

Restoring furniture offers many rewards

The craftsmanship of fine, old furniture and the rich glow of aged wood are things that can't be reproduced today. But this doesn't have to be a problem for people who want to fill their homes with beautiful furniture.

Homer Formby, nationally known expert on wood care and refinishing, says that, with just a little patience and effort, older furniture can be restored to its original beauty.

"More and more people today are rediscovering the pleasure that comes from working with your hands," Formby says. "Refinishing wood gives you that feeling of accomplishment — and, as a bonus, a piece of furniture that you'll use for years to come."

"When friends compliment you on your 'new' dining room table, you can tell them, 'I did that myself.' Now that's a proud feeling."

One of the most common problems with an old piece is a darkened, ugly finish. "This is called ambering, and it's caused by years of exposure to light," Formby says.

"Don't let that discourage you — it's the finish, not the wood, that's discolored. Modern technology has made it quicker and easier to remove that old finish."

Formby points out that, often, old furniture may be covered by a build up of pollution, and a thorough cleaning may be all that's required to restore the appearance.

To determine if a cleaning will suffice, Formby recommends rubbing the dirtiest spot on the piece with furniture cleaner (not polish) on a cotton cloth.

Try several applications, letting furniture cleaner dry between applications. If you can clean this dirty spot to your satisfaction, and the wood grain turns out clear, don't bother refinishing the piece. However, if the finish is badly marred or "alligatored" from use, you probably need to refinish.

In the past, refinishing furniture involved stripping and sanding. However, according to Formby, stripping old furniture takes away the wood's patina (the beautiful glow brought out with age) and may loosen joints.

"Modern furniture refinishers have taken most of the work out of refinishing, as well as doing away with the mess involved with stripping," he says.

Formby points out that furniture refinishers remove varnish, lacquer and shellac. A piece covered with paint or a synthetic resin calls for a paint remover.

To tell which product to use, moisten a cotton ball with nail polish remover, and touch an inconspicuous area of the finish that is still glossy.

If the cotton ball sticks, the finish is varnish, lacquer or shellac, and a refinisher is needed. If the cotton ball does not stick, use paint remover.

To use paint remover, apply it with a brush in six-inch strokes. (Note: brush in one direction only, to maximize effectiveness.)

Wait until the bubbling action stops, then lift off the old paint with a wide putty knife. Don't scrape or gouge, and repeat as needed.

Furniture refinisher can be applied with 0000 steel wool. Work on small areas (about the size of a dinner plate), overlap-

ping the areas until you're through.

Then, to remove swirls and streaks, rub fresh refinisher with steel wool from one end of the piece to the other, going with the wood grain.

Wipe the piece immediately with a clean cotton cloth and let it dry at least 30 minutes. Then buff the surface well — not hard — with dry steel wool.

"An old paintbrush trimmed to a stubby length will help work the refinisher out of carved and fluted trims," Formby says.

Once you've exposed the wood, you may want to stain it to change the color. Whether or not you stain the wood, your final step should be to apply a finish to protect the wood.

Formby says, "Be certain the finish you choose contains tung oil. It's the oldest and best preservative in the world."

Formby encourages people with questions on wood care, refinishing, staining, or other wood projects to write him at P.O. Box 667P, Olive Branch, MS 38654. (Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.)



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Use accessories for "quick change" artistry

Picture a room that's totally beige...carpet, wall and sofas. Then imagine a tall black urn in the corner and striking ebony accents scattered about.

Quick change!

That same room is now abloom with accessories in romantic pastels. A peach tone vase sits on one table. Dramatically grouped on another is a bevy of bowls boasting silk pastel bouquets.

With just a little bit of imagination, you can visualize the very different sense of each room, created by the presence of accessories and the effect of their colorways.

The first and lasting impression of a room is most often its color. One tends to recall an oasis of calm after leaving a roomscape of neutral tones. A cheerful yellow room will be remembered as bathed in sunlight.

A few striking accessories or dramatic groupings will transform the color scheme or mood of a room more easily and inexpensively than any other category of furnishing, and you can feel up-to-date without having a major investment.

