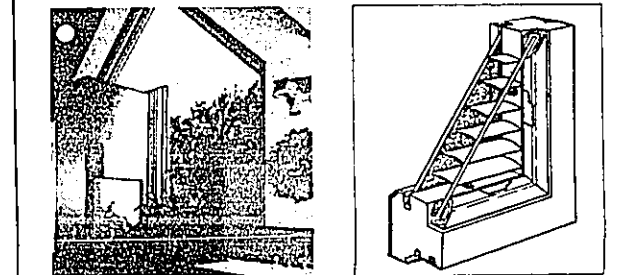


LAURA ASHLEY

"Honeysuckle" blossoms on curtains and on a stripe vinyl wall covering bordered around the door. Companion fabrics are available.

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## Refinishing furniture: labor-intensive but fun

Furniture that is raunchy or ragged may have a second life. 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. Necessity is the mother in invention, and invention is what will set your decor apart.

Inveterate shoppers of flea markets and junktiques 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.

Initiates into the world of restorable furniture can test the waters by diving just one day to combing the local resources. Don't go to 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 up 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 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 and Row).

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

The Tunton Press of Newton, Conn., publishes several videos on furniture repairing. These video workshops separate myth from necessity with step-by-step lessons in reconstruction and refinishing.

Removing paint and varnish is probably the toughest task in bringing 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 ever more 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. He prefers furniture refinisher for dissolving varnish, lacquer and shellac and paint remover for polyurethane and paint.

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