floors pass inspection, refinishing them is one of the best investments you can make — it preserves the home's original charm while adding genuine value. Vancouver Floor Installers can match you with a refinishing specialist experienced with heritage softwood floors at no cost.

---

Q3

### **What's the difference between a full sand-and-refinish versus a screen-and-recoat for my Vancouver hardwood?**

**A full sand-and-refinish strips your hardwood floor down to bare wood and rebuilds the finish from scratch, while a screen-and-recoat lightly scuffs the existing finish and applies a fresh topcoat — the difference in cost, time, and disruption is significant.** Choosing the right one depends on the current condition of your floors

and what you are trying to achieve.

## When Each Option Makes Sense

A **screen-and-recoat** (also called a buff-and-coat) is the right choice when your existing finish is worn but not damaged through to the wood. If you see dullness, light surface scratches, and traffic patterns but the stain colour is intact and there are no deep gouges, grey spots, or water stains, a screen-and-recoat will restore the shine and add years of protection. The process involves lightly abrading the existing finish with a floor buffer fitted with a mesh screen or sanding pad, vacuuming thoroughly, and applying one or two fresh coats of polyurethane. The entire process typically takes **one day** for a standard room, and you can walk on the floor within 24 hours. Costs run **\$1.50 to \$3.50 per square foot** in Metro Vancouver — roughly half the cost of a full refinish.

A **full sand-and-refinish** is necessary when the finish is worn through to bare wood in areas, when you want to change the stain colour, when there are deep scratches, pet stains, water damage, or grey oxidation, or when the floor has never been refinished and has decades of wear. This process uses a drum sander and edger to remove all existing finish and a thin layer of wood, followed by progressively finer grits to achieve a smooth surface. Then comes optional staining, followed by three coats of polyurethane with light sanding between coats. A full refinish takes **3 to 5 days** for a typical Vancouver home and costs **\$3.50 to \$8 per square foot** depending on the wood species, condition, and whether staining is involved.

**One critical point that many homeowners overlook: a screen-and-recoat only works if the new finish can bond to the existing finish.** If the old finish has been waxed, treated with certain cleaning products, or is a fundamentally different chemistry (applying water-based poly over old oil-based without proper preparation), the new coat may peel or flake. A professional will test adhesion in an inconspicuous area before proceeding. In Metro Vancouver's humid marine climate, floors in older homes sometimes develop micro-moisture issues beneath the finish that cause adhesion problems — another reason professional assessment matters.

**For budget-conscious Vancouver homeowners, here is a practical strategy:** if your hardwood floors are in fair condition with no colour change needed, start with a screen-and-recoat at **\$1.50 to \$3.50 per square foot**. This can buy you another 3 to 5 years before a full refinish is needed. When the time comes for a full sand-and-refinish, you can then invest the **\$3.50 to \$8 per square foot** to completely transform the floor, including a stain colour change if desired. For a 1,000-square-foot main floor, that is the difference between roughly **\$1,500 to \$3,500** now versus **\$3,500 to \$8,000** later.

The one scenario where a screen-and-recoat is never appropriate is when the finish has worn through to bare wood — the screen will damage the exposed wood further and the recoat will not adhere properly to bare wood surrounded by existing finish. If you can see raw wood in doorways, hallways, or kitchen work areas, a full refinish is the way to go. Need help deciding? Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with a refinishing professional

who will assess your floors and recommend the right approach — at no cost to you.

---

## How long does a hardwood floor refinishing project take in a typical Vancouver home — can I stay during the work?

**A typical hardwood floor refinishing project in a Vancouver home takes 3 to 5 days from first sanding pass to final coat, and in most cases you should plan to stay elsewhere for at least 2 to 3 of those days.** The timeline depends on the square footage, whether you are staining, the type of finish being applied, and how many rooms are being done simultaneously.

Here is how a standard refinishing project breaks down for a typical Vancouver home with 800 to 1,200 square feet of hardwood. **Day one** involves moving furniture out of the work area, taping off doorways and vents, and the heavy sanding with a drum sander and edger. This is the loudest, dustiest phase — even with modern dustless sanding systems, some fine dust escapes containment. **Day two** includes the final fine-grit sanding passes, vacuuming, tack-cloth wiping, and applying stain if you are changing colours. Stain needs 6 to 12 hours to dry before the first coat of finish can go on. **Days three through five** are dedicated to applying polyurethane coats — typically three coats total, with light sanding between each coat and adequate drying time.

**The finish type significantly affects both timeline and liveability during the project.** Water-based polyurethane dries in 2 to 4 hours between coats and has relatively low odour, which means a skilled crew can sometimes apply two coats in one day and compress the project to 3 to 4 days. Oil-based polyurethane requires 8 to 24 hours between coats and produces strong fumes that linger — this stretches the project to 5 days or more and makes the home genuinely unpleasant to occupy. Hardwax oil finishes like Rubio Monocoat can sometimes be completed in 2 to 3 days since they cure differently, though they require more careful application.

