

Well-constructed sofas in timeless designs are likely to outlive their coverings, making them ideal candidates for recovering or even reupholstery some years after purchase. Jasmin Grand pillow back sofa in Edinburgh with Paradise and Mancini scatter cushions, from £1,789, Parker Knoll.



BEAUTY LIES BENEATH

Restore a favourite chair or an heirloom sofa to its sumptuous best with a furniture makeover; reupholstery will regenerate the look of your home with added comfort and renewed style

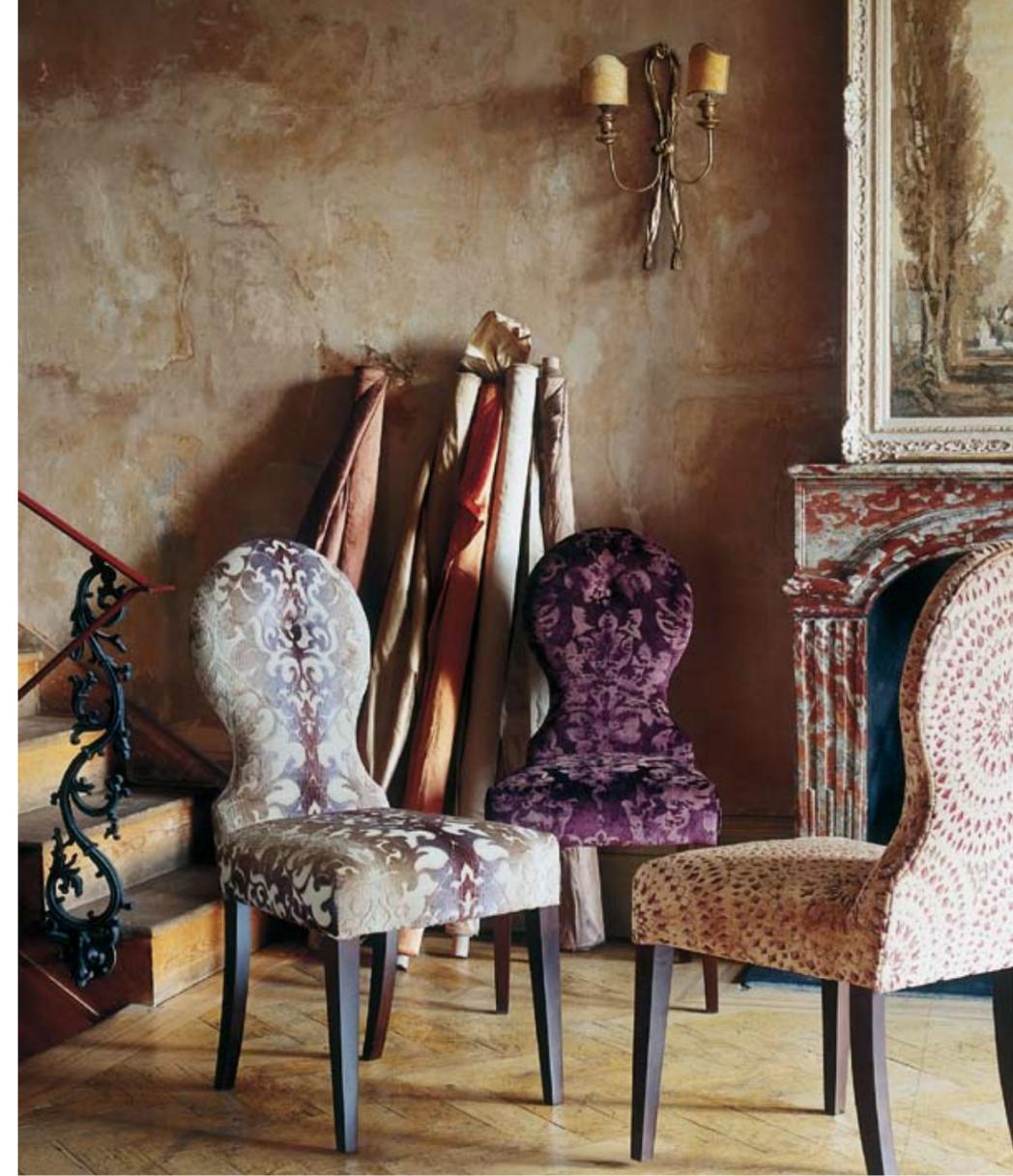
Well made pieces of furniture are a little like the human body. Over time, the underlying structure may still be in tact but the padding will have sagged a little and that attractive top layer will betray its age. Thankfully, with needle and thread and lots of tender loving care, there are skilled individuals who can help return a piece of furniture back to its former glory.

