



The Facts About Glitsa

She Don't Smell Too Good (But She Sure is Purdy) A Letter from Duane Bartel—Part One of Four.

I like to say our finishes smell bad because they are working so hard. Beyond the humor, there is actually a lot of truth in that statement. Glitsa isn't in this industry to win accolades for its fragrance. We would have to compromise too much of what really matters to our customers to do that. What our customers demand is the toughest, most durable and beautiful wood floor finish in the industry. Think of it as Miss America with a black belt.

But the question persists. Why do Swedish Finishes smell the way they do? Let's start by describing what a Swedish Finish is.

A Swedish finish, also referred to as a Conversion Varnish, is a coating consisting of specialized resins suspended in solvents. The resins, which are engineered to be exceptionally tough and durable, must be held in suspension using solvents that are tailored to work well with those resins. Some of the solvents that meet these requirements are called aromatic solvents. They are called aromatic because they have a strong aroma. Not necessarily a "purdy" aroma, just a strong aroma.

On occasion, a contractor will say to me that he prefers waterborne finishes partly because he doesn't have to wear a respirator or ventilate the house after applying the finish. There is a dangerous fallacy in this thinking. All floor coatings use solvents and resins. All these products emit vapors during application and curing that can be harmful without exercising suitable precautions. One product shouldn't be deemed safer than another simply because it does not have a strong odor. These are solvents that are not aromatic that are just as harmful or worse than many aromatics. With any floor-coating product, use of a respirator during application and proper ventilation of the home during curing are fundamental to protecting the health of the contractor and homeowner.

I am sometimes asked what causes some contractors eyes to water. This is caused primarily by the presence of an alcohol solvent that is a very close cousin to the alcohol used in beer. Another minor factor influencing eye irritation is the presence of a very, very minute amount of formaldehyde that is integral to the resin.

In future articles I will be going into greater depth on the subjects of toxicity of solvents and resins, including the much-exaggerated matter of formaldehyde. Unfortunately, there is a lot misinformation in the industry regarding the risks associated with various products. There are urban legends and myths that ignore reality, common sense and good science. I intend to replace myth with fact in these upcoming articles. ♦