



Sometimes the late afternoon sun comes through that crooked glass, making curious patterns that relight memories of a time when I could crawl under a chair.

A Windsor Chair

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Foreword:

Any chair, whose structural basis is a solid wooden seat, is a Windsor chair. The design first appeared around 1700 at Windsor Castle as painted chairs for outdoor use. The appealing design rapidly spread throughout England and the colonies. Despite the appealing design, in England, Windsor chairs “wouldn’t do” in the finest parlors. The Windsor chair was essentially a country chair, or a tavern chair in England. In America country chair makers produced many rude variations of the popular designs, but the finest chairs were made in the eastern seaboard cities. The elegance of the best American made chairs was second to none. Soon American chairmakers were exporting chairs around the Caribbean and Atlantic (including England). The Sackback (or Roundback in England) became popular just before the American Revolution. The Revolution ruined the chairmaking business. Some chairmakers endured the war by making caskets. After the war a fake bamboo look became the latest thing and the colonial Sackbacks started their long enlistment of silent service. Around 1850 the industrial revolution overwhelmed both country and city chair makers. Most chairs made after 1850, are “factory chairs”, and the art was gone.

There are implicit truths about any chair surviving from the 1700’s and early 1800’s. The chair is hand made and there are tool marks everywhere and piece-to-piece variations in the parts. Surviving designs are structurally sound as demonstrated by their enduring 250 years of daily use and abuse. Survivors must also have had a basic aesthetic appeal, to have lived on through 250 years of the wide swings of style, fads, and whims. Bad design ideas; either structural or aesthetic, long ago went “out by the road” or into the woodstove.

The individual parts of the Sackback Windsor chair look delicate, but support each other in such a way as to make the whole ensemble robust. Breaking one part will usually result in

breaking several. The delicate appearance and classic appeal of the Sackback seduce the eye and warm the heart. Even your cat will like this chair. On “The Antiques Road Show”, a good original eighteenth century Windsor chairs can appraise for hundreds of thousand dollars.



back-wedged.

I caught the Windsor bug at the Bay Tree Pub in Burford England. Don't bother to go there. We went back. The chairs are gone, but the beer is good. I was later reinfected by reading Mike Dunbar's book. Every joint in the historic chairs has been studied and ideas that would only last one hundred years have been ejected. My Windsor Chairs are made from wood cut on our farm in West Virginia. The chairs are glued with "Titebond III" wood glue, and finished with "Minwax Wipe-On Poly" - - - no stain. The glued joints are tapered through tenons which are



We have found that a thin foam pad protects the seat finish and adds to the comfort. Kay covers the pads with beautiful quilt blocks. She also adds felt or cork stickers to the feet of straight chairs to protect her shiny floor.



Our chairs are only replicas of the classics, but they still are one-of-a-kind treasures, which will bring warm thoughts to the people we'll never know and a second long life for our forest trees. These pleasant memories of the future keep us going.

Our chairs are not antiques (yet). You need to wait.



1. Craftsmanship:

On your first chair you will be taking a lot of risky steps. After you make several Windsor chairs, you can learn how to do each step in a lower risk manner. The final quality of any piece you make is up to you. The quality does not depend on your level of skill and dexterity, but on your standard of excellence. Everybody (even a master) makes mistakes. The question is how ugly a mistake will you tolerate living on in your work, (or death in the wood-stove).

There is a human weakness to accelerate and rush the job. This tendency is a craftsman's worst enemy. Learn to smell out this acceleration and take a break. Put an easy chair in your shop. I don't think you can make any money making chairs. It is a labor of love. Slow down. Do it right. Do it over if you must. Enjoy the work and the pleasure of others when they see and use your beautiful classic Windsor chair. Now it's your turn to make a treasure for the centuries. Do your best, then sign and date it on the bottom. No excuses necessary.



2. Materials:

Making a Windsor chair is a lot of work on small amount of wood. Luckily the work is not dangerous to you or the emerging chair. You will most certainly get a beautiful chair on your first try. The only risk of failure is failure of your own persistence. Since the project is so much work and such a small risk of failure, use only the best wood. Pick black walnut or cherry. As you start out on each part, if you see inferior material, toss it, and make another. The time spent on each part is small compared to the whole, but any shabby part will make a shabby whole.