

# TAKING CARE OF THE BIG THREE

Handling the maintenance of your metal, stone and wood.

BY JEFF WILHOIT

First impressions....We all know how important they are in business or when meeting someone new, but many times their importance is discounted when it comes to how current or prospective tenants view your building. One of the ways people build first impressions is by the condition of your metal, stone and wood surfaces on the outside and inside of your building. Nowhere are these surfaces put in the spotlight more than your building entrance and lobby areas.

How are those areas looking in your building? Do your elevator cabs have some colorful words or a phone number scratched in the metal? Has your stone floor lost its shine that it once had? Is it worn down by traffic and abused by a barrage of high heels? Does your wood trim look old and faded or scuffed up and dried out? Well, if this describes your metal, stone and wood, don't worry — you're not alone. Many building managers wrestle with this problem and don't know where to turn for help. The good news is that these surfaces are meant to last a lifetime and can almost always be restored to a like-new condition. Their looks can even be changed to bring a building more up-to-date with the latest design trends, all without having to replace or remove the existing surface. This can be music to a building manager's ears when ownership wants you to update the building to attract new tenants without spending excessive amounts of money and time to do a full remodel.

Metal is one of the most versatile and durable materials known to man. It's strong and can be used in the structural support of your building, yet it can also be elegant and used as a decorative finish. There are many different types of metal; the most commonly used in



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decorative finishes are bronze, stainless steel, aluminum and copper, just to name a few. There are also a number of different finishes with each type of metal from a natural antique look all the way to a mirror finish with every level of shine in between.

Metal is used a lot in and around elevators because of its ability to hold up over time with hundreds of people touching and rubbing up against it every day. However, like most surfaces, it doesn't resist scrapes and scratches, and when that happens you have three options: (1) Leave it and hope no one notices; (2) Replace the metal which is likely to cost a small fortune and may not match the existing metal; (3) Call a company specializing in metal restoration to take out the scratch and refinish the metal to shine like new. In many cases the best option is to have the metal restored by a metal refinishing company. Most metal restoration companies can work wonders on scratches and can make old metal shine like new. Typically, metal restoration companies work overnight when most of your tenants are not in the building. This avoids any issues with noise, smells or elevator downtime.

On lacquered finishes, technicians strip off the existing coating, then begin the cleaning and performing the scratch removal process. The scratches are removed by hand sanding or with a machine. Once the metal is restored, a clear coat lacquer is applied to protect against tarnishing, fingerprints and scratches. Most building managers, especially those managing LEED certified buildings, are concerned about spraying lacquer in their buildings, however with the advent of new LEED compliant lacquers and state of the art air



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filtration systems to reduce particulates and smells in the air, those concerns can be mitigated. The end result is that you receive a new metal appearance at a fraction of the cost it would be to replace it.

With the economic downturn the last 2 years, many building managers are looking for ways to update the look of the metal in their buildings without the expense of replacing it. That's why oxidizing, which is the chemical process of changing the color and appearance of metal, is becoming so popular. Many buildings, especially historic buildings that are being remodeled, are choosing to move away from the high polished brass look to go with antique oil rubbed bronze coloring. This relatively simple process can dramatically change the appearance of an entire building.

The oxidation process can be used to change the metal to many different colors depending on the metal type. Another way to change the look of your metal is to paint it. This is an inexpensive way to change the look or cover up imperfections in the metal. Paint can range from a solid color to paint that mimics the look of stainless steel or stone. Copper can even be changed to give it a green patina look without having to wait years for it to change on its own. When it comes to metal there are so many different finishes that choosing one can almost be overwhelming. It's a good idea to choose a metal refinishing company that can provide you examples of the different finishes or even do a sample for you on your metal so you can see how it will look before you agree to do a large surface area.

