

1983 Jaguar XJS Interior Wood Trim Repair and Refinishing

The following describes and shows one method of wood trim repair/restoration/refinishing for wood trim on Jaguar cars, specifically this 1983 Jaguar XJS, although the wood trim should be the same in all similar years.

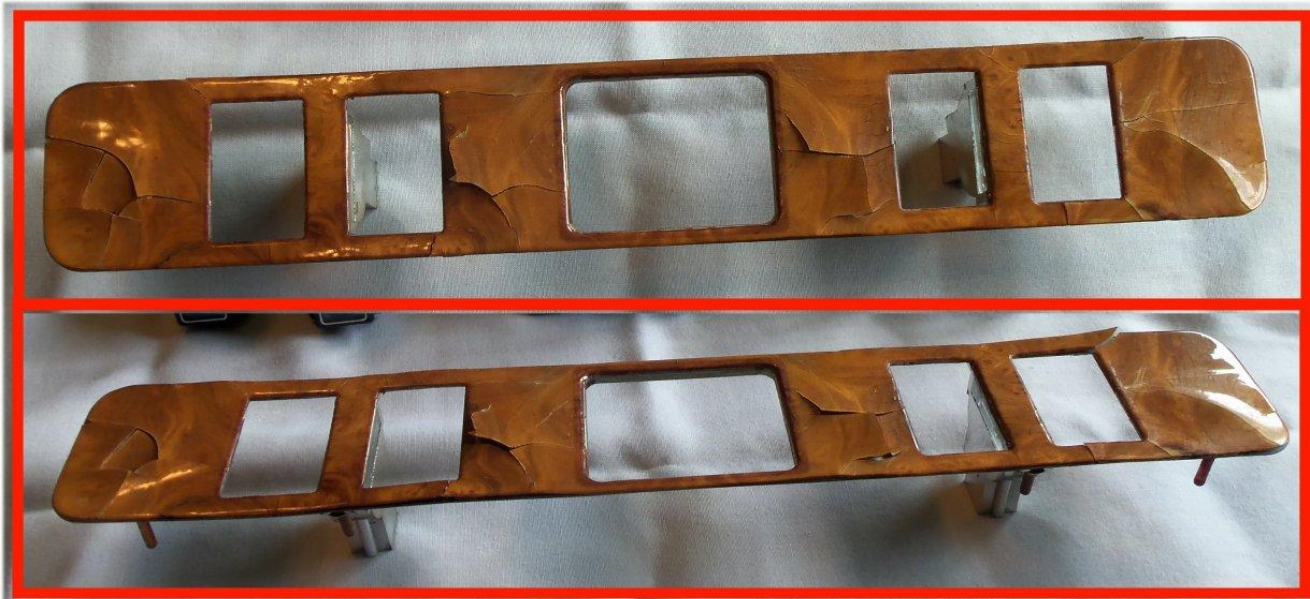
CAUTION! The wood veneer is thin ... VERY THIN ... do not use a power sander on it, not even a finishing sander, but especially not a belt sander – the veneer would be gone before you even had a chance to check and see how you were doing.

The wood veneer around the switches and clock is applied to a metal backing plate, the other pieces on the dash are applied to wood backing (I have not yet removed the wood trim on the doors to see what the backing is for those pieces).

Some of the wood trim veneer pieces were cracked and peeling away from the backing, other pieces had the veneer cracking and lifting at the cracks, but were not yet completely peeling away from the backing.

ATTENTION! The longer you wait to repair/restore the cracked/cracking wood trim, the more difficult the work in repairing/restoring/refinishing the wood veneer will become – just ask me ... I found that out.

The wood veneer trim around the switches and the clock were in the worst condition, with many cracks with the cracked veneer lifting and peeling away from the metal backing. My intent was to save the original veneer and repair/restore/refinish it as close to the original look and condition as I could (with the realization that I was not a master wood worker nor did I have all the tools which would likely be necessary for such work) – with that in mind, I set about considering various ways to save the original veneer. I started with the worst piece first ... what to heck, if I couldn't do the worst piece and had to replace it, no harm, no foul, but – if I could repair/restore/refinish the worst piece, then I should be able to do the same with the wood veneer pieces which are not in as bad condition - seemed logical at the time.



This wood veneer was really worse than it looks in these photos as these photos do not show all the cracks and splits, or all of the lifting/peeling of the veneer. The photos which follow show the cracking, peeling, and lifting in better detail.

