

Building Scene

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special writer

Furniture that is raunchy or ragged may find second life in your new home. No matter that it's chipped, wobbly, dented or even missing a portion.

You can infuse that table, chair or chest of drawers with new life and a new look.

Veteran shoppers of flea markets and junkies know this. So do those familiar with estate sales, garage sales and Goodwill or Salvation Army stores. You can save hundreds of dollars and end up with one-of-a-kind collector's items.

Newcomers to the world of restorable furniture can test the waters by devoting just one day to combing the local resources. Don't go into antique stores where furniture is apt to be pricey.

Check your newspaper's classified section and the telephone directory for resources. Then hit the garage sales in the wee hours, as the pros do. From there, move in to the shops and thrift stores with an open mind and imaginative eye.

That peeling credenza may only need a new or old marble top. Replace the pedestal on an occasional table with columns, statuary or a narrow bookshelf.

This route is not without pitfalls. Nor is it without work.

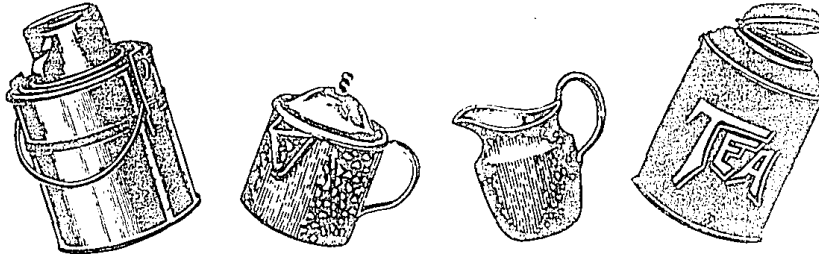
Stand back. First ask yourself if your find is a generally attractive piece of furniture. Visualize it in your room.

Scrutinize the finish and check the joints. Is it solid? Does it need regluing? Does it have a natural finish or has it been painted?

SOMETIMES SECONDHAND furnishings can be infested with termites or roaches. Be prepared to put the piece in a closed room with a pesticide fogger if necessary.

Last, determine whether you have

Furnishing the new with the old



the place and patience to do the restoration yourself or if it is a task best left to a professional.

You will most certainly want to consult with your hardware and paint store about the most suitable products for your specific project. And, unless you are a seasoned refinisher, you may want to invest in a how-to book before beginning.

"The Weekend Finisher," the latest restoration book from Bruce Johnson (Ballantine), is excellent, as is "The Illustrated Handbook of Furniture Restoration" by George Buchanan (Harper & Row).

Look for refinishing tips in magazines such as Country Living and Fine Wood Working.

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Removing paint and varnish is probably the toughest task in bring-

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ing around used furniture. Wood absorbs paint, and a solid color will be labor-intensive to remove.

But the effort is not without tips and tricks, and there are excellent products to help you out. 3M has a new line of refinishing products, including Safest Stripper and Hand Erase Sander.

ONE OF THE most established wood finisher manufacturers, Homer Formby, recommends against all-purpose strippers that can take out the patina and raise wood grain. Formby prefers furniture refinisher for dissolving varnish, lacquer

and shellac and paint remover for polyurethane and paint.

Colonial antiques originally may have been painted with compounds made of egg and milk. These require a special paint remover called PDE.

Paint removers work best between 65 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit. Working in moderate temperatures in a well-ventilated area and in small sections at a time will help ensure your success.

Don't stroke the paint remover back and forth over the furniture. This might fan the gases and cut down on product effectiveness. Just drag the remover-filled paintbrush a

short distance. Stop, refill the brush and make another small stroke.

After the bubbling action stops, use a plastic, not metal, scraper to remove one layer of paint at a time. Some handy types develop enough expertise that they are able to arrest paint removing at a certain layer if it one they would like to preserve.

Toothpicks and string soaked in paint remover are excellent tools for removing softened paint from crevices, corner and seams. Use an aerosol paint remover to get into especially tight areas.

TO REMOVE DIRT, grease, oil and loose particles, rub the surface with a lint-free cloth dampened with mineral spirits, paint thinner or liquid sander. Tighten screws, reglue and add more nails, if necessary.

Wood patch compounds have evolved along with paint remover, and the synthetic latex wood patches are easy to water first to prevent the wood from absorbing too much of the patch moisture.

Press the patching material tightly into the hole, leaving it slightly higher than the surrounding areas. After it is dry, sand it down with medium-grade sandpaper attached to a sanding block. If you have trouble matching the patch with a stained surface, mix wood stain with the patching compound.

Wood fill, differing from patch, is designed for filling open-grained hardwoods like oak, mahogany and walnut. Scratches can be masked by rubbing the flaw with a wet tea bag, shoe polish or wax stick. If you're trying to achieve a country look, you may want to leave surface blemishes and minor scratches.

Clean the surface again before proceeding with staining and varnish or paint. Choose a paint suitable for your project and its location. Outdoor furniture requires special preparation and an exterior or marine varnish such as Varathane that will resist moisture.

