

Born again

Restore that worn piece – but get it done professionally, reports **Paul Edwards**.

HERE'S some advice for enthusiastic amateurs planning to restore a much-loved, much-used piece of furniture – do not attempt it yourself. Restorers say much of their work comes from people who tackle projects above their level of competence.

Not that good restorers are short of work. The economic crunch means that more homemakers are looking to restore what they have, rather than spending on replacement furnishings. And, while the retail arm of the antiques trade has suffered in the past few years, the interest in restoring fine furniture is undiminished.

George Karadimitrios, head of Antique Restorations, says it makes economic sense to spend on restoring something good, rather than spending a lot on something that won't last more than a decade.

"In today's throwaway society, damaged furniture is often thrown out and replaced. The repercussions to the environment are enormous. By having furniture restored you will be doing your bit for the environment," he says. "By reusing, recycling, repairing and restoring, we can help reduce landfill waste, reduce carbon emissions, save trees, minimise global warming and climate change.

"If your furniture — antique or otherwise — is damaged or just needs a facelift with some new polish or a change of upholstery, don't throw it

out — [first] call a restorer."

Mr Karadimitrios' favourite antique styles come from the Georgian period (1714-1830) and the Regency era (1811-1830). "Furniture during these periods was well made, and some Edwardian furniture (1901-1910) was influenced by the Georgian period, so this is also to my taste. Art deco has nice clean lines that work well with period and modern homes, but I find the latter part of the Victorian period too busy and a little ostentatious."

LONG LIFE

A good restoration lasts decades. George Karadimitrios wax-finishes most pieces to help protect the surface and tone down the high sheen that is naturally present on a French-polished finish. This makes the item less likely to mark and also makes it look much-loved, well-maintained and well-used.

■ Most modern furniture is finished with nitrocellulose lacquer and should be wiped with a slightly damp cloth. Avoid using products that may contain silicone.

■ Antiques finished with shellac (French-polished) should be waxed twice a year. Wipe off dust with a slightly damp cloth.

■ Avoid putting heated objects, such as hot plates, casseroles and pizza boxes, on any furniture. They leave heat marks.

■ Water trapped underneath a vase will leave marks, and alcohol can damage a surface unless wiped immediately.



George Karadimitrios with the Lord Mayor's throne he restored.



MODERN MAKEOVERS

Is it worth restoring modern furniture? Only the good stuff, says George Karadimitrios.

"A customer bought a row of cinema seats from a Geelong theatre that closed. They wanted to restore them for the waiting room in their Sydney head office. The metal work was cleaned, the old paint was removed and repainted, and the timber was repolished. The fabric chosen was a rich red velvet from Warwick fabrics."

Many 20th-century pieces that, technically, are not antiques, can be worth restoring. "People are realising (some) furniture from the first three quarters of the last century is well made, especially when compared to today's mass-produced (pieces)."

Before and after: The sofa of a three-piece suite that cost about \$7000 to restore in Italian leather.



TRICKS OF THE TRADE

1 DO NOT even think of messing about with a valuable piece of furniture. George Karadimitrios recounts being given a chair, which had been repainted white, to strip and repolish. It appeared to be a Queen Anne reproduction. Removing the thick, modern paint revealed the chair as the genuine article – circa 1700. Problem was, the original chinoiserie finish had been painted over – a beautiful, valuable chair had been ruined.

2 DO NOT use commercial glue to fix a chair. It won't work, and removing the glue adds to the cost of having it professionally restored.

3 DO NOT use an electric sander to strip furniture. The sander will leave orbital marks and also destroy the valuable patina that has evolved over decades.

4 DO NOT try to fix a wobbly chair by putting a nail through the joints. Instead, dismantle the chair, clean out the old glue from the joint, apply fresh glue and

re-clip it. That nail will loosen quickly, damaging the wood in the process.

5 DO NOT use non-reversible modern glues — pearl/hide glue is the correct glue to use, applied hot from a double boiler.

CONTACTS
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Right: Re-covered George III wheel-back chair designed by George Hepplewhite.

PICTURES:
GERRY
ANGELOS

