

Around the clock

Pam Neville finds an antiques restorer who has poured his heart and soul into a grand old timepiece

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATTHEW WILLIAMS



THIS PAGE: The clock is a work in progress for Jonathan Maze; the intricate marquetry for the base is on the workbench.

FACING PAGE: The arabesque marquetry is made of holly, pear and ebony wood. Some of the artisan's tools are old, others had to be custom-made for this job. A fretsaw is used to cut the intricate patterns.

If a more ambitious restoration project has been carried out on a piece of antique furniture in New Zealand, Jonathan Maze doesn't know about it – and he probably would know about it. In twelve years as a restorer he has worked on some of the finest antiques in the country for art galleries, museums, auction houses and private collectors.

He has just spent three months rejuvenating a 300-year-old long-case clock that not only required extensive repairs but also the recreation of large sections of marquetry decoration. The intricate, inlaid wood patterns were in the arabesque style, which Jonathan describes as “insanely detailed”.

Jonathan enjoyed working on the delicate marquetry of this long-case clock, also called a grandfather clock. But, he says, the original workmanship on the European piece doesn't compare to that of Anton Seuffert, New Zealand's most famous cabinetmaker, whose work now sells for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“Anton Seuffert's technique was superlative. I can copy the marquetry on this clock but it's almost impossible to copy him. His work makes all other marquetry look clumsy.”

Jonathan was first introduced to the furniture Anton Seuffert made in Auckland in the late 1800s during a five-year apprenticeship with William Cottrell, his mentor and New Zealand's best-known antique restoration expert. Jonathan was so inspired by his time working with William, he gave up his planned career in furniture-making in favour of becoming a restorer.

The grandfather clock was brought to him by Wanganui-based American artist Bob Bourdon. He had purchased it some years before at Dunbar Sloane in Wellington and the auctioneers put him in touch with Jonathan.

Bob had discovered that the clock was made in England in 1705 and was owned by one family from the

mid 18th century until he bought it. During World War II the family hid it from marauding soldiers in a cave in Guernsey in the Channel Islands and the same family later brought it to New Zealand.

When the clock arrived at Jonathan's Auckland workshop, much of the bottom section was missing, sections of marquetry were damaged or gone, and the “hood”, or top, had been lost.

Bob and Jonathan got to work using books, photographs and the internet to build up a picture of what the clock should look like, then jointly designed new sections of marquetry or created mirror images of existing pieces for Jonathan to cut from wood. Meanwhile the clock mechanism was restored by Bruce Aitken, an expert in Christchurch.

It's been an undertaking of great complexity and expense: about \$11,000 to buy the clock at auction, \$3000 to restore the mechanism and \$15,000 to restore the case. But Jonathan says money isn't his main motivation. He gets the most satisfaction out of tracing the history of pieces, specially when they have been passed down in families. “Seeing their family heirlooms restored means so much to people and I find it rewarding to be involved.” ■