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Removal of the wood veneer trim which the switches and clock are mounted in requires a thin, flat, yet strong tool as the wood trim is adhered to a metal backing which has four retaining prongs that are in push-in receiver fittings. The tool needs to be thin to be able to be inserted behind the metal backing, flat so the tool does not leave marks pressed into the leather surround, and strong enough to pry the metal backing out of the push-in receivers.

Two of the retaining prongs are shown near the bottom corners in the lower photo above – the other two retaining prongs are in the same location near the top corners.

I found that a the use of ordinary tools in my garage worked quite well, I used a well worn 5-in-1 tool to remove this piece as it was thin, flat, and strong ... and being well worn means no sharp points, edges, or anything sharp which could tear or scratch the leather surround or the wood veneer itself.

After releasing the metal backing retaining prongs from the push-in receivers, the switches have plugs on them which need to be pulled off (the plugs pull off from the sides of the switches, not from the backs), lights need to be pulled out of their openings (they are held in with spring tension around the socket ends), and there are two leads which need to be disconnected from the clock.

You are now holding the entire wood trim veneer, metal backing, switches and clock assembly in your hand.

The switches and clock push out of the metal backing by releasing the spring tension pieces which hold each in place at the backside of the metal backing – NOTE: keep track of which switch is removed from where, while they are not easy to mix up, you could inadvertently swap pairs, swap halves of the pairs or put them back in upside down with respect to each other ... a simple way to keep track of what goes where is to take a photo before removing anything, you will then know the way they were when you started.

You now have the wood veneer and metal backing ready for you to start addressing what you need to do to repair/restore/refinish the wood veneer.



The center piece of veneer fell out when the switches and clock were removed.



Almost none of the veneer is still adhered to the metal back in this part between the left switches and the clock to the right.

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The two thin strips across the top and bottom of the switch are no longer adhered and are cracked and broken.



Almost none of the veneer is still adhered to the metal back in this part between the clock and the switches to the right.



The left end is also cracked and does not look to still be adhered very well either.

My original intention was to glue the loose veneer back to the wood backing ... but the backing turned out to be metal and the metal backing prevents that, as does the stiff and curled veneer (I didn't want to risk cracking/breaking the thin wood veneer any more than it already was).

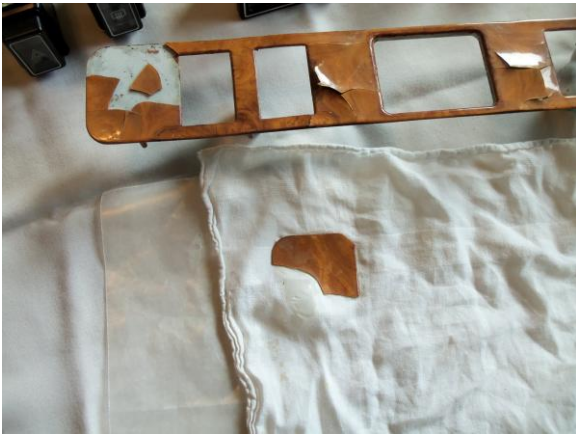
I had to get creative in order to save the wood veneer as it was worse than it looked like when in the car.

The switches and the clock were helping hold the veneer in place so it did not look as bad ... don't get me wrong, it did not look good all cracked and bending outward like it was, but I did not realize that the switches and clock were holding the veneer in place like it was.

I decided that when I removed the wood veneer from the metal backing, I would have to glue each piece to a thin piece of cloth to serve as a 'puzzle piece holder' to keep all the pieces of the puzzle together and each piece in its proper place.

What to use that was very thin? I recycle old handkerchiefs to serve as rags in the garage, and one of those old handkerchiefs would work quite well for this purpose.

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I started at the upper left corner as that piece practically fell off when I tried to remove it, and the piece below it had already fallen off when I removed the switches.

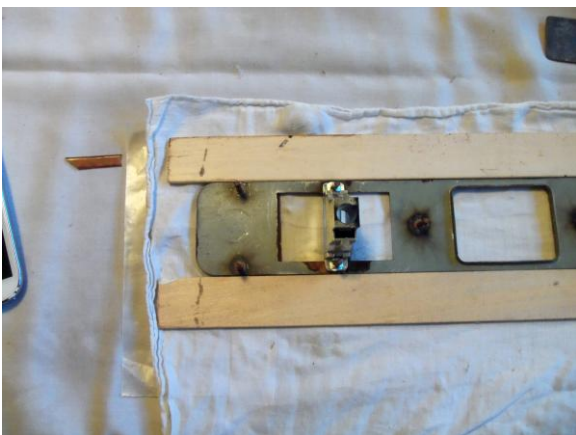
The piece on the handkerchief has already been glued in place and is dry.

