



MADE IN NEW YORK

Restoration Drama

Antiques expert Christophe Pourny makes everything old look brand-new again

NOT JUST ANYONE could be entrusted with restoring George Washington's writing desk. To bring it back to its original Colonial Era sheen, the art and conservation department of New York's Design Commission asked furniture expert Christophe Pourny to give the first president's perch a tune-up, which required a mild cleaning with alcohol followed by the application of a clear finish in lieu of the original French polish. Now the desk holds pride of place behind velvet ropes in the Governor's Ballroom at City Hall.

"Here I am, French, from the other side of the ocean," recalls Pourny. "I realized I must have done something right to be given this job!" The son of antiques dealers, Pourny was exposed to the world of rarefied furniture early on, while he was growing up in the South of France. "As a kid, I was mesmerized by high-gloss finishes—they would drive me crazy. I always wondered how it was done."



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Patience, he learned, is key, especially when it comes to the time-consuming process of European-style lacquer. In his Dumbo studio, he sticks to old-world techniques and avoids chemical applications whenever possible, relying



Mr. Clean
In his Dumbo studio, Christophe Pourny cleans and refinishes antique and vintage furniture, including this water-damaged pyramidal side table. See *Resources*.

DOUG YOUNG



Detail Oriented
 (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Rye straw, imported from France, is ironed to a smooth finish before being applied to paneling. In Pourny's studio, a restored tabletop awaits its base. Hand-carved bun feet get their final coat of finish. Clear-bond and garnet shellacs are used in the French finishing process. Pourny assembles two-tone bronze legs on a reproduction Maison Jansen table. See *Resources*.

heavily on beeswax and linseed oils and rags made from old T-shirts, not to mention countless hours of hand padding and polishing with soft cotton cloths. If he needs to strip a piece, good old-fashioned elbow grease and metal scrapers are the preferred tools.

"Antiques have a life of their own, and we are just the temporary custodians of them," says Pourny, who also makes custom reproductions when clients can't find the real deal. "All of my customers are very curious about the life of their furniture, and that's what keeps me going." —*Miranda Agee*