

Andrew Matthews is a qualified and experienced restorer and conservator. Clients include Trinity, Girton and King's Colleges, the Fitzwilliam Museum and Kettle's Yard House. Here he gives some tips on how to care for your fine furniture



Furniture restorer Andrew Matthews in his workshop

Perhaps the most important aspect of maintenance is routine inspection. We need to check for mechanical trouble, such as a loose chair-leg or a wobbly arm, before it develops into something more serious; check for worm and rot, assess marks and scratches before deciding whether and how to have them removed; check sun-induced damage to a polished surface; look for broken upholstery webbing or a sagging seat, examine veneers for stability and castors for smooth running.

MOVING FURNITURE

Much damage occurs when furniture is moved. Whenever possible the piece should be lifted by its strongest components: rails, cabinets and chests by their lowest rails or at 'foot' level, not by the top. In principle never drag furniture.

SURFACE DAMAGE

Main causes of surface damage are liquids, excessive heat, scratches and bruises. Mats can avoid the these occurring. Spilt water and water-based liquids can be wiped off to prevent them spreading and the surface rubbed dry. Spirits and other solvents spilt should be gently dabbed to prevent the surface being degraded. Otherwise seek help from a competent restorer. Removing bruises from a polished surface is not to be recommended at home as this process carries considerable risk of damaging the patina and changing the surface colour. Seek professional help.

MAINTENANCE

Regular dusting is recommended. Use a clean duster, ensuring it is grit-free. Remove food and grease by gentle washing with tepid water with a little vinegar added. Wash off deposits and dry with a clean cloth. This treatment must not be carried out on any gilded surface. Do not attempt to use 'quick fix' aerosol sprays or creams or any product containing silicon which, in time, can leave a milky finish or bloom on the surface. Contrary to popular belief, wax polish does

not penetrate the surface and feed the wood, but only gives surface protection and an attractive finish, which is easier to clean than a dull one. Use good quality wax polish perhaps twice a year, although pieces subject to heavy wear may need polishing more often. Pigmented wax polish can colour in small scratches but if the pigment is darker than the wood it may well eventually darken the surface.

veneers

Loose or lifting veneer if easily removable should be placed in an envelope and kept in a safe place ready for the attention of a restorer/ conservator. If necessary secure with masking tape and seek professional help. Do not attempt to re-glue veneer with anything other than traditional Scotch glue.

SURFACE REVIVORS

These products can be useful where surface dirt does not respond to washing but should be used with caution as because of the 'cocktail' nature of the liquid we do not know what is reacting with what.

Do not use those that contain oil, for whilst darkening the appearance of scratches they will soon re-appear.

CLEANING BRASSWARE

If brass has to be cleaned, and the general conservation view is against this practice, then Brasso or other good quality product can be used. Removing the brass fittings, for cleaning is possible but not recommended, as repeated removal will leave a trail of damage. One solution is to make a cardboard mask which fits neatly around the fitting keeping the metal polish off the furniture. After cleaning, a coat of lacquer will prevent further tarnishing.

INFESTATION

Woodworm or common furniture beetle is usually found in glue blocks inside furniture, inside seat rails, drawer linings and generally parts of furniture which are functional rather than decorative. Furniture should be inspected for tell-tale holes. Cuprinol Low Odour Woodworm Killer fluid can be safely used on polished surfaces but wiped off as soon as possible.

STORAGE

To avoid damage from damp and condensation do not store furniture directly on stone or brick floors or next to outside walls. Avoid sudden change in temperature and humidity. Avoid direct sunlight onto furniture, especially pieces with glass placed on top.

Contact: 07808 590 370 or view the website at www.aam-restoration.co.uk

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