

ADVICE

How to reupholster a sofa

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Reupholstering an old piece of furniture is an opportunity to turn a workhorse into a show pony
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an old seat, it might be necessary to tighten the joints, repair the frame and replace springs, webbing, padding and filling, as well as the fabric. “We always say that you never know what you are going to find when you take off the old upholstery,” says Carol Mandeville, of the London Chair Collective.

Know when to let go

“We are honest with customers and tell them if it’s not worth it,” says Heather Maskill, of A Little Furniture Shop, which restores vintage seats. “We won’t touch old high-street sofas that are cheaper to buy new.”

So what is worth refurbishing?

Likely candidates include couches, chairs and ottomans that are basically sound, fit your room perfectly and perhaps have sentimental value. “As a rule, solid Victorian or Edwardian furniture would have good materials for the frame and will be dependable and comfortable,” Mandeville says. Pieces with provenance such as midcentury modern and classic Danish furniture will repay the investment of reupholstering.

How do I find a professional?

Posh sofa firms like George Smith will restore their own pieces. If you didn’t buy your couch from such a distinguished source, you need a local specialist. The Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers (AMUSF) checks the work of its 259 members, whose geographical spread extends from Helston to Banff (upholsterers.co.uk). Plumbs has more than



Then there are regional groups such as the London Chair Collective, with members all over the capital (thelondonchaircollective.com). In the West Country, a workshop of six makes up the Bristol Upholstery Collective, a training centre founded by Leigh-Anne Treadwell and approved by the AMUSF (bristolupholsterycollective.com).

Is there a qualification to look out for?

Some of the old guard will have a City & Guilds qualification from the London College of Furniture (now part of London Metropolitan University). The most widely accepted certificate is now the AMUSF upholstery diploma, offered by the Cass at London Met, but there are other qualifications, including a fast-track diploma taking six weeks at the Traditional Upholstery Workshop (upholsterycourses.com) and a one-year diploma at the Traditional Upholstery School (traditionalupholsterschool.co.uk). Professionals agree, however, that to become proficient takes time and experience, so ask how long your upholsterer has been in the business rather than relying on a certificate.

Finding a fabric

Most jobs are quoted “ex-fabric”. Your upholsterer may then offer materials from a set selection. There’s no need to settle



THE SUNDAY TIMES
MONDAY JULY 16 2018



Liberty,” Mandeville says. “The staff are highly knowledgeable about what is suitable and will be able to suggest a fabric that is better for certain budgets.”

The professionals buy their fabrics at Design Centre Chelsea Harbour, and it’s a great place to go for inspiration, with all the big names under one roof. Before you make a choice, you’ll need a little knowledge about fire regulations and rub tests. The material you choose must comply with levels of fire resistance set out in the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations. The rub test approximates wear and tear from someone sitting down on and getting up from an upholstered seat: fabric that will stand up to a minimum of 20,000 rubs is advisable for general domestic upholstery; a heavily used piece will need 30,000-plus.

Get creative

Reupholstering an old piece of furniture is an opportunity to turn a workhorse into a show pony. Jay Blades, the furniture upcycler who appears on the BBC shows *Money for Nothing* and *The Repair Shop*, makes vintage seats into spectacular statement pieces with snazzy upholstery (jayand.co). The sharp midcentury lines of brands such as Ercol and G Plan work best for the Blades treatment, which often involves an arresting print from *Timorous Beasties* or colour-block plains, contrast buttons and piping.

What will I pay?

Reupholstery is not a cheap fix. You could probably buy an



THE SUNDAY TIMES

MONDAY JULY 16 2018



...can now be done online, but you can get the satisfaction of giving new life to a loved piece of furniture, supporting specialist craftspeople and preserving traditional skills. Guide prices from the London Chair Collective quote re-covering an armchair from £475; according to the Bristol Upholstery Collective, reupholstering a sofa starts at about £750. Both prices are ex-fabric.

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