



Krylon Acrylic Crystal Clear Finish

by Bob Altig



Introduction



One can lasts for what seems forever. Cost is \$4 at Sears.

Right now you are probably thinking, OH BOY! Here comes another road to travel in the search for the perfect pen finish. There have been a ton of tutorials written on finishing pens and many of them have worked very well for me, but often yielded inconsistent results. For instance, the CA/BLO finish works well on most woods, but if used on an oily wood like African Blackwood, it becomes cloudy over time unless the BLO is used very sparingly. There always seems to be some kind of wood that doesn't lend itself well to a particular finishing technique. I have used dipping in lacquer, friction polish, shellac, Minwax Helmsman Spar Urethane, Deft, Enduro, MinWax Polyurethane, CA, CA/BLO, buffing with EEE, White Diamond and Carnuba, Tung Oil, Watco Danish Oil, Boiled Linseed Oil, and few others that I can't remember now. All have their advantages and disadvantages, but with each method I have learned lessons the hard way on what is usually a relatively expensive piece of exotic wood.

I look for the following in a finish:

1. High gloss
2. Easy application
3. Minimal time to apply
4. Durable
5. Resists water marks
6. Doesn't mask the beauty of the material
7. Doesn't discolor over time

Materials:

1. Norton 3X High Performance Sandpaper 150, 180, 220, 320, 400 grits.
2. Micromesh 1500, 1800, 2400, 3200, 3600, 4000, 6000, 8000, 12000 grits.
3. Krylon Acrylic Crystal Clear Spray Can.

The finishing method discussed here is only a suggestion. It works well for me and I haven't had a failure yet. I see no reason why it wouldn't work just as well for you. Incidentally, I discovered this method in the same way I have discovered so many good things in life, by accident. I had purchased the Krylon to coat a picture I was using in a poly-resin casting. I accidentally grabbed the Krylon can by mistake instead of the Minwax Polyurethane spray. After noticing my mistake, I decided I might just as well let the spray cure and see how it turned out. Now, I'm glad I did.

If you will permit me; I have been reluctant to write this tutorial. In the past many people writing these tutorials have experienced utter frustration with readers criticizing the process being taught. After numerous back and forth exchanges, it is usually discovered that the person criticizing the process hasn't followed the steps as outlined in the tutorial, but decided, all on their own, they could improve the

results by omitting or adding steps to the process. Please follow the steps discussed below as they are written. If you then experience issues with the process, please contact me and I will try to assist. But please don't contact me if you have decided you can skip a step, or can inject another step to improve the process, never having tried it the way it is written. By all means feel free to experiment. Things work differently for different people, but please don't criticize the process until you have tried it at least once exactly as it is written. You see, my wife tells me I have about as much patience with people as a bull moose in mating season.

A quick word about sanding:



Comes in packs of three sheets and each pack costs about \$3 at Home Depot. All three sheets in the pack are the same grit.

Many of the steps I will mention will seem unnecessary to some readers. They may be overkill, I don't know. But when I first became interested in working with wood, my parents were building a house. The house had a lot of built in bookcases constructed out of mahogany, and all the kitchen cabinets were ash. They hired a wood finisher to put a finish on all these things. I was fascinated watching him and talked to him a lot when he was cleaning up his equipment each day. His name was Henry, he was a perfectionist, and he taught me a lot when I was taking Beginning Woodshop in Junior High School that year.

I asked him one day why he spent so much time sanding the wood. It seemed to me to be a waste of time because the finish would probably fill in any slight imperfections in the wood surface. He told me he loved the smell of sanding dust in the morning. Actually, he told me that the smoother you can get the wood before applying the finish, the better the finish will be. He even went so far as to sand the wood glass smooth, then wet the wood with a sponge to raise the grain, let the wood dry, and resand. He kept doing this until the wet sponge no longer raised the grain after the wood dried. The man was a true craftsman, not just a wood finisher.

