A Conservation Primer: Caring for Historic Furniture

Tad Fallon, Principal Conservator
Fallon & Wilkinson, LLC
Baltic, CT
Welcome!
Talk Outline

• Introduction to Fallon & Wilkinson studio: the work we do, our capabilities, and facility
• What a Conservator does, how we examine an object, what we are looking for, and how we go about it
• Examining the surface: deciphering patina and past interventions
• Reproductions and how they can help
• Introduction to wood identification
• The “do’s and don'ts” of furniture care, practical tips for collections maintenance
Fallon & Wilkinson, LLC

- Founded in 2000 by Tad Fallon & Randy Wilkinson.
- Graduate degrees in Conservation from the Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute (Formerly CAL)
- “Conservators in Private Practice”
- Fully Monitored, Secure and Climate Controlled Lab
- Full time Staff of 5
- Clients from a wide spectrum ranging from small and medium sized museums, insurance companies, private collectors and homeowners
Why Call a Conservator?

Or just what do you guys do anyways?
Intervention needs thoughtful consideration..
Things happen...
How to Find a Conservator:

- American Institute for Conservation
- www.conservation-us.org
- The AIC Code of Ethics
- Examination / Assessment
- Discussion of Treatment Goals / Options
- Treatment Proposal
- Documentation (Level depends)
- Treatment Report
Structural Repairs, Loss Compensation
Coatings / Finish Conservation
Research, Analysis and Treatment
Severe color loss, in a short time...
Cederquist Studio Visit, San Clemente, CA. March 2013
Examining the surface: deciphering patina and past interventions
An 18th Century Rush Seat Side Chair, New England
Chest of Drawers, 1705-25. Saybrook or Guilford, CT. Oak, Tulip Poplar, Pine, Paint
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Reproductions make sense, for a variety of reasons

Replica, or Reproduction?
Furniture Reproductions: Hamilton Grange, NYC
26 Pieces of Federal Furniture in two years...
Introduction to Wood Identification
How a Conservator Approaches Identifying Wood

- Keen sense of pattern recognition
- Low magnification
- Higher magnification
- Big picture
# The Decision Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What wood is it?</th>
<th>Other important considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What is your first impression?</td>
<td>• Does it follow craft tradition?</td>
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<td>• Is it a hardwood or softwood?</td>
<td>• Given the geographic origin of the object, is it possible?</td>
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<td>• Color</td>
<td>• Do the trade routes support the conclusion?</td>
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<td>• Density</td>
<td>• Are you looking at original material?</td>
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<td>• Hazard a guess</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Do the cellular features support your guess?</td>
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Chest of Drawers  Saybrook or Guilford
1705-1725
Chest of Drawers  Saybrook or Guilford

From the accession records

- Chest of Drawers
- 1705-1725
- Saybrook or Guilford
- Oak, tulip poplar, pine
Chest of Drawers  Saybrook or Guilford
1705-1725

Oak

Pine
Chest of Drawers  Saybrook or Guilford
1705-1725

- Drawer sides, back and fronts: poplar???

End grain of dovetail
Chest of Drawers  Saybrook or Guilford
1705-1725

Detail of End Grain of dovetail  Magnified 25x
Chest of Drawers  Saybrook or Guilford
1705-1725

Magnified 50x

Noded Rays

Poplar reference sample
Conclusion

- Oak stiles and rails
- Pine panels
- Drawers sides and back - poplar
Identifying Wood Workshop
TBA, Fall 2016
The “Do’s and Don’ts” of Furniture Care
Do’s: Low tech humidity control
75% RH = 14% MC in summer
20% RH = 4.5% MC in winter
Maintaining Brasses: Do’s
When to Call a Conservator
Watering the Plants? Please Don’t
Consider Minimally Intrusive Upholstery Treatments
We Don’t Recommend This!
Care and Maintenance Tips

You can do it!
Basic Furniture Care: Housekeeping

- Dusting basics: use clean white cotton cloths and soft artists brushes
- Avoid “friable” surfaces (consult with a conservator)
- Waxing once per year on well varnished furniture
- Consider implementing a removable coatings program for metal hardware
Select Waxes
Please avoid....
Recognizing an easy fix
FALLON & WILKINSON, LLC
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Veneer
0-gee Hall mirror
Thank You!

Questions?