

OTTAWA FLOOR INSTALL



# Floor Refinishing

Hardwood sanding, staining, refinishing, and  
restoration

15 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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## Q1

### **Our hardwood has tons of surface scratches — would a screen and recoat fix that or is sanding required?**

**A screen and recoat can fix light surface scratches, but deeper scratches that catch your fingernail will need full sanding.** The key test is running your fingernail across the scratches - if your nail catches, those scratches go through the finish into the wood itself.

**Screen and recoat** (also called buff and coat) removes only the top layer of finish using fine abrasive screens, then applies 1-2 new coats of polyurethane. This process costs \$1.50-\$3 per square foot in Ottawa and works well for surface-level wear, light scratches, and dullness that hasn't penetrated the wood. The existing finish must be in decent condition underneath for this method to work properly.

**Full sanding and refinishing** is required when scratches go into the wood, when there are deep gouges, water stains, or when the existing finish is failing. This process removes all old finish and a thin layer of wood, allowing for stain changes and complete restoration. Expect \$3-\$6 per square foot for full refinishing in the Ottawa area.

**Professional assessment is crucial** because attempting a screen and recoat on floors that need full sanding will result in poor adhesion and premature finish failure. The existing finish type also matters - oil-based finishes typically recoat better than water-based, and some older finishes may not accept new coats properly.

Most Ottawa homes with moderate surface scratching are good candidates for screen and recoat, especially if the floors were last refinished within 7-10 years. The process takes 2-3 days including drying time, versus 4-5 days for full refinishing.

For a professional assessment of whether your hardwood needs screening or full sanding, request a free consultation from Ottawa Floor Install.

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## Q2

### **We want to change from glossy to satin finish — does that mean a full refinish?**

**Yes, changing from glossy to satin finish requires a full refinish** - you cannot simply apply satin polyurethane over an existing glossy finish without proper preparation.

The glossy finish creates a smooth, non-porous surface that new polyurethane cannot properly bond to. **Without sanding, the new satin finish would peel, bubble, or wear off quickly.** A full refinish involves sanding down through the existing glossy topcoat to bare wood, then applying new stain (if desired) and multiple coats of satin

finish.

**The refinishing process typically takes 3-5 days** and includes dustless sanding to remove the old finish, optional stain application, and 2-3 coats of satin polyurethane with light sanding between coats. In Ottawa's climate, proper drying time between coats is crucial - rushing this process can result in a cloudy or soft finish that won't hold up to foot traffic.

**Satin finish is an excellent choice** as it provides durability similar to gloss but with a more natural appearance that better hides scratches and dust. It's particularly popular in Ottawa homes because it complements both traditional and contemporary design styles while being more forgiving for busy households.

The cost for a full refinish in Ottawa typically runs **\$3-6 per square foot** depending on your home's square footage and any complications like pet stains or deep scratches. Some homeowners also take this opportunity to change their wood's color with stain, which adds about \$1 per square foot but can dramatically update your space.

**For a free estimate on refinishing your floors to satin finish, request a quote from Ottawa Floor Install** - we use dustless sanding equipment and premium water-based finishes that cure faster with less odor.

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**Q3**

## **The floors were refinished about 10 years ago and already look dull — is that normal lifespan?**

**Ten years is on the shorter side for a floor refinish to look dull, but it's not uncommon depending on traffic and maintenance.** A properly applied polyurethane finish should typically last 7-15 years before needing attention, so you're right in that middle range.

**Several factors affect how long a refinished floor maintains its appearance.** High-traffic areas like entryways, kitchens, and hallways naturally show wear faster than bedrooms or formal dining rooms. The type of finish used also matters - oil-based polyurethane generally lasts longer than water-based, though water-based has improved significantly in recent years. The number of coats applied during refinishing is crucial too - a proper job should include at least 2-3 finish coats, with some contractors applying up to 4 coats in high-traffic areas.

**Your maintenance routine over the past decade plays a huge role in the current appearance.** Using harsh cleaners, steam mops, or wet mopping can break down the finish prematurely. Even something as simple as not using furniture pads or tracking in sand and grit can cause the protective coating to wear through faster. Pet nails, high heels, and heavy furniture movement without protection all contribute to finish deterioration.

