

REFINISHING TOUCH

BY JOYCE TURNER-GIONET // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON HARTOG & WALSER REFINISHING

THE PLACE: Walser Furniture Refinishing & Antique Restoration opened shop in Port Credit in 1956 and never left. How could they? The phone never stopped ringing. Len Walser took over from his father in 1988. As he puts it, "I was raised in the shop."

You can teach a kid a trade but you can't make him love it. Len's one of the lucky ones who loves what he does. He's also incredibly good at it; so good that all business now comes through referrals. Every

piece has a story. Yes, customers bring expensive items, but they also bring items that aren't worth much. It's not about the money for those folk. It's about the memories. Sometimes it's about subtly changing a piece to fit a modern room.

THE STYLE: Everything is done by hand. Currently, Len is restoring two solid-walnut Victorian chairs, circa 1840, including the intricate inlay of acorns and leaves. He had to take each chair apart, right down to the tacks and springs without damaging the old wood, an incredibly labour-intensive proposition. Len employs a craftsman in his 70s whose only job is restoring damaged inlay. He also has a

turner, a leather specialist, even an expert on clockworks.

WHAT'S HOT: Although dark stains and finishes are in, 80 per cent of Len's customers want their piece restored to its original look, including original stain colour.

FAVOURITES: Len's had a few unusual requests. He designed and finished a dog ramp to match a walnut bedroom suite. He refinished an electric guitar in electric blue. Recently, he cut the legs off a 1940s office desk and in a dramatic move suggested replacing them with six-inch casters. The customer manufactures casters and wheels and the desk was his father's. He wanted it restored but also to make it more contemporary and different. It's now the company's signature piece. "I don't play favourites," says Len. "I get attached to every piece and when I give it back I tell the customer I'm just lending it to them," he smiles.

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