



Gary Olsson hand selecting timber for strength and grain character



Master Turner Lorrie Loe (ex Malloe Turnery, NZ)



Colour matching then French Polishing in pure shellac



Moulding astragal doors



Careful hand stripping to gently remove the old polish



Traditional hand carving



Dovetailing with mallet and chisel

GN OLSSON Mastercraftsmen exhibition

It was with great pleasure and enthusiasm that we took up the offer to exhibit at the prestigious Queensland Antique Dealers Association annual antique fair. We've sponsored the event for years now and it was great to actually exhibit all those time-honoured crafts we employ when creating a commissioned piece. It was a wonderful opportunity to show that these skills are still being practiced today – if you know where to look.

The displays included photo albums of our antique restoration and conservation work, custom fine furniture pieces (including antique reproductions and replicas) and leather embossing and gilding (for leather desk inserts and upholstery applications). They also showed our affiliations with the Australian Antique and Art Dealers Association, Superyacht (Interiors) Associations, and the membership with the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials. Of great popularity was the master craftsman album, so we've included them again in this article.

We also had laminated posters made of published articles from *Antiques & Art in*

Queensland. Each poster highlighted a different aspect of our craftsmanship, including design work, intricate and heritage joinery, wood turning, wood carving, French polishing, marquetry and parquetry, inlays and boule, painted furniture and upholstery.

Children were drawn to the rocking horse poster and the older generation drew much pleasure from seeing the photo of another blue ribbon win in the Tradesman Turnout with my team of four Clydesdale horses pulling the GN OLSSON Furniture Maker delivery dray. The double page full colour posters featuring libraries we've built, intricate and heritage joinery, corporate furniture and superyacht furniture were eye catching and also popular.

The twin display cabinets we had on show were ideal for the display of antique tools of these trades. Ironically, we could have sold the tools many times over to avid antique tool collectors. Each time we would have to say, 'Sorry, they aren't for sale. We actually still use a lot of them in our workshop.'

Our upholstery display included curled horse hair and the long and curved needles used in

hand stitching, webbing pliers, and a range of decorative tacks including leather covered ones.

The old gilding tools with their smooth stones drew the eye, alongside the embossing wheels and the rolls of 22ct gold. The blacksmith-crafted fittings and brass lettering highlighted some of our metal-working skills, as did the cast brass handles. The ebonist's cutouts intrigued people with their accurate geometrical designs, and the gilded ebonised timber drew enquiries as well. It was surprising how few people realised that mother-of-pearl comes from the shell of a mollusc.

The wood turning and wood carving chisels, with their varying shapes and handles, were gazed at by many an enthusiast. One particular visitor collected different shaped tool handles. He loved the brass ferruled ebony handles which were turned as a gift for me by our retiring 92-year-old wood turner. The barley twist and miniature turning samples were intriguing curiosities as were the detailed designs and patterns used by our carvers and turners.

The corner display unit with its bevelled glass and mirrors was wonderful for showing

off the brilliant genuine gold butter dish and silver candlesticks. People are amazed to see the before and after of tired silver cutlery being transformed to beautiful silver again.

The wickerwork display featured the split cane (now a rare craft), hand woven cane and the different rushes and canes, from millimetres thick to nearly four centimetres across. The wicker worker just laughed when I asked for some samples and tools of his trade. He said, 'Well, I'm the tool!' as he handed me samples. (I walked right into that one!)

The glass display featured stained glass, lead lighting, resilvering (mirrors), and both curved and hand bevelled glass. It was both colourful and effective. Many people didn't realise you can still get all this work done. Though admittedly, some we need to source through our interstate contacts.

The old shellac bottle, polishing rubbers, bottles of stains and brushes, as well as a colourful assortment of wax sticks reminded people that matching and touching up polish work, and hand French Polishing is still practiced with reliable results, as has been attested to throughout centuries of application.

Work is still conducted in the same time tested fashion, of centuries ago



Dovetail joints made by hand using a dovetail saw



Chiselling out the mortise



Artifact repair and conservation



Gold embossing and gilding



Use of hand plane to shoot the edge ready for jointing



All aspects of wickerwork

As a centrepiece feature, we had the gilded leather sign featuring our 22 ct gold embossed leather inserts. It was with pride that we had a laminated copy of the original woodcarver drawings for the Queensland Parliament coat of arms displayed beside it. This was a reflection of our custodian role in keeping many of the Queensland Parliament patterns and materials.

We discovered people enjoy delving into the foundations of a business. I commenced my business in 1980 and a lot of good people have helped with the success of this now internationally recognised firm. So we had a corner devoted to my apprenticeship and early trade years at Harvey Brothers, Woolloongabba. We had my first income tax return and a handwritten letter of reference from Elvin Harvey. A published article outlined the connection between our firm and Harvey Brothers. We also paid tribute to L J Harvey (Elvin's father) the internationally recognised artist, (sculptor and woodcarver, and of course, furniture maker).

The Queensland Art Gallery publication, *L J Harvey and His School*, was of great interest to collectors of Harvey pottery and carvings.

Both L J Harvey and his son Elvin taught many students how to sculpt and carve. Another feature article was displayed about our woodcarver. He, too, was apprenticed at Harvey Brothers, and that was where we met.

Overall it was a wonderful four days and we enjoyed it immensely. People attending the exhibition were able to see first hand, that a select few still practice the skills and techniques of these old world crafts. The traditional mastercraftsmen at GN Olsson's cabinetmaking workshop have been utilising these trade secrets since establishment in 1980. Whether it be fine furniture making, restoration of antiques, or intricate heritage joinery – the work is still conducted in the same time tested fashion, of centuries ago.

We'd like to thank the Queensland Antique Dealers Association for inviting us, and for the wonderful public of Brisbane for visiting our exhibit ■

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GN OLSSON Mastercraftsmen Exhibit at the Annual Queensland Antique Fair