

Please read this before using our products

Finish Information and Surface Maintenance

Yakisugi “shou sugi ban” is a “maintenance-optional” exterior siding. Exterior wood siding is mechanically degraded over time by UV radiation, atmospheric moisture and precipitation, freeze-thaw cycle, and wind. The owner chooses either to embrace the traditional “sabi” aesthetic and savor it as it develops into a rich patina over decades, or to simply re-oil at any time in the future to return color vibrancy. Suyaki will remain the same black color for decades before the soot layer wears off, and can be re-oiled periodically to keep it black even longer. Our Gendai and Pika-Pika products are heat treated same as Suyaki then brushed during production and will weather in color same as any kind of oiled wood siding. It is important to differentiate between wood longevity and color longevity.

Cryptomeria (“sugi” or Japanese cypress) is a rot-resistant wood species, and the heat treatment improves wood longevity by burning off the hemi-cellulose and turning the surface hydrophobic and case hardened. However, color change from weathering is the same as any wood siding. The rich patina that develops over time is valued in Japan. Traditionally yakisugi was installed unfinished and left that way for the lifetime of the structure or replacement. Historically, only higher-grade residences or public facilities have had oil stain finishes applied and maintained. However, Japan’s modern preference has migrated to oil prefinishes (the statistic is 80% of the market) due to availability and acceptance of finishes and desire to maintain color consistency for as long as possible.

For most customers, we recommend finishing our products with a high-grade oil stain, and most of what we ship has a factory-applied oil finish. When installed outdoors the extra UV protection will slow down the weathering process and bond in surface soot, and when installed indoors enhances the wood grain and makes cleaning easier. Note the typical weathering due to lack of finish or finish maintenance in photos in the historical gallery on our website’s “What is Yakisugi” page. This is due to the lack of a repainting culture in Japan. Organic weathering is beautiful but many North American owners want the color to stay the same over time.

Weathering speed and pattern depend on finish spec, pigment content, and method of application, the nature of each individual plank, local exposure to weather, and maintenance. Sun-exposed surfaces will gradually mellow burnt orange as the soot erodes over decades, moisture-exposed surfaces will gradually turn silver, and areas with protection from both will stay the original color. Finishing with a UV-resistant oil and regular refinishing per manufacturer instructions will slow down the aging process and allow the siding to retain the specified color longer. This will also allow the maximum lifetime possible by preventing dimensional movement, checking, and UV degradation of the fibers. Basically, yakisugi is similar to any other wood siding in terms of finishes. The main difference is that due to the product being sooty we are not able to use a standard siding roll-coating line and therefore cannot apply oil stain to all sides of the boards.

After initial installation and within several years depending on conditions, minute hairline cracks will open on the surface of exterior planks and the color will start to change. At this point the owner should decide

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whether to embrace the Japanese patina aesthetic and enjoy how the wood ages, or re-apply the oil stain in a maintenance program to keep the color fresh over time. Refinishing as soon as color begins to change will fill in these cracks and make a longer-wearing surface. Each maintenance coat of finish will generally last longer than previous coats did due to oil build up. All exterior finishes we use are breathable for best thermal performance and longevity. Another important point on the finishes we specify is that oil stains erode gradually over time, different from paints that flake or peel.

Please consult with us for specific project requirements and our recommendation to match your spec.

On Finishes...

- All prefinishes will bond the soot to the surface and prevent it from coming off when touched. After installation the wall can be wiped down with a wet cloth or washed down with water, and there will not be a noticeable soot residue afterwards. Do not scrub unoiled Gendai since the color will change.
- Natural unmodified plant-derived semi-transparent traditional oils (oxidizing monomers) will show the grain best but will need more regular maintenance to stay vibrant than modern semi-solid alkyd (polymerized) oils. This is because semi-solid alkyd oils have more pigmented UV-blocking surface residue that stays the original color until it erodes through, exposing the wood color. Wood finished with traditional oils will fade gradually over several years. Alkyds will have more consistent color for the first several years, then wood grain will show through after the pigmented surface residue erodes.
- For maximum color longevity on exteriors we recommend alkyd oils with an unmodified oil component for lux appearance and elasticity. Alkyds are plant-derived oils (safflower, linseed, soy, etc) that have been chemically modified into a polymer and penetrate into the wood with a water carrier in solution. They offer maximum UV protection and erode gradually in a pixilated pattern instead of crazing and scaling off like paint. Alkyds have more defined pigment color.
- For maximum depth of grain, natural color, and rich patina we recommend traditional oils containing both a drying oil binder and mineral oil carrier. Traditional oils have more organic, nuanced color.
- For interior Suyaki applications petroleum- or plant-derived polyurethanes make a good-looking, washable surface.
- For better wood longevity on exteriors, finish end cuts, rips, drilled holes, or notches during installation.
- For best color longevity apply second or third coats of oil stain before or after installation.
- Some professionals think that back-oiling wood will increase longevity or dimensional stability in exterior applications. There are mixed opinions on this and it is never done in Japan. We therefore only oil the back side by special order. There is no need to back-finish wood for interior applications.
- Use a penetrating UV-resistant plant-derived finish for exterior. High pigment and trans-oxide load is the best UV-inhibitor available for maximum color longevity.

Maintenance Guidelines

- Cypress has premium longevity over most other species partially due to a fungi-resistant tannin content, but mainly since porous and quick-drying so that fungi are not encouraged to grow.
- Tannins may leach from the cypress within the first year or so after exposure to atmospheric moisture, and stain lighter colored surfaces below. These stains will generally wash away with rain exposure within the second year after installation. This is normal for all cypress or cedar species. See the photos on our FAQ page. For this and other reasons, traditional Japanese design in most regions



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locates wood below stucco on elevations. If any tannin stains appear on the wood or lower surfaces and need to be removed, wash off with a mild oxalic acid product.

- To keep siding color consistent over time, apply a maintenance coat of finish when the wood begins to change color. Generally, the first maintenance coat will be within 1~10 years for traditional oils, then additional maintenance coats will be needed further and further apart due to oil build-up. Alkyds normally last longer before maintenance is needed, and a general rule of thumb is a re-oiling schedule of 2~15 years. Or let it weather and appreciate the organic patina, also savor the lower cost and effort.
- Before application of a maintenance coat, clean and prepare the surface as specified by the finish manufacturer. Wash with a soft brush or cloth, never with a stiff brush or power washer. A power washer will break open the wood's microscopic cell walls and cause premature and inconsistent weathering. Never sand or scrape yakisugi.
- A very weak TSP or soap solution, commercial no-wash neutral pH cleaner, or simply clean water, can be applied with a cloth and residue removed to clean off pollen, dirt, dust, etc. It is best to use a product supplied by the finish manufacturer if any cleaning agent is used before re-oiling.
- Always clean and refinish a hidden test area before attempting the entire wall surface.
- Touch up of damage, such as scratches or dings, or local uneven weathering, can be done easily with the specified finish maintenance product. Traditional oils blend better than alkyds. Suyaki or Gendai damage can be touched up with a black or dark brown stain, or the original prefinish. A small nick can be carefully dabbed with stain, bleaching can be lightly blended with stain and a rag, or for interior even a magic marker or grease pencil can be used for quick cosmetic touch-up.
- Scratches to our Suyaki with an interior urethane finish can be touched up with a waterborne polyurethane pigmented black with universal pigment. Damage or scratches to the Suyaki soot layer on exterior applications can be touched up by carefully dabbing black oil locally then wiping off any excess.
- It is important to follow finish manufacturer's instructions and to test when reapplying.

