

David Fugge

“The Furniture Man”

Antique Furniture Restoration & Repair

by Nancy Cohen

“Furniture’s been my electrode to unveil who I am to myself.”

David Fugge



The phrase from Shakespeare, “...one man in his time plays many parts...” seems to exemplify David Fugge (affectionately called “The Furniture Man”), who has been restoring antiques for over 30 years. Though his profession falls under the purview of furniture restoration, David’s approach, integrating historic and modern, can involve being, among other things, explorer, artist/craftsman, healer, chemist, historian, and student.

From his workshop in a renovated garage in Durham, David offers antique restoration and conservation, furniture refinishing and repair. Antiques are usually considered 100 years or older. Though he has worked on pieces circa the 1500’s through the present, his specialty and passion remain antiques and heirloom restoration. “Furniture value is still vital, connects generations, and conveys historical education.” Simply consider examples of “Grandpa’s favorite chair” or Lincoln’s White House bedroom.

According to David, basic reasons



people restore are: interesting interior design; a piece has personal meaning; and, repairs generally cost less than buying new furniture, which may not have the character or durability of older, hand-crafted works. Antique pieces house their own unique history. Having personal value and significance to owners, their care is especially important, knowledge David takes to heart and from which he derives inspiration.

David upholds a reverence for furniture and often advocates maintaining marks of antiquity, letting repairs show to convey the life of a piece. His approach is to safeguard the original, believing “Conservation of the past is very important and my finished product should be like a well cared for preserved piece, not a new one.” He relishes the advent of autumn, talking of amber leaves, nostalgia and how “furniture comes alive as people go inside again and reconsider their décor.” Noting furniture is part of every home, yet often taken for granted, he aims to restore not just items, but people’s

appreciation for them and history. He says preserving and learning from our heritage is vital, adding “there would be no museums if you couldn’t fix furniture.”

Meeting customers, particularly those passionate about heirloom preservation, is a favorite aspect of his work. Clients can bring items to his workshop, or, if small and local, he will personally pick them up. For larger objects, he hires a local moving company. David initially views pieces and inquires about client’s expectations. Because “no two pieces are exactly alike as they are changed by exposure, experiences, and owners,” he will look at structural aspects then determine cosmetic approach. He says he can often “feel the furniture,” getting a vibe that, with client’s dictates, helps determine his approach to that piece.

Choosing stains, glues, and laquers depends on the item. Nothing David uses comes solely out of a can without his playing “chemist.” Every project is a new voyage. He says although products have changed to comply with



environmental standards, their quality is still evolving. Because of this, he may tweak products, making original mixes to ensure proper consistency and effect for each piece.

Restorations positively impact environmental sustainability. Fugge’s repairs have saved 1000s of items from landfills. With nearly 80% of furniture now made overseas, often utilizing huge machinery, renovation may help: save energy; diminish costs and effects of manufacturing, packaging, and transport; and, reduce potential health problems from high resins and chemicals.

David’s interest in furniture developed in the 1970’s when his Uncle Alfie, who owned a Hartford County antique restoration shop, asked his mechanically-inclined nephew to help out after school. He was





A statue from India awaits repair.



An antique cradle soon to be restored.

fascinated by the variety of customers, and visits to different locations, which kindled his sense of adventure and novelty. What began as a way to make money and learn skills, sharing time with a beloved friend ("Alfie was an eccentric and I liked that connection"), turned out to be a life-long endeavor of love. He trained by watching and working ("You can't get basics any other way but to do.") and asserts all he learned remains relevant.

Starting his own business in 1976, David has been in Durham for over 20 years. "Home Furniture Repair with David Fugge," was a national best-selling video, and he has appeared in several publications, including Refinishing Magazine. He tells of Alfie making polish in old Hellman's jars, which David later refined and sold under the label New England Village Lemon Polish. (He advises using light polish, not waxing). His hobbies include sculpting, motorcycle riding, surfing, automobile restoration, and painting. On an old victrola, "the ultimate green machine boombox," he occasionally listens to music matching the era of the piece on which he's working.