**Can you stay in the home?** During the sanding phase, the answer is technically yes if you can seal off the work area from your living space, but the noise level makes it difficult to work from home or be comfortable. During the finishing phase with water-based polyurethane, low-VOC formulas are tolerable in well-ventilated rooms, though anyone with respiratory sensitivities, young children, or pets should avoid the space until the final coat has cured for at least 24 hours. With oil-based polyurethane, **plan to be out of the home entirely** for the finishing phase — the fumes are intense and potentially harmful without proper respiratory protection.

**Metro Vancouver's marine climate introduces a timing consideration that matters.** Humidity levels affect drying times for both stain and finish. During the wet season (October through March), when indoor humidity in Vancouver homes typically sits between 45% and 60%, drying times can stretch longer than manufacturer specifications suggest. Running your home's heating system and, if available, a dehumidifier in the work area helps significantly. Summer refinishing (June through September) generally offers faster dry times due to lower humidity and the ability to open windows for ventilation without introducing rain-laden air.

**For practical planning, budget these timelines in Metro Vancouver:** water-based polyurethane finish with no stain change — 3 days, light furniture back on day 4, area rugs after 2 weeks. Water-based with stain colour change — 4 days minimum. Oil-based polyurethane — 5 to 7 days including full cure time before furniture return. The refinished floors should not have area rugs placed on them for **at least 2 weeks** regardless of finish type, to allow full curing without trapping solvents.

The cost for a standard refinish in Metro Vancouver runs **\$3.50 to \$8 per square foot**, so an 800-square-foot main floor typically ranges from **\$2,800 to \$6,400** depending on wood condition, stain choices, and finish type. If you need to find temporary accommodation during the work, factor that into your budget. Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with experienced refinishing professionals who will walk you through the timeline for your specific project.

---

Q5

## Is dustless sanding really dustless for refinishing hardwood in my Vancouver condo?

**Dustless sanding is not truly dustless — it is dramatically dust-reduced, capturing approximately 95% to 99% of the dust generated during sanding.** The term is a bit of marketing optimism, but the technology represents a genuine and significant improvement over traditional sanding methods, and it is especially important for refinishing hardwood in Vancouver condos where dust migration to neighbouring units is a serious concern.

Modern dustless sanding systems work by attaching powerful vacuum units directly to the drum sander, edger, and orbital sander via large-diameter hoses. The vacuum pulls dust from the sanding point into a sealed containment unit — usually a truck-mounted or trailer-mounted system parked outside, connected by hoses run through a window or door. The best systems capture dust particles down to 1 micron in size, which eliminates the visible dust clouds that traditional sanding produces. However, some fine airborne dust still escapes, particularly from the edger working along walls and in corners where the vacuum attachment cannot seal completely. You will notice a fine film of dust on surfaces in the work area, but nothing like the thick coating that old-school sanding leaves.

**For Vancouver condo refinishing, dustless sanding is not just a nice-to-have — it is practically mandatory.** Strata buildings have shared HVAC systems, common hallways, and neighbours in close proximity. Traditional sanding sends fine dust through every crack, vent, and gap into adjacent units, common hallways, and mechanical systems. This creates legitimate complaints from neighbours, potential strata bylaw violations, and damage to HVAC filters and electronics. Most professional refinishing contractors serving Metro Vancouver condos now use dustless systems as their standard approach, and many strata corporations require it as a condition of approving

the work.

**Even with dustless sanding, proper containment measures are essential in a condo setting.** A professional crew will seal off the work area from the rest of your unit using plastic sheeting and painter's tape over doorways, cover HVAC registers to prevent dust from entering the duct system, and lay protective coverings in hallways used for access. If the hoses need to run through common areas to reach an exterior vacuum unit, the installer should coordinate with your strata manager and protect common area flooring and walls.

**Expect to pay a slight premium for dustless sanding in Metro Vancouver.** The equipment is expensive to purchase and maintain, and setup takes longer than traditional methods. Refinishing costs in a condo with dustless sanding typically run **\$4 to \$8 per square foot** — about **\$0.50 to \$1.50 per square foot** more than a standard refinish in a house where traditional sanding might still be acceptable. For a typical 600-square-foot Vancouver condo, that means a total project cost of roughly **\$2,400 to \$4,800**. The premium is well worth it when you factor in the avoided cleanup time, neighbour goodwill, and strata compliance.

**A few practical tips for your condo refinishing project:** remove or cover all soft furnishings, electronics, and kitchen items in the work area — even with dustless systems, the residual 1% to 5% of escaped dust settles on everything. Seal your bedroom closets if they are near the work zone. Inform your strata council and immediate neighbours about the timeline, and confirm that your contractor carries WorkSafeBC coverage and adequate liability insurance, which most strata corporations require before approving any in-suite renovation work. If you are ready to refinish your condo hardwood, Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with refinishing professionals who use dustless systems and are experienced with Metro Vancouver strata requirements.

