



Fig 1. Solid mahogany. This case was stripped and re-French polished.

In Part 2 we gave some very basic guidance on the problems and pitfalls that can be encountered when buying a clock. We not only looked at different types of clocks but also at the price ranges involved depending on condition. Now we will assume you have made a reasonably astute purchase in terms of the mechanism but that you will be interested in making your clock look better on your mantelpiece. As the clock purchase is likely to become one of the centrepieces of your room it is important that we consider the levels of restoration that you may need to carry out.

How far therefore can you go? Here we will be examining restoration of the clock case. As you will recall from Parts 1 and 2 we are likely to have to deal with three basic materials namely wood, stone and metal.

We will be mentioning some of the modern restoration chemicals in use today. Some of these can be downright dangerous, even in small quantities. Wherever possible we will follow traditional treatments that are well tried and amongst the safest available. However always ensure you carry out your restoration in an area with good ventilation.

Wood

First of all what can you find out about the wood used in the clock case? Is it solid, perhaps oak or mahogany? Or is the show wood a veneer? A veneer can usually be spotted by looking for the edges under a magnifying glass. Or thirdly is it a scumble, that is, a painted-on grain? A good scumble may be hard to detect. For an example see Fig 10 on page 45 in the May/June Edition. Incidentally a scumble is very easily damaged. There are three basic wood finishes.

The third in a three-part series Back to basics with clocks, Part 3 Renovating cases

By Peter Wotton

(a) Wax: A superb classical finish. For surfaces too thick with old wax there are cleaners but they must be used sparingly otherwise the patina, that is the surface that has built up over time could be lost. If re-polishing use only a pure beeswax.

(b) Oil: Another classical finish usually found on oak is linseed oil. This should be applied with pressure. The aim is to protect, bring out the grain and strengthen the wood. Don't allow excess oil to settle on the surface.

(c) French Polish: This classical finish is particularly associated with mahogany. See Fig 1. It gives a rich depth of appearance as it is built up with many layers. French polish can be applied on top of beeswax or oiled surfaces. Incidentally French polish also makes an excellent finish on leather.

A typically mediocre condition will show marks and scratches. Firstly you may have to use a wax polish remover. If absolutely necessary and if you have to disturb the patina, rub down very lightly with a very sensitive sanding agent. Follow with coats of French polish, when most surface scratches and discolourations will disappear. See Fig 2. Most French polishing also implies rubbing down between coats. If the original finish is crazed (see Fig 3) use light applications of methylated spirits. Allow to harden for at least a day. Rub down and French polish. Small cracks and holes are best filled with French polish. Rub down and re-polish until the blemishes fill and disappear. For cracks use a shellac stick. Heat and drip into the crack.

French polishing is explained in many books and the bottle carries instructions. If you are unfamiliar with French polishing it is advisable to practise on a test piece before committing yourself to the actual renovation of the wooden surface of the clock.

Stone

(a) Slate. See Figs 4 & 5. This is the most common stone to be seen in clocks. If the surface has strong whitish patches you have a choice. For a bad case, sand back carefully until the surface colour is even. Apply a black stain then polish with pure beeswax. Two tips: black grate polish (Zebo) is an excellent stain/cover before waxing. Black boot polish must be the pure beeswax variety. Most are not!

(b) Marble. Appears in an incredible range of coloured, veined stones as well as jet-black. To test for marble, apply, where the result cannot be seen, a spot of vinegar or lemon juice. Marble will 'fizz' slightly. Always use pure beeswax to polish.

(c) Alabaster. See Fig 6. wash solely with white spirit and then only if really dirty. Otherwise this material is best left alone as it

is weak, relatively porous and its inherent ethereal quality can easily be lost.

Metals

(a) Copper and Brass. Brasso and Duraglit, incidentally also ideal for Bakelite, are the staple, easily found cleaners and are perfectly adequate. Brasso and a cloth or toothbrush, or a drill-mounted mop or brush will clean almost anything. Four tips. Do not allow Brasso to dry on the surface being polished. Use protection over the mouth and/or a hood plus an extractor fan. A cardboard box connected to a vacuum cleaner also works. This particularly applies when cleaning with a tooth brush or powered polisher. Be aware that for delicate surfaces this approach is severe and can produce excessive wear. Originally, mercury-gilding which is now illegal was used for protecting brass. If this is present and in good condition leave well alone. See Figs 7 & 8.

