

Reprinted from the Bloomington *Herald-Times*, Thursday, April 21, 2005

The Herald-Times HOMESTYLE PROFILE:



Above: Tim touches up the finish on a scuffed maple bedpost

Photos by Carrol Krause

Don't Despair! Spot repairs can restore cherished antiques

By Carrol Krause – *Herald-Times Homestyle*

Anyone who has watched “Antiques Roadshow” knows that you should try to preserve the finish on a piece of old furniture and not refinish. But when that piece is scarred or scuffed, it’s another thing altogether to restore its looks with a spot finish repair.

“The nice thing about this is that it’s all reversible,” said Tim Puro of Monroe Furniture Restoration as he worked recently on a maple bed rail at Blue Moon Consignment.

Tim was working on a surface gash, but he’s equally at home repairing burns, gouges, chips, water rings, or the place where the new puppy chewed the table leg down to a nub.

“There is no such thing as an invisible repair,” he said firmly. “The goal of this repair is to pass the ‘six-foot, six-inch’ rule. That means it’s not visible when standing six feet

away, and it's only apparent at six inches to someone who doesn't know it's there. Hopefully, by the time I'm done, you will be able to say, 'that was worked on, but where? – Oh, there!'"

Tim's family was involved in collecting antiques, as was his neighbor. "I grew up thinking everyone refinished a piece or two of furniture each year," he laughed.

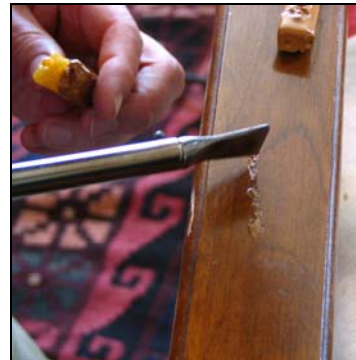
Tim took classes at the Marc Adams School of Woodworking in Franklin from a visiting master spot-finisher from Minnesota, Mitch Kohanek. After being "absolutely enthralled" by what he learned, Tim practiced spot finishing for several years until he eventually ended up as the instructor's assistant during class.

Before starting to work on the gouged bed rail, Tim readied his capacious "doctor's bag" filled with pigments, shellacs, solvents, glues, brushes, and lacquer burn-in sticks.

Then he made sure the scar was deep enough to hold the repair by scoring it quickly with the point of his pocket knife. (*Remember, this is all reversible!*) Then he took out his colored burn-in sticks and studied them carefully to see which ones should be mixed together to approximate the color of the existing finish. Then he plugged in his hot-knife, which instantly melted the tips of the burn-in sticks, mingling their colors together.

He applied the melted material to the gouge using the tip of the hot knife. Then he applied burn-in balm to the area around the damaged rail to prevent the heat from scorching the finish, and then leveled the repair smooth with his hot knife. "I was pleased to see that this piece was an Ethan Allen," he remarked as he worked, "because they use finishes that can be easily repaired. This furniture was meant to repair, not to be thrown out."

Then he sanded the area smooth with a fine sandpaper (600 grit) moistened with Murphy's Oil Soap and water. Then he adjusted the color of the repair using powdered pigments and lacquer, and went once more over the entire area with a padding lacquer (a combination of lacquer, shellac and solvents) until the sheen matched the original.



Above: The maple bed rail "before", with gouges; **middle:** A hot knife is used for filling deep gouges with pigmented melted lacquer; **bottom:** The maple bed rail "after" the repair. Photos by Carrol Krause

“I was told when I took the training,” he said, “‘always do the best you can; perfectionists need not apply.’ You want as good a job as possible, but to get it perfect IS impossible. This repair may look perfect in this light, but it may be glaringly apparent if I look at it in a different way. But usually, ‘good-enough’ IS good enough.”

From one side, the repair was completely invisible. From the other side, it was faintly visible if the observer already knew where to look.

The owner of Blue Moon, Fagan Baldwin, came over to see how Tim was doing with the bedrail.

“Oh, my!” she exclaimed, peering at the rail to ascertain where the repair was. “That’s amazing! It’s absolutely what I’d hoped it would be.”

Because of his background and training, Tim can detect almost as many facts about a given piece of furniture as Sherlock Holmes could. Looking carefully at an antique desk at Blue Moon, he immediately identified it as having most likely been made circa 1900, an example of the Colonial Revival style, using mahogany for the front and top and pine for the insides of the drawers.

“The finish has been padded-out before I came along,” he continued. “It’s above average quality, and the dovetails are hand cut. I can tell the finish is lacquer by the way it crackles along straight lines. And it probably originally had a piece of glass on top, because the top looks better than the sides.”

The hardware on the front of the drawers had worked loose until they dangled from one side, wearing circular grooves into the mahogany. But that was no problem for Tim, who likes this sort of challenge.

“I enjoy it, or I wouldn’t be doing it,” he pointed out. “I work in a bank all day, and I meet with people, I spend a lot of time on the phone, and write letters. It’s satisfying in one way, while furniture repair is satisfying in another way.”



Tim went on to erase a “cottoning” problem on another desktop, an example of where the gun cotton in a lacquer finish had come out of solution, casting a furry-looking white scar over the surface. A steady wiping of one of his magic unguents erased the problem, along with a pair of water rings.

“As long as people have children or pets,” Tim summed up, “they’ll have damage, and I’ll always have work.”

But it’s good to know that much of that damage can be erased. “Antiques Road Show,” here we come!



Tim was able to mend this table leg where a puppy named “Duke” gnawed on it. Photos courtesy of Tim Puro

For more information on spot finishing, contact Tim Puro of Monroe Furniture Restoration at 812-333-0779 or tpuro@insightbb.com or www.furniturerestore.net.

Reprinted with permission from the Bloomington Indiana Herald-Times