---

Q6

## Can I change my hardwood floor stain colour during refinishing — going from honey oak to dark walnut?

**Yes, you can absolutely change your hardwood floor stain colour during a refinish — going from honey oak to dark walnut is one of the most popular transformations in Metro Vancouver homes right now.** The process requires a full sand-and-refinish (not just a screen-and-recoat) because every trace of the old finish and stain must be removed to allow the new colour to absorb evenly into bare wood.

The sanding phase is critical when changing colours. Your refinisher will sand through three or more grits, starting with a coarse 36 or 40 grit to strip the old finish and progressively moving to finer grits (60, 80, and 100 or 120) to create a smooth, uniform surface that accepts stain consistently. **Any remaining traces of the old finish will block stain absorption and create blotchy, uneven colour** — this is why a colour change is more labour-

intensive than a clear-coat refinish and typically costs more.

Going from a lighter colour like honey oak to a dark walnut stain is actually easier than the reverse. Dark stains are more forgiving because they mask minor inconsistencies in the wood grain. Going from dark to light is significantly more difficult and sometimes impossible to achieve evenly, especially on softwoods like fir, because the original dark stain can penetrate deep into the wood grain and resist complete removal.

**Wood species matters enormously when choosing a dark stain.** Red oak, which is the most common hardwood floor in Metro Vancouver homes built from the 1970s through the 2000s, has a prominent grain pattern that shows through dark stains beautifully — but some homeowners find the pronounced grain too busy under very dark stains. White oak has a tighter, more subtle grain that looks exceptionally elegant in dark walnut and espresso tones, which is why white oak has become the premium choice for contemporary Vancouver renovations. Maple is notoriously difficult to stain dark because its tight, closed grain absorbs stain unevenly, creating a blotchy appearance. If you have maple floors and want a dark look, your refinisher may recommend a **water-popping** technique — lightly misting the sanded wood with water to raise the grain and open the pores before staining — or using a dye-based stain instead of a traditional pigmented stain.

**Expect your refinisher to create stain samples on your actual floor before committing to a colour.** A professional will sand a section in an inconspicuous area (inside a closet or under where furniture will sit) and apply your chosen stain so you can see exactly how it looks on your specific wood under your home's lighting. Stain colours on manufacturer sample boards — which are typically applied to maple or birch — can look dramatically different on your actual floor species. Dark walnut on a sample card versus dark walnut on 30-year-old red oak are two very different things.

**For a colour-change refinish in Metro Vancouver, budget \$5 to \$8 per square foot,** compared to \$3.50 to \$6 for a refinish without a stain change. The additional cost covers the extra sanding precision required, stain application and drying time (typically a full extra day), and the additional coat of stain that very dark colours often need for even coverage. For a 1,000-square-foot main floor, a colour-change refinish runs approximately **\$5,000 to \$8,000**.

One Metro Vancouver climate note: **stain drying times are affected by humidity.** During the wet season, stain may need 8 to 12 hours to dry fully before the first polyurethane coat, compared to 6 to 8 hours in summer. Your refinisher will adjust the schedule accordingly. After staining, three coats of polyurethane are standard — water-based polyurethane is strongly recommended over dark stains because it dries clear, whereas oil-based polyurethane adds an amber tone that shifts the colour warmer over time.

Vancouver Floor Installers can match you with refinishing professionals who specialize in colour-change transformations — get connected for a free estimate on your project.

## How do I fix water-stained hardwood floors in my Vancouver home without refinishing the whole room?

**Fixing water-stained hardwood floors without refinishing the entire room is possible in many cases, but the success depends on whether the stain is in the finish layer or has penetrated into the wood itself.** In Metro Vancouver, water stains on hardwood are extremely common given the marine climate — tracked-in rain near entryways, leaking windows, overflowing planters, and pet water bowls are the usual culprits.

**Surface-level water stains — white or cloudy marks that sit in the finish layer — are the easiest to address.**

These occur when moisture gets trapped between polyurethane coats or just beneath the surface. You can often remove white water marks by gently rubbing the area with a cloth dampened with denatured alcohol, allowing it to soften and re-fuse the finish. Another approach is to place a clean cloth over the stain and apply a warm iron (no steam) for a few seconds at a time — the heat draws the trapped moisture out of the finish. These methods work best on relatively fresh stains and may not completely eliminate marks that have been sitting for months.

**Dark water stains — black or grey marks — indicate that moisture has penetrated through the finish and into the wood fibres.** These are significantly more difficult to address without a full refinish. The dark colour comes from tannins in the wood reacting with water and iron (often from nails beneath the surface). For localized dark stains, a **spot treatment** approach involves carefully sanding just the affected area down to bare wood, applying oxalic acid (wood bleach) to neutralize the dark tannin staining, rinsing and drying thoroughly, then re-staining and refinishing the sanded area to match the surrounding floor.

