

KNOW-HOW

Stain Master

Patric Richardson (aka the Laundry Evangelist) spills secrets for getting the yellow, yuck and stink out of vintage textiles.



First things first. Oxidation (yellowing) is the biggest problem with vintage pieces, Patric says. Treat by dipping a yellowed item in a basin of hot water and sodium percarbonate (bleach alternative). "It will literally whiten in front of you, and often take out stains, too," Patric says. "It's my first line of defense." Find bleach alternative in stores, including some quilting shops, that sell specialty detergents. If stains remain after dipping, treat with an oil soap/oil stain remover. (A very mild dish soap such as Joy could work, too.) Stubborn stains may require Amodex Ink & Stain remover, available in many grocery stores, home improvement centers and online.

A bar rag is your friend. Use it (or a similar absorbent towel) to back the underside of a stained area as you work on it. "It will hold the solution against the fabric, and minimize the work you have to do," Patric says.

Use a horsehair (that's key!) brush to work on stains that need extra attention. No toothbrushes!

Unfinished wood clothespins are best when hanging items to dry. Painted or stained ones could leach color onto the fabric.

A washing machine is a yes for Patric for almost everything (unless valuable or super fragile)—ideally placed in a mesh bag. Dryer? A hard no!

To remove odors, hang items in the sun. If that doesn't work, break out the vodka. "Give the fabric a mist," Patric says. "Vodka is antiseptic. It kills mildew and absorbs odors." Any proof will do!

Go old-school. When washing, use soap flakes, which are gentler than standard detergents. "You need something appropriate to the era of the item," Patric says. Find soap flakes in specialty stores. In a pinch, use baby shampoo, he says.

Our Expert

Patric Richardson's love of textiles led him to found Mona Williams (monawilliams.com), a Minneapolis store that sells vintage designs. He also developed a line of specialty cleaners and holds "laundry camps." laundryevangelist.com

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