

# Resurgence in demand for the artisan skill of the master upholsterer

There's a new and green interest in upholstery...

The UK used to be full of people making things. Everything could be sourced and produced locally. Mass production and international importing weren't issues and so a thriving specialist craft industry flourished. The upholsterer was one of the key crafts at the heart of local business.

A renewed interest in handmade, one-of-a-kind items, vintage styles, and environmentally conscious consumption is now driving a tremendous resurgence in upholstery.

"People used to get furniture reupholstered all the time, but then it got cheaper and cheaper," comments Edward Crowther, Founder and Managing Director of Lincoln master upholsterer, Crowther & Sons. "What looks like a Rolls Royce on the outside can be a cheap, poor quality product on the inside. Now, people are starting to realize that older pieces last longer."

Edward and his team breathe new life into hundreds of pieces of furniture every year that would otherwise be discarded. The workshop on the outskirts of Lincoln is an Aladdin's cave of textiles, remnants, tapestries, fabrics, buttons and trimmings



Edward and his highly skilled team are very flexible in the way they work and will reupholster a loved item of furniture, design a bespoke piece or offer a selection from the Crowther Collection.

"When it comes to furniture, it's what's inside that really counts. In today's market, that's often cheap materials and a particleboard frame



instead of real wood. You could have three chairs that look the same, but you take them apart and everyone is different. That means that in addition to patience, the trade requires a lot of know-how, something that's increasingly scarce."

At Crowther & Sons the fusion of both state of the art modern and traditional fillings combines the best of both worlds with the overriding emphasis on quality of materials and construction.

"It's satisfying making something with your hands, you have something to show for your efforts when the job is done," adds Edward who founded his business almost 30 years ago and now has eldest son, Ed, working alongside him as a fellow master upholsterer and youngest son, Daniel, at the beginning of his apprenticeship.

"It's not an easy job – you need to have a good understanding of shape and form, structure and depth; you need to be a tailor, a carpenter, a problem solver, and an artist", adds Edward.

The appeal to the client is in equal parts a quest for quality and the desire for something custom-made. There is an extraordinary stock of affordable antique and vintage furniture that's ripe for reupholstering. The notion of avoiding waste now motivates many to refurbish an old piece.

"It's nice to update the style, in light of that ethos of renewal and recycling, to give it a more modern feel," adds Edward's eldest son and fellow master upholsterer, Ed Junior. "There's a lot of older furniture that's in fantastic shape. It has great bones, it's perfectly strong, the frames are great but it looks old. Once it is reupholstered it can work for another 15 to 20 years."

A host of astonishing stories can often be unveiled when stripping back these pieces of furniture. The Crowther & Sons team find inscriptions hinting at who might have made the original piece and often uncover hidden pasts and notes spanning many lifetimes.

"Our decisions as master upholsterers are made with integrity and respect for the artisan works and skills of times gone by. By upholstering them you add to that story and make it something that will provide enjoyment to someone for years to come," adds Edward.

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