Regarding qualifications for this work, David offers "I think it's important to have passion for what you do and you need an Uncle Alfie to get you started. Your curiosity

David M. Fugge Furniture Restoration is located at 328 Main Street in Durham, CT, 860.349.1131, www.dmfuggeantiquerestoration.com.



will take it further and find a way. Then, put a lot of time in to get it right." Despite spending most of his life working with furniture, David maintains he is still learning. "No one can know everything there is to know about furniture. The information is so vast it's like talking to the stars."

In essence, David is like the furniture he tends, a "Renaissance Man" rich with his own unique history and spirit. Epitomizing how fulfilling work can enhance well-being, he declares "When I get into the roots of what I do, I'm exactly where I want to be. In the zone, time stops and you're seizing the moment." He enchants visitors with his passion, stories and myriad projects, and adds, "When you're doing what you like, you become free, time is arrested, and it's all about the work and the dreaming."

inspiration

ECO-FILM PICKS

Movies with a Message Worth Watching

As movie-making technology has become less expensive and more accessible, eco-films have exploded onto the scene. While companies like National Geographic and Discovery Channel continue to contribute high-quality nature films, independent eco-filmmakers are also releasing inspired films almost by the day. Because most of these movies run less than 90 minutes, they have become sought-after teaching tools for family movie nights, school classrooms and readers looking for a break from books.

It was a tough call, but after reviewing 50 standouts, *Natural Awakenings* picked five films highly favored for their clear message, entertainment value and motivating call to action.

FOOD, INC.: Producers present the whole enchilada when it comes to understanding what we eat and the implications of our food choices. Beyond a plateful of facts, it's also packed with entertaining graphics. The climax answers the inevitable viewer question: "This is an appalling situation, but what can I do about it?" Attention parents: There is a documentary-style scene showing mistreatment of an ailing cow to fast-forward through; otherwise, the coast is clear. (*FoodIncMovie.com*)

TAPPED: Filmmakers tackle two significant issues facing the modern world: the emerging scarcity of water and the staggering quantity of plastic bottle waste. Images of the Texas-sized floating island of garbage in the middle of the Pacific Ocean will make us think seriously about kicking the bottled water habit for good. (*TappedTheMovie.com*)

A COMMUNITY OF GARDENERS: Anyone taking up the first lady's call to home vegetable gardening will revel in this film's portrayal of the many ways local gardens provide communities with gifts of food, knowledge, empowerment and reconciliation. A *Community of Gardeners* shows that local gardening is so much more than a labor-intensive solution to the ills of the

manufactured-food industry; it is also good for the soul. (*CommunityOfGardeners.com*)

THE END OF THE LINE: Much as the eco-film standard bearer, *An Inconvenient Truth*, sounds the alert on global warming, *The End of the Line* reports on the troubled state of the rapid decline of the fish stocks that feed the world. Similarly, the film highlights how viewers' everyday choices can stop contributing to the problem. (*EndOfTheLine.com*)

FUEL: Civilization's era of crude oil and other fossil fuels is rapidly coming to a close, while the future of energy has yet to be written. The replacement technologies for alternative sustainable energies are already understood, if not widely promoted. Many are ready to be put to work now and await only our adoption. Next-generation technologies also beckon. *Fuel*, a Hollywood-style documentary featuring such environmental spokespersons as Woody Harrelson and Sheryl Crow, proves that the future of energy is as much about imagination and creativity as it is about kilowatt-hours. (*TheFuelFilm.com*)

Contributors include Michael Curran, health writer, and Michael D'Estries, film reviewer.

More Great Films

Black Gold: A Film about Coffee and Trade on the economics of coffee
BlackGoldMovie.com

Blue Gold: World Water Wars on the politics of water
BlueGold-WorldWaterWars.com

Dirt! The Movie on the vital role of healthy soil
DirtTheMovie.org

Dive! on American food waste
DiveTheFilm.com

Everything's Cool on environmentalism in politics
EverythingsCool.org

Flow on the world water crisis
FlowTheFilm.com

Garbage Warrior on truly sustainable housing
GarbageWarrior.com

King Corn on the great American corn diet
KingCorn.net

The Last Beekeeper on the global bee crisis
PlanetGreen.Discovery.com

No Impact Man on implementing sustainable living
NoImpactDoc.com

Ripe for Change on the economics of agriculture
CaliforniaDreamSeries.org/rfc.htm