

Oriental treasures or flea market finds

Restoration of Chinese antiques is fast becoming a specialty for Acacia Furniture because the opportunity to learn the art is so limited to the U.S. craftsman.

By Loraine McCallie
staff writer

Tim Korzan, who once designed and built custom-made furniture exclusively, and Dave Rybicki, one-time owner of Franklin Country Workshop, teamed up about a year ago to form what has

become one of the most prestigious refinishing and restoring companies of antique furnishings in the Midwest. Korzan points to an altar table that may have been made by a Chinese court-appointed craftsman several centuries ago, or an ornate Oriental vase stand and remarks casually, "Pretty el-

list stuff."

The two, who are craftsmen and artisans in their own right, hold sway over Acacia Furniture, a combination office, manufacturing plant and refurbishing workshop at 24770 Crestview in Farmington Hills.

While Rybicki might spend several hundred hours casting molds to restore the bas relief on an \$150,000 ancient Chinese screen, he says he gives as much care to a three-drawer maple chest a client may have picked up for \$50 in a flea market.

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"There are no schools that teach it, no books on the subject to speak of," Rybicki said.

"I have read everything that's available, and it wasn't much.

"You just learn by doing, and I was lucky enough to get a chance to learn." That chance came from a collector of Oriental pieces. His skills have expanded to duplicating the intricacies of Chinese brush work and figuring out the mitering of a circular table top he called his "Japanese puzzle."

"Basic craftsmanship runs across the board," Korzan said. "What we have here is all good craftsmanship or it wouldn't have withstood hundreds of years of wear.

"Most of us (in the trade) are familiar with the European work. But some of the pieces we've gotten here, I swear, must have come from the Forbidden City."

AN INCREDIBLE amount of research is put into minute details to restore pieces that come to Acacia in what Korzan called "incredible, dreadful condition."

The two have become adept at spotting almost immediately a piece that has been "gypsyed together."

They use the term to describe a piece of furniture that has been restored with another kind of wood used to replace the damaged original. The gypsyed piece then is finished with lacquer or

paint to make it appear the same as the original.

To correct that, they "canabalize."

This means they take rare woods from pieces that cannot be restored and save them to use when that kind of wood is needed to make a piece or part for another item that can be salvaged.

"Whether it's inlaid metals, mother

of pearl, marble or rare woods, we have a source for them all," Rybicki said.

As for waxes and paints, the two have literally hundreds of formulas, some of which they've devised themselves.

The final results have in many cases been unusual and produced rare show pieces of museum quality.

come by for no other reason than that what they are doing is so unusual.

"We supervise constantly and continuously," Korzan said. "After all, we're working on some one's very prize and very special piece, and most likely a very rare piece."

In another section of Acacia Furniture, craftsmen work on custom-designed pieces, a portion of the business

HELP FOR the partners is hard to

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Tim Korzan works on an Oriental base stand, at left, that will be refitted with a marble top. It was probably used in mid-19th century China, even though its ball and claw feet are of European influence. Chinese chair is waiting for its next application of wax, although it probably has about 100 already on it. Rosewood table in front, once a Chinese altar table, will be steel woolled rather than stripped so it will retain its patina.

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