This was my starting point for removing the puzzle pieces from the metal backing and making a completed but separate wood veneer piece I could then work with.



Progress! Getting ready to glue the small piece at the top in place, but ... I need a guide to know where to place it.

A putty knife and utility knife work well for removing the pieces of veneer from the metal backing.



I placed the metal backing over the pieces I had already glued in place and used two paint stirrers as guides.



Now I had the left end, and guides for the top and bottom of the veneer.

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More progress!



Some pieces are actually still adhered in place pretty good – Darn! Loose pieces are easier to work with.



Mostly done removing the veneer puzzle from the metal backing and gluing to the cloth. A few small pieces of the wood veneer are all that are left to be removed.

The veneer piece is definitely taking shape and now looks like it might be feasible to repair and refinish.

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Now that I have completed removing the wood veneer puzzle pieces from the metal backing and gluing them to the cloth backing to keep the veneer pieces aligned and together, the reassembled veneer piece does not lay flat due to the veneer pieces being warped.

My next concern is making my wood veneer piece flat ... if the veneer piece does not lay flat, the veneer piece will not be usable for being re-adhered to the metal backing.

I decided that I could make the wood veneer lay flat using a method used for bending wood – after all, I was simply “un-bending” the wood, so the method should work: steam and pressure.



This is my “un-bending form” that I will use as the “form” to which the steam un-bending will form the wood veneer to (flat).



The wood veneer is on the “un-bending form” with the cloth side down; a sheet of wax paper has been placed over the wood veneer, which is facing up.



This is my steam and pressure forming tool.



The veneer is now “un-bent” and lays flat.

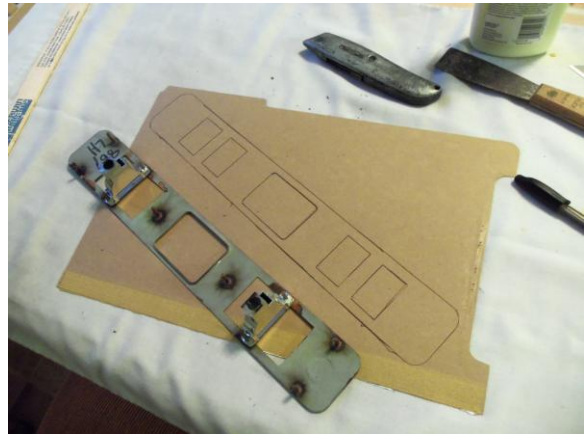
The wood veneer is now flat, however, the cloth backing leaves the wood veneer too flexible – a stiffer backing is needed to keep the wood veneer “in plane” with itself such that the wood veneer can be handled and then re-adhered to the metal backing.

I used a thin but stiff piece of cardboard (which is basically wood in a different form) to glue the cloth backed wood veneer to.

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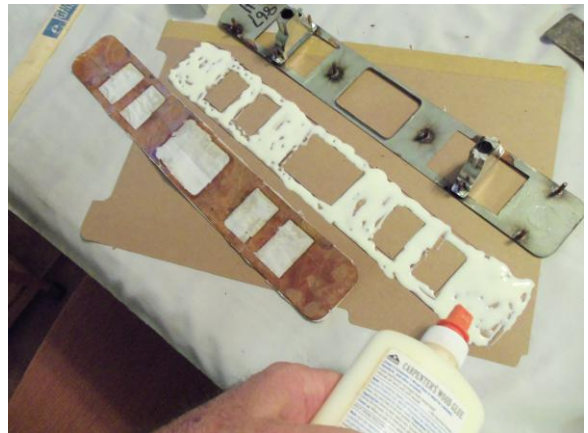
Tracing the metal backing to make the cardboard backing for the wood veneer.



This is the traced cardboard backing.



The wood veneer and the cardboard backing are ready to be glued together.



The cardboard backing is coated with wood glue, the wood veneer is ready to be placed on the glue and clamped in place.



The wood veneer has been placed on the glued cardboard backing.



Applying initial pressure to set the veneer into the glue prior to clamping.

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Preparing for overnight clamping of the wood veneer to the cardboard backing.



Ready for overnight clamping overnight and flattening of the wood veneer.



Clamps applied to flatten the wood veneer while clamping for gluing to the cardboard backing.