An upholsterer can build new furniture or repair existing pieces that have seen better days. "Reupholstering is usually embarked upon to reshape a piece of furniture," explains David Spragg, owner of Cotswolds furniture makers S Rouse & Co. In other cases, only the top fabric needs to be replaced, which is known as re-covering.

There are many reasons for wanting to reupholster furniture. A piece may be a family heirloom too precious to be discarded just because the stuffing is leaking. Perhaps the furniture is an antique bought at auction for a song yet needing some work to preserve it. Maybe the piece is no longer comfortable to sit on because the padding is out of shape. Sometimes the surface fabric is dated or does not fit into a scheme.

Whether re-covering or reupholstering, the upholsterer will generally charge by the hour, so the final cost depends on the amount of work involved. The fabric is extra. "The misconception about reupholstery is that it will be cheaper to have something re-covered than reupholstered but it can be just as labour intensive and therefore as expensive a process," comments Esther Denny of the London Chair Collective. Nonetheless, a well-upholstered piece should outlive a mass-produced piece.

Often the only way to know if the furniture needs to be totally reupholstered or just re-covered is to have it stripped back to the frame, which can often still be in good shape. "Cloth can hide a lot of sins,"



remarks Sara Berton of Hatfields Restoration, a London-based restoration company. When the wooden or metal frame of the furniture is exposed, it will be clear if the piece has woodworm or rust and whether the joints need to be replaced or strengthened. A good upholsterer will try to work with the existing materials that are in a salvageable condition, to keep costs down without compromising the integrity of the furniture. Sometimes, only "spot repairs" are required, explains Sue Cook, design director for The Odd Chair Company. For example, the fabric may have worn away on the arms of a chair, so it is possible to take a pristine section of fabric from

ABOVE Different fabrics can give the same dining chair a completely different character. Bohemian range, from left, Provence LF844C £62.90 a metre, LF845C Loganberry ££73.90 a metre, and LF841C Tabac £62.90 a metre; all Linwood. **RIGHT** Often the only way to see how a chair should be repaired is to strip it back to the frame. Fabric shown, Large Paisley and Wide Stripe in Prussian Blue and Natural, both £38 a metre, Sanderson.





the back of the chair and use it to replace the fabric that has worn on the arm. The back can then be covered in a complementary cloth.

UPHOLSTERY TECHNIQUES

Full-scale reupholstery rebuilds the furniture from the frame. Upholsterers who follow traditional techniques will use natural fibres and materials to reshape the chair. First, strips of jute webbing will be woven across the frame to provide a firm surface on which to build the seat. These webbing and fabrics can be attached using traditional tacks or modern staples. Purists will use tacks, although it might be necessary to use staples if the wood frame is too worn to hold a tack.

If the furniture is to be sprung, these are then hand-stitched into position. Traditional upholsterers use coil springs rather than the more modern zigzag design. A layer of hessian is then stitched into position over the springs before the stuffing is added. Typically this will be made of natural fibres such as horsehair or coconut fibres which are painstakingly teased into place to make a firm, smooth seat. Some upholsterers use horsehair which comes ready rolled, to be cut to length as required. This might be a little more efficient a method but it is far removed from using foam to create the padding. As Val Thompson of The London Chair Collective comments, traditional animal hair stuffing will provide a "firmer finish than foam and will last a lifetime". Foam seats are not as firm or tight around the edge as a seat made from traditional upholstery techniques. The furniture can also be filled with feathers to give a piece a more "lived-in look", explains David Spragg. The stuffing is held in place by a layer of calico, then at least one layer of wadding is usually placed over the top to stop any fibres protruding through and also to protect the top layer of fabric. ▶



TOP LEFT A classic sofa makes a statement in a room when covered in fabric with a bold pattern. Miss Firefly small sofa in Adelphine Hollyhock with scatter cushions in Pure Dove, from £1,755, Sofa Workshop.

ABOVE David Seyfried will quote to re-cover furniture previously supplied by the company. Hasker chair, which requires 3.5 metres of fabric, from £695, David Seyfried.

RIGHT This silk jacquard velvet reproduces a design based on an Italian 17th century cope, which was a cape worn by clergy. Verona, in blue, £198 a metre, Northcroft Fabrics.



Upholstery

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Occasional chairs are ideal candidates for unusual, signature fabrics.

