

Mon Repos

NARRANDERA



Why old ideas ain't necessarily bad

A while ago I was discussing a design for a dining table with a mate. We were looking at the timber that he had available, discussing the length and width of the table, and the design of the top and legs. He asked how I would build it with what he had available. I replied with a fairly time honoured design, using traditional joinery and methods.

Although he liked my ideas, a higher power intervened and he went with a more modern design to better suit the apparent aesthetic ideals of the present era.

Modern methods can be fantastic, when used in the right way. And while I have nothing against modern designs, I strongly believe that there are thousands of examples of why traditional methods and designs will endure and are superior.

This issue

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I'm a member of a few facebook groups that are champions of what is called "upcycling." In the main this seems to be slapping a few coats of house paint on an old piece of furniture. Beautiful veneer work covered by smoky gray house paint. Centuries old English or French Oak smothered in off white paint. Of course, there are some fantastic examples of vintage pieces of furniture being given a new lease of life through thoughtful and tasteful restoration. I've also seen some wonderful local examples of chalk and mineral paint being used to finish a design and give it a wonderful boost, using colour and shade. However, I'll always be in favour of natural timber with a clear finish. I'm looking forward to when this phase of painting vintage and antique furniture ends, as it will mean I'll have lots of work, stripping and refinishing these pieces.

A few years ago there was a revolution in the woodworking world, a phenomenal new joining method that swept every publication and youtube channel. Everyone was ridiculing traditional joinery and extolling the wonders of pocket hole joinery. This method of joining timber together uses screws inserted at an angle. It was everywhere, being used by everyone, in place of traditional methods. It was an easy and accessible way for beginners to get into the hobby of woodworking. Fantastic!!!

Except that this method of joining timber does not allow for timber movement. Timber needs to be allowed to move with the seasons: as it dries, it shrinks, and then it swells again through moisture in the air. The pocket screw revolution was used for everything. Joining board to board along its length to make tabletops, and then using the same method of screws to join legs to rails, and rails to the top. What you end up with is a super rigid and incredibly strong build, that has zero allowance for expansion and contraction of timber.

Beautiful pieces of furniture suddenly began exploding and imploding as the tremendous forces present in solid timber were not allowed to move with the seasons. Traditional joinery allows for timber to be free to move, as can be seen in any museum, home or any place where antique furniture can be found. How else would this furniture still be being used hundreds of years after it was built? The craftsmen that built these pieces of furniture, no matter how grand or plain, understood how and why timber moved, and constructed their furniture to endure the forces present.

In January my family and I had the privilege of travelling through Europe for a month. While we were in Scotland we visited Doune Castle. For those of you familiar with the TV show Outlander, this was used as Castle Leoch, Monty Python fans would know it from the "your mother was a hamster scene", and Game of Thrones fans would possibly recognise it as "Winterfell". It was built in the 14th Century by Robert James, the son of King Robert II of Scotland.



In the Lord's or Baron's Hall there is a table, made from the Old Gallows Tree that grew in front of Doune Castle and was blown down in 1878. This table is a travelling table, able to be pulled apart for transport by the Lord as he moved around his lands. Think flatpacked furniture before IKEA started making meatballs. It's a very classic design. Breadboard ends, Tusk mortise and tenon Joints, Draw-bored Tenons. Beautiful craftsmanship. It's close to 150 years old and it is still a very functional and beautiful piece of furniture.

In Amsterdam, Paris, London, and Edinburgh we saw pieces of furniture that were hundreds of years old, and still very much in use, despite their antiquated design and methods of construction.

Why are they still holding together?

Because they were built using time honoured and tested methods.

I realise this "rant" may get me labelled as a boring old "antiques roadshow" fuddy duddy. Someone that's against progress and is living in the past.

Part of me doesn't mind that. Part of me loves the idea that I'm the "keeper of old things" as my daughter's roller skating teacher puts it.

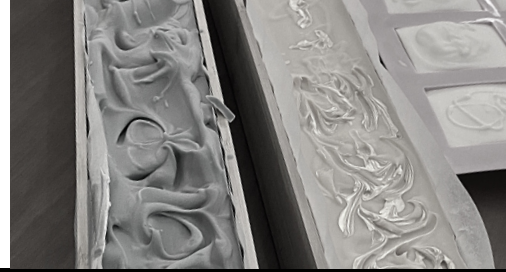
Another part of me wonders why "Old" is antiquated, irrelevant and outdated?

After all, we're all getting older, it seems a terrible shame to dismiss everything that is older than us.

Just my two cents.



One of the wonderful things about living and working in this amazing house is meeting people that have a connection to Mon Repos and The Murrumbidgee Club. If anyone has photos, stories and/or any memorabilia, we'd love to talk to you!



Night Classes

Intermediate Woodwork: Tuesday 6-8pm Class Full

Beginner Woodwork: Wednesday 6-8pm 3 spaces available

Restoration Class: Thursday 6-8pm Class Full

Grandfather Trade Classes

Blacksmithing

1 Day Beginner course \$300pp

21st October 4 Positions 22nd October 4 Positions

2 Day Course \$550pp

September 16/17th 2 Positions October 28/29 4 Positions

Cold Process Soap Making

1 Day Course \$225

September 16th Full October 21st Full November 25th 4 Positions

Leatherworking

1 Day Course

October 22nd 3 Positions

5 Board Bench

October 28th 3 Positions

If you have a group of 4-6 and would like to do this class together, please get in touch with us to discuss the possibility of arranging a private date just for your group

******NEW CLASSES******

SEE NEXT PAGE



New Classes

Wool Felting: Felting is the process of connecting or blending wool, wool roving or fiber together to make a fabric. With Wet Felting, that is accomplished with water, water temperature fluctuation, soap and agitation.

