

DECK SEAMS FOR A PLANKED DECK

The following comments have been taken from the Glen-L Boatbuilder Forum on the subject of creating a planked deck. There are so many ways this process can be done and each builder has his idea of the “best” way. Use this as a guideline for determining how to best finish YOUR boat...

I have been reading these forums and looking through the boat plans and pictures for a couple of years now. In many of the pictures of boats built I keep noticing something that I don't understand. What is used in between the thin planks that many builders apply to the top of their boats. I'm talking about the thin strips of mahogany or the like with white lines between the planks to improve the looks of the boat. What is the material used to create those white lines? I would be interested in creating a similar look.

Some people have used dark wood/light wood, some mix white coloring with thickened epoxy, traditionally it was caulk between the planks.

--Warren Oatman

Lots of thoughts on this one!

Some people use contrasting wood strips.

Some people mix a white epoxy (a combination of microspheres & epoxy resin).

Some people don't like white and use off white or black.

Some people varnish over it, some don't.

Some people use caulk, like I did (3M 4000 UV).

--Bill Edmundson

So I'm going to start with Doug Hodder's Malahini. I talked to Doug on the phone when he was building this baby and he explained how he got the look. He bookmatched his mahogany strips and then set them against each other. Then he actually used a good quality vinyl pinstripe tape and laid out his feature lines. Finally, he started applying coat after coat of epoxy until there was enough build up that the tape could no longer be felt and everything was smooth. Here is the result:



Next is Graham Knight's Squirt. Graham used thin strips of a very light colored wood between his mahogany strips. An easy way of doing this is to rip and sand the lighter colored wood until it's the thinness you want and then glue it to the mahogany strips along one side. Then you cut your mahogany to fit and the lighter colored wood inlay is already in place. From there all you have to do is figure out your inlay at the covering boards. Here's what Graham's boat looked like when finished:



Then there is Mark Bronkalla's Riviera. Mark used the white colored epoxy to achieve his look. His entire build is documented on his fantastic website www.bronkalla.com. Here is his boat:



For me personally, I had been vacillating between methods. But when I got to the recent Gathering this past October, I saw Bill Yonescu's boat. Bill used the same method as Graham Knight with alternating light and dark colored wood. When I saw that in person, I knew that this was the way I was going to go with my Zip. To me, it just looks superb!

--Dave Grason

Also, there was some mention that when the colored epoxy method was used, some cracking occurred when the boat was left outside for a few days in a sunlight warming/cooling situation with a cover on.

I'm thinking of the alternating color wood strip method for this reason for my build.

--Warren Oatman

If you go with the two contrasting woods, the trick is to laminate them first. That is plane both pieces first, then laminate them together. Then plane them after they are laminated. Then rip your planking. That way the narrow strip is already attached to one side. And, you have two clean sides to match together.

--Bill Edmundson

Great techniques here 😊 We are planning on black (or very dark) stripes between African mahogany. One thought I had was using stained Walnut for the stripes. The question being...Can I stain the walnut first, then epoxy (or glue) it to the mahogany as Bill mentioned?

--Tbone

Yes you can. Now keep in mind that whenever you apply varnish or any kind of finish really, the wood will darken somewhat anyway. If you're going to use walnut, you may be getting dark enough that you may as well just go ahead and paint the dark wood dark. I'd try a couple of test panels before I committed to the final deck.

--Dave Grason

If you laminate the dark wood to the lighter wood, then you have to cut it and plane it....so you can't stain it first.

Even if you laminate thin pieces together then after you apply it to the deck, you have to sand it to get everything level, so no you can't stain first.

--Warren Oatman

Rather than using wood strips, the traditional method is to leave the gaps between the deck planks open. Do your staining and epoxy work. then fill the seams with some sort of caulking. Many use epoxy. Others use a product like Sikaflex.

--Bruce Dow

I plan to use the "home made secret recipe" of a seasoned boat-builder (credit to Dwight Boyd and his article "Seams to Me" in the Canadian ACBS Magazine). Basically, he recommends DAP window glazing putty, mixed with a dollop of varnish and some ochre paint tint. The ochre gives a traditional Canadian "yellow" to the seams, versus the typical American "white".

