

## The Restorer

By Dafna Canan

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(Note: The title of the column in Hebrew is "The Restorator." It is pronounced like the automotive part, "alternator".)

**No, it's not part of your car engine or a relative of the *alternator*. The restorer is a specialist in the repair and restoration of art objects and antique furniture. True, there aren't many such professionals in our neck of the woods, but our reporter Daphna Canan met one on Moshav Batsra.**

Sidebar to right of main text, with photo descriptions/captions under the title:

### Designers Column (article 1 of 4)

1. Walnut wood bowl tooled on a lathe by my father Daniel when he was 13. The bowl was gilded with gold leaf (24.75 carat), using the water-based method, and lacquered with a finish allowing it to be used with food.
2. Furniture storeroom of the master restorer Simone Chiaruggi in Florence Italy, where all gold and silver gilding is done. In the background is Tuscan furniture from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries waiting to be restored.
3. Front doors to a home, originally from Amsterdam, that were adapted for a private residence in Ramat Hasharon. They were repaired, modified to fit the doorjamb, and refinished.

Situated in an orchard in Batsra, in a large hanger cluttered with tools, dismantled furniture, and a dog, Jeremy Zetland restores furniture. He studied the profession, rare in our area, in Florence, "the world restoration capitol." He works in Israel restoring valuable antique furniture as well as old furniture with only sentimental value, all with the same eagerness and sparkle in his eyes.

Zetland, 34, born and raised in Tel Aviv, came to restoration as he did to most things in his life. He comes across something that feels right and then takes them to the limit. As a child he participated in practically every workshop that was offered at the Helena Rubinstein Art Pavilion – painting, sketching, sculpture, silk screening and engraving.

After getting his B.A. degree, in of all things, social work, he decided to return to his first love, art, and began studying special painting effects with a Scotsman living in Israel. A rapport developed between them, and Zetland stayed on to work for him in his studio for a year. By then the decision to go abroad to study design had solidified and he went to Italy with his father looking for the right school. In a ten-day period the two visited some 13 schools, from Como near the Swiss border to Sienna. "I was undecided between product design and restoration, and when I arrived at Palazzo Spinelli (*Istituto per L'arte e il Restauro*) in Florence, I knew that's where I wanted to stay. I came with a portfolio of my work that didn't exactly match the criteria for this school. Generally speaking, people who study restoration do not come from an art orientation but rather with a background in chemistry and physics. The director of the school made it clear to me that restoration is not art, but science – but I was resolute and within two weeks I started my studies."

### **Apprenticeship with the Chiaruggi family**

The program in restoration included courses in antique carpentry, carving, inlay, design and mechanical drawing, and all the relevant theoretical studies in biology and technology of wood and the history of furniture. Palazzo Spinelli is located in the center of Florence, and the various faculties are situated on either side of the Arno River. The school specializes in all areas of restoration – fabric, ironwork, stone, fresco and wood. The teachers at the school change almost every year, and they are all actively working as restorers. Together with his studies, Zetland worked as an apprentice in a local studio. A friend of his parents introduced him to the head of the Jewish community, herself a teacher of history of art at one of the city's academic institutions, and she introduced him to the Chiaruggi family, fourth-generation antique furniture and wood restorers in Florence.

“Every afternoon I would go to the Chiaruggi workshop and work with them on Florentine and Tuscan furniture. I accompanied them on visits with the heads of different workshops and learned things no school can really teach. How people relate to their work is very different in Florence than what we experience here. Aside from eating and resting in the afternoon, restorers are greatly respected by their clients who are ready to wait a year to get their furniture back, and there is mutual respect among the restorers themselves, who share their knowledge and cooperate with one another.”

### **Glue from bulls, rabbits or fish**

After a year, Zetland returned to Israel. “The school does not require completion of the three-year program, but offers different diplomas at the end of every year,” he explained. He began to evaluate the market in Israel and quickly realized that he was alone in the field. The few restorers who worked here using traditional European techniques were suspicious of him and reluctant to cooperate. For a while he worked with a Russian restorer who lived in Jerusalem, until he opened his own studio in Batsra four years ago. With time Zetland earned a reputation as a quality professional restorer and as a man who is a pleasure to work with. He works on furniture belonging to private clients, many of them Anglo-Saxons who brought antique furniture with them from their native lands or who bought fine furniture, as well as old furniture with only sentimental value. He also works with museums on special projects. Zetland is one of the few restorers in Israel who remains loyal to traditional techniques and committed to using only natural materials. “The whole idea of restoration is that even in another 100 years they'll be able to repair the piece. The hot glues that I use – made from cattle hide, rabbit skin, and fish – contract and expand together with the wood and therefore do not damage the furniture. In addition, such glues can be easily removed with warm water without negative effect on the wood. Use of standard synthetic glues or screws and nails damages furniture because their contraction and expansion differ from that of wood.”

### **Meticulous workmanship**

Work on every piece of furniture is meticulous and requires a great deal of time. Zetland examines the piece and determines what materials were used to construct it and what repairs need to be made. He takes apart the piece and begins working on missing elements – wood that was damaged by a blow and needs pieces replaced – Formica or other decorative inlay that has aged, paint and finish that have to be renewed. When he needs specific details he contacts specialists in the area in question. “A restorer usually specializes in only one area, and in my case that's wood. When I need carving, upholstery or machine tooling on a lathe, I

go to professionals in these areas. If I'm missing a handle, I order one from a craftsman who makes it just as a piece of jewelry is made."

In order not to burn out from such precise and painstaking work, Zetland continues to deal with special painting of furniture and builds unique pieces for custom orders. "I try to use all my knowledge of restoration for artistic painting effects, but without being limited by the rules. I combine materials that aren't ordinarily put together and use tools that are never used in restoration. If I don't create things myself, I'll suffocate." Once a week he teaches secrets of the trade through hands-on restoration projects his students bring from home. As part of his desire to combine love of what he does with social work, Zetland hopes that in the future he'll be able to accept troubled youth under his tutelage and work with them as part of their therapy.

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