



Above The finished fully restored card table in all its finery

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

Brassed off

John Lloyd tackles some mitring problems in the restoration of this Regency card table.

PART 1

This piece of furniture comes from a time when the 18th century restraint in furniture design was replaced with something altogether more eye catching.

Not perhaps quite as outrageous as the French style, which combined striped veneers and marquetry inlays all smothered in sparkling ormolu

mounts, but then the English were always rather more restrained with their furniture design than the continentals.

It is quite remarkable how a narrow strip of seawater can have quite such a marked effect on the furniture 'wow' factor.

This particular high fashion regency number has the classic combination of Brazilian, or 'Rio',

rosewood, brass inlay and gilt mounts on the feet. The thing that makes it a card table rather than a tea table is that when the top is opened out, it reveals a baize liner, rather than a polished surface.

All of us serious bridge-playing woodworkers know this is no good at all for playing cards on, because the cards slither about all over place.



1 A veneer repair cramped up

2 Edge veneer repair around base glued up – note softwood repair to the underneath of the foot

3 Tracing around some brass work, to replace rosewood veneer. Using a brass-rubbing technique gives a crisper line than a pencil

Problems

The main problems with this piece, apart from the fact that a lot of the veneer was letting go or had already gone, was that a restorer had already attempted to restore it. I know it is easy to take the moral high ground, and it's even easier to criticise other people's work, but thinking that anything Brazilian would be a good choice for the veneer repairs is perhaps a little misguided.

There's nothing wrong with being an optimist, quite the reverse, but Brazilian mahogany and Brazilian rosewood don't have very many features in common apart from the fact that they both come from Brazil!

Where brass has been inlaid into wood, there will always be work for the restorer, unless it has just been restored, of course. A moment's thought will probably suffice to come up with several very good reasons why sticking bits of metal into wooden surfaces is not a brilliant idea.

Brass expands and contracts due to heat, and wood shrinks and expands due to humidity, and both

conditions occur at different rates and times, which ends up with the brass bits buckling or popping out. The remedy for this is often to trim brass line to the new, shorter groove that it is meant to be living in, and to glue it back.

The usual way for line inlay to go round a right-angled corner is to cut a mitre. However, our previous restorer had had a go at the brass repairs, and although he had at least used the right material this time, he hadn't mastered the mitre, so there were some interesting corners.

Using one mitre and one square end at the same corner is a little misguided, but when this is combined with non-reversible glue, it can be a bit of a challenge to rectify. In this case I decided that there could be a degree of destruction involved in trying to prise the new brass line out, so I took the view that a better solution would be to use a little cosmetic trickery to hide these little mistakes.

In places the original brass line was sticking up a little proud of the

surrounding wood. The original adhesive used for securing brass line was scotch glue, possibly combined with a bit of garlic, either in the glue or on the brass, depending on which old wife was used for technical advice at the time.

This means that a bit of heat and some pressure from an MDF block and a clamp can get things back into register, but the new repairs that were sticking up and had been secured with what was possibly epoxy, had to be filed, very carefully! Filing the surrounding rosewood and in so doing removing patches of the pale oxidised surface, creating dark purple splotches, would not enhance the newly improved brass.

Veneer

Veneer repairs, apart from requiring the right species of wood, also require the correct thickness. The original veneers from this period were all saw-cut, so were in the region of 2mm ($\frac{5}{64}$ in) thick, which means that a skinny knife-cut veneer just isn't going to do the job.

Occasionally saw-cut Rio rosewood veneer can be found, but it tends to be a bit thin on the ground these days, as does Rio in the solid, although, again, it can be found if you know where to look and who to ask.

A lot of the veneer repairs were fairly straightforward, but there were some tricky bits missing from

4 Cutting around rosewood blank with a piercing saw



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5 Trimming the repair having glued it down



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6 The resulting finished repair



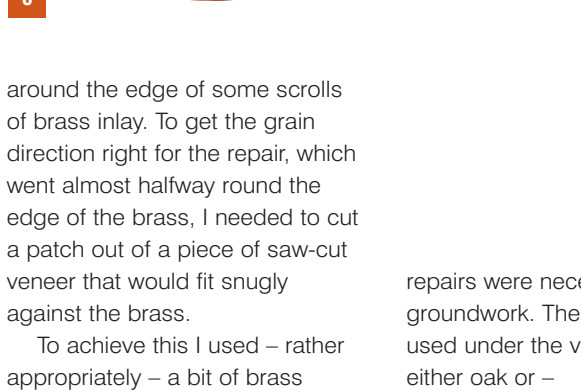
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7 Chemically bleaching a new repair to match the existing tone of the wood



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8 Various repairs clamped and glued up



around the edge of some scrolls of brass inlay. To get the grain direction right for the repair, which went almost halfway round the edge of the brass, I needed to cut a patch out of a piece of saw-cut veneer that would fit snugly against the brass.

To achieve this I used – rather appropriately – a bit of brass rubbing, using a piece of paper and a piece of thin brass rod, rather than a pencil, because this gave a crisper line to work from.

Having created the outline, the paper was stuck onto a piece of rosewood veneer, with the grain in the right direction, with some Spray Mount. The veneer was then cut to shape with a piercing saw and glued in place with some scotch glue and held in place with some masking tape. The outside edge of the repair was then finally trimmed to shape when the glue was set.

Groundwork repairs

Having removed the brass mounts from around the feet for cleaning, it became obvious that a few

repairs were necessary to the groundwork. The structural wood used under the veneers is usually either oak or – as in this case – pine.

Quite a straightforward repair was required to the scrolls on the underside of the feet. I created a flat area for gluing and rub-jointed the roughly shaped repair piece in place. I did the final shaping once the glue had set.

The mounts themselves

had a rather odd look to them. The expected finish to the mounts on a piece of this quality would be gilt,



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9 Prepared ground for new veneer

10 Gluing down new veneer with a hammer

11 Softwood foot repair shaped and ready for staining

12 Trimming the veneer repair...

13 ...and the corner of the repair

14 Cleaned up foot mount with the badly cleaned up and painted mounts

15 That's better...the mounts the way they should be

but these looked rather dull, they certainly didn't have that deep gold glow, so they weren't gold, well not on the surface anyway.

I tried a bit of stripper on one of the mounts and discovered that these lovely mounts had been covered in gold paint.

Under this, the surface was a bit grubby, but after a bit of cleaning that gold glow emerged. Obviously painting is quicker than careful cleaning, but it doesn't really have quite the same aesthetic affect.

The central supporting column had split-turned mouldings around it, and where the base met the column the moulding was curved. The moulding was a bobbin shape

and was made from solid Rio rosewood. Rosewood is not known for its bending ability, in fact, it is really rather brittle, so a plan for getting it to follow the curve of the column was going to be needed, but making the moulding was the first priority, worrying about bending it came later. **F&C**

Next month

John tackles the moulding and works out how to bend rosewood.