The challenge with spot repairs is **blending the refinished area with the surrounding floor.** Even with careful colour matching, a freshly finished patch will look different from aged finish around it — the sheen level, colour tone, and wear pattern will not match perfectly. This is more noticeable on lighter floors and in areas with consistent lighting. On darker stained floors or in areas partially covered by furniture, spot repairs can be nearly invisible. In high-traffic, high-visibility areas like living room centres, a spot repair may be obvious enough that refinishing the entire room becomes the better investment.

**For Vancouver homeowners dealing with larger water-damaged areas — say from a window leak during a winter storm or a slow plumbing drip — a room-level refinish is usually the more cost-effective and visually superior solution.** Refinishing a single room costs **\$3.50 to \$7 per square foot**, so a 150-square-foot bedroom runs roughly **\$525 to \$1,050**. Attempting multiple spot repairs across a larger damaged area can approach that cost while producing inferior results.

**If individual boards are severely warped, cupped, or blackened beyond recovery, board replacement is an option.** A skilled flooring professional can remove the damaged boards, source matching species and dimensions

(salvaged material from flooring supply houses or architectural salvage shops in the Lower Mainland), and weave in replacement boards. This works best with common species like red oak, white oak, and Douglas fir. After replacement, the new boards and surrounding area are sanded and finished together. Board replacement with blending typically costs **\$15 to \$40 per board** plus refinishing of the immediate area.

**Prevention is critical in Vancouver's wet climate.** Place quality doormats at all exterior entrances (both outside and inside the door), wipe up any standing water immediately, use protective mats under pet water bowls, and check window seals annually before the rainy season. Maintaining your polyurethane finish with periodic screen-and-recoats every 3 to 5 years creates a stronger moisture barrier. If you are dealing with water damage beyond simple surface stains, Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with refinishing professionals who specialize in repair and restoration work.

---

Q8

## Is oil-based or water-based polyurethane better for refinishing hardwood in Vancouver's humid climate?

**Water-based polyurethane is the better choice for most hardwood refinishing projects in Metro Vancouver, and it has become the dominant finish used by professional refinishers across the Lower Mainland.** That said, oil-based polyurethane and natural oil finishes each have specific advantages that make them the right choice in certain situations.

**Water-based polyurethane excels in Vancouver's humid marine climate for several practical reasons.** It dries significantly faster — 2 to 4 hours between coats versus 8 to 24 hours for oil-based — which means less time for airborne dust particles in Metro Vancouver's often-open-window environment to settle into the wet finish. Faster drying also means the project timeline compresses from 5 to 7 days down to 3 to 4 days, reducing the time your home is disrupted. Water-based formulas have dramatically lower VOC (volatile organic compound) emissions, making them far more tolerable during application and particularly important in Vancouver condos and strata buildings where fumes can migrate to neighbouring units.

From a performance standpoint, **water-based polyurethane dries crystal clear and stays clear over time**, which preserves the natural colour of your wood and any applied stain. This matters enormously if you have invested in a specific stain colour — the finish will not shift it. Modern professional-grade water-based polyurethanes like Bona Traffic HD, Loba Supra, and StreetShoe have closed the durability gap with oil-based products significantly. Three coats of a commercial-grade water-based poly provide excellent abrasion resistance and longevity, typically lasting 7 to 12 years in a normal residential setting before needing a maintenance recoat.

**Oil-based polyurethane still has its place, particularly when you want a specific aesthetic.** Oil-based finishes add a warm, amber tone to the wood that deepens over time — on species like red oak and fir, this golden warmth is part of the traditional character that many homeowners in Vancouver's older neighbourhoods prefer. Oil-based poly also builds a slightly thicker film per coat, giving a more pronounced depth and richness to the finish. If you are refinishing Douglas fir floors in a 1940s character home in Kitsilano or Kerrisdale and want that classic amber glow, oil-based polyurethane delivers a look that water-based cannot replicate.

However, **oil-based polyurethane presents real challenges in Vancouver's climate.** The extended drying time of 8 to 24 hours between coats means the wet finish sits exposed to dust and humidity for much longer. During the October-to-March wet season, when indoor humidity commonly sits between 45% and 60% in Vancouver homes, oil-based poly can take even longer to cure properly. The strong fumes require the home to be unoccupied during application and for 24 to 48 hours after the final coat — a significant inconvenience and potential issue in strata buildings. Oil-based poly also yellows over time, which is desirable on warm-toned woods but problematic if you have applied a grey, white-washed, or cool-toned stain.

**A third option gaining popularity in Metro Vancouver is hardwax oil finishes** such as Rubio Monocoat and Osmo Polyx-Oil. These penetrating oils soak into the wood rather than sitting on top as a film, creating a natural, matte look that is very much on-trend in contemporary Vancouver homes. Hardwax oils are repairable — you can spot-repair scratches and worn areas without refinishing the entire floor, which is a significant advantage. The trade-off is that they require more frequent maintenance (recoating every 1 to 3 years in high-traffic areas) and are less resistant to standing water than polyurethane film finishes.