There is probably no other architectural surface as impressive as stone. It brings a sense of class, strength and beauty to any building — as long as it's properly maintained. Two of the major benefits of stone are its ability to reflect light and its durability, especially when it's used on floors. However, over time problems can begin to appear. That luster can wear off and it can become dull, worn, scratched, stained or dirty. Traffic patterns can become visible on all stone surfaces like terrazzo, granite, marble, travertine and any kind of natural stone. Stone floors can develop scratches from the grit that's carried on shoes acting like sand paper and water marks can appear from liquids containing acids which will greatly reduce the reflectivity of the surface. Stone floors can even develop lippage and become unlevelled where two stones meet causing a trip hazard. It's enough to keep any building manager or chief engineer up at night.

Stone is designed to last the lifetime of your building and it's a surface that in most cases can be brought back to a like new condition by an experienced stone specialist, even after years of neglect. However stone is something that can be ruined very quickly by an inexperienced technician or unintentionally by your janitorial crew and it can end up costing you much more to repair. That's why it is always a good idea to have a maintenance account with a company that specializes in stone. As with metal, the degree of reflectivity or shine is up to you and ranges from a matte finish to a high polish that almost looks like glass. Most restoration companies will do a small sample so you can see what the finished product will look like. You won't believe the comments you'll get from your tenants when your floor shines, it makes the other parts of your building shine a little brighter as well.

Wood can bring a sense of warmth and richness to a building that no other architectural surface can match. As an architectural accent, wood is often used in elevator cabs, floors, reception desks, conference tables, trim and doors which are areas that traditionally get the most abuse in commercial buildings. Combine that with the fact that wood is not as durable as metal or stone, and you can see why many building managers have wood restoration companies on speed dial. Many times small scratches can be covered up with a marker stick, however if the scratch is severe or a large surface becomes faded or worn, then it's time to call in the pros. Wood restoration is very unforgiving if it is done by an amateur. There is definitely an art to working with wood, and because every job is different based on the type of wood used, it takes specially trained artists with a keen eye to match the many colors and grains of architectural wood finishes. A good wood refinishing company will help you decide which type of restoration is right for you and your situation.



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There are really three types of wood refinishing. There is touch up, which is good for small scratches or something that won't be seen up close. This is a quick and cost effective solution that works well in certain situations. The second option would be what some would refer to as a refinish process, which would include a touch-up plus adding a tint or clear coat. This works well for fading or minor scratches. The third option is a full restoration that consists of stripping or sanding off the old finish, repairing damaged areas, staining and recoating the wood. This option is a lot more labor intensive than the other two



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## building maintenance

options but is still considerably less than replacing the wood.

You will find a wide variety of wood companies from small mom-and-pop type businesses to large restoration companies. You will also find they use many different techniques as to how they restore your wood. Just like painting a picture one technique is not necessarily better than the other as long as you get the look you want and the vendor has used quality products that will hold up over time.

Many vendors offer monthly maintenance programs. These programs are attractive to building managers because they insure that their building stays looking great and the cost can be spread equally over an entire year. When selecting a vendor to restore or maintain your metal, stone or wood be sure and ask these key questions:

(1) How long have they been in business? The techniques that are used to restore metal, stone and wood can't be learned overnight; it takes many years of experience.

(2) If you're looking at a monthly maintenance program, does the vendor give you a schedule of what items are being done for that particular month? This is important so you are able to keep an eye out for what's being refinished and the quality of the work being done, so you can hold the vendor accountable.

(3) Ask the prospective vendor what they would do if you don't like the way something looks. Even great vendors can't match what you are looking for every time, but what's important is how they address the issue.

(4) Ask about their safety policies and training. This question may not immediately come to mind, but it is important since these companies will be bringing chemicals and power tools into your building.

(5) If your building is LEED certified or if you're applying for LEED certification, ask the vendor about their company's LEED products and processes. Then double-check to make sure the products they are using are actually LEED compliant.

In conclusion, the next time you take a look at your metal, stone and wood, make sure it makes a good first impression. If it doesn't, contact a qualified vendor to help your building shine.

*Jeff Wilhoit is director of training with Mid-America Metals.  
He can be reached at [jwilhoit@midamericametals.com](mailto:jwilhoit@midamericametals.com)*



Stone, metal and wood help create a building's identity.