--Bruce Dow

A couple people (including myself) have used micro balloons. Mixed with the epoxy they give you white seams. Bought mine from Glen-L. Some micro balloons are off white.

The only thing I would do different: I filled the seams and then varnished. This left some yellow in the seams. I should have varnished and then filled the seams. Other than that I think they look good.

--John K

John K,

If you fill after the varnish, won't that leave epoxy mix with no UV protection??

--Warren

Yes it would. was not thinking about that. I liked the white and was trying to think about a method of not getting the varnish to yellow the seams.

--John K

Thanks for the help guys!

I looked at some of the other posts and have come up with the following plan:

- 1) Sand the decking down close to finished.
- 2) Coat with System Three Clear Coat epoxy so white epoxy filler doesn't stain the planks (hadn't thought of this step)
- 3) fill the seams with white epoxy mix. (Will talk to System Three people about what they recommend.)
- 4) Sand down to final surface and re-coat with Clear Coat.
- 5) Do final coating with System /three clear LPU paint.

Does that sound like it makes sense and is in the right order?

Also, I have considered staining my kingplank and covering boards dark like they do on the chris crafts. I would have to stain that before the clear coat goes on and after some pretty good sanding. This might muck things up a bit if I have to go back and sand some more?? Maybe I should wait to do the staining until after the seams are in. I suppose I could just coat the inside of the seams where the stain would be to prevent it from staining?

--Lawry

As far as I know, the stain must go on before the epoxy.

--Bruce

Here is an excerpt from the article "It Seams to Me..." by Dwight Boyd in "Classic Boat" magazine, Spring, 2005.

>> Start Excerpt

"... the materials are available from any good hardware store. Dap Window Glazing (comes in half litre and one litre cans), a small tube of ochre (dark yellow) tinting colour, and some varnish. The Dap Window Glazing is basically a white putty, but it has a tiny bit of elasticity to it and handles easier than putty. To about 1 cup of DAP add about 1/2 teaspoon of tint (you can control the color by the amount of tint you add so start with a little bit) and about 1 tablespoon of varnish. Mix thoroughly. Put on the yellow rubber gloves and get your hands in there; it's a sticky gooeey mass. When properly mixed you should finish with something that has the consistency of peanut butter.

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Working in small batches, about a half a cup at a time

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Put the mixture in a plastic container and heat in the microwave for 20 or 30 seconds or until the mix reaches the viscosity of heavy corn syrup.

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With a plastic putty knife, work the caulking into the seams, making sure it is all the way to the bottom and there are no air bubbles and it is smooth level. Do one or two seams, then pick up as much excess caulking as possible with the putty knife. Have a thinners-dampened rag on hand and wipe over what you have just done to clean off any remaining compound. It will leave a slight haze - that's OK. Now put a little thinner in a plastic tub and, using the back of a plastic teaspoon, tool a slight concave into the seam. Repeat until the job is done, then pour yourself a tall one and admire your handy-work. Let this dry for about a week. When you return, wipe the deck with a clean soft rag lightly dampened with thinners to remove the haze and apply the remaining coats of varnish in the usual manner. Cheers."

>> End Excerpt.

--Bruce Dow

Here's another Tip : *Taping before applying the white epoxy saves a lot of work !*

You can now pour a large puddle of epoxy and moved it around with a plastic squeegee.

Pull the tape when the epoxy starts to gel.



--Mr. Hot Rod

We have had a 1955 Chris Craft Holiday in our family since 1970. I have had the "pleasure" of caulking seams since I was about 8 years old.

My Dad and I tried EVERYTHING. Here is the run down:

1. Caulking then varnishing produces yellow stripes.
2. Caulking after varnishing (with 3M or other marine caulk) will eventually produce dirty, impossible to clean stripes
3. Painting over the varnish is tedious, tiresome, and almost impossible to get it to come out looking good.
4. Hiring a professional just get the pro frustrated and they leave...