**Cost comparison in Metro Vancouver:** water-based polyurethane refinishing runs **\$3.50 to \$7 per square foot**. Oil-based polyurethane is similar in material cost but the longer project timeline can add **\$0.50 to \$1.50 per square foot** in additional labour. Hardwax oil finishes typically cost **\$5 to \$9 per square foot** due to higher material costs and the specialized application technique. For help choosing the right finish for your floors and finding a qualified refinisher, Vancouver Floor Installers can match you with experienced professionals at no cost.

---

Q9

## **Can pet scratches and dents in my Vancouver hardwood floors be fixed with refinishing alone?**

**Refinishing can eliminate most pet scratches but cannot remove dents — the distinction is important because scratches and dents are fundamentally different types of damage.** Understanding what refinishing can and cannot fix will help you set realistic expectations before investing in the project.

**Pet scratches are the most common type of hardwood floor damage in Vancouver homes, and refinishing handles them extremely well.** Scratches are grooves cut into the finish layer and sometimes into the wood surface by pet nails. During a full sand-and-refinish, the drum sander and edger remove the entire existing finish plus a thin layer of wood — typically 1/32 to 1/16 of an inch. Light to moderate scratches from dogs and cats are almost always shallower than this, which means sanding completely erases them. Even deeper scratches that have cut into the wood grain are usually removed or significantly reduced by the sanding process. After sanding, staining, and three coats of polyurethane, the floor looks brand new with no trace of pet wear.

**Dents are a different story entirely.** Dents occur when something heavy or impactful compresses the wood fibres — large dogs with their full body weight concentrated on small paw areas, dropped objects, or furniture being dragged. The wood fibres are pushed down rather than cut away, creating a depression in the surface. Sanding can smooth the edges of a dent and make it less visible, but it cannot raise compressed wood fibres back to their original level without removing all the surrounding wood down to the depth of the dent, which would mean taking off far too much material.

**There is a technique called steam raising that can partially lift dents before refinishing.** Your refinisher applies a damp cloth and a hot iron to the dented area — the heat and moisture cause the compressed wood fibres to swell back toward their original position. This works best on unfinished or freshly sanded wood, on shallow dents, and on softer species like fir and pine where the fibres compress rather than break. On harder species like oak and maple, deep dents often involve broken fibres that cannot be raised. Steam raising is not a miracle solution, but it can reduce dent depth by 30% to 70% in favourable conditions, and combined with sanding, the result is usually a floor where dents are barely perceptible.

**Pet urine stains are the one type of pet damage that refinishing may not fully resolve.** Pet urine that has soaked through the finish and into the wood creates dark staining from tannin reactions, and the marks often extend deeper than sanding can reach. For localized urine spots, oxalic acid (wood bleach) applied after sanding can lighten or eliminate the dark discoloration. Severe urine damage — repeated soaking in the same spot over months or years — may require replacement of the affected boards. If the subfloor beneath has also been saturated, it may need treatment or replacement as well. In Metro Vancouver's humid climate, urine-soaked subfloors are particularly prone to developing mould, which adds another layer of remediation.

**For a refinish that addresses typical pet damage in a Vancouver home, budget \$3.50 to \$8 per square foot.** The lower end assumes light scratching with minimal prep work, while the higher end covers heavy scratching, spot treatments for stains, steam raising of dents, and possible board replacements. A 1,000-square-foot main floor with moderate pet damage typically runs **\$4,000 to \$7,000** for a comprehensive refinish.

To protect your refinished floors going forward, keep pet nails trimmed regularly, place mats under water and food bowls, and consider applying a commercial-grade water-based polyurethane with a satin or matte finish — these

show scratches less than high-gloss finishes. If you are ready to restore your pet-worn hardwood, Vancouver Floor Installers can match you with a refinishing professional who can assess the damage and give you an honest evaluation of what refinishing can achieve.

---

## What time of year is best to refinish hardwood floors in Vancouver — summer or spring?

**Late spring through early fall — specifically May through September — is the ideal window for hardwood floor refinishing in Metro Vancouver, with June through August being the sweet spot.** The reason comes down to humidity, temperature, ventilation, and drying conditions, all of which directly affect the quality and durability of your refinished floors.

**Summer offers the lowest humidity levels in Metro Vancouver's annual cycle.** While Vancouver never gets truly dry compared to interior BC or the Prairies, summer humidity typically drops to 40% to 55% indoors compared to 50% to 65% during the rainy season. Lower humidity means stain absorbs more evenly, polyurethane dries faster and cures harder, and there is less risk of moisture-related finish defects like bubbling, clouding, or poor adhesion between coats. Water-based polyurethane that takes 3 to 4 hours to dry between coats in summer can stretch to 5 to 6 hours or more during a wet November week — this adds days to the project timeline and increases the window for dust contamination.

**Ventilation is the other major advantage of summer refinishing.** During the finishing phase, adequate airflow is essential for proper drying and for clearing VOC fumes — even low-VOC water-based finishes benefit from fresh air circulation. In summer, you can open windows on the opposite side of the home from the work area to create cross-ventilation without worrying about rain blowing in. During Metro Vancouver's rainy season, opening windows risks introducing moisture-laden air that slows drying and can compromise finish quality. Running HVAC systems for ventilation during winter works but is less effective than natural airflow.