Start with your basics. Then build and change with accessory accents. Actually that is the secret of the best dressed women, as well as professional designers.

The formula for accessory decorating is easy.

1. Determine your color choice or choices.
2. Decide whether you want striking contrasts or a monochromatic feeling.
3. Then, let your personal taste guide your choice.

In addition to bringing a fresh look into your rooms, let your accessories reflect your interests or personality.

Be a "quick change artist" in your home by taking advantage of the wonderful selection of decorative accessories available to you in furniture stores.

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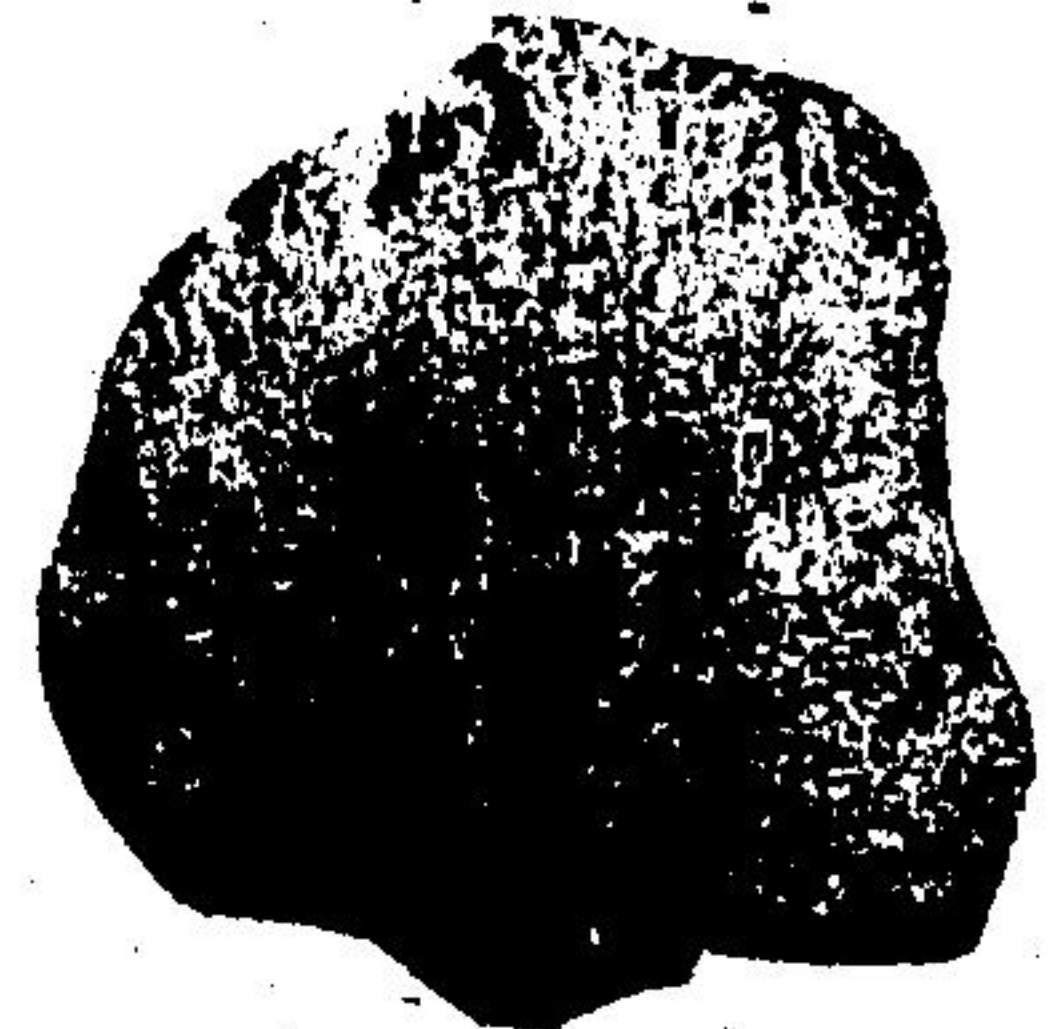
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