Final solution after about 15 years of messing with it:

After you have stripped out old caulk, varnish and get your final coat the way you like it. LET THIS DRY FOR ONE WEEK. If you want to use, go ahead, it shouldn't hurt anything. Then, after drying, tape your seams. Go to Lowe's or the Home Depot (I am not making this up) and get a good bathroom silicone brilliant white caulk. Caulk your seams smoothing with a finger, popsicle stick or other tool.

If in a year you don't like how the seams are looking, you can literally "pull" the seams out like long strands of spaghetti. You can have them removed and be re-caulked in a day.

--MI Russ

You say that like yellow stripes are a bad thing... 😊

I guess it's different strokes for different folks... The tradition up here is that the yellow stripes are a sign of "authenticity"... at all the shows up here I don't think I have ever seen "bright white" seams.

--Bruce Dow (Canada)

Anyway, I asked him (Jim Potter in Manotick Ontario) what he used in the seams and he said Silkaflex Sealant. I asked him about shrinkage and he said he has never had a problem. BTW, he is 100% old school. He avoids epoxy like the plague and never uses plywood. The decks are coated with multiple coats of varnish only. All his restorations are using the original construction methods so I was a little surprised at the choice of caulk.

--Bruce T

"Best" method is relative.

Key question here is: "How are you going to finish over the deck and seams?"

If you are going to use epoxy or epoxy and glass, then go with arigid filler (wood, wood+paint, or wood+colored epoxy). If you are filling after varnishing, then caulking is fine. For varnish over caulk, I have no idea if it will work. I did the white colored epoxy strips.

From another email question: "How is the white epoxy over time?" It has yellowed slightly, after 6 summers it is a light cream color. Not sure if the color change is due to the filler strips or the epoxy and glass over the top of it (I suspect the covering).

While the color is slightly creamy, I also have ABSOLUTELY no seam failures or separation (however there are some spots in the fiberglass weave from high temperature damage). So, one of the other considerations in the search for the perfect deck seam is: "How will it hold up over time?" In this area, the epoxy with fiberglass wins again, however, if high heat or a dark cover (my mistake) are used, then other effects may cause problems.

--Mark Bronkalla

Very interesting/controversial topic...thought I'd chime in with what hacker craft does, and what (i think) I'm going to do. They use 6 (I think) inch boards, which is wider than what I plan to use, but the principle is the same...they pre-stain the boards, and then butt them tightly up against each other on the deck. They then bevel in a slight "valley" at each seam, and two on the board itself...then fill any gaps with epoxy, and paint over the bevels. You end up with what APPEARS to be lots of 2 inch thin strips with caulking between them, but is actually much more durable (and less time consuming) than 6 inch wide boards with no caulking to soften up.

--Dennon Osterman

My deck mahogany was 1 1/2 inch strips at 3/16 inch thick. I figured out 1 1/2 inch wide because of the width I can buy standard masking tape. It might seem silly, but I figured if I used a masking tape of a standard width, then taping up for caulking, painting, or seam filling would be easier because I would only need to lay one line of tape down. (I hope I explained that well).

I wound up using vinyl pinstripes for my deck so it didn't matter. But the theory was there.

Good Luck,

KB (Bulldogboater)

On my Monaco I initially used the Sikaflex caulk between the deck planks, but it was extremely difficult to work with. Sort of like working with chewing gum mixed with the stickiest glue you've ever experienced. I made a complete mess of the deck. Once it dried out I completely removed it and started over. By the way, this was about a 20 hour job to remove. I then re-caulked using plain old Dap brand kitchen and bath latex caulk, in Brilliant White. It's water soluble for easy working with and easy clean up. It doesn't shrink or crack, and remains flexible. When dry, I sanded the entire deck to give me clean/crisp wood to caulk edges, and then varnished over everything. The varnish yielded a slightly yellow tint to the white caulk. The finished product isn't "concourse/show" quality, but overall I'm pleased.....and if I build another boat I'll definitely use the same product and process. You can judge for yourself.....go to the customer archives and look under Monaco, Garry Stout.