**That said, professional refinishing can be done year-round in Metro Vancouver, and there are actually some advantages to booking during the off-season.** October through March is the slower period for most refinishing contractors in the Lower Mainland, which means you may find shorter wait times for scheduling, more flexibility on start dates, and occasionally lower pricing. A skilled refinisher who controls the indoor environment — running the home's heating system to maintain 18 to 22 degrees Celsius, using a dehumidifier to keep indoor humidity below 50%, and managing airflow carefully — can achieve excellent results in any season. The key is that the professional knows how to adjust their process for the conditions.

**Spring (March through May) is a solid compromise if summer does not work for your schedule.** Rain frequency is tapering off, temperatures are rising, and humidity levels are beginning to drop. Early spring can still have stretches of wet weather that affect drying times, but by April and May, conditions are generally favourable. Many Vancouver homeowners time their refinishing for May to coincide with the practical overlap of improving weather and pre-summer scheduling availability before contractors' busiest months.

## Here are the practical scheduling considerations for each season in Metro Vancouver:

During **summer (June to August)**, expect the best drying conditions but also the longest wait times for booking — plan 3 to 6 weeks ahead. Costs are standard at **\$3.50 to \$8 per square foot**. During **spring and fall**, conditions are good with moderate booking lead times of 2 to 4 weeks. **Winter (November to February)** offers the fastest booking availability and sometimes modest discounts, but projects may take 1 to 2 extra days due to slower drying, and the home must be kept warm with controlled humidity throughout.

Regardless of season, plan your refinishing around any major events — the floor needs 24 hours of no foot traffic after the final coat, light traffic only for the first week, and no area rugs for at least 2 weeks to allow full curing. If you are planning a summer refinish, now is the time to book. Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with refinishing professionals across Metro Vancouver for a free estimate.

---

### Q11

## How many coats of polyurethane should go on a refinished hardwood floor in a Vancouver home?

**Three coats of polyurethane is the professional standard for refinished hardwood floors in Metro Vancouver, and this is the minimum you should accept from any refinishing contractor.** Some situations call for four coats, particularly in high-traffic areas, commercial spaces, or homes with large dogs. Two coats is never sufficient for a floor that needs to withstand daily life in a family home.

Each coat of polyurethane serves a specific purpose in building a durable finish system. **The first coat** seals the bare wood (or stained wood), penetrating into the grain and creating a bond between the wood surface and the finish film. This coat absorbs partially into the wood and does not build much surface thickness. **The second coat** begins building the protective film layer, adding depth and starting to create the scratch-resistant surface you need. **The third coat** completes the protective film, providing the final layer of abrasion resistance, moisture protection, and the sheen level you have chosen (matte, satin, semi-gloss, or gloss). Together, three coats build approximately 3 to 4 mils of dry film thickness — enough to protect the wood from normal household wear for 7 to 12 years before a maintenance recoat is needed.

**Between each coat, light sanding (called intercoat abrasion or screening) is essential.** Your refinisher will lightly sand the cured coat with a fine-grit screen or sandpaper — typically 180 to 220 grit — to create microscopic scratches that give the next coat something to grip. Without this step, the subsequent coat may not adhere properly and can peel or delaminate over time. After screening, the dust is thoroughly vacuumed and the floor is wiped with a tack cloth before the next coat goes on. This screen-between-coats process is a hallmark of professional work

and one of the main reasons DIY refinishing often produces inferior results.

**In Metro Vancouver's humid marine climate, the number of coats is especially important for moisture protection.** Hardwood floors in Vancouver homes are constantly exposed to elevated humidity — typically 40% to 60% indoors year-round — and moisture tracked in from the region's frequent rain. A robust three-coat polyurethane system creates a more effective moisture barrier than two coats, reducing the amount of ambient moisture that reaches the wood and helping prevent the cupping, crowning, and seasonal movement that Vancouver homeowners commonly experience.

**When should you consider a fourth coat?** If your home has high foot traffic (families with children, multiple pets, frequent entertaining), a fourth coat adds measurable longevity. Entryways, hallways, and kitchen floors benefit from the extra protection. The additional coat adds roughly **\$0.75 to \$1.50 per square foot** to the project cost but can extend the time between refinishings by 2 to 4 years — a worthwhile investment when a full refinish costs **\$3.50 to \$8 per square foot**.

**The type of polyurethane affects both the number of coats needed and the application process.** Water-based polyurethane builds a thinner film per coat than oil-based, which is why three coats of water-based is the absolute minimum and four coats is common in professional applications. Oil-based polyurethane builds a thicker film per coat, so three coats provides slightly more total film thickness — but the trade-off is 8 to 24 hours of drying time between coats versus 2 to 4 hours for water-based. Hardwax oil finishes like Rubio Monocoat work differently — they penetrate the wood rather than building a surface film, and typically require only one or two coats, but they need more frequent maintenance recoating.