**The good news is that dull floors don't always need a full refinish.** If the wood itself isn't damaged and you're just dealing with a worn finish, a **buff and recoat** might be all you need. This process involves lightly abrading the existing finish and applying fresh topcoats, typically costing \$1.50-\$3 per square foot in the Ottawa market - much less than a full sand and refinish at \$3-\$6 per square foot.

**Before deciding on your next step, have the floors professionally evaluated.** A licensed flooring contractor can determine whether the wear has gone through to the wood or if it's just surface-level finish deterioration. They can also identify any moisture issues or subfloor problems that might have contributed to premature wear. For a professional assessment of your floors and refinishing options, request a consultation from Ottawa Floor Install.

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Q4

## Can we stain pine floors dark without it turning blotchy?

**Yes, pine floors can be stained dark without blotchiness, but it requires proper preparation and technique.**

Pine is a notoriously difficult wood to stain evenly due to its varying grain density, but professional contractors use specific methods to achieve beautiful, uniform dark stains.

The key to preventing blotchy staining on pine is using a **pre-stain wood conditioner** before applying any stain. Pine has alternating areas of hard and soft grain that absorb stain at different rates - the soft grain soaks up stain quickly and darkly, while the hard grain barely takes any color. A quality pre-conditioner partially seals the wood fibers, allowing for more even stain penetration across both grain types.

**Professional application technique** is crucial for dark stains on pine. The stain must be applied quickly and evenly, then wiped consistently to prevent lap marks and uneven absorption. Water-based stains often work better than oil-based for pine because they penetrate more uniformly, though oil-based stains can work with proper conditioning. Multiple light coats typically produce better results than one heavy application.

In Ottawa's climate, proper **moisture content and acclimation** are essential before staining. Pine flooring should be at 6-8% moisture content and acclimated to your home's conditions for at least 72 hours. The room temperature and humidity during staining also affect how evenly the stain absorbs - ideal conditions are 65-75°F with 30-50% humidity.

**Gel stains** are another excellent option for pine floors, as they sit on top of the wood rather than penetrating deeply, which naturally reduces blotching. Dark gel stains like ebony or dark walnut can achieve rich, uniform color on pine with less risk of uneven absorption.

For best results with dark staining on pine floors, professional installation and finishing is highly recommended. The preparation, conditioning, staining, and finishing process requires experience to execute properly, especially for achieving consistent dark colors.

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Q5

## Our hardwood feels rough after refinishing — is that a sanding issue?

**Yes, rough hardwood after refinishing is typically a sanding issue** - either incomplete sanding progression, contaminated sandpaper, or rushing through the grits without proper dust removal between stages.

**Proper sanding requires a systematic progression** through increasingly fine grits, usually starting around 36-60 grit for initial cuts and finishing with 100-120 grit before applying stain or finish. Each grit should remove the scratches from the previous grit, creating a progressively smoother surface. If any step is skipped or rushed, those coarser scratches remain visible under the finish, creating that rough texture you're feeling.

**Dust contamination is another common culprit** in Ottawa's older homes where drywall dust or debris can settle on the floor between sanding and finishing. Even microscopic particles can create texture issues when they get trapped under the polyurethane. Professional refinishers use dust containment systems and tack cloths to ensure completely clean surfaces before applying finish coats.

**The finish application itself can also contribute to roughness** if applied too thick, in poor environmental conditions, or without proper surface preparation. Ottawa's humidity fluctuations mean timing is crucial - applying finish when humidity is too high can cause texture problems as the coating cures.

**This issue requires professional correction** through light sanding with fine grits (150-220) and recoating, or potentially a full re-sand if the problem is severe. The existing finish needs to be evaluated to determine the best repair approach without damaging the wood further.

**For a professional assessment of your refinishing issue, request a consultation from Ottawa Floor Install** - we can determine whether a simple screen and recoat will solve the problem or if more extensive correction is needed.

