

# Spotlight on...

## Vincent Reed Conservation & Restoration

**L**inseed oil, beeswax, shellac – wonderfully old-fashioned aromas to conjure memories from childhood. Greeting you as you enter Vincent Reed's showroom and workshop in Hassocks, these smells of restoration are as enticing as freshly baked bread, and one steps into a world of artisan craftsmanship and good taste.

Growing up in Henfield, Vincent Reed always had an appreciation of wood and furniture. When other children of his age were playing football or on their bikes he was whittling, carving and polishing. This earnest determination and perfectionism made Vincent difficult to pigeonhole when later it came to meeting the careers advisers at school; he was passionately musical and artistic but there seemed no obvious career path for him to take.

With determination and the support of his parents, Vincent decided on a vocational career. An interesting opportunity arose with the Horsham Piano Centre, which combined his love of music and beautiful objects. He discovered that he enjoyed restoring the cases of the pianos more than the interiors, and an idea that he could perhaps make a living from furniture restoration began to blossom.

An apprenticeship with Michael Norman Antiques in Brighton's Laines was his first opportunity. He eagerly absorbed every nuance of the trade from the 12 other restorers, skills including leatherwork, turning, glass cutting, soldering, lock restoration as well as polishing and wood conservation. Sadly, along with many traditional antique restorers, the company is no more. Recent years have seen a catastrophic decline in apprentices due to the bottoming out of the antique furniture market, so this age old skill, which can take up to 10 years to qualify in, is slowly dying as the older generation retire.



At the age of 21 Vincent decided to take a break to dedicate time to his passion of blues harmonica and singing (interspersed with periods as a film extra, which gave him some interesting brushes with celebrity). In 2001 he left London to direct his energies towards furniture restoration once more. This time he struck out alone, launching his own business in Henfield - Vincent Reed Furniture.

Vincent's signature refectory tables became the backbone of the business, and as Vincent Reed grew with the addition of two showrooms and extra staff, the company's reputation for the highest quality of craftsmanship spread. The refectory tables are hand made with English oak pit-sawn 300 years ago. No two pieces are the same, and the wood holds the history of ages in its very grain, which is polished with beeswax to a beautiful sheen to bring out its intrinsic beauty. These are not just hand crafted tables, but unique heirlooms that will be handed down through generations.

Demand for restoration on a larger scale meant diversification into the restoration of flooring, beams and staircases of listed buildings and barn conversions. Antique furniture restoration, which was the majority of Vincent's business in the early years, was fast taken over by these larger restoration projects, although it still remains one of the unique services that he offers. Vincent's mantra of 'conservation first, restoration second' means that every item of furniture, from the most

extravagantly inlaid French period bureau to a rustic country oak table, is assessed for the impact that restoration will have on it. "It's important for me to talk with the customer before we start any restoration project, large or small, said Vincent. "I feel strongly that the history of each piece should be preserved, and if that means some of the natural wear and tear is kept then so be it. It adds to the beauty and history of the finished piece, our aim is not to end up with an item that looks brand new. The pleasure is in producing something that has been given love and attention, the wood's grain and colour restored, and true craftsmanship allowed to shine."

Vincent's most exciting project to date is the restoration of the interior of Groombridge Place in Kent. A set for the film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, this beautiful country home dating back to the 17th Century is full of 300 year old paneling, hand-carved staircases and oak flooring. The paneling had been covered in blue paint and a heavy-handed contractor began stripping it with chemicals before the intervention of English Heritage. Vincent was able to halt the process and continue with restoration by hand, painstakingly removing the paint with copper brushes, two inch sections at a time. He discovered chisel marks made by the craftsmen, and animal glue from the original construction. The paneling was then treated with traditional beeswax to bring it to a beautiful deep lustre, exposing the patina of the old wood and preserving it for future generations to enjoy.

So, going forward in these times of tightening belts, is there a place for restoration and craftsmanship? Vincent thinks so, his order books are healthy and the demand for bespoke furniture, flooring and large scale projects is as strong as ever. He has seen his business evolve, and now his move towards a workshop based service for restoration and the incredibly successful online sales have given him the best of both worlds. The showroom in Hassocks is going, and the business is clearing its stock to make room for the next chapter in its evolution.

Don't miss this opportunity to see some of Vincent's furniture and home accessories, and perhaps come home with something that has been beautifully hand-crafted, your very own heirloom.

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*There is a two day clearance sale at Vincent Reed on Saturday 1st & Sunday 2nd August.*



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