

Which is which?



This beautiful boule desk was refitted with a reproduction 22ct gold embossed leather insert

When doing reproductions, the aim is usually to reproduce in such a way that it is impossible to tell the reproduction from the original. This starts with the choice of timber. Both the type of timber and its grain character needs to be the same.

The construction methods of the original should be replicated, and this requires a thorough understanding and implementation of traditional cabinetmaking techniques. One should not consider deviating from original construction methods, even if the application of the technique will not be visible, e.g. secret mitred dovetails.

Replicating an original can even mean using the same types of tools on the reproduction as would have been used on the original. A collection of antique hand tools is always a considerable advantage. Mastercraftsmen all say that the old tools are examples of fine craftsmanship in themselves, and usually of far better quality than their modern day equivalents.

Care must be taken to ensure the reproduction is finished in the same way as the original. For instance, if the back of an original cabinet is hand planed and then left alone as completed, the reproduction must also be done this way.

Attention to fine detail is every bit as important as the major construction methods. Handles, hinges, 22ct gold tooling patterns, inlays, mouldings and turnings all need to be faithfully replicated. If the original has solid brass cast handles, then so too must the reproduction. Since the original has traditional cabinetmaking screws, the reproduction should have them also. This can mean importing from

other countries when the items are unavailable in Australia. Alternatively, it could mean engaging a blacksmith or engineer if the fittings are unavailable worldwide. Only a glazing specialist can replicate original shaped and 'poured' glass.

Associated crafts of upholstery and woodcarving should also attend to authentic replication of the original, considering both materials used and methods. The carver must carve not in his own personal style, but in the manner of the original carver.

Traditional cabinetmakers and upholsterers who have been operating for a long time will have a secret stash of old fittings and materials that they may store for decades. In itself, each item is worth very little. However, the value they can potentially add to an item of furniture makes them literally irreplaceable.

The French polishing should be authentically reproduced using hand applied and hand finished pure shellac. Modern cheaper finishes can look incredibly similar to traditional shellac, however they lower the value of the end item, and have not stood the test of time. Patina in a brand new reproduction requires a good blending of common sense and artistic licence to create believable signs of wear and usage.

If all the above are considered and implemented, then this extreme doctrine can add value to single reproduction items or even to sets or suites, such as a set of chairs. A set of seven original chairs is worth more as a set of eight chairs that includes one reproduction chair.

If someone who commissions a reproduction is after the general style of the antique, but is not necessarily concerned about strict adherence to



Hand bevelling in these Gothic arched, mahogany barred doors provides a striking feature for this impressive custom-designed reproduction George III bookcase



Reproduction of fleur-de-lys leather embossing for these beautiful antique French chairs enables faithful reproduction of the original traditional upholstery



The originals, as well as the two reproduction Harvey Bros chairs were all traditionally re-upholstered. It became an unwinnable party game for dinner guests to pick the two reproduction chairs

the extreme doctrine outlined in this article, there is room for much compromise, and even the possibility of improvements to design and construction, for their specific purpose. A mastercraftsman will provide a full range of options to the client and inform them fully so they understand the implications of their decisions on usability, value and longevity.

In reproductions, (and indeed in restoration work), 'anything is possible', if you can engage a mastercraftsman with the knowledge and the materials, as well as the networks of those in

associated trades. Lately, this is getting more and more difficult, as those great craftsmen slowly retire from this industry. Those they trained are constantly tempted into higher paying, though lower skilled building industry trades.

Only those who take pride in their work remain. Their motivation is the respect of the old craftsmen of yesterday, the genuine desire to conserve furniture from our past, and the satisfaction of having their accomplishments last for centuries ■

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Reproduction of this original dining chair as a generously proportioned carver completes this 12-chair dining suite



Apart from the colour of the velvet, it is impossible to pick the original chair from its two originals