Wood furniture's original finish usually adds to the value of the piece. Many times furniture only needs a good cleaning to restore its natural grain and color. Be careful not to over-restore furniture. In other words, don't use finish removers or sandpaper if you don't have to.

**Washing Furniture**

A detergent and water solution can be used successfully to clean old furniture if you work quickly and don't get the piece too wet. When water remains on furniture too long, the finish will develop a white haze. This is especially true with shellac and lacquer finishes.

To make the solution, mix 1 teaspoon of detergent in 1 quart of warm water (Figure 1). Dip a cloth into the solution. Wring out the cloth until it's almost dry (Figure 2). Wipe a small area at a time. Work quickly (Figure 3). Remove the detergent solution by wiping with a cloth wrung out in clean, clear water (Figure 4).

Immediately dry the area you've washed. Use a clean, soft cloth. Then continue cleaning other sections until you've covered the whole piece.

If a white haze develops, remove it by buffing the finish with 0000 steel wool or use a cleaner-conditioner.

**Mineral spirits or turpentine** can be used to clean very dirty furniture and to remove a build-up of polish. Dip a cloth into a small dish of mineral spirits or turpentine. Wring it out until it's almost dry. Clean a small area at a time. Then rub with a clean, dry cloth. Continue until the entire piece of furniture is clean.

**Cleaning And Conditioning**

A cleaner-conditioner can be used on new or old furniture to:

- Remove a build-up of polish and dirt.
- Restore the natural grain and color of wood.
- Hide scratches.
- Retard checking.
- Remove cloudiness and dullness caused by smoke, grease, and dust.
- Recondition dry woods. Furniture gets dry during the winter months when houses are heated and there's little moisture in the air.

**Cleaner #1.**

You can make the following cleaner-conditioner to be used on oil, varnish, and lacquer finishes. If you are careful to use it sparingly, it can also be used on shellac finishes. To determine if a finish is shellac, rub a hidden spot with denatured alcohol. If the finish is shellac, it will soften and come off.
Materials Needed.
Glass jar with tight-fitting lid
Gum turpentine
Boiled linseed oil
Newspapers
Hot water
Cup or small flat can
Saucer or small pie pan
Soft, clean cloths
Old toothbrush
0000 steel wool

Making the Cleaner-Conditioner. In the glass jar, pour 1 part of gum turpentine to 3 parts of boiled linseed oil; for example, 1/4 cup of gum turpentine and 3/4 cup of linseed oil (Figure 5). Cover tightly and shake well. The mixture can be stored indefinitely.

Caution: It is flammable and should be kept away from hot surfaces or open flames. Also, store out of the reach of children.

Using the Cleaner-Conditioner. Spread a layer of newspapers under the piece of furniture.
Pour hot water into a cup or can. Set the cup on a saucer or pie pan.
Shake the cleaner-conditioner. Pour enough into the cup to cover the surface of the water. Do not stir the cleaner into the water.
Dip a cloth into the floating oil mixture. Wring out the cloth.
Rub a small area at a time. Don't get too much moisture in the joints or glued areas because the glue will soften. Use a toothbrush on any carved areas or grooves.
If there's a buildup of dirt, dip a piece of 0000 steel wool into the mixture. Gently rub the piece, rubbing with the grain of the wood. Clean a small area at a time. Remove all traces of the mixture with a soft, clean cloth. Continue cleaning small areas until the entire piece of furniture is covered. Throw away the mixture and the cloths when you finish.

Waxing
After cleaning, let the furniture dry completely. Then use a good furniture wax, according to the manufacturer's instructions, to restore the shine.

*NOTE: Don't smoke while cleaning furniture.

References
Alexander, Alice Mae; Cleaning May Restore Furniture; Missouri Cooperative Extension Service.
Bradshaw, Patricia A., and Jane C. Berry; Cleaning Wood Finishes; Texas Cooperative Extension Service.
Hartley, Evelyn V.; Cleaning Furniture with Homemade Products; Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service.

Cleaner #2.
This is similar to cleaner #1. It can be used on fine antiques, finishes which have been damaged by water, and extremely grimy finishes.

Materials Needed.
Small flat can or jar
Boiled linseed oil
Gum turpentine
White vinegar
0000 steel wool
Soft, clean cloths

Making the Cleaner. Mix equal parts of boiled linseed oil, gum turpentine, and white vinegar in the can or jar (Figure 6). This cleaner cannot be stored for later use because it will curdle.

Using the Cleaner. * Dip a piece of 0000 steel wool into the mixture. Gently rub the piece, rubbing with the grain of the wood. Clean a small area at a time. Remove all traces of the mixture with a soft, clean cloth. Continue cleaning small areas until the entire piece of furniture is covered. Throw away the mixture and the cloths when you finish.

Waxing
After cleaning, let the furniture dry completely. Then use a good furniture wax, according to the manufacturer's instructions, to restore the shine.

*NOTE: Don't smoke while cleaning furniture.