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Q6

## **We want to go much darker with our existing oak — is that realistic without it looking muddy?**

**Yes, you can absolutely go much darker with oak flooring without it looking muddy, but success depends on proper preparation and stain selection.** Oak's open grain structure actually accepts dark stains very well when done correctly.

The key to avoiding muddy results is **proper sanding and grain preparation**. Your floors need to be sanded down to bare wood with progressively finer grits, ending with 100-120 grit. This ensures the stain penetrates evenly into oak's prominent grain pattern. Any existing finish, wax, or residue will prevent proper stain absorption and create that muddy appearance you're worried about.

**Stain choice makes a huge difference** for dramatic color changes. High-quality penetrating stains like Minwax Dark Walnut, Ebony, or Jacobean work beautifully on oak. For the richest, most even coverage, many contractors

use a **pre-conditioner** before staining, especially when going very dark. This helps prevent blotchiness and ensures the grain pattern shows through clearly rather than looking flat or muddy.

In Ottawa's climate, **proper drying time between coats is crucial** - rushing the process is often what creates muddy-looking results. Each stain coat needs 8-12 hours to fully penetrate, and humidity levels affect drying time. Professional contractors will test stain colors on inconspicuous areas or sample boards first, since oak can look quite different once multiple coats of polyurethane are applied over dark stain.

**Consider the room's lighting** when choosing your dark stain. North-facing rooms in Ottawa homes can make very dark floors appear almost black, while south-facing rooms will show more of the rich brown tones. LED lighting also affects how dark stains appear compared to traditional incandescent bulbs.

For a dramatic transformation like this, professional refinishing ensures proper grain preparation and stain application. Want to see how different dark stains would look on your specific oak floors? We offer free consultations where we can test stain samples on your existing flooring.

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Q7

## Is dustless hardwood refinishing really dustless or still messy?

**Dustless hardwood refinishing significantly reduces dust but isn't 100% dust-free.** Modern dustless systems capture 95-99% of dust particles during sanding, making it far cleaner than traditional refinishing methods.

**How dustless systems work:** Professional dustless sanders use powerful vacuum systems built directly into the sanding equipment. As the sander removes the old finish and smooths the wood, the vacuum immediately captures the dust particles before they can become airborne. This creates a much cleaner work environment compared to traditional belt sanders that send dust clouds throughout your home.

**What to expect during the process:** You'll still see some fine dust particles, especially around edges where hand sanding is required, and during the final buffing stages. However, the difference is dramatic - instead of dust coating every surface in your home, you might find just light dusting on nearby furniture that's easily wiped away. Most homeowners can remain in their homes during dustless refinishing, though you'll want to keep doors closed to unaffected rooms.

**In Ottawa's older homes,** dustless refinishing is particularly valuable since many have forced-air heating systems that would otherwise circulate dust throughout the entire house. The process typically takes 2-3 days including drying time, and you can usually walk on the floors in socks after 24 hours, with full furniture replacement after 3-5 days depending on the finish used.

**Professional equipment makes the difference** - contractors use industrial-grade dustless systems that cost \$15,000-30,000, far more effective than rental equipment. The investment in proper dustless technology is why professional refinishing typically costs \$3-6 per square foot in Ottawa, but the cleaner process and superior results justify the investment.

For a free estimate on dustless hardwood refinishing, request a quote from Ottawa Floor Install to discuss your specific project and timeline.

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Q8

## Can I change my light oak floors to a dark walnut stain with refinishing?

**Yes, you can change light oak floors to a dark walnut stain through refinishing,** but the success depends on your current floor's condition and the specific oak species. Most oak floors can achieve a rich walnut color with proper sanding and staining.

The refinishing process involves **complete sanding down to bare wood** to remove all existing finish and stain. Your flooring contractor will start with coarse grits (36-60) and progress to fine grits (100-120) to create a smooth surface that accepts stain evenly. **Red oak typically takes dark stains better than white oak** due to its more open grain structure, though both can achieve beautiful walnut tones.

**Color matching is crucial** - walnut stain colors vary significantly between manufacturers. Your contractor should test stain samples on inconspicuous areas or spare boards to ensure you get the exact shade you want. The grain pattern of oak will still show through, creating a unique look that's different from natural walnut but equally attractive.

