

# BREAKING THE BARRIER

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## ABSTRACT

This is a short discussion to introduce *Professional Refinishing* magazine and its goal of including in its pages everyone who works on furniture or woodwork of any age or value. What one calls oneself—Museum Conservator, Furniture Refinisher, Dip and Stripper—matters little when it comes to deciding how an object should be treated. It is the nature of the object itself and the desires of the owner that matter most. For example, a 1950s kitchen chair in a conservator's home is not conserved like an eighteenth-century highboy, and an eighteenth-century highboy in a dip-and-stripper's home should not be dipped and stripped. We all wear many hats and we should be communicating more. *Professional Refinishing* offers the best forum for doing this.



**T**hose of us who work on furniture and woodwork go by many names, including conservator, restorer, refinisher, repairer, touch-up person, spot repairer, and probably a few more.

What we call ourselves, however, isn't nearly as important as what we do, and we all do fairly similar things to fairly similar objects. What we call ourselves, in fact, is far less important than the objects we work on.

No matter who's doing the work, a 1780s Chippendale chair should not be treated the same as an inexpensive, 1980s kitchen chair. On the 1980s chair, it's OK to use yellow glue in the joints and polyurethane or catalyzed lacquer for the finish. But it's not OK to use these materials on an original Chippendale chair.

One of the major problems in our trade or profession is that we don't talk to each other. Conservators, who are better educated and trained than most refinishers, understand the difference between the two chairs, but many refinishers don't.

This is not really their fault. Many in the trade are extremely isolated. They rarely talk to each other, and few ever hear of any schools or courses that can instruct them. Most are almost entirely dependent upon their suppliers for information, and their suppliers are most interested in selling stuff.

Things are changing, however. For the first time ever in the United States, there's now a magazine that can explain refinishing ethics, and a lot more. And the best thing about it is that it's a trade magazine that goes free to everyone, so almost everyone is exposed.

*Professional Refinishing* magazine offers a unique opportunity to raise the level of the entire trade. It offers a forum in which we can all talk to each other. We should take advantage of this opportunity.

But as a magazine, we have to serve our readers carefully. We can't seem to be elitist or absolutist or we will lose the audience. The readers of this magazine work on every imaginable type and quality of furniture and woodwork—most of it of very little value.

Those working on the highest-end furniture should respect the work of those working on everyday furniture. And those working on everyday furniture should respect the work of the most skilled restorers and conservators. We are all working on furniture or woodwork, and most of us are pretty good at what we do. We can all learn from each other.

The goal of *Professional Refinishing* is to raise the level of everyone's knowledge, craftsmanship, income, and respect from the larger community. To accomplish this as editor, I have to appeal to the interests of even the most destructive of refinishers—those who use lye baths for stripping and put epoxy glue in joints. I'm not going to win these people over by scorning them.

As editor, therefore, I include articles on stripping, spraying, how to run a business, and in the current issue, for example, articles on the *Antiques Roadshow* and cyanoacrylate glue.

The *Antiques Roadshow* is a hot topic among refinishers because it sends a very misleading, and ultimately destructive, message. (Please read the article and see if you don't agree.) By publishing this article I'm telling these refinishers that *Professional Refinishing* has their interests at heart.

Cyanoacrylate glue is used by a lot of refinishers to reglue furniture. If they're going to use this glue, which I, personally, don't think is the best way to go, then I want them to, at least, understand how it works.

But I also include articles that should push all but the very best craftsmen to improve their knowledge and skills:

- How to do quality repairs.
- The differences in finishes and glues (includ-

ing the limitations of cyanoacrylate glue, which is mentioned in this same article).

- An understanding of furniture and safe working practices.
- When to refinish and when not to.
- Lots on hide glue, as those of you who know me would expect.

Educating the trade is a slow process. I ask for your understanding of the difficulties, and for your support. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity here to impact the survival of all furniture, and to acquaint everyone in the trade with the ethics of conservation, and maybe even into joining AIC. We shouldn't let this opportunity pass us by.

Please don't hesitate to let me know how I'm doing, or even, in an inspired moment, volunteer to contribute to the magazine.