Class will run on from 10-2
4th November 6 *positions* 2nd December 6 *Positions*
Cost will be \$150 per person

Beginner Welding: Want to learn how to stick random pieces of metal together? Got a welder in the shed but it doesn't "work"? Not sure what the dials and buttons do on the front of your welder? This class will allow you to bring your welder to MRN and our Instructor will show you how to set your machine up, and will have you gluing pieces of metal together so that they stay stuck in no time! Participants will make a small "Camping BBQ" and a Cube Moneybox as the projects for this class. There is no requirement to have your own welder to do this class, we will provide welders.

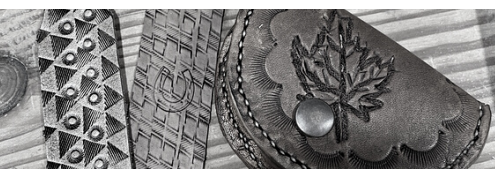
Class will run from 10-4
18th November 4 *Positions*
Cost will be \$280 per person

*******IN DEVELOPMENT*******

Intro to DIY tools: We've all got a heap of hand and power tools sitting in the shed, but do we know how to use them properly and safely? This class will be aimed at the complete novice and our two instructors will take you through a range of everyday tools that you will encounter in any DIY job.
Class will run for 3 hours, 9-12 or 1-4

Cypress Planter Boxes: This class will be a one day woodworking class, slightly more advanced than the 5 Board Bench, where students will make a pair of Cypress Planter Boxes.
Still working out costs and project details

We're always on the lookout for new classes to teach, and for new teachers. If you have an idea for a class, or know someone that is passionate about a skill or trade, please let us know!





Meet the Teacher

Scott Rowlings - *Furniture Maker, Restorer, Teacher and Lifter of Slightly Heavy Objects*



Why do you do what you do?

I've been extremely lucky to have amazing teachers and mentors over my lifetime. My dad has probably been my biggest role model in life, and continues to be so. I got into education as a way of passing along the skills that I've been taught. I've worked alongside some amazing craftsman as a high school teacher, and continue to do so. Mon Repos Furniture School is another way of passing along the knowledge and skills that I've been taught, to people who are eager to learn.

10 Quick Questions

Favourite Footy Team?

Hawthorn Hawks

Favourite Food?

Pad Thai

Favourite Song?

Whole Lotta Love - Led Zep

Favourite Book?

Anarchist's Workbench - Christopher Schwarz

Favourite Movie?

Mr Holland's Opus or Original Star Wars Trilogy

Tea or Coffee?

COFFEE

Cats or Dogs?

Dogs

What did you want to be when you grew up?

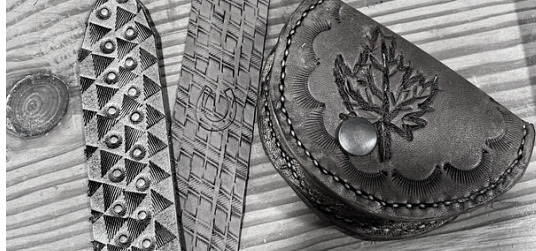
I have to grow up? A Rockstar

Favourite Season?

Spring

One place you'd love to visit?

Scotland, again!



Meet the Teacher



Why do you do what you do?

I like creating, teaching and working with people so making soap and teaching soap making gives me all of those things in one. I never get tired of creating soap. Every loaf of soap is going to be different, even from the same recipe so it never gets old for me, and I am always learning new things to try whether it is a colour technique or a new ingredient, and the science behind what works and what doesn't. On a practical level, it is far removed from my "day job" so it enables me to have therapeutic fun while also working without pressure but still having a small income. I love the challenge of the last few minutes of mixing a batch as they are a really intense rush to get the perfect consistency in time for the pour without it starting to set before I get it in the mould. I have had many oops, too late moments! My plan is to take my craft and business into retirement with me and have the flexibility to work or not work on any given day. That's the plan anyway!

Jan Kates - Soap Making 10 Quick Questions

Favourite Footy Team?

What is this "footy" you speak of? Oh The Matildas of course! I know nothing about the game but I love what the Matildas are doing for sports women, for inspiring young female soccer players, and most of all, for Australia. Amazing ambassadors for the sport and for our country. I feel that they are crusaders Sorry, were you expecting a short answer?

Favourite Food?

Everything except offal, broadbeans, and tofu. Peas do not rate highly either. Restaurants of choice are Italian or Thai.

Favourite Song?

SOS sung by Dimash Qudaibergen
[https://youtu.be/AUARjexCTIQ?
si=D4O7sqihyYVWisvk](https://youtu.be/AUARjexCTIQ?si=D4O7sqihyYVWisvk)

Favourite Book?

The Barefoot Investor by Scott Pape

Favourite Movie?

My Big Fat Greek Wedding

Tea or Coffee?

Coffee

Cats or Dogs?

Dogs

What did you want to be when you grew up?

A vet

Favourite Season?

Winter

One place you'd love to visit?

Just one? Darwin to see our son living there now. But there are many more on the wish list: Italy, France,