In Ottawa's climate, **proper drying time between coats is essential**. Humidity levels affect how stain penetrates and how finishes cure. Professional contractors account for seasonal variations and may adjust their timeline accordingly. The entire process typically takes 3-5 days including drying time between the stain and protective topcoat application.

**One important consideration:** if your floors have been previously refinished multiple times, there may not be enough wood thickness remaining for another full sand. A professional assessment can determine if your floors are good candidates for this dramatic color change.

For a free estimate on refinishing your oak floors to walnut, request a quote from Ottawa Floor Install. Our experienced team can evaluate your specific floors and show you exactly what results to expect.

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Q9

## What is the difference between oil-based and water-based polyurethane finishes?

**Oil-based polyurethane** penetrates deeper into the wood and provides a warm, amber tone that enhances the natural grain, while **water-based polyurethane** dries clear without changing the wood's natural color and offers faster drying times with lower odor.

**Oil-based finishes** are the traditional choice for hardwood floors, taking 8-12 hours between coats and requiring 24-48 hours before light foot traffic. They provide exceptional durability and scratch resistance, making them ideal for high-traffic areas. The amber tint deepens over time, giving floors a rich, classic appearance that many homeowners prefer. However, they produce strong fumes during application and curing, requiring good ventilation and potentially temporary relocation during the process.

**Water-based finishes** dry much faster - typically 2-4 hours between coats with same-day light traffic possible. They maintain the wood's natural color without yellowing, making them perfect for lighter woods like maple or ash, or when you want to preserve a specific stain color. Modern water-based polyurethanes have significantly improved in durability and now rival oil-based options for wear resistance. They're also more environmentally friendly with lower VOC emissions.

In Ottawa's climate, both finishes perform well, though the faster cure time of water-based can be advantageous during humid summer months. **Cost-wise**, water-based finishes typically run \$0.50-\$1.00 more per square foot due to higher material costs, but the reduced labor time from faster drying can offset this difference. Many Ottawa homeowners choose oil-based for traditional oak floors and water-based for lighter species or when minimal downtime is crucial.

**Professional application is essential** for both types, as proper technique, temperature control, and dust-free conditions significantly impact the final result. For a free consultation on refinishing your hardwood floors, Ottawa Floor Install can help you choose the right finish for your specific needs and wood species.

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## Q10

### What causes the shiny spots wearing through on my polyurethane finish?

**Shiny spots wearing through on polyurethane finish** are typically caused by **high-traffic wear patterns** where the protective topcoat has been abraded away, exposing the bare wood underneath. This creates a dull, worn appearance in contrast to the still-glossy surrounding areas.

The most common culprits are **repetitive foot traffic in specific pathways** - like the route from your front door to the kitchen, or areas where you pivot frequently like in front of the sink or stove. **Furniture movement** without proper floor protectors also creates these wear spots, as does **grit and debris** acting like sandpaper when walked on. Pet claws, especially from larger dogs, can accelerate this wear in their regular walking paths.

**Inadequate floor maintenance** often contributes to premature finish wear. When dust, dirt, and small particles aren't regularly removed, they get ground into the finish with each footstep. Using harsh cleaning products or excessive water can also break down the polyurethane over time, making it more susceptible to wear.

In Ottawa's climate, **seasonal humidity changes** can cause wood movement that stresses the finish, while **salt and sand tracked in during winter months** are particularly abrasive to polyurethane coatings. Many Ottawa homeowners notice accelerated wear during winter months when these contaminants are constantly being brought indoors.

**Prevention involves regular cleaning with appropriate hardwood cleaners**, using area rugs in high-traffic zones, and maintaining consistent humidity levels. Once wear spots appear, they typically require professional attention - either a **buff and recoat** (\$1.50-\$3 per sq ft) if caught early, or **full refinishing** (\$3-\$6 per sq ft) if the wood is exposed. For a professional assessment of your floor's condition and refinishing options, Ottawa Floor Install can evaluate whether your floors need a simple recoat or complete refinishing.

