

Insight

French polishing

Peter Sefton's students learn the art of French polishing

Most of the work undertaken in the Furniture School is newly-designed and is constructed contemporary furniture, but for a few Saturdays each year the workshop is dedicated to furniture restoration. It is a great thing to be able to see the contrast of our new furniture against the old pieces and antiques.

Courses

The short course students bring their own pieces in from home or fresh from auction houses. We have practice panels for students to work on, but tackling a moulded and fully-functioning piece of furniture is much more demanding and ultimately a very satisfying project.

My long-term friend and commercial French polisher, Bob Jones, teaches our specialist French polishing course, and has many decades of experience. Bob would usually undertake the finishing work that passed through my commercial workshops, whether it had a traditional French polish or a sprayed lacquer finish and I have known him almost 30 years.

When our courses run, we set up the workshop with covers over the usually clean workbenches, ready for the messy job of stripping, sanding and cleaning up the old furniture. This preparation work is usually completed on the first of the two Saturdays, leaving the next class for the cleaner refinishing work. The second Saturday of the course is a combination of grain filling, staining and colouring up before starting the French polishing process. Bob does a great job discussing the options available and the best materials for the job; it's a large subject area and



Top: The underside of the Pembroke table in the process of being stripped
Above: Cleaning up with abranet, prior to polishing

so it's backed up with course notes and handouts covering the key points and materials. But this is very much a practical hands-on course with Bob demonstrating each step of the way and pointing out the different processes used on each student's project, from the range of pieces they have brought in themselves.

The transformation that occurs over the two days is amazing from the very tired but interesting pieces the students have bought in from home, to the newly loved items that return again refreshed and with a new lease of life. ■

Peter Sefton

Peter Sefton is a well-known furniture maker who runs courses in fine woodworking, teaching and mentoring students at the Peter Sefton Furniture School. He also owns Wood Workers Workshop and he is a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers.
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Bob demonstrating the stripping process