

Refurbishing furniture: The pros and cons

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(Photo: Irwin's Furniture Restoration)

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Maybe that old couch in your family room is looking a little beat up. It's more than 10 years old; so why not just donate it to charity? But you love sitting on it, and it fits the space perfectly. It might even take forever to find something you'll like just as well.

So which is better, buying something new or reupholstering your old beloved sofa? And which costs more?

It all depends, of course, on the quality of the structure of that sofa. You might not be able to replace it with something that is built as well unless you pay a high price. But on the other hand, reupholstering that couch or refinishing that old wooden desk will cost something and can take several weeks of going without any sofa.

So why do people refinish or refurbish furniture?

- A lot of us want to hang on to Grandma's dining-room table because it has lots of memories attached to it and we know we can't replace it. We're saving memories.
- Sometimes people restore or reupholster furniture because it just plain "fits." It's the exact size and shape they need for a room.
- Men tend to want to keep sofas and chairs that feel good to sit in, while women think more about how they look. For both those reasons, people keep what they have and re-cover or refinish it.



Wooden chairs show damage and wear. You could throw them away or ... (Photo: *Irwin's Furniture Restoration*)

Increasingly, says Don Irwin of Irwin's Furniture Restoration in Phoenix, especially with 25- to 40-year-olds, some people choose restoration because it seems like the environmentally sound thing to do. They don't want to buy furniture that they're going to throw away in a few years.

"They're especially interested in Midcentury Modern furniture. They buy and refinish furniture from the 1940s and 1950s," Irwin said. "They'll even pay thousands for vintage Danish modern, for example, and pay to refinish it as well. They're tired of throwaway furniture."

There are also a lot of residents here who came from other parts of the country and brought their family heirlooms with them. Eventually, they decide to refinish them as well or they need to fix things that have gotten broken.

Another really big reason for having furniture repaired or restored is when an unfortunate accident comes along. Floods caused by broken pipes are common in Arizona, but the right furniture-repair company can make everything right again. Even wooden furniture charred or discolored in a fire can be fixed beautifully.



A child's rocker before restoration. (Photo: Irwin's Furniture Restoration)

Some points to remember if you're considering reupholstering or refinishing:

- Before deciding to restore a sofa or table, be realistic about its quality. If you paid only \$200 or \$300 for a couch or a dining-room table, you don't want to spend \$800 or \$900 for a quality restoration job. Reupholstery and refinishing can be expensive.
- Before choosing a company to work on your furniture, check the business website and then visit the shop to see how work is done and what it is working on. While you're there, ask to see pictures of pieces the shop worked on and how they turned out. "It's always good to walk around a business to make sure it's a real place," Irwin said.
- Make sure that the company has liability insurance. Ask for a copy of the certificate of insurance from its insurance carrier. This is a standard document that all insurance companies will forward free of charge to anyone requesting it. It will serve as proof of insurance and insurance limits. Furniture restorers do not need to be licensed by the Arizona Registrar of Contractors, but they can be. In those cases you can check them out at www.azroc.gov.

- For estimates from a repair company, you can e-mail or mail photos along with a description of what you want done. Be sure to talk about every problem area — like stains or broken legs — in your table, chair or couch, so they have a complete picture of what's going on. If you don't disclose all the dirty details, the company may want to increase the fee once your furniture arrives in the shop. For example, a picture might not reveal the fact that your foam stuffing has turned into dust.

- Arranging in-home visits can be harder. Sometimes a representative the company will come to your house to make an estimate if it's not too far away, but might charge a fee based on your ZIP code.

- Repair companies often have fabrics to choose from for reupholstery. If you don't like the choices, a company can calculate how much yardages you need to buy from someone else. However, that can make it trickier to estimate the yardage needed. The upholsterer needs to know the "pattern repeat," which varies depending on whether you choose a fabric with a large or small pattern. Sometimes an upholsterer can tell by looking at a photo of your sofa how much is needed, but sometimes it cannot be determined until your piece is in the shop.



A child's rocker after restoration. (Photo: Irwin's Furniture Restoration)

- Expect to put down a deposit of up to 50 percent of what the furniture will cost.

- You may have to wait and live without a piece of furniture for a while. Furniture-restoration companies can be busy, and your furniture will have to wait its turn for fixing. It may take 30 to 45 days to repair wooden pieces or three or four weeks for reupholstery.

- You can have someone pick up your furniture and deliver it when it's finished, but that will cost extra. The firm should also have a commercial-vehicle insurance policy if it is moving furniture for you.

Next week: We'll talk about avoiding being taken by phony contractors; don't let scoundrels prey on you or

your parent or grandparent.

For more do-it-yourself tips, go to rosieonthehouse.com. An Arizona homebuilding and remodeling industry expert for 25 years, Rosie Romero is the host of the syndicated Rosie on the House radio program heard in Phoenix from 8 to 11 a.m. Saturdays on KTAR-FM (92.3). Call 888-767-4348.