

Wood Finishes Reference Card for Modern Interiors

Match the finish to the room before you shop

Decision shortcuts by room

1 Living room with strong south light

Matte or satin walnut, smoked oak, or natural white oak. Avoid high gloss (will show every fingerprint and dust mote).

2 Dining room used daily

White oak with a hardwax oil finish (Rubio Monocoat, Osmo) or polyurethane. Both handle wine spills and resist heat marks.

3 Home with kids under 10

Hardwax oil over solid hardwood. Easy to spot repair scratches, no full refinish needed.

4 Pet household

Avoid high gloss lacquer (shows every claw scratch). Choose textured or fluted oak which hides marks visually.

5 North facing room with low light

Lighter natural oak or ebonized fumed oak. Walnut can read too dark in poor light.

6 Coastal Toronto condo with floor to ceiling windows

UV stable finishes (water based polyurethane, Rubio Monocoat). Walnut bleaches under sustained UV without protection.

7 Heritage home with traditional millwork

Cherry, mahogany, or stained walnut. Oak in a Tudor stain bridges modern and traditional.

8 Minimalist Scandi style room

Natural white oak, ash, or birch in a soft matte oil finish.

9 Modern glam aesthetic

Ebony or high gloss lacquer. Pair with brass, marble, and travertine for the full effect.