

1. How did you come to set up your own upholstery company? How did you know this career was right for you?

After spending 18 months living in New Zealand I had a phone call from my mother to say that my estranged great uncle was quite ill and I should come home. I spent a month living in his house which was like an untouched time capsule. He was a great admirer of beautiful furniture and 'things'. He was also quite an eccentric to say the least and had wonderful taste! Some of his beautiful old pieces of furniture were in need of some serious rescuing and reviving. When the house came to be sold I realized his furniture was just going to be shipped off to auction and possibly meet a tragic end! I thought this would be a good opportunity to learn how to restore his beautiful old sofas and chairs so I booked myself onto a two year full time course at Burnley college of construction. I finished the course in May 2009. I started the business whilst I was still on the course.

2. Do you have a personal ethos with regard to your designs?

I did a degree in fine art textiles and my work had a strong emphasis on sculpture and installation. Learning how to upholster furniture was a different type of creative that I knew from art college but still has links to sculptural. I suppose I am applying creative ideas to what most people see as a trade.

I came across a wall paper designer called "Dupenny" who is based in Brighton and has been working on a series of Berlesque designs, When I saw her work in the Sunday times design section I thought it was wonderful and how great these designs would look on furniture. I contacted her and we agreed to try a collaboration which has worked really well. I am currently looking for more designers to work with who have inspiring print designs which I can apply onto fabric and upholster furniture with. I defiantly think that restoring antiques and bringing them to life with contemporary fabrics has great potential. I love old furniture and think its such a shame that we live in such a throw away society.

3. What inspires you? Do you have a muse of any kind, or any particular designers you look up to?

My greatest inspiration is bringing old antiques back to life. Sometimes I will strip down an old piece of furniture and find notes from the previous upholsterer or an old piece of newspaper from when it was last done. Its like unwrapping a piece of history, each piece has a story to tell! I always try and put a note or a magazine article in each piece I re upholster so there is something interesting for the next upholsterer to find in years to come! There have been some great designers in the past whos work I greatly admire such as the like of George Hepplewhite or Chippendale, their designs are

timeless and beautiful. There are also some great contemporary designers too whose ideas I think are great such as Aiveen Daly who has taken a fashion approach to upholstering her pieces.

4. Where do you find the materials for your work?

If I am doing a commission piece the customer usually chooses their own fabrics, I use various fabric stockists, I try and source as locally as I can such as Ross fabrics which is a Leeds based company. It entirely depend on how much the customer wants to pay for the fabric and of course the piece of furniture in question. I recently upholstered a piano stool for a customer who wanted me to use her husbands old tweed trousers! It was a challenge to work out how I was going to make the fabric stretch, it looked surprisingly effective!

When I have the time I try and work on pieces that are one offs that I may have found at antique fairs and auctions. With these pieces I would like to do more collaborations with print designers to come up with quirky one off pieces.

5. What is your favourite or most popular creation so far?

My favourite creation up to date has been the berlesque range that I collaborated with Dupenny. I had to restore the chairs first and then apply this fabric which is something these chairs have never seen in their whole life time, I think it's the combination of old and off the wall new which makes them work so well. I love working with quality old pieces as they have been made using such old techniques which are made to last. Its satisfying to bring something back to life which deserves the time and effort you put in to restore them!

6. How have Artsmix helped you? How did you come to be involved with them?

I moved into the Arts Mix workshop in June this year and it has been a hive of activity and creativity for me. I meet lots of other designers and makers who are all like minded people who I have already started collaborating with. Its great to be based here. I make full use of the wonderfully equipped workshop and above all its great to be able to work alongside other creative people. Upholstery can be quite an isolating job so to be able to come to work in the morning and see lots of other smilely positive faces sets my day off to a good start!

7. What are you currently working on?

Im currently doing a parker Knoll wing chair as a commssion. It's not a particulary beautiful chair but hopefully it will be worth it as the customer loves it and Im giving it a new lease of life!

8. What do you hope to achieve in the next five years?

In the next five years I hope that I will have established a definite style of my own so people will walk past one of my restored antique chairs and say "Wow, That's an Emily Farncombe, Would't it look brilliant in our front room!"

I'm really keen to keep collaborating with other designers and makers, I would like to find exciting print designs and apply them to the antiques that I restore. To me a combination of old and new can bring a house alive. I think everyone should have a piece of furniture in their house which turns heads and tells a story!

I am running a workshop at Factory 4 called Re vamp your furniture. This is a really fun creative workshop where you can bring along any old piece of furniture and bring it back to life! It gives you a great sense of satisfaction and achievement and that old chair that was hidden in the corner gets given a whole new lease of life!

Please visit my web site and or drop by the workshop

www.emilyfarncombe.co.uk