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## Q11

### What time of year is best to refinish hardwood floors in Ottawa?

**Fall and winter are typically the best times to refinish hardwood floors in Ottawa**, with October through March offering the most favorable conditions for optimal results.

**Indoor humidity control** is the primary factor that makes cooler months ideal for refinishing. Ottawa's winter heating season maintains consistent indoor humidity levels between 30-50%, which allows polyurethane finishes to cure properly without the complications of summer's high humidity. During summer months, Ottawa's humidity can

exceed 70%, causing finishes to dry slowly, potentially creating adhesion issues or a cloudy appearance.

**Temperature stability** during fall and winter also works in your favor. Heated homes maintain steady temperatures around 68-72°F, which is perfect for finish application and curing. Summer's fluctuating temperatures and the need for air conditioning can create drafts and temperature swings that interfere with proper finish application.

**Practical considerations** make cooler months more convenient for Ottawa homeowners. You'll likely be spending more time indoors anyway, making it easier to plan around the 3-5 day process when rooms are off-limits. The strong odors from oil-based finishes are also easier to manage when you can open windows briefly for ventilation without losing all your heated air. Additionally, most flooring contractors have better availability during their slower winter season.

**Avoid refinishing during Ottawa's spring thaw** (March-April) when basement humidity spikes from snowmelt, and late summer when humidity peaks. The dustless sanding systems used by professional contractors make seasonal timing less critical than it once was, but proper curing conditions remain important for a long-lasting finish.

For the best results on your hardwood refinishing project, consider scheduling during Ottawa's heating season when indoor conditions are most stable. Professional contractors can provide specific timing recommendations based on your home's conditions and the type of finish being applied.

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## Q12

### Is refinishing engineered hardwood possible, or do I need to replace it?

**Yes, engineered hardwood can often be refinished, but it depends on the thickness of the wear layer.** Most quality engineered hardwood floors can be sanded and refinished 1-3 times during their lifetime, making refinishing a cost-effective alternative to full replacement.

The key factor is the **wear layer thickness** - the solid wood veneer on top of the engineered plywood core. Premium engineered hardwood typically has a 3-6mm wear layer that can handle multiple refinishing cycles, while budget options may only have a 1-2mm layer suitable for light buffing or one refinishing. You'll need a flooring professional to measure the wear layer and assess whether there's enough material to sand through scratches and surface damage without hitting the plywood underneath.

**In Ottawa's market, engineered hardwood refinishing costs \$3-6 per square foot** compared to \$8-15 per square foot for replacement with new engineered hardwood. The refinishing process involves dustless sanding to remove the existing finish and surface imperfections, followed by stain application (if desired) and 2-3 coats of polyurethane finish. This typically takes 3-5 days including drying time between coats.

**Signs your engineered hardwood is a good refinishing candidate** include surface scratches, worn finish, minor dents, or color changes from sun exposure. However, if you see plywood edges, have deep gouges, water damage, or loose planks, replacement may be necessary. Pre-finished engineered floors with beveled edges can be more challenging to refinish smoothly than site-finished floors.

For an accurate assessment of your specific engineered hardwood floors, a professional evaluation is essential.

**Want to discuss your refinishing project?** Ottawa Floor Install offers free consultations to determine whether refinishing or replacement is the best option for your floors.

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### Q13

## How long does hardwood refinishing take, and can I stay in the house?

**Hardwood refinishing typically takes 3-5 days for most homes, but you'll need to plan for limited access during the process.** The timeline depends on your home's size, the number of coats needed, and drying conditions.

**Day 1** involves sanding the floors, which creates significant dust despite modern dustless systems. **Day 2** includes final sanding and applying the first coat of finish. **Days 3-4** involve additional coats - most floors need 2-3 coats of polyurethane for durability. **Day 5** is typically when floors are ready for light foot traffic, though full curing takes up to 30 days.

**You can usually stay in your home during refinishing, but with important limitations.** The rooms being refinished will be completely off-limits during sanding and for 24-48 hours after each coat of finish. You'll need alternative sleeping arrangements if bedrooms are being done, and you'll need access to other areas of your home for cooking and daily activities. The fumes from oil-based finishes are stronger than water-based options, so ventilation is crucial.

