

Repairing and Refinishing Wood Handles

Many torches had wooden handles. In the case of torches of the late 1920s and forward, it would not be difficult to find a replacement for a battered handle. Parts torches are readily available for these torches. In the case of early torches with wooden handles, it would be almost impossible to find a replacement. Such is the case of the rare AMERICAN torch below.



This torch had either been left outside for a prolonged amount of time or spent a significant amount of time in a damp barn or shed. The finish on the oak wood handle was gone and mice had used the bottom section of the handle to sharpen their teeth. A significant portion had been chewed away from the bottom of the handle. It was, however, repairable. The choice in this situation would be to either replace it or repair it. It would be relatively simple to turn one out on a lathe in a woodshop. However, whenever possible, I choose to repair an original part rather than replace it.

The key to repairing this handle was to use a wood filler that could be shaped, sanded, and stained just like real wood. The product I use is Elmer's Damaged Wood System (below).



This is an epoxy product and there are two cans inside the box. It is a 50/50 mix and you select the amount you want to use. It has the consistency of putty and dries relatively quickly. Be sure to get it as close as possible to the shape you desire. The less sanding you have to do, the better. After 24 hours it can be sanded and stained.

After the repair has been sanded to the proper shape, stain can be used to blend the repair into the color of the original wood. Select a stain color that is appropriate for the wood. This handle was red oak. Red oak darkens as it ages. I used a mahogany stain because of its dark red tones. In this case, the stain darkened the weathered wood. I added a few extra coats of stain over the repair to make it darker and blend it in. Different color stains

or “color Sticks” in pencil form can be used to paint in a grain but in most cases that really isn’t necessary. These torches are old and it is not unusual to see darker or scorched sections on a wood handle.

After making all the repairs, I use Tung oil as a finish. Tung oil soaks into the wood and preserves it. It may take a few coats to get the glossy finish you desire. Make sure you get “Glossy” Tung oil. It also comes in a satin finish. The Minwax brand works well but most good brands will do a fine job.



Below is the finished handle and the completed torch:



The same process can be used on painted handles. The handles on Turner Baffle torches (below) come out very nice. Use the filler to repair any dents, cracks, or gouges in the handle. Then spray paint the handle (I use spray cans) using many thin coats. Let each coat dry for 24 hours and sand with 400 grit sandpaper between each coat to create a perfectly smooth finish. Don't try to cover the entire handle with only one coat. Several thin coats are much better. Use 600 grit sandpaper prior to your last coat.

If you make a mistake, don't worry. Just let it dry for 24 hours, sand away the blemish or run, and spray it again. Patience is the name of the game.



