

The Story behind the sketches, sketched over one week.

Mitchell Powell and I work together in our conservation firm, MPF Conservation. Mitchell bought his brother-in-law's upholstery shop at 23. Fascinated with traditional forms (unlike his brother-in-law), he hired skilled journeymen to train him. Several men trained him to become the conservator of museum antiquities he is today.

It was really fun interviewing Mitchell; some of the answers surprised me!

"I love uncovering ingenious historical fiber filled structural forms (sofas + chairs). I enjoy taking soft materials (hair, cotton, coir) and turning them into structural elements with proper flex, comfort, and decorative beauty. A bit like making a cake!"

"I love that each project is completely different; unusual objects walk in the door all the time! I work on a mid-century modern piece one month and a 200-year-old piece the next, tassels and fringe one week and a leather bellow the next."

"Sometimes I wish I occasionally worked with other talented upholsterers for the camaraderie and swapping skills. It can be lonely working every day by oneself. Having the shop cats, good friends, keeps my heart happy. It is a perk of owning the business. They can't always be in the studio -- they are banned when we have museum projects, if a client is allergic or if the show-cover is silk, though they have their nails trimmed weekly."

* An aside, we often work in different rooms.

"While projects last from 3-8 weeks, in each phase I'm doing something different. Woodworking, tailoring, hand-stitching, upholstering, and traditional finishes. The job is physically demanding, standing long hours, pulling heavy threads, hand-stitching, moving furniture, so as I get older, it is taxing, but it also keeps me in shape!"

"Throwaway furniture has changed the demand for our skills, so it is harder to make a living.

"Average" folks don't know that today's "expensive" furniture may be shortly destined for the landfill. They don't realize a lovely old sofa done properly is not more expensive than the half-dozen they will buy and toss over a decade! Our throwaway society has also made it difficult to obtain proper supplies in the USA, and many items are bought from Europe."

"My most memorable project was conserving the Flemish Sofa that resides in the Hearst Castle in California. The most challenging was the first time I conserved an original mid-century Egg Chair by Arne Jacobsen ca. 1960... An engineering feat!"