

COUNTRY CHAIRMAKING

by Jack Hill David & Charles 1993 £16.99
ISBN 0 7153 8767 7

Jack Hill's new book sets out to instruct the reader in the detailed construction of country chairs of various styles.

The first part of the book takes the reader through a history of the evolution of the chair from its lordly use as a medieval badge of rank, to the provincial styles in common use throughout the 18th and 19th century.

The tools, techniques and materials used by the old chairmakers are discussed at length, the text being amply illustrated with many old photographs. He shows the tedium of the work carried out by the "bodgers" as unimaginable and for such a pittance of wages. The work of the ladder back chairmakers in comparison must have been less monotonous, since they at least saw the finished product. The sheer hard work is vividly described.

The materials used by the old chairmakers are well described and obviously well understood by the author, whose own preference for the use of ash is very apparent. The advantages and disadvantages of the main species, ash, beech and elm are discussed, as is the use of less common woods. The use of the word coppice in this book seems to imply any small (up to 8 inches diameter) tree, fresh sawn, whereas this is not the case with beech which does not coppice well. The use of green (unseasoned) timber seems to be the author's favourite and he describes the easy and pleasant way it works, as well as some specific techniques used in working it.

Traditional tools are discussed and well illustrated. Advice is given to the reader as to how to make tools that are now unavailable, or that were always "user" made.

The drawings and diagrams throughout the book are precise and easy to follow. Some interesting ideas on the origin of tool names are proposed. The tools used and the jigs developed by the author are somewhat removed from the traditional. Rounding planes, for example, were not historically used by chairmakers but the end result does seem to justify the means.

The second part of the book contains the "recipes" (author's word) for implementing several projects involving the construction of a simple stool, a ladder back chair, a smokers bow and double bow back windsor chairs. Each specific project is introduced with a brief history of the chair, followed by clear and precise instructions for making it. The diagrams and drawings are very easily followed. Each project is accompanied by a colour photograph of one of the author's finished products.

Purists may find the author's interpretations of the old classic chairs as rather simplified and modern in appearance but this does not detract from the obvious purpose of the book, which is to encourage more chair-making and I for one applaud this. The book is worth purchasing and would be a welcome addition to any woodworker's bookshelf.

Ian King

THE BONHAM'S DIRECTORY - 1993

compiled by Tim Forrest and John Kirkwood.
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The directory provides an enlarged guide to professional conservators and restorers of a wide range of collectable artifacts. The areas covered include paintings, photographs, picture frames, porcelain, glass, furniture, clocks, watches, barometers, textiles, books, arms and armour, sporting equipment, metalwork and musical instruments.

The major division is by subject matter. Within each section, entries providing particulars of each establishment, are arranged by counties, alphabetically. The details under each entry are comprehensive, listing name, address, telephone and fax numbers, opening times, specialism, service provided, contact name and associated relevant information. There is a cross-reference system linking the same firm under the different categories of work undertaken.

The directory also lists firms supplying ancillary services including photography, insurance and transport. The volume finishes with a selection of institutes offering full-time courses for training in conservation and a glossary with useful addresses.

Priced at £10.99, it is a useful reference book; well organised and presented, for those seeking specialist information on restoration.

Roger Woods