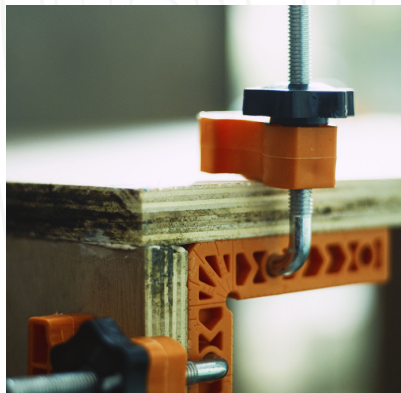
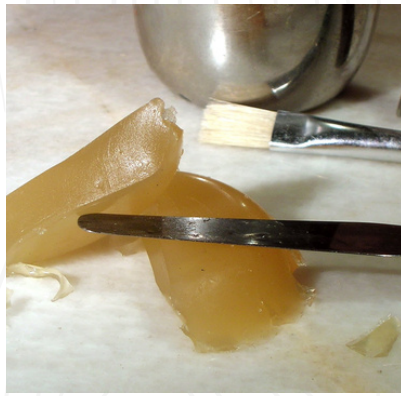


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why is hide glue still used today when there are so many alternatives readily available?

Hide Glue Vs Modern Wood Glue

Hide glue comes in two main variations, there is hot hide glue which would be the standard traditional glue that is most likely used on the majority of antique furniture. The glue is made from collagen derived from animal bone and hide, it is sold dried so you can mix with water and heat to a specific temperature – usually around 60-65°.

The most compelling benefit of hide glue in antique restoration, aside from maintaining some level of historical accuracy, is that despite creating a very strong bond when dry, it is easily removed using heat or steam. This allows for an easier repair without the risk of damaging the furniture. Hide glue can also stick to other hide glue, meaning it is not always necessary to remove the old glue before a repair. Finally, as the glue has a very strong bond and lacks plasticity it doesn't “creep” over time meaning the joints do not slowly move when exposed to prolonged pressure.

Hide glue becomes quite slick when warm, acting almost like a lubricant. This helps tight-fitting joints, such as mortise and tenons or dovetails, slide together more easily during assembly, making them easier to clamp and helping them fit together properly. It is also much kinder when it comes to finishing. Any small traces left around a joint are less likely to leave noticeable glue marks or stop stains and traditional finishes from soaking into the wood. Because it can be softened with warm water, excess glue is also easy to clean away before finishing, helping to create a neat, almost invisible repair.

Despite its many advantages, hot hide glue does have a few drawbacks. It is not the most convenient adhesive to use, as it requires some preparation before it can be applied. The dried granules must be mixed with water and heated in a glue pot to the correct temperature. It also has a very short open time of less than a minute, meaning there is only a brief window to position and clamp the joint before the glue begins to set. This can make complex repairs more challenging and requires a little more planning than when using modern adhesives.

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Hide glue is also not suitable for every application. It is not waterproof, making it a poor choice for furniture that will be exposed to damp conditions or used outdoors. It is also sensitive to heat and humidity, which can weaken the bond over time.

The second type of hide glue is liquid hide glue which comes ready to use straight from the bottle and does not require a glue pot or heating. This makes it a much more convenient option for small repairs or for those who do not regularly carry out restoration work. Liquid hide glue has a much longer open time, this can be particularly useful when working on larger or more complicated pieces of furniture. It also retains the main benefit of traditional hide glue and can be reversed using heat.

Although this ready to use version is generally considered slightly weaker than its more labour intensive counterpart due to the inclusion of certain additives to keep it in a liquid state, it is still an excellent choice for many restoration projects. It provides a good middle ground between traditional and modern adhesives.

Modern wood glues have completely changed the way we approach woodworking. They are easy to use, widely available and can create incredibly strong bonds. For many modern woodworking projects, they are the obvious choice because they are reliable and convenient and require very little preparation. Most modern glues come ready to use straight from the bottle and usually have a much longer working time.

There are also many different types of modern wood glue available, each designed for different situations. Some are waterproof or weather resistant, making them ideal for outdoor furniture. Polyurethane glues can also expand slightly as they cure, which can help when working with joints that are not perfectly tight.

However, some can also create problems when working on antique furniture. The biggest disadvantage of many modern adhesives is that they are difficult, if not impossible, to remove once they have cured. While this creates a very strong bond, it can make future repairs much harder and may risk damaging the original wood. Modern glues can also leave behind a plastic-like residue around joints that can stop stains, oils and finishes from soaking into the wood properly, potentially leaving visible marks that are difficult to hide.

This does not mean that modern glues are unsuitable for furniture restoration. They have many applications, especially when repairing newer pieces or areas where reversibility is not a concern. However, when working on antique furniture, the ability to undo a repair in the future may be as important as the strength of the bond.

At the end of the day, both traditional and modern adhesives have their place. Modern glues offer strength, convenience and reliability, while hide glue allows us to work in a way that respects the original methods used by the craftspeople who built these pieces. So to answer the original question, the continued use of hide glue shows that traditional methods still have a valuable place in the world of furniture restoration with properties that cannot be replicated by modern alternatives.