

## UPGRADING YOUR CABIN SOLE

Islanders of all sizes were manufactured with a plywood cabin sole. In later years it was the “standard” very thin layer of teak and holly (probably 1/16<sup>th</sup>) on 5/8<sup>ths</sup> plywood. In earlier years (like our Bahama 30) it was just plywood, no teak & holly! The 70s and early 80s were all about carpet! In either case, that thin layer of teak & holly veneer has suffered over the years with plenty of battle damage. For those of us who wish to upgrade or refinish the cabin sole on our valued Islanders there is an endless parade of options. One of those options is a product called NuTeak (<http://www.nuteak.com/>), the company based in Florida. I was asked to re-finish a parquet floor on a Grand Banks a few years ago and had some knowledge of the NuTeak product. It presented itself as a visually appealing, durable alternative. A molded-in teak finish on a plastic 36” x 2 1/2” plank, 1/8<sup>th</sup> thick. Unlike some other similar products, each plank is an individual plank. There is no “multiple planks ending on the same joint” appearance. There is also the choice of a light colored “holly” strip separating the planks, or a “black tar” strip, usually for outdoors. NuTeak has a web site that didn’t provide a great deal of information on this particular product, focusing instead on their custom-made sheets for quick installation. But I did find a NuTeak Northwest web site that does detail these planks. The informative video makes it look more complicated than it really is. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbKwbsDzuuw>.



This document is not going to be a “how to install” instruction sheet. However, it will be a “lessons learned” sheet to avoid first time mistakes on a one-time project.

### Planning

- The product arrives in long cardboard boxes with the Bostik glue in large sausages, probably in a separate box. There will be one white “holly” (or black) strip for each plank. The strips come in sheets of 15 and will need to be split. Bend each strip longitudinally and separate by hand. It’s far easier to do when the sheet is warm (lay it in the sun or heat it up with a heat gun).
- Plan the floor by laying out the planks and strips as you would like to see them when finished. Not all of them, just enough to figure out the side-to-side numbers and cuts. You’d rather not cut planks longitudinally if avoidable. Check to see where the hatches (if any) are going to fit in.
- Most installers will simply butt the planks into the bulkhead with a 90° athwartship plank. It’s simple, it’s elegant. I used 45° corners simply because I didn’t think of the simpler way. I think the 45° corners look nicer as well. If you are planning the 45° corners indicate that in your order. You will need more strips.
- Cutting the planks can be a challenge. If a table saw is handy, great. I use a sharp box cutter and metal straight edge, cutting through from the top with a few slices and then breaking off the end. The same plies for the longitudinal cuts.
- Each plank has bevelled edges. When cutting a plank to a specific length I use a 120 grit sanding block to add the bevel to the cut edge. It looks better that way.

Lay out the planks in preparation for gluing them down:

- I would limit the gluing process to what you can reach comfortably without having to kneel on the fresh product. Overnight drying is all that's needed to be able to walk or kneel on the laid planks without disturbing them.
- Number the planks once you're pleased with the pattern. Where you cut a plank for a hatch you want to ensure that the same plank carries onto the hatch. Once you start the gluing process it's very easy to grab the wrong plank.
- When laying down for a hatch, remove the hatch and allow a small overhang into the void for the planks and strips. Same with the hatch itself, a small overhang all around. This can be trimmed later with a hand-held router (like countertop laminate). It's much easier with better results than trying to perfect each cut.
- Ensure that the plank ends and strip ends don't end in the same place. Cut the strip to move that joint.



## Gluing

- Now comes the fun part! You could purchase a proper "gun" for the glue sausage, but it's just as easy to cut a small hole at the end of the sausage and squeeze the glue out. It's a very thick paste (very much like 3M4200 caulking, which you can also use if you run out. It's the same type of product).
- I use a drywall spatula to spread it around, then a serrated plaster trowel to ensure an even thickness.
- Once satisfied the glue is in all the right places, the plank(s) and strip(s) are laid onto it. Weights are supposed to be used to hold the planks in place. That works well in a factory setting. I don't have a lot of weights although I have used bricks in the past. Now I just put paper towels on the planks and then carefully walk around on them, pressing them into the glue with body weight. This is where the importance of having flat planks and strips come apparent. If the plank or strip was bent when laid down, it will spring up again. The application of heat (a heat gun) should solve that problem. A few minutes of walking slowly over the planks should do it. Remove the paper towels and clean up the glue that has squeezed up through the joints (hence the paper towels!). Clean up is time consuming but easy, ordinary paint solvent and small



squares of paper towels. Dampen the paper towel and wipe. The planks may have shifted when pressing them down. Carefully slide them back into position.

- If you have curved sections of hull (like in some Catalinas) warming the planks and strips up is critical. A heat gun works best. Some sort of moveable weight may be necessary as well.
- The glue is not permanent for a few days. I have been able to correct mistakes up to a week later, pulling the plank up with some difficulty, but being able to replace it. I haven't tried it beyond a week but suspect that it would be possible as well, just a greater degree of effort.
- Where there is a hatch pull or hinge involved, I remove the pull/hinge and do a rough cut in the plank before laying it down in the glue. The next day I carefully cut out the opening with a box cutter knife. It's much easier to do if careful heat is applied to the plank (it gets very soft). Then I use bits of the plank material in the opening to bring the pull/hinge back up to the right height.
- Last but not least, at the end of the day, if I find small gaps in the plank/strip where the white glue is apparent, I fill the gap with LePage Teak wood filler. Unless you know where the filler is it's almost impossible to see it.

If I had known about this product 20 years ago when we purchased "Natasha", our Islander Bahama 30, I probably would have applied it over the factory plywood cabin sole. As it was, I installed an oak and mahogany sole along the same visual lines.



Bert Vermeer

s/v Natasha

Sidney BC