

## Marquetry Restoration

### My Preamble

My journey into the realm of Marquetry Restoration came quite suddenly, via email on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

It was from a Lady in Queens, NY who said in part “I have been searching the internet for a person who can repair a marquetry hunting scene that is in need of restoration. However, I got lost in your web site looking at all the beautiful creations. Actually I wish to purchase one, The Anasazi, Canyon de Chelly, White House, Arizona.”

Uhhh! I was quite taken aback but I did sell her *The Anasazi* but soon received another email re the Restoration. I declined attempting this myself but did email 3 clubs in the New York area but received NO answers back. She told me she also emailed a few clubs and also go no replies.

I was somewhat disappointed that my marquetarian brothers and sisters turned away, so I decided to ‘maybe’ help.

### Before you take possession of your Clients treasure.

At this point I recommend emailing your potential client since you have no way of knowing what you will be dealing with. It could be possible that you will be trying to restore the Marquetry equivalent of a million dollar van Gogh but at least it will be your client’s treasure. Remembering that doing Marquetry Restoration is NOT like creating a picture, the restoration cost will be somewhat higher than selling a picture and the repair techniques very different.

First off then you will need to set some basic understanding between you and your client. These are at least the following.

1. If you deem the marquetry piece is beyond restoration or your abilities your client must understand that they will bear the cost of return shipment. (In my case the UPS costs were \$78 + Insurance.)
2. Make it clear that you will do your very best effort at restoration and point out that you can only take the picture back to, or close to its original new condition, the end product will only be as good as the skill level of the original marquetarian.
3. The cost quote is difficult. In my case I estimated the cost with a provision that repair supplies and outside paid help you might need will be added to the final bill. This Bill will then be presented at the finish and there will, be no shipment until the moneys are received.
4. You need Hi-Def images of the piece and close up images of any “bad” spots that need special consideration.
5. You need the past history and age if available.
6. You want to know if your client has any special requisites or requests. In my case it was best effort on Artist identification, the use of the Original UPS heavy cardboard box for return mail and if the frame was rebuilt the top veneer must be cross grained as per photos.

### When you receive your clients marquetry piece.

Now the excitement boils. *Unpack* carefully so as not to add to any problems the piece might have.

Take a look at the piece and put aside for a day for it to get *acclimatized* to your workroom.

I like to write a *detailed log* of work done and purchases. This makes a nice, professional touch when you send the picture back to the client with a bill and makes it so you don’t forget any details.

Now *take a good look* at the picture. Restorations are all different so this stage is very important. What do you see?

- i. Is the *Patina* very dark? Is it dark with Grime, Dirt Smoke or what?
- ii. Are there any places that have *scratches or gouges*? Are there deep?

- iii. Are there any *missing pieces or voids* on the Picture?
- iv. What glues or building *techniques* were used?
- v. What was the *finish* used.
- vi. Do you see any *Mold or Fungus*?
- vii. What is the *condition of the Border or Frame* used?



Although there are many techniques that are a needed to effect different Restorations I can only show you what I did. So the Original Image as received from the client is shown at right, with just two of the others below. I was in email contact with my client throughout the restoration.



**This section tells the client to accept my suggests on restoration and possible changes before I start.**

My first impression was that I could do something with this piece. I suggested that the Frame must be scrapped since it fell of the picture and the nails that held it on were mostly gone. My second suggestion was that I will use Polyurethane Gloss as a finish on the new Frame and back panel but to avoid what I call the Disney affect I will use Satin on the picture itself. The client wanted the cross grain on the new Frame but I said that I cannot do a cross grain and also mold it to an Ogee Curve. To understand what I mean by cross grain look at the frame on either the Original picture or Tree Branch above. I said I will make a new frame using 3/4" pine molding and veneer it with Walnut. This I could probably cross grain the visible top plane of the New Frame. I mentioned there will be some Supplies to buy namely Varnish, Sanding Sealer, Corner Molding and Contact cement etc. for the frame veneer. I also mentioned that I will NOT ship it until the summer heat here is Arizona gets into the low 90's. It was 110 deg F when I was doing most of the work.

*Notice we have NOT started working on the Picture until these things are settled.*

### **Start of the Restoration Process.**

OK we have now an understanding between me and the client.

#### ***First the Picture:***

I noticed that the picture was slightly bowed along the length probably due to age.

I decided to work on the Patina to see what was underneath. Since this was old and bought from an Antique dealer I did not know how much Veneer I have left or how uniform the thickness was across the picture.

