

SUMMARY

Structural and Functional Modifications in Furniture objects: The Case of a 19th Century Display Cabinet

Structural modifications in furniture is a topic that has not been researched a lot. This dissertation seeks to gain some insight into how and why modifications occur. At the core of this paper is a 19th century display cabinet that has undergone several significant modifications. Its structure was analysed and the cabinet was restored as part of this dissertation.

In the first chapter, modifications are observed based on a selection of furniture objects including well-known pieces of historical furniture as well as items restored at Pallas UAS. In the following chapter, conclusions are drawn as to what the reasons and circumstances surrounding the modifications are. The circumstances that lead to modifications are manifold. As exemplified by the furniture objects introduced in this paper, they may be rooted in financial, functional, aesthetical or political necessity. Most importantly, decisions to modify furniture objects are tied to a shift in value judgments. However, from the perspective of restoration, this topic presents a different set of questions. For the restorer, modifying a furniture item's structure is usually something to be avoided. Yet in some instances, like in the example given in this paper, restoring the structural integrity of a piece of furniture may be undesirable as it conflicts with other, more valuable qualities of the object. It highlights that in practice the aim to retain an optimal combination of values is more important than restoring an item's structural integrity at all costs.

The topic of structural modifications is valuable because it provides insight into the relationship between people and furniture. Curiously, the nature of research seems to have a certain degree of overlap with that of archaeology and therefore its methodology may be of use when researching this topic in the future.

In the second chapter, the various structural modifications throughout the display cabinet's lifespan are described. The original iteration of the cabinet featured a simple diamond-shaped fretwork glass panel. Its most likely purpose was to display items of value such as books or dishware. It was determined that the cabinet originally had a transparent French polish finish. The next stage saw several modifications. The glass fretwork was replaced with a panel and the bottom panel was probably replaced as well. Additionally, the cabinet's depth increased due

to the addition of an extra frame to the main carcass. This modification called for a different type of finish as the newly added wood would have appeared very obvious next to the original material. Therefore, wood graining techniques were applied to visually unify all the surfaces. Consequently, the function of the cabinet changed, too. In this stage it was most likely used to store linen. Finally – leading up to its last stage of utilization – holes were drilled into the door's panels. This marks another change in function: with the cabinet going out of style it was placed in a cellar and was used to store jars and cans of food.

The third chapter details the process of restoring the 19th century display cabinet. In accordance with the owner's wish, a relatively conservative approach was chosen. The aim of the restoration process was to restore the cabinet into a functional state while retaining its aesthetic appeal. In order to achieve that, crucially necessary structural repairs were done. The holes in the door panels were filled. The cabinet's legs were recreated following the example of a similar cabinet made in early 19th century Russian Empire. While some of the work still remains to be done, the objectives set for the restoration process have otherwise been achieved.