Getting Wood Floor Sanding Right: What Every London Homeowner Should Know

If you live with original hardwood flooring, you already know how much character it brings to a room. But that character fades when the surface starts looking tired, scratched, or worn through in the high-traffic spots. A lot of people assume they can fix it with a quick DIY pass, only to end up with a patchy, uneven mess that costs more to correct than a professional job would have been in the first place. I have been called to properties across London where a weekend project turned into a full-scale refinishing headache. The truth is, **wood floor sanding** is one of those jobs where the difference between a good result and a great one comes down to experience, the right kit, and knowing when to stop.

Why Surface Preparation Dictates Everything

The finish you see on a floor is only as good as the surface underneath it. Skipping steps or using the wrong grade of abrasive paper is the fastest way to guarantee a short-lived result. A professional approach to surface preparation starts with assessing the existing floor finish. Is it a wax, a hard wax oil like Osmo, a lacquer, or a varnish? Each one behaves differently under the sander. A lacquer tends to gum up sanding belts if you hit it with too fine a grit too soon. An oil finish can clog the abrasive paper in seconds if you have not stripped it back properly first.

I always start with a coarse grit on a heavy-duty floor sanding machine, usually around 24 or 36 grit, to remove the old coating and level out any minor unevenness. From there, I step up through 60, 80, and finally 120 grit. That progression is not optional. Jumping from coarse to fine leaves scratch marks that show up the moment you apply your floor finish. And you cannot always see them under the dust extraction system's light until it is too late.

The Machines Matter More Than You Think

Not all floor sanding machines are built the same. A lightweight orbital sander might work for a small closet, but for a full room of solid wood or parquet flooring, you need a proper belt sander or a drum sander. The weight and the drum action make the difference between a flat floor and a wavy one. I have seen living rooms where a DIY hire sander left a dip in the middle of every board because the operator lingered too long in one spot. That is the kind of mistake that forces you to use a floor levelling compound just to get the surface flat again, which adds time and cost to the job.



Professional machines from brands like Bona or Lägler are built for this work. They have variable speed control, heavy-duty dust extraction, and the kind of balance that lets you work a full room without fatigue. The dust extraction system on these machines is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Fine wood dust is a respiratory hazard, and it settles into every crevice in your home if you are not capturing it at source. A good extraction setup also keeps the abrasive paper working efficiently. When dust sits between the paper and the wood, it clogs the grit and reduces cutting speed, which pushes you to press harder and create unevenness.

Choosing the Right Abrasive and Belts

Abrasive paper and sanding belts are consumables, but they are not all the same. Cheap belts wear out halfway through a room, and you end up changing them three times as often. That slows down the work and drives up the cost in the long run. I use belts from reputable suppliers and match the backing material to the job. A cloth-backed belt handles the heat and pressure of heavy stock removal on oak flooring much better than a paper-backed one. For the finer passes, a stearate-coated paper resists clogging when you are working on floors that had a wax or oil finish.

Grit selection also depends on the wood species. Oak flooring is an open-grain hardwood. It needs a slightly finer finish pass than a closed-grain wood like maple, because the open pores can trap abrasive particles and show up as dark specks under a clear lacquer. Parquet flooring, especially the older herringbone patterns, requires extra care around the edges. The blocks are often smaller and more prone to chatter if you run the machine across the grain. I always do the perimeter with an edger and then run the main machine parallel to the long grain of the blocks.

Engineered Wood and Solid Wood Are Not the Same

A lot of modern homes have engineered wood flooring, which is a thin veneer of real wood over a composite core. You can sand it, but only once or twice before you go through the wear layer. Solid wood and parquet flooring, on the other hand, can be sanded many times over the life of the floor. That is one of the reasons original parquet is so valuable. It can be restored again and again. If you have engineered wood, the approach to **wood floor sanding** has to be conservative. You are removing material, and you cannot put it back. I always do a thickness check with a gauge before I start, to know exactly how much I have to work with.

For solid wood and parquet, you have more freedom. Deep scratches, pet stains, and water damage can often be sanded out entirely. But you still need to be methodical. A stain that has penetrated the wood may need a localised treatment with oxalic acid before you sand, otherwise the dark spot will reappear through the new finish. I have seen floors where

someone sanded the whole room, applied a fresh coat of varnish, and the stain showed right through three days later. That is a tough conversation to have with a client.

Finishing: The Payoff for All That Prep

Once the sanding is done, the room is clean, and the surface is smooth to the touch, you get to choose your floor finish. This is where personal preference and practical use meet. A lacquer gives a hard, durable coating that resists scratches and is easy to clean. It is a good choice for high-traffic hallways and rental properties. But lacquer can chip if the floor flexes, and repairs are difficult because you have to sand the whole panel to blend the repair.



Hard wax oils like Osmo penetrate the wood and leave a more natural, matte look. They are easier to spot-repair, and they do not create a plastic-like layer. The trade-off is that they need reapplication more often in heavy-use areas. I have used Osmo on a lot of London period conversions where the owner wanted the floor to look like wood, not like it was wearing a coat of plastic. For those jobs, I apply the oil with a roller and then buff it with a white pad on a floor machine to get an even sheen.

Varnish is another option, though it has fallen out of favour in recent years because of its tendency to yellow and its strong solvent smell during application. Still, for a budget-friendly renovation, a good quality varnish can give decent protection if the surface preparation is right.

Commercial and Contract Sanding

Contract sanding is a different beast. In commercial spaces, the timelines are tighter, the areas are larger, and the dust extraction has to be industrial-grade. A retail shop cannot close for three days while you sand and finish the floor. You work in phases, often overnight, and you use fast-drying finishes. The machines are bigger, the dust extraction is centralised, and the abrasive consumption is much higher. I have done contract sanding in restaurants and offices across London, and the key difference is logistics. You are coordinating with the client's business hours, protecting fixtures, and managing the dust so the space is usable the next morning.

For commercial parquet flooring, the restoration process is the same in principle but different in scale. A ballroom or a showroom might have thousands of square feet of parquet blocks. You cannot sand that by hand, and you cannot afford to stop halfway through to change a belt. The machines run on a schedule, and the team moves as a unit. That is where experience with brands like Bona and Lägler really pays off, because the equipment has to be reliable under continuous use.

What to Look For in a Professional Service

If you are thinking about hiring someone for wood floor sanding, here are a few things to check:

- Do they use a dust extraction system that captures fine particles at source? Ask to see the setup.
- Do they carry multiple grades of abrasive paper and match the grit to the wood species and existing finish?
- Can they tell you the difference between treating a lacquered floor and an oiled one before they start?
- Do they check the thickness of the wear layer on engineered wood before sanding?
- Are they familiar with the products they will use, whether that is Osmo, Bona, or a traditional wood filler and lacquer system?

A good operator will be happy to walk you through the process. They will also tell you what they cannot do. If a floor is too thin to sand, the honest answer is to refinish it without sanding, or to replace it. Nobody wants to pay for a service that damages their floor.



Final Thoughts on Wood Floor Sanding

I have been working with London's floors for years, and I still learn something new on almost every job. The wood changes with the seasons, the products improve, and every building has its own quirks. What stays constant is the principle: preparation is everything. Rushing the sanding stage to save time or money always costs more in the end. A floor that has been sanded properly, with the right machine, the right grit progression, and the right finish, will last for decades. One that has been cut short will show its flaws within a year.

The best **wood floor sanding** is the kind you do not notice, because the floor looks like it was always meant to look. That is the goal. Whether you are restoring a Victorian parquet in a terraced house or finishing a new oak floor in a modern flat, the work underneath the finish is what makes the result last.