**In Ottawa's climate, humidity and temperature affect drying times significantly.** Winter heating can speed drying but may cause finish issues, while summer humidity can extend drying times. Professional contractors adjust their process based on seasonal conditions and use proper ventilation equipment to manage fumes and moisture.

**Water-based finishes dry faster** (2-4 hours between coats) compared to oil-based finishes (8-12 hours), making water-based a good choice if you need faster access to your rooms. However, oil-based finishes provide superior durability for high-traffic areas.

For a free estimate on your hardwood refinishing project, request a quote from Ottawa Floor Install. Professional contractors ensure proper ventilation, dust control, and timing to minimize disruption to your daily routine.

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### Q14

## What is the difference between a screen and recoat versus a full sand for my floor refinishing project?

**Screen and recoat** is a light surface refresh that removes only the top layer of finish, while **full sanding** strips the floor down to bare wood and completely refinishes it. The choice depends on your floor's current condition and how much wear it's showing.

**Screen and recoat** involves using a buffer with a fine abrasive screen (typically 120-150 grit) to lightly scuff the existing finish, creating adhesion for a new topcoat. This process removes surface scratches, light scuffs, and restores the protective layer without touching the actual wood. It's ideal when your hardwood still looks good but the finish appears dull, has minor surface scratches, or shows light traffic wear patterns. The wood color and any existing stain remain completely unchanged.

**Full sanding** uses progressively finer grits (starting around 36-40 grit, finishing at 100-120 grit) to remove all existing finish and a thin layer of wood. This process can eliminate deep scratches, water stains, pet damage, and significant wear patterns. Full sanding also allows you to change the wood's color with new stain, repair minor gaps with wood filler, and essentially gives you a brand-new floor appearance. However, it's more invasive and removes about 1/32" of wood thickness.

In Ottawa's climate with seasonal humidity changes, **screen and recoat typically costs \$1.50 - \$3.00 per square foot** and takes 1-2 days, while **full sanding and refinishing runs \$3.00 - \$8.00 per square foot** and requires 3-5 days including drying time. Most Ottawa homes with well-maintained hardwood can benefit from screen and recoat every 3-5 years, while full refinishing is needed every 7-12 years depending on traffic and maintenance.

The decision often comes down to whether you can live with your current wood color and if the damage penetrates beyond the finish layer. Deep scratches that catch your fingernail, water stains that have penetrated the wood, or floors that haven't been maintained in over a decade typically require full sanding.

For a professional assessment of your specific floors and a free refinishing estimate, Ottawa Floor Install can evaluate whether screen and recoat will achieve your desired results or if full sanding is necessary.

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**Q15**

## How soon after refinishing can I put area rugs back down?

**You can typically place area rugs back down 7-14 days after hardwood refinishing**, but the exact timing depends on the type of finish used and environmental conditions.

**Water-based polyurethane finishes** are ready for rugs in about 7-10 days, as they cure faster and have lower VOC emissions. **Oil-based polyurethane finishes** need the full 14 days or even longer, as they take more time to fully cure and off-gas. The finish may feel dry to the touch after 24-48 hours, but it continues curing beneath the surface for weeks.

**Temperature and humidity significantly affect curing time** in Ottawa's climate. During humid summer months, finishes take longer to cure completely. Winter heating can speed the process but may also cause the wood to contract slightly. Your refinishing contractor should provide specific guidance based on the products used and current conditions in your home.

**Placing rugs too early can cause several problems** including finish discoloration, trapped moisture leading to cloudy spots, or the rug backing adhering to the not-fully-cured finish. When you do replace your rugs, ensure they have breathable backings rather than rubber or vinyl, which can trap moisture against the new finish.

**Before replacing area rugs**, open windows for ventilation if weather permits, and ensure the finish no longer has a strong chemical odor. If you're unsure about timing, wait an extra few days - it's better to be cautious with a fresh refinishing investment.

For professional hardwood refinishing with proper curing guidance, request a quote from Ottawa Floor Install for your next refinishing project.

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