



Brian White, an associate at Astonish Antique Furniture Restoration, and Dick Patch inspect repairs to be made on an antique table. The company can create custom-made finishes on site to match any wood creating seamless repairs to antiques and heirlooms.



Dick Patch, owner of Astonish Antique Furniture Restoration, stands with his restored 1957 Chevrolet panel van that he uses to pick up and deliver antique and heirloom furniture.

Photos by Claire Parker

Local antiques craftsman takes old, makes it new

Claire Parker
Correspondent

Walking into Dick Patch's workshop on Old Cave Spring Road is a throwback to times past. Take a warm day in April, for example. The doors are open, the guys in the back are discussing odds on the NCAA men's championship basketball game, Muffin, Patch's old deaf and blind dog, occasionally scratches an itch and no one seems to mind the tedious tasks at hand.

There are heirloom desks to be refinished, broken antique chair legs to be repaired and 19th century hardware to be restored.

Around these craftsmen are simple tools of the trade; tried and true equipment that has been used by furniture makers for centuries. Hammers, nails and hide glue, a concoction made from animal hide that Patch makes himself and keeps in the refrigerator because it's still the best glue around, he says.

Patch owns Astonish Antique Furniture Restoration, which opened five years ago in his garage on Cotton Mill Road. The former Army soldier has worked in the business for 30 years and started tinkering with furniture as a pastime.

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Through his dabbling, he met a fellow at the Smithsonian who specialized in furniture restoration. When he was offered the chance to apprentice with him, he jumped on board to make his hobby a career. "I really love working with beautiful things," Patch says.

The apprenticeship took him to St. Paul, Minn., and from there he moved to Minneapolis to start his own business. When the weather turned too cold for his native Northern Virginia blood, Patch decided to move back to the Commonwealth and set up shop in Roanoke.

"I started out alone in my garage but word spread and now I have four employees," Patch says. They work out of a building formerly owned by Cave Spring fireman Ike Suffin, who used the space to refinish furniture as well. Patch says people still come by to tell stories about Suffin, who supposedly would run from his nearby house, through the workshop and into the neighboring fire station when a call came in.

But the furniture that comes in and out of the shop today has just as many interesting stories to tell. Patch says he loves hearing customers explain how a piece was once owned by

a grandparent or relative and how special it is to restore something that is emotionally valuable to a client.

"People want to honor their mothers and fathers when they restore a piece," he says. "It is very labor intensive but there is an instant gratification when you see people love what they are getting."

Patch has worked on everything from a 1700 mule chest to a replica of the original Brandon Oaks Lutheran Church, built in 1850, which was demolished in the 1970s to make way for a retirement community still there today.

Patch says that the bulk of his work is on family heirlooms in need of repair and occasionally he does some interior restoration work on older homes in the valley.

But what he is looking forward to next is a surge in younger generations keeping their family heirlooms and antiques in good condition. With the state of the economy, it seems more practical to refinish your grandmother's kitchen table than to buy a new piece of furniture that is not nearly as well constructed, Patch says. "At least that is what I am hoping for the future of the business," he says with a grin.