Wood veneer after being clamped overnight to glue the wood veneer to the cardboard backing and flatten the wood veneer.



It is now time to chisel out the cloth and cardboard backing.



Chiseling out the cloth and cardboard backing from the switch and clock openings in the wood veneer.

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The wood veneer is temporarily placed on the metal backing to check for overall fit and flatness.



The wood veneer lays flat on the metal backing and the openings line up.

The next step will be removing the original finish, which is yellowed from age. After experimenting with various methods to find the best way to remove the original finish, I found that carefully ... and “carefully” is the correct word ... carefully scraping/prying/popping off the original finish using a semi-sharp (not “dull”, but not “brand new sharp” either) 1/4 inch wood chisel.

Work the wood chisel under the original finish (which is about as thick as the veneer itself), making sure not to cut into the veneer, then slowly push the chisel with its flat side down on the veneer, allowing the original finish to go up the tapered side of the chisel. You may need to start the chisel with its flat side up – see photo.

In some cases, when I could see a large area coming loose, I used a feeler gauge (thick enough to be somewhat stiff, but thin enough to slip under the original finish) to slip under the original finish and gently force the feeler gauge between the original finish and the wood veneer – this successfully worked for larger pieces of the original finish which would come loose in one larger piece.

Wear a glove on the hand you are using to hold the wood veneer in place as the wood chisel may slip, and when it does, the chisel will cut into your skin ... not to worry, though ... those cuts will heal soon and you can then put the glove on to protect yourself from future cuts — I only slipped and cut myself twice before I put the glove on ... maybe you are a faster learner?

If you thought the earlier job of removing the wood veneer from the metal backing was detailed and labor intensive, ...

Or that the job of gluing the puzzle pieces you removed from the metal backing to the cloth backing was detailed and labor intensive ...

Or that the job of steaming the wood veneer flat or gluing the wood veneer to the cardboard backing was work ...

If so, you may not want to undertake this project as removing the original finish from the wood veneer is more detailed and labor intensive than all the previous put together — this is just a heads up, it is not meant to discourage you from taking on the project ... the results are worth it.

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Using the wood chisel, start where the wood veneer is cracked and lifting – start the chisel under the original finish but between the original finish and the wood veneer itself.

This work needs to be done carefully so as to not push the chisel into the wood veneer below and create a gouge in the veneer – you do not want that.



While most of the original finish will likely come off in smaller pieces, as can be seen on the towel in the background, some pieces may come loose as a larger area, I used a feeler gauge thick enough to be somewhat stiff yet thin enough that I could slide the feeler gauge between the original finish and the wood veneer and gently pushed in, loosening larger area which would pop off as larger pieces.



The wood veneer with the original yellowed finish removed.



This is the original finish, which was originally clear, but it is now so yellowed that you whatever you can see through it (which is not much) looks “yellowish”.

I originally thought the wood trim in my car was some special kind of blonde burl, maybe maple or something.

As it turned out, the blonde look was just from the yellowed finish, which made it look blonde, that was all it was – 34 years of exposure to sunlight ... and my car was a New Jersey car which was not driven during the winter months, and was garage kept when not in use (I am the second owner and have owned the car the last eight years, since February of 2008). The wood veneer in a car left outside in the sun for longer periods may be in worse condition, however, if all the wood veneer is still there, you can probably repair/restore/refinish it.

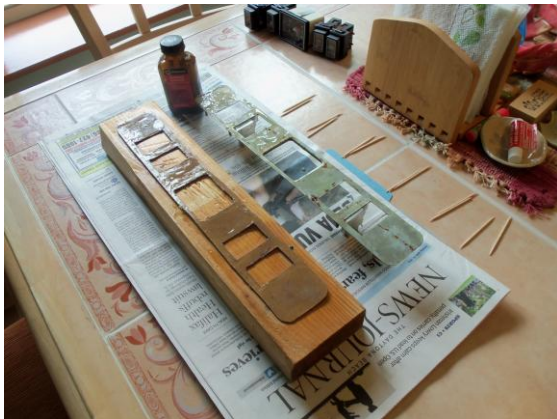
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After some light hand sanding, I sprayed a first coat of clear gloss lacquer on the wood veneer side so glue and other stuff could be removed and not be on the actual wood. This came in quite handy as I progressed through the following steps.

Once the wood veneer is flattened and on the cardboard backing, very little sanding was needed – keep in mind that the veneer is very thin, so it would not take much sanding to go too deep into the veneer.

