

# ONEQUESTION

with **Brian White**, furniture restorer



BRETT WINTER LEMON

Brian White: "A lot of times we're beat down and torn up and we need somebody to put us back on track, make us feel better about ourselves."

## Is it tough to find beauty in something that others have given up on?

**BRIAN WHITE**  
Furniture restorer,  
Astonish Antique Restoration  
Roanoke County  
Age: 44

In both the physical and spiritual sense, Brian White takes the scratched, dented and dinged of this world and restores them to their former glory.

For 20 years, White has worked as one of the region's foremost furniture restorers, the past four years at Astonish Antique Restoration in Roanoke County.

But tables and chairs aren't the only things on which White can make the crooked straight and the rough places plain. The past three years he has served as associate pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church in Salem, tending damaged souls with like-minded care.

But in our throwaway society, is it tough to find beauty in something someone else has given up on?

"I've had a couple of those. I've had a couple that have been beyond repair, but I took the time and made it presentable. If you have the patience, you can see how good you really are.

"I've been in the repair part of the furniture business for almost 20 years. That consists of anything from fixing dents and scratches, fixing broken legs, stripping it down. A lot of people think I work a lot of magic by making things disappear, but that's just what I do.

"I had a lady that called, and she had this huge headboard that had this big rip out of the side. She'd given up on it, but I took the piece that she had and glued it in, took some two-part epoxy putty, let it get hard and sanded it down, took some colors and matched it up to the bed, put it on, shot it with some lacquer and polished it to the look of the bed.

"I'll never forget her face when she went to looking at the bed and she said, 'There's no way you could have done that!'

"Mostly I work on tables, dining room tables. Scratches, dents, people set hot things on them and leave a ring of

moisture.

"I take distilled alcohol, and I put that on a rag and get it damp enough that it's barely wet and do a swinging motion, bringing your arm back and forth, just barely hitting it, and you keep that up until the ring is gone. Once that's done, it leaves a shiny place, so I take a steel wool to knock that shine off and get the alcohol off and then put some compound on it to buff the scratches from the steel wool off and bring it back to the original finish.

"I had a doctor around the area that had some music boxes that he purchased from France, very old items, and he wanted work on the outside. Someone had put some veneer piece on it at one point and it stood out like a sore thumb. I took it upon myself to make that disappear. It turned out so great he was really satisfied. One of them was worth about \$50,000.

"I'm originally from North Carolina, and when I graduated from college, I was working at a steakhouse. I got tired of that, and a friend asked me about working at a furniture factory. I was putting furniture in a box,

but I saw that the repair part was pretty awesome. I started doing it and have been doing it ever since.

"A lot of times we try to keep everything original. If it has to have a new piece we let the customer know. But nine times out of 10 we try to use the original to keep the value of the piece. Everything here that we restore, I say if there's any new pieces to it, it's 10 to 15 percent new that we have to put on.

"A lot of times when I go out or a piece comes in, my first instinct is to see how bad it is. When I see how bad it is or what kind of damage is done, I start seeing the repair process to see what I can do to make it better.

"In the ministry, I see folks ... you can see the sadness of the situation they're going through. But the whole time I'm thinking, 'What can I do to make things better?'

"A lot of times we're beat down and torn up and we need somebody to put us back on track, make us feel better about ourselves so we can keep going."

— Michael Hemphill, special to BRBJ 27