Bloomsbury Library chairs covered in linen designed by Josef Frank during the 1940s, £1,650, Ben Pentreath.

"Choose a fabric according to the amount of floppiness you can live with," recommends Rachel Ashwell.

Simple sectional sofa in Muslin, £4,733, tufted ottoman in Sovereign Grey vintage velvet, £1,376; both Rachel Ashwell Shabby Chic Couture.

Loose covers are practical and offer versatility. Multiyork provides loose-covered sofas as well as a reupholstering service. Inca medium sofa in Memento Aqua Marine, £1,679;

Verona Small Sofa in MYK Serlin Waterfall, £1,379, both Multiyork.

Furniture need not be covered in a single fabric. Each item of furniture from Squint Limited has a carefully arranged covering, in a palette of your choice, making for wonderful statement pieces. Single-end chaise, £3,800, Squint Limited.



The choice of upholstery fabric is vast. Two factors narrow down the search for the perfect covering: durability and authenticity. Fabric is classified according to how well it can resist wear and tear, explains Jo Eaton, who heads up the style team at Sanderson. Fabric covering a piece of domestic furniture, which will only be used occasionally, should be able to withstand 6,000 or more rubs before it starts to fall apart. This increases to 25,000 rubs for a piece that will be heavily used in the home, such as a sofa or armchair.

FABRIC CHOICE

Opting for period specific fabric is a question of personal choice. Some upholsterers and antiques dealers recommend reupholstering in traditional-style fabrics, using

brocades and jewel-like reds, golds and greens for Jacobean-era furniture, damasks for Georgian pieces and chintzy prints or plush velvets and mohairs for Victorian-period pieces. Helen Linfield, co-owner of antiques dealer Wakelin and Linfield, is very much a proponent of using reproduction fabrics to reupholster a piece of furniture. "It is important to be able to see how sumptuous a chair could look," she insists. It might be acceptable to opt for modern neutrals if the furniture is a reproduction but she feels it is "insulting" to choose these to cover an original. Sometimes it is possible to find a scrap of fabric still on the original piece, but as John Kitching, owner of fabric manufacturer Northcroft comments, "Often pieces have been reupholstered many times over the years so it can be difficult to know what the original fabric would have looked like." Sometimes going against the norm produces dramatic results. Sara Berton recalls a client who chose a heavy-weight wool to cover a Regency sofa which would originally have been covered in a silk damask. The wool gave the piece a stylish, contemporary edge. "It was a stroke of genius," she enthuses. ■

LOOSE COVERS AND SPECIAL SERVICES

An alternative to re-upholstering a piece of furniture is to have loose covers made. Removeable covers are both decorative and practical, protecting the underlying fabric from the strains - and stains - of everyday life. Quality producers will work directly from the client's existing furniture so they can tailor-make the covers to the piece for a neat fit.

Lined covers give a heavier finish but fabrics need to drape well for a stylish, relaxed look. Pre-shrunk covers guarantee that they will still fit the furniture after the first wash, although dry cleaning is widely recommended. Loose covers are not suitable for buttoned or tufted furniture or pieces covered in velvets or other textured fabrics, as the covers tend to 'creep'.

The Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers offers a post-code search for artisans in your area, and the Guild of Traditional Upholsterers can advise on artisans trained in making loose covers, reupholstery and re-covering.

Where loose covers are unsuitable, bear in mind that some furniture manufacturers, including Wesley-Barrell, Multiyork and Ercol, keep

a design archive, so furniture can be re-covered even if the design is no longer stocked. Other manufacturers will re-cover their own pieces on a case-by-case basis. This can be worth pursuing although, depending on the task, the cost can be close to that of purchasing a new sofa.

- **Beaumont & Fletcher**
All furniture made to order and will re-cover own pieces. beaumontandfletcher.com
- **Duresta**
Will supply replacement covers for loose-covered models and re-cover own pieces of fitted furniture in special cases. Loose covers for fitted pieces are not possible. duresta.com
- **David Seyfried**
New pieces can be covered in a chosen fabric; will re-cover own designs. davidseyfried.com
- **Dudgeon**
Traditional handstitched bespoke sofas and chairs. Will re-cover own pieces. dudgeonsofas.com
- **Sofa Workshop**
All items handmade in Britain. Offers re-covering and loose covers on all current and many archive models. sofaworkshop.com
- **George Smith**
All George Smith pieces re-covered and repaired. georgesmith.co.uk