**A practical cost breakdown for a 1,000-square-foot refinish in Metro Vancouver:** three coats of water-based polyurethane runs **\$3.50 to \$7 per square foot** (\$3,500 to \$7,000 total). Adding a fourth coat brings the total to roughly **\$4.25 to \$8.50 per square foot** (\$4,250 to \$8,500). The additional coat adds approximately half a day to the project timeline. If you want to ensure your refinished floors get the protection they need in Vancouver's climate, Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with experienced professionals who never cut corners on coat count.

---

Q12

## Can I refinish engineered hardwood floors or do they need to be replaced when they look worn?

**Yes, many engineered hardwood floors can be refinished — but it depends entirely on the thickness of the wear layer.** The wear layer is the real hardwood veneer on top of the plywood or HDF core, and it determines how much sanding the floor can tolerate before you hit the substrate beneath.

Engineered hardwood products vary widely in wear layer thickness, typically ranging from **2mm to 6mm**. A floor with a 4mm or thicker wear layer can generally be sanded and refinished **one to two times** over its lifetime. Products with a 2mm wear layer are essentially one-and-done — a light screen-and-recoat is possible, but a full sand-and-refinish risks cutting through to the plywood core, which ruins the floor permanently. If you are unsure of your wear layer thickness, check the original product specifications or carefully measure at a floor vent or transition point where the cross-section is visible.

The distinction between a **full sand-and-refinish** and a **screen-and-recoat** matters enormously here. A screen-and-recoat (also called a buff-and-coat) removes only the top layer of finish without cutting into the wood itself. This process costs roughly **\$2 to \$4 per square foot** in Metro Vancouver and is ideal for engineered floors with surface scratches, dullness, or light wear where the wood itself is not damaged. It removes about 1/32 of an inch of material. A full sand-and-refinish, on the other hand, uses a drum or orbital sander to strip everything down to raw wood, removing approximately 1/16 to 1/8 of an inch. This costs **\$3 to \$8 per square foot** and is necessary when there are deep scratches, stains, or significant wear patterns.

In Metro Vancouver's humid marine climate, engineered hardwood is actually the preferred hardwood choice because its cross-ply construction resists the moisture-driven expansion and contraction that plagues solid hardwood. If your engineered floor is showing wear but the wood itself is sound, a screen-and-recoat can restore it beautifully for a fraction of the replacement cost. **Replacing 500 square feet of engineered hardwood runs \$3,500 to \$8,000 installed**, while a screen-and-recoat on the same area costs **\$1,000 to \$2,000** — making refinishing the far more economical choice when the wear layer supports it.

One important consideration: if your engineered hardwood was installed as a **floating floor** (click-lock system), full sanding with a drum sander is risky. The vibration and downward pressure can cause planks to shift, separate, or bounce, resulting in an uneven finish. A professional using an **orbital sander** is the safer approach for floating engineered floors. Glue-down and nail-down engineered installations handle sanding much better because they are firmly anchored to the subfloor.

Before committing to refinishing, have a professional flooring contractor assess the wear layer thickness and overall floor condition. If the wear layer is too thin or the core is compromised by past moisture exposure — not uncommon in Vancouver basements or ground-level suites — replacement may be the better investment. Need help deciding? Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with experienced refinishing professionals for a free assessment.

## How do I restore original fir floors hidden under carpet in my 1940s Vancouver bungalow?

Restoring original fir floors in a 1940s Vancouver bungalow is one of the most rewarding renovation projects you can undertake — and these old-growth Douglas fir floors are genuinely irreplaceable. The tight grain patterns and warm amber tones of pre-war fir are something modern lumber simply cannot replicate, making these floors worth every dollar you invest in their restoration.

The first step is a **careful carpet removal** to assess what you are working with. Pull back the carpet and underpad in a corner or closet to inspect the fir underneath. You are looking for the overall condition of the boards, any areas of rot or water damage, how the carpet was secured (tack strips around the perimeter are normal and leave minimal damage, but if carpet was glued directly to the wood, removal is significantly more involved), and whether there are old paint spills, adhesive residue, or stains. Most 1940s Vancouver bungalows used **tongue-and-groove fir planks** that were face-nailed — you will see rows of nail heads across each board. In homes of this era, fir subfloors and finish floors were often the same material, so what you see is what you get.

**Expect the floors to look rough initially.** Eighty-plus years of use, carpet tack holes along every wall, old finish residue, and possibly some board replacements or patches are completely normal. The good news is that Douglas fir is a softwood that sands beautifully and takes stain well, though its softness means it dents and scratches more easily than hardwood species like oak or maple.

The restoration process typically involves **removing all carpet, underpad, tack strips, and staples**, then filling nail holes and small gaps with colour-matched wood filler. A professional will sand the entire floor using progressively finer grits — typically starting at **36 or 40 grit** to remove old finish and level the surface, progressing through **60 and 80 grit**, and finishing at **100 or 120 grit** for a smooth surface ready for stain or finish. **Do not attempt this with a rented drum sander** — fir is soft and unforgiving, and an inexperienced operator will leave visible drum marks, waves, and gouges that are impossible to hide under finish.

