



CECOTTICOLLEZIONI

## Gommalacca | Shellac

**History:** Shellac is an ancient, valuable technique to add a beautiful finish to wooden furniture. Shellac is a natural resin secreted by a species of insect from the family Coccoidea (*Kerria lacca*) that lives on trees, mainly in the Indian subcontinent. The resin is secreted by the insect to protect itself and directly sets on the tree branches. Shellac is picked, washed, dried and sieved, then sold in the form of yellow-brown scales.

The art of using shellac is extremely old, dating back to as many as 4000 years ago, according to some sources. Most of it is currently produced in South-East Asia, North-East India, Southern China and Bangladesh. The most fascinating uses of shellac range from pharmaceuticals to baking, millinery and obviously for finishing and restoring wooden furniture.

Using shellac as a wood finish was first mentioned as early as in the sixteenth century and, though it has been used in the West since the 17th century, as the secret behind the beauty of Stradivarius violins, it never really gained ground until the early 19th century, then it established itself as the most common finishing technique at least until the Thirties, when it was replaced by cheaper synthetic finishes.

**Technique:** A shellac finish can be a very time-consuming process that can last up to 6 days and consists of 3 key steps. Step one involves rubbing in several coats of shellac with a cloth pad, then alternately buffing it in with pumice to fill up all the pores of the wood. The finish is left to rest for 2 days, then, when it is dry, the pores will show again. As central step, the most time-consuming one, shellac is rubbed again, with the help of alcohol, until the wood feels smooth to the touch. Up to 8-10 coats of shellac may have to be applied at this stage. Another 48 hours rest is required before the last step can take place, when the shellac is mixed with oil. All these many coats of shellac give wood its distinctive high-gloss finish, which makes this technique so valuable and fascinating, and every piece so unique.

