

One Working Day

... as observed by **Roger Wates**, Director at furnishing and restoration company E & A Wates

The day begins with the old enemy... woodworm. At 6.15am, in conversation with Terry our cabinet maker we conclude that woodworm damage to three tacking rails (the framework which comprises the seat) within a set of six mahogany Georgian dining chairs has weakened the strength of the timber so much that it is beyond treatment. Imagine the interior of a Crunchy bar with the addition of white powder cascading to the floor and you will know why we decided to replace them with solid beech. If the damage had been more superficial then after treating the woodworm, an application of Terry's special concoction, a mixture of glue and sawdust, would provide sufficient resurfacing to enable us to tack new webbing straps to the seat without splitting the brittle timber.

This early walk around the workshop before most craftsmen arrive is a chance to look at the progress on each bench, assess how near the furniture is to completion and plan for deliveries to clients. In this visit I find that Len has finished all the stuffing and stitching required for a semi-circular sofa which we had gutted and rebuilt the loose frame. Rob had undertaken deep buttoning work to two Ottomans in charcoal-coloured wool felt and Tony our French polisher (although he's not actually French...the description relates to a polishing process practised in Paris from around 1815) had completed work on a bow-fronted four-drawer George III chest.

Great... that will be a useful balance to collect! If you want to start collecting antiques then these chests are one of the best investments you can make.

Now I've opened up the showroom and check the message pad... astonishing, a client who we thought had accepted an estimate in 2008 but never progressed the order and for whom we had stored furniture for ten years, had contacted us out of the blue to accept the restoration of his twin pedestal desk and drinks cupboard. Then a message that a client was chasing her curtain and wallpaper order, a major embassy had some new work for us at the ambassador's residence, and a hotel in Sloane Square wanted us to do a trial bedroom scheme. Three other enquiries also needed a response. In our Fabric department I noticed three-metre sample lengths of fabric had arrived from Colefax & Fowler for display purposes on our stand at the forthcoming Decorative Fair at Battersea Park (it is on three times a year and this fantastic fair is the only place where the antiques world and Interior Design actually meet). Additionally, a long overdue order for fabric for a client in Wimbledon had at last arrived. For this client we had already restored their rocking horse and garden swing!

Next, to my desk and we're pushing 7am. Eleven new emails since I left at 7 the previous night... a cup of tea to start the day and then straight into them. A client wanted to know



what her metal chair looked like after shot-blasting, another saying how pleased they were after covering their William IV sofa and a third who sent her beekeeping newsletter (a most amusing read), two emails from a luxury menswear clothing company one sent at 1am requesting a roll of velvet that same day to decorate their Christmas window in Sloane Street. It needed to be the same fabric to match the curtains we had supplied to their new Regent Street store. This was a problem as our supplier is in Scotland and would not be able to deliver that same afternoon. I would need to find an alternative supplier with peacock blue velvet in stock and within reach of London (we finally found some Sanderson fabric that fitted the bill and taxied it down from Milton Keynes at the cost of £70). The second email was chasing delivery for work we were undertaking for their stores in Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Dubai. All were planned for this week but dates were being brought forward. Felt mildly sick at the prospect of not achieving this! Oh and by the way, they loved the four-

fold screen that we had made for their Covent Garden Store... phew! Then a couple of LinkedIn emails not related to the business that proved a bit of a distraction. Two friends parading their details of new skills they had acquired. I bet they weren't at work already. Lastly, like so many enquiries we receive, an attachment showing a number of images of damaged furniture. These showed a badly split leather suite after years of use in a property let. The owners actually wanted it patched up, favouring durability over aesthetics. Sadly we declined this offer.

Next I perused my appointment diary to see that I had three commitments that morning: seeing a client who was opening a store in Webbs Road SW11 who needed oak display cabinets restored in order to display jewellery. They also required new upholstery work for bespoke steel chairs that they had made

and the reupholstery of a Victorian chaise. A second appointment was for a client who had bought G Plan chairs from us 30 years ago and they need repairing. Apparently one chair had collapsed during a dinner party! These dinner party accidents actually happen quite often and whilst often hilarious at the time can leave a few problems. Once a beautiful, elegantly carved Chippendale chair snapped where the back leg meets the seat. We wanted to keep the amazing original carving so we carefully cut the leg in half lengthways and spliced it onto a new leg that we had made from old mahogany! We all relish the challenges that confront us in our work and enjoy creating feasible solutions. For the G Plan customer we also needed to measure for curtains for the lounge bay window. My third was a local call to view a 17th century wing chair for reupholstery and a George I (1725-

ish) walnut secrétaire with damaged veneer and brass stays on the fall (the flap that opens forward to reveal the interior). Now this I wanted to see – really exciting work and a privilege to have been recommended to them.

I left the store and really enjoyed meeting these clients, viewed some lovely furniture and was excited at the variety of the potential work. Not only that but today all parking metres, red lines and traffic wardens had been successfully outwitted. I recall many impossible parking scenarios and once I left a client in the early evening to find my car in mid-air suspended from a grabber truck and about to be pounded. The client joined with me in remonstrating and after a hasty plastic transaction my car was finally liberated! It is so hard to predict the length of a visit.

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The curtain client wanted to update their scheme and wondered what the current trends were. I advised that people are moving away from cream coloured neutrals and that stronger colours and patterns are again popular. Grey is the new cream and they loved some of our washable brushed cotton and linen ranges for their sofa. We also agreed on a rather smart padded pelmet board for their bay window in a co-ordinate to complement their curtains. They also wanted advice about headboard styles and how we could make bedroom curtains blackout as the husband was struggling to stay asleep in the summer and getting rather fractious! We proposed a blackout roller blind with a small fascia strip to sit behind the curtains.

After a rushed lunch at my desk I was back in our showroom where

we have four floors of new furniture and introduced by Lorraine and Karen, our reception team, to some customers who were selecting a sofa and were reluctant to buy on line. They wanted to discuss the construction of the frame, sit on the cushions and select their own choice of fabric from our fabric library. We narrowed down our huge range of 1500 books to a choice of just three textured plains. Not bad work for half an hour and also with the prospect of a carpet sale for their stairs! We discussed the collapse of Dwell, the contemporary furniture chain with one of their shops in Balham and whether the John Lewis Partnership were a threat to us. Of course they are I said but we try and provide an all-round service that includes interior design, soft furnishings, furniture restoration and personal attention but I think

they already knew that!

Finally, I planned an assault on some paperwork, several estimates to produce with a detailed specification and costing, some research required on the Georgian secrétaire about appropriate drawer handles, some invoices to swallow and another string of emails to read. Before I knew it the time was 7pm again and there was far more outstanding than at the start of the day...bit of a trend there. Just got to the car in time to listen to the Archers on my way home although I turned the sound down when the theme tune was playing at the traffic lights! Oh well, I'm out of the closet now!

Do come and see us at:
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