I guess the point is this. The same principles apply to a wooden pen blank. If you really want an outstanding finish to your pens, sand, sand, sand, then sand some more. As a lot of woodturning instructors say, "Use sandpaper as if someone else were buying it for you."

Enough philosophy, let's "git-er-done":

There are many brands of sandpaper on the market, but I prefer to use Norton 3X High Performance sandpaper, available at Home Depot. I prefer it simply because it's readily available, fairly inexpensive, and doesn't seem to clog up as fast as other brands. I sand my blanks using 150 grit through 400 grit sandpaper (see materials list). I sand on the lathe at roughly 500 rpm. I stop the lathe after using each grit and sand the blank lengthwise to remove any lines caused by the blank spinning while sanding with the lathe spinning. I don't wet the wood like Henry did. I'm not that much of a perfectionist. You're now done with the sand paper, but as the late Billy Mays said, but wait, there's more.



Micromesh foam sponge is pictured which I don't use. Seven sheet sets (2400-12000) cost about \$13 and last for years. Individual sheets cost about \$2. Wash often to extend the life of the sheets.

Just don't apply too much at one time. Several light coats produce better results than one thick coat. Krylon advertises the finish will dry in 12 minutes. However, I don't believe everything I read, so I let the finish dry for about an hour or until the end of the ball game on TV, whichever comes last. That may sound like a lot of time to wait, but if you do numerous blanks all at the same time, you can go on to other things during the drying time like watching TV.

Return to the lathe for another round of micromesh -

1500 to 12,000 grit. Wipe the piece down with mineral spirits again, let dry and wipe with a clean cloth.

Repeat the spray and micromesh process at least one more time. You can do it as many times as you think you need to do, but I have found two times is quite sufficient to give the depth of finish I want. If you want more depth just apply more coats.

It's time to polish the sanded blanks using micromesh starting with 1500 grit and stopping with 12,000 grit (again, see the materials list). Now I've got a very smooth piece of wood that already shines, but not enough. Wipe the piece down well with Mineral Spirits using a clean dry cloth to remove small particles of sawdust that lodged in the wood grain. Let dry thoroughly, about 10 minutes should do it, and wipe again with a clean cloth to be rid of the mineral spirits residue.

Now we're ready to apply a thin coat of Krylon Acrylic Crystal Clear Spray. I want the coverage to be complete, but not necessarily even. Krylon has excellent leveling properties.



A deer antler and African Blackwood set of blanks ready for an application of Krylon. Be sure to cover the lathe bed to protect it.



The completed pen. This is a Typhoon Fountain kit from Penn State Industries.

Summary:

I have successfully used this finish on a variety of woods, acrylics, corncobs (CA first to stabilize), cork (sanding sealer first to fill in porous areas), antler, and buffalo horn. The natural oil content of woods like African Blackwood and Cocobolo do not adversely affect this finish or cause any clouding that I have noticed. The finish is extremely hard and durable over time. To the touch, the surface of the finish almost feels like a poly-resin casting has been done over the surface. If you try it, I hope you are as pleased as I am with the finish and ease of application.

I have no vested interest or financial arrangement of any kind with the manufacturers or retailers of any of the products mentioned in this tutorial. I am merely a satisfied customer.

Safety:

1. Always wear good dust protection when sanding. A wet bandana over your nose and mouth only helps in cowboy movies. Get a good dust mask or a respirator before you need to drag an oxygen bottle along behind you. Dust in your lungs isn't a good thing.
2. Wear a good spray paint mask when applying the finish and do the spraying in a well ventilated area. Paint or finishing products in your lungs aren't a good thing.
3. Should you accidentally spray something you didn't want to – like your hand, your Rolex wristwatch, or your new Lamborghini Diablo – clean up is easily done with mineral spirits followed by soap and water (no soap and water on the Rolex please).
4. And, of course, always wear safety glasses in the shop. Glossy eyes may be romantic, but acrylic finish on your eyeball can ruin your whole day.
5. Protect your skin, lungs and eyes. You only get one set of each in this life so make them last.



Altig Custom Pens
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