



Restoration, restoration

Andrew Matthews gave up a career in the music industry to find his true metier in furniture restoration. **Jenny Chapman** went to see him at his workshop west of Cambridge.

The workshop overlooks fields, with nothing else on the horizon. Gentle jazz piano music is the only company apart from the furniture itself, often in bits. This is the setting for Andrew Matthews, furniture restorer, at work in the middle of nowhere, the other side of Arrington to the west of Cambridge.

Andrew is a craftsman through and through, he loves his work and his dedication has paid off with restoration jobs from most of the Cambridge colleges, English Heritage, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and what he calls "Cambridge old money".

“The challenge is to take something back to the customer and they can’t see the repair.”



The day I go to see him in the old potato sorting room he has turned into his workshop, he is surrounded by bits of a sideboard, but not just any old sideboard, this one belonged to Queen Mary.

"It now belongs to a Canadian doctor who buys pieces with provenance. It's about 1830 and he wants to give it back to Marlborough House, where it once was."

The sideboard was lent to an academic in Cambridge for awhile, and at some time it has been badly scratched and chipped, restoring it is a labour of love.

Andrew is a man of Kent, brought up in Herne Bay, he started out as a lighting technician, touring with Elton John, Culture Club and Mike Oldfield, before buying a derelict house in Canterbury and in the process of doing it up finding a different talent.

He made shelves and boxes from old floorboards and driftwood and started selling his creations on the market at Camden Lock in London. From here he moved on to train as a cabinetmaker and then as a restorer.

"I was always interested in old things, as a kid I used to collect stuff like gasmasks."

He moved to Cambridge when his partner got a job here, converted his garage into a workshop and word quickly spread.

"The most interesting job I've done was a bookcase in King's College, a mahogany great front, it was absolutely huge, in one of the fellows' rooms and too big to fit along just one wall, so it had been broken up.

"It was packed with old books, some in Latin, and so heavy I had to do the work in situ. The job was to make

each piece of the bookcase look as if it should be separate, but restore the whole piece so that it could be put back as one. It was a challenge, and that's what I like.

"Everything I do has to be done by hand, and I have a voluntary assistant some days, Liz, who was a health service executive but got health service fatigue and decided to take a degree course in furniture restoration. She comes to me for work experience, and she's very good."

Andrew works with a clutch of craftsmen and women in and around Cambridge when he needs specialist skills, a particular type of carving, cane work, upholstery. He also consults Cheffins for expert advice, but hugely enjoys doing research himself.

Some of his work is unexpected, like the modern leather boardroom chair in need of attention, or the Ikea chair he was asked to repair by a member of the Rothschild family.

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He has recently been advising on the restoration of the Divinity School in Trinity Street, which has

been largely untouched for more than a century, leaving wonderful Victorian Gothic wood panelling and doors, including those deliciously heavy old locks, which he is also expert in restoring.

Andrew says you will never get rich doing his kind of work: "I get by," he says, adding that it's about more than earning a living, it's a way of life.

Andrew welcomes visitors to his workshop. If you would like to call by, ring him on 07808 590370. www.furniture-repair-cambridge.co.uk

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