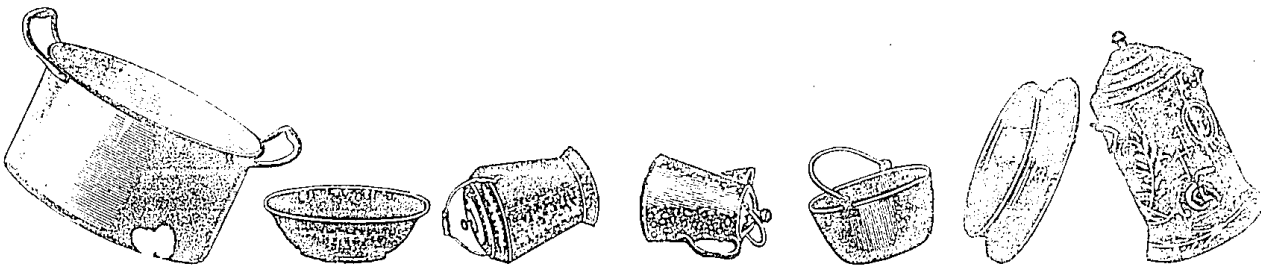
Nimble-fingered do-it-yourselfers will find broad possibilities in stenciling and faux finishes. While not effortless, the techniques are certainly getting easier.

ACHIEVABLE EFFECTS range from subtly stained unfinished wood to more elaborate marbling or stenciled motifs on painted wood. A good guide to faux finishes is Joesta Innes' book, "Paint Magic" (Panttheon).

The quaintness of Early American furniture can be achieved by using a contemporary milk paint product. After the first coat is dry, rub it gently with steel wool to knock off wood whiskers that result when moisture raises the grain.

To seal the fresh milk paint surface, use a clean penetrating oil finish. Apply two coats, rubbing each one thoroughly.

Finally, comb a well-provisioned hardware store or antique stores for unusual hardware. Unique pulls, knobs and feet can lend a final pizzazz to your restoration.



2nd-hand roses need care before blooming

(AP) — Coleen Johnston has furnished at least three houses with garage sale and flea market finds. Her finest hour was when she picked up a wicker sofa and matching chair for \$3.

"They were sitting in a driveway and people were passing them by," she said. "I looked at them and thought, 'How soon can I get them to my car?'"

She cautions that not all forays are so fruitful, and nearly every secondhand purchase — including the wicker — needs some work.

"A lot of the furniture at garage sales, flea markets and auctions is truly junk, but if you're patient you'll find something," said Johnston, whose new book, "Garage Sale Decorator," tells how to redo and decorate with castoff furniture.

THE Zumbrota, Minn., resident is a veteran of garage sales in the Midwest, Southwest and upstate New York. Chairs are the most plentiful, she said.

"Often, they are dirty and you may not like the fabric," she said, but that's no reason to reject them.

"Sit down to see if the chair is comfortable. This will give you an idea of the condition of the springs."

If springs need retying or the chair is wobbly, move on. You don't need the headache. But if it is sturdy and you like the style, consider recovering it.

"ALMOST ANYONE can upholster something if they have a staple gun," Johnston said. But she advises buying inexpensive fabrics for a first try.

If you're in the market for wood side chairs, remember that the most likely damage is a missing stretcher or side piece.

A lumber yard will cut stretchers to fit, or you can buy hardwood dowels and have them cut to fit. You'll have to whittle the ends of the stretcher to fit it into the leg.

REFINISHING IS easy, Johnston said, and glue can work wonders on loose joints. Easy it may be, but refinishing chairs is tedious because they have so many surfaces and so much detail.

"You can do a dining room table in less time than one chair," said Betty Dixon, supervisor of the telephone hot line for Formby's refinishing products.

After the \$3 outlay for the wicker set, Johnston spent several hours and another \$50 or so restoring it.

She fixed the sofa's sagging seat by pulling taut the bamboo strapping that had come loose and retying it with cane she had on hand. She also re-tacked the seat to the frame.

Working outdoors, she spray painted the blue pieces white — it took 15 cans of paint — and fitted the sofa with foam cushions picked up for 25 cents each and then slipcovered with six yards of remnant fabric that cost approximately \$20.

"Buying (wood) furniture that is covered with paint is the biggest gamble," Johnston said, "because you don't know what is underneath."

As an example, many pieces with a very red mahogany look are actually maple stained to look like mahogany, she said.

A RESTORING tip from Dixon: Use a hypodermic needle to apply glue to furniture joints.

Make a solution of nine parts white glue and one part water. Fill a hypodermic syringe with the solution and insert the needle in the loose joint. Fill the joint with the glue and clamp it for 14 hours, protecting the piece with blocks of wood.

If you don't have clamps, cut an old car inner tube in long strips and wrap the rubber around and around, pulling it taut.

Clamping is essential to the repair. Water not only thins the glue, it allows it to penetrate the wood better, Dixon said.

BEFORE REFINISHING an old piece, clean it first to assess the damage. You may find that cleaning, buffing and rewaxing is all that is needed.

If that isn't the case, test the surface to determine whether a wood refinisher (which removes shellac, lacquer or varnish) or paint remover (for polyurethane or paint) is required.

Moisten a cotton ball with nail polish remover or acetone and touch an area of the finish. If the wet cotton damages the finish or sticks to the piece, a refinisher will do the job. If not, you'll need paint remover.

(The Formby hot line is 1-800-367-6297. "Garage Sale Decorator" is published by Betterway Publications, Crozet, Va., \$9.95, paper.)

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