I decided to use a scraper to gently scrape away the gloom. I use a single sided safety razor for most of my scraping needs. Otherwise I use an Exacto knife with a curved blade for heavier scrapping. Scraping by the way I use extensively when I am making marquetry pieces. I really lucked out as the dirt came off very easily. I would suggest that the grime was hearth or cigarette smoke. I needed 220 sandpaper carefully get the scratches out that you can see in the tree trunk and I used a combination of Scraping and sandpaper to remove the mold. There were three places that I again lucked out on and these were the light yellow blobs just underneath the mold in the tree branches. I am so glad that these were not holes through the veneer showing the substrate or in this case the plywood base. I sanded the whole thing up-to 600 grit. It looked very clean. See image at left. I put blue tape all around to cover the area where I wanted to eventually glue this to the frame.

So, at this point since I didn't want to seal and varnish this piece yet I put one (1) coat of sanding sealer then put it aside to "rest".

#### ***Secondly the Back of the Picture:***

Scraped and lightly sanded the back and it came up beautiful. A few coats of Sanding Sealer and it was ready for the Polyurethane Varnish.

#### ***Now the Frame:***

Using our woodshop Chop Saw I made a regular bevel cornered Frame using the 3/4" Corner Molding.

I cut the required 3'4" outside edge pieces and 1/4" sides, other than the frame top, out of Walnut veneer and using contact cement managed to complete this in a couple of days.

For the Cross-Veneer on the top, I cut strips allowing a 1/4" overlap and using the contract-cement I glued them on. It turned out terrible since I must have gotten sloppy with the cement and there were dried cement marks along the top that would impair the varnish finish. I removed the top cross-veneer from the frame and started again. That was easy to say. It took me all day to break the Contact Cement bond and sand and scrape the surface flat again.

I cemented a new set of Walnut Cross-Veneer strips to the top and let it cure for a time. After turning the frame over onto its face I trimmed off the overlap in the standard way using a scalpel and all should have been perfect. It would have been if the grain was lengthwise but .....

On the frame top I noticed very small, but annoying chips on the outer edges. I took the Cross-Veneer off again and sanded flat. That was another day. Talk about frustration.

I decided to study why the minute chips came on the edges. Using a test piece it turned out that the 'enter point' my scalpel cut was perfect with no chips observed, but where the blade came out it produced the chips.

This time I cut another set of Cross-Veneer only this time I made them with NO overhang so there would be no trimming and also made sure that I remembered which were the 'enter points' side of the Veneer strips after cutting them out. It was obvious after cementing these on to the frame with the 'enter points' upwards, my research paid off. The Veneer covering the frame was perfect.

I sanded the whole frame and used sealer everywhere except on the edge that I will be gluing it to the picture. After a few coats of sanding sealer, I applied a few coats of Wipe on Polyurethane Gloss and it looked great. I applied a couple of coats of Gloss Wipe on Polyurethane to the Back of the Picture and a couple of coats of SATIN Wipe on Polyurethane to the Picture.

At this point I used Titebond II to glue the Picture into the new Frame and used 4 clamps at each corner to take

out the Picture bow whilst it set.

After a day to dry I got lucky again as the picture frame corrected the bow.

### ***The fitting of the Hanger on the back.***

One thing I learned from my few years of entering Marquetry for Judging at competitions was the need to make sure the hanger also met the stringent requirements of the Judges. When I received this piece there was a piece



of wire wrapped around a couple of screws. That was not very professional!.

For this I bought a couple of Triangular Ring Fasteners and some Cord. After fitting the Ring Fasteners my wife takes over and she wraps the cord round the ring and sews the cord together. This makes a really nice and professional looking hanger. See image.

Oh! By the way, one of the requirements arranged with my client was that I was to sign and date the Restoration on the back.

### ***Some words of wisdom gleaned from my Restoration experience.***

Remember if you try a Marquetry Restoration please remember that you are NOT creating this piece of marquetry and whatever amount of work you put into it the end product will only be as good as the original artists' skill level.

There was a request to identify the artist. I sent the '*Marquetry Initials*' to an expert in England. He could not identify the artist but did give me some good information. By looking at the picture he recognized that it was saw cut and not scalpel or knife cut. This gave the piece a strong probability that it was American, and not being an expert in the American styles came up short on identifying the Initials."

***My thoughts?*** I am pleased with the results although the technique is not mine. The amount of detail that was hidden or not easy to see has come out and the whole picture is pleasing and lives again.



### ***This is the Final Restoration.***

I hope you like it and maybe find that you would like to try Restoration out for yourselves. It can be very rewarding.

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