(b) Spelter and Bronze. Apart from dusting down, these materials should preferably be left untouched. However, spelter, if in a really poor state can be stripped to the bare metal by soaking in a cleaner such as Horolene. It may then be rubbed down and sprayed for appearance and protection. Fig 9 shows a Marley Horse treated in this way and sprayed with bronze paint.

(c) Iron and Steel. The greatest problem is rust, which must be removed completely. Surface rust is most easily removed by light scraping, say with a fine craft knife. Then polish with a polishing sandpaper. If the surface is pitted after removing all surface rust, use a liquid rust remover. For a black finish use gun bluing compound. Finally, finish with a wipe of light oil.

Tools and Materials.

(a) Tools - Little more than a good range of pliers and screwdrivers should be necessary.

(b) Materials - Brasso, Duraglit, Grate polish (Zebo), pure beeswax, methylated spirits, French polish, linseed oil and fine grade sandpapers, 400grit and higher are obtainable at superstores. Polishing sandpaper, old wax removers, black stain, shellac sticks and polishing mops/brushes (for a motor/drill powered polisher) are obtainable from the suppliers listed below.

Suppliers

Meadows & Passmore - 01273 421321
H.S. Walsh & Sons - 020 8778 7061

Further Reading

Johnson, Lorraine. *How to Restore and Repair Practically Everything*. Michael Joseph, 1984.

Wotton, Peter & Oliver, Brian. *Marble Clocks*. Shire Publications, 1999.



Fig 2. The oak veneer of this Napoleon Hat clock was in a terrible condition. The half-restored case was first oiled to bring out the grain and then French polished. This is easy to do and the results are a striking improvement.



Fig 3. This Mahogany French polished veneer has crazed with age, probably from the heat of a coal fire. It is not difficult to correct, though some may prefer to accept it as part of the patina.



Fig 5. Marble clocks are often engraved with Greek style patterns which were originally decorated with a gold paint. They can be repainted or, as in the illustration, filled with gold wax. Method: Rub a hard, gold wax crayon across the pattern (as shown) until the pattern indentation is filled. With a sharp, flat piece of wood (a sliced cocktail stick is shown) scrape across the pattern until only the wax in the pattern indentation remains. Finally, rub hard with a soft cloth to polish. The illustration shows the various stages.



Fig 4. This piece of slate, originally in poor condition, has been sanded and then divided into three sections. One section has been left untouched (extreme right), one section has been waxed (unstained beeswax - centre section), while the third section (extreme left) has been treated with Zebo grate blacking before waxing.



Fig 8. Front view of the 1927 Telechron modified for the English market.

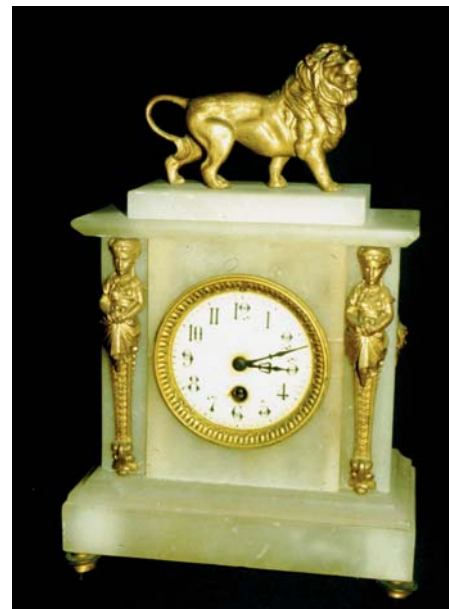


Fig 6. Properly presented, as in this example, Alabaster adds considerably to the presence of a clock. Beware however, that the ethereal quality is easily destroyed by unskilled cleaning and interference.



Fig 7. Care is required on this plated surface and Duraglit is the more suitable cleaner. The Telechron electric clock was first patented in America in 1918 and introduced to the English market in 1927 (when the AC mains was suitable). The English agents, Everett & Edgumbe, produced a version named Synclock, however this is one of the very earliest examples still marked as made by the Warren Telechron Co. but modified for the English mains (230v, 50Hz).



Fig 9. One of a pair of well-detailed spelter Marley Horses, this example was stripped, the surface rubbed down and then re-sprayed with a bronze lacquer.