



Upholding upholstery

Carshalton lad Lee Richard has stayed close to his roots with his high street-based upholstery business. GEOFFREY ROY paid a visit to his busy workshop where he restores everything from chairs brought in from stately homes to museum pieces

TUCKED away, in a walkway off Carshalton High Street, you might be lucky enough to stumble across upholsterer Lee Richard working away in his no-fuss workshop.

A Carshalton lad, 29-year-old Lee has lived in the village all his life and works on everything from chairs brought in from stately homes to modern furniture.

His father was an upholsterer, too, as well as several of his brothers, and when Lee left school at 16, he became an apprentice at the family business. "I wasn't that academic but I was good with my hands and I learnt quickly," he says.

After four years as an apprentice, he decided that he wanted to move on and set up his own workshop. Although it was mainly small bits and pieces at the start, he soon found plenty of work repairing and restoring. "As my reputation grew, I got more and more interesting pieces of furniture to work on," he says. "I now do a fair amount of museum work and I recently repaired a couple of gilt-edged chairs from the Tsarist period in Russia. It was a nice rewarding job that came from one of my furniture restorer friends.

"Most of my work is local, although I do get some work from outside the county from time to time – mainly from people who are visiting friends and family in the village and pass by the workshop."

Bringing history alive

When working on modern pieces, Lee enjoys being creative with colour schemes, but he's also a firm believer that most antique furniture should be restored in keeping with the original maker's design.

"Much of my work is with antiques and I have developed many of the traditional skills and methods required to restore such furniture," he says. "It would be a crime to



Lee spends much of his time restoring antique furniture and has even worked on some museum pieces

throw away such beautiful pieces of work when a bit of time and effort would return the piece to its original beauty."

Having honed his formidable skills through an apprenticeship, a form of training that has started to die out in recent years, I wonder what he makes of the change?

"I feel it is definitely better to learn a trade by the hands-on approach of the older generation," he says. "A more modern approach is to go to college to learn upholstery but those courses are mainly aimed at the hobbyist.

"I may take on someone myself in the future, but not right now. I don't have

much space in my workshop and I am so busy at the moment that I haven't a lot of time to dedicate to providing work experience and hands-on instruction.

"I like my job; I am always learning and I get to work on some of the most beautiful pieces you can imagine," he concludes. "I try to apply as much care and attention to detail as the original maker did when he created the furniture in the first place and that, in itself, is extremely rewarding."

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