Also, the only sanding you should need to do is to sand down any high ridges along where the cracks were.

If you were successful in getting all the wood veneer off the metal backing, you shouldn't have any significant holes or gaps which need wood filler. I had a couple of small areas and a 'knot' which I had to fill.



This photo shows the cardboard backing side of the wood veneer and the metal backing plate coated with contact cement.



This is the contact cement I used, it is available in small bottles or quarts, it is less expensive by the quart, save the small bottles and refill them.



The contact as set up and is ready to be assembled.

The toothpicks you see allow the wood veneer to be laid over the metal backing without making contact.



Remove a toothpick at one end and squeeze the wood veneer to the metal backing plate, making sure the two are aligned.

Work toward the other end, making sure the pieces are still aligned, then remove a toothpick and squeeze the two pieces together, toothpick by toothpick.

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After matching the wood veneer with the metal backing and removing all the toothpicks, make sure to squeeze the two pieces tightly together to assure a good and full adhesion bond between the two.

You now have a wood veneer on metal backing with one coat of clear gloss lacquer which is ready for any touchups which might be needed, followed by finishing with multiple coats of clear gloss lacquer.



This is ready for touchup and finishing the wood veneer on the metal backing the switches and the clock go in.



You can see some minor imperfections which need to be addressed during the finishing process.

Minor imperfections can be touched up with black lacquer – spray some black lacquer into the can's cap, dip a Q-Tip into the liquid black lacquer in the cap and touch the black lacquer end to the imperfection – wipe the excess out (lacquer dries very quickly, so you need to act QUICKLY or you may need to lightly sand some black lacquer off (another reason to spray a coat of clear lacquer on the wood veneer first, so the black lacquer or wood filler can be removed easier).

The fill in a “knot” in the wood veneer fell out, I used some dark walnut wood filler to fill the “knot”, sanded it to be flush with the surface, then it looked original behind the clear gloss lacquer coats.

You can now build up the lacquer in the imperfections using clear gloss lacquer, filling, sanding, filling, sanding and spraying the entire piece occasionally as you fill and sand.

When you spray the entire piece, you will be able to see high spots which you can sand down (you will be sanding lacquer, not the wood veneer) and the low spots you will need to fill with clear gloss lacquer. I used clear gloss lacquer for everything as each additional coat of the lacquer bonds itself into and becomes part of the lacquer below it. This is why lacquer, unlike paint, does not have multiple defined coats – lacquer becomes one thicker and thicker coat with the application of ‘another coat’ of lacquer.

Once the surface of the piece looks evenly smooth when sprayed with clear gloss lacquer, the piece is now ready for a very light sanding and another several coats of clear gloss lacquer.

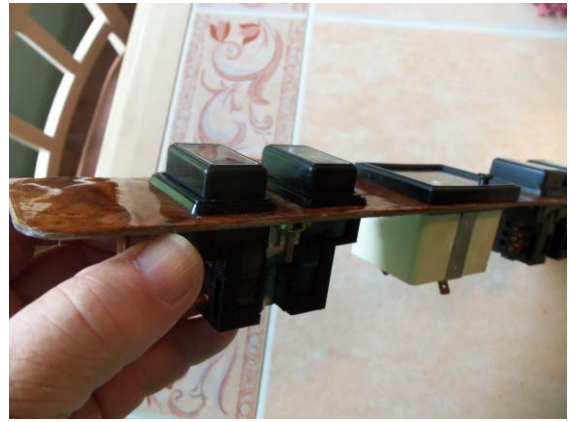
With lacquer, once you have an evenly smooth surface, you do not need to sand between coats, just spray as many additional coats as you want to achieve the depth and desired look you want.

When the surface looks like you want it too, you are done with that piece.

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This is the preliminary fit and checking to see how it looks nearly finished.



An angle view showing the surface of the wood veneer after having been repaired/restored/refinished as described above.



This is a close up of the installed wood veneer, you can see some of the crack lines behind the clear lacquer, but it is all flat, smooth, and glossy.



This is the same end – this is what I started with.

The large curved crack line is visible in the finished veneer, but the finished wood veneer look was well worth the effort, time, and work it took.



The photo to the left shows the other wood veneer trim pieces which went through the same process, except that these pieces have wood backing, which eliminated the steps up to adhering the veneer to the metal backing.

Other photos of the finished wood veneer trim pieces follow.

Those are followed by photos of the wood veneer trim pieces installed and the project complete.

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