For finishing, you have several excellent options. A **natural clear finish** (water-based polyurethane) lets the warm honey tones of the fir shine through and is the most popular choice for character home restorations in Vancouver. **Hardwax oil finishes** like Rubio Monocoat provide a beautiful matte, natural look that is very on-trend and easier to spot-repair than polyurethane. If you want to darken the floors, fir accepts stain well, though it can blotch — a **pre-stain conditioner** is essential for even colour absorption.

### Cost Expectations

A full fir floor restoration in a typical 1940s Vancouver bungalow (roughly **800 to 1,200 square feet** of floor area) runs **\$3,500 to \$8,000** including carpet removal, tack strip removal, sanding, filling, and three coats of finish. Board replacements or patches for damaged sections add **\$15 to \$30 per linear foot** for salvaged fir to match. Sourcing matching old-growth fir is increasingly difficult — salvage yards in the Lower Mainland are your best bet.

One critical note for 1940s homes: **test for lead paint** if there is any painted finish on the floors or surrounding trim, and **check for asbestos** if there is sheet vinyl or 9x9-inch tiles under the carpet. Both were common in this era and require professional handling under BC regulations. Vancouver Floor Installers can match you with contractors experienced in heritage fir floor restoration — get connected for a free estimate on bringing your original floors back to life.

---

Q14

## What stain colours are trending for hardwood floor refinishing in Vancouver homes right now?

**The dominant trend in Metro Vancouver hardwood floor refinishing right now is a strong move toward natural, lighter tones — with white oak and matte finishes leading the way.** The dark espresso and ebony stains that were everywhere a decade ago have given way to warmer, more organic looks that complement Vancouver's West Coast modern and mid-century aesthetics.

**Natural and unstained finishes** are the single most popular choice in Vancouver's design scene right now. Homeowners are embracing the raw beauty of the wood grain itself, particularly on **white oak**, which has a clean, contemporary look with its cool undertones and prominent grain pattern. A clear matte or satin finish — especially **hardwax oil** products like Rubio Monocoat or Bona Hard Wax Oil — gives the floor a barely-there, raw-wood appearance that feels effortlessly modern. This look pairs beautifully with the natural light that Vancouver homes are designed to maximize and complements the earthy, organic palette that dominates West Coast interior design.

**Light and mid-tone stains** are the next most requested colours. Shades like **natural white oak, honey, golden wheat, and light walnut** add warmth without heaviness. These tones work particularly well in Vancouver's older character homes — Craftsman bungalows, Vancouver Specials, and mid-century ranchers — where they brighten rooms during the grey, overcast months from October through March. For Douglas fir floors common in pre-1960s Vancouver homes, a light golden or amber stain enhances the natural warmth of the wood without overwhelming the tight, beautiful grain.

**Grey-toned stains** remain popular in contemporary and Scandinavian-inspired interiors, though they have moved from stark silver-grey toward warmer **greige (grey-beige)** tones. True grey stains are tricky to apply evenly — they tend to show lap marks and blotchiness, especially on softer species like fir and birch. A professional with experience in grey staining is essential, and **water-based staining systems** produce more consistent results than oil-based on lighter colours.

**Dark stains have not disappeared entirely**, but the trend has shifted from flat ebony to richer, more dimensional darks like **dark walnut, Jacobean, and smoked oak**. These deep tones still have their place in formal living rooms, heritage homes, and dramatic modern interiors. The key difference from a few years ago is the finish — **matte and ultra-matte sheens** have almost entirely replaced the high-gloss finishes that once accompanied dark stains. High-gloss floors show every speck of dust, every scratch, and every footprint, which makes them particularly impractical in Vancouver's rainy climate where tracked-in moisture and grit are daily realities.

The finish sheen itself is arguably the bigger trend story. **Matte and ultra-matte finishes now account for the majority of refinishing projects** in Metro Vancouver. Water-based polyurethane in matte sheen and hardwax oil finishes both deliver this look. Hardwax oil has the advantage of being spot-repairable — if an area gets scratched or worn, you can sand and re-oil just that section without refinishing the entire floor. Water-based polyurethane is more durable overall but requires a full sand-and-recoat when it eventually wears.

A full sand-and-stain refinishing project in Metro Vancouver typically costs **\$4 to \$8 per square foot**, with specialty staining techniques (fuming, reactive staining, or multi-step colour processes) at the higher end. The colour choice does not significantly affect cost — the finish type and number of coats are the main price variables. If you are considering refinishing your hardwood floors, Vancouver Floor Installers can connect you with experienced refinishing contractors who can show you stain samples on your actual wood species for a truly informed decision.

---

**Disclaimer:** This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Vancouver Floor Installers. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any flooring project. Information is current as of March 15, 2026 and may change. Visit [vancouverfloorinstallers.com](https://vancouverfloorinstallers.com) for the latest answers.