

Designer style

If you've got an old dressing table or chest of drawers that has seen better days, we could just have the answer... JANET DONIN meets a talented couple in Richmond who transform tired pieces of furniture by covering them in wallpaper



Name: John and Kay Harris

Company: CentrePiece Furniture
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FOR many years, the exciting worlds of advertising and fashion dominated the lives of John and Kay Harris, a Richmond-based couple in their early sixties. However, when the time came to make a change, they turned their joint artistic talents into creating fabulous furniture.

"The idea came to me about a year ago when decorating my daughter's bedroom," says John. "We had a roll of wallpaper left over and wondered what to do with it. Then I had a light bulb moment and CentrePiece Furniture became a reality."

"That first piece was a small chest of drawers, which when covered with the floral wallpaper took on a completely new lease of life. Before that it was ready for the attic."

Family heirlooms

And that's really the ethos of this new company. By sourcing unloved pieces of furniture at local auctions or second-hand shops, John and Kay can recycle them into heirlooms of the future.

The secret of the transformation lies in John's meticulous attention to

detail and his patience in working with so much care that the wallpaper covers the furniture seamlessly. When he finds a new chest, dressing table or cabinet, his creative juices start to flow and he can visualise how it will look when it's finished. Fortunately, Kay is perfectly in tune with this thinking and can source just the right wallpaper design and paint colour to create that 'wow' factor.

"Sourcing the wallpapers is my passion," says Kay. "I often find new designs on the internet or I could be strolling down the King's Road and something will catch my eye. If we have a commission to make over an existing piece of furniture for a client, we'll take into consideration the look of their home and find a paper to complement it in an avant garde way."

Looking at a chest covered in a black and gold Zoffany paper, I can see what she means. It looks utterly exotic yet the smooth lacquered finish is totally practical. Mood boards showing papers and paints and various finishes are always presented to the client, which are works of art in

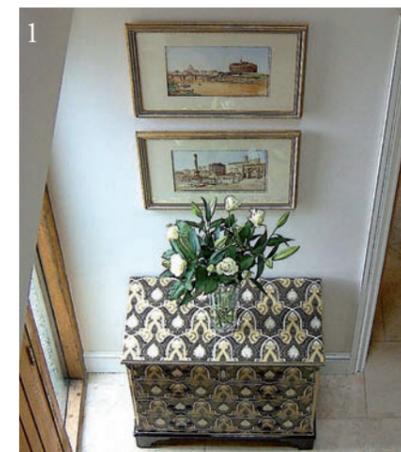
themselves, and then the skilled process of transformation takes place.

"With our furniture, the delight is in the detail," adds Kay. "We try very hard to find just the right knobs, hinges or handles to complement the furniture and John often covers the back of a piece, like a dressing table, so it can be admired from all angles."

Works of art

Furniture patterned with football heroes may not be on the agenda at CentrePiece, but a strong geometric print transforming a veneered chest into a rich Moroccan looking treasure – or a rather dated dressing table made over with a black and white, Jocelyn Warner floral paper – are the reinvented pieces that typify John and Kay's designs, which range in price from £1,250 to £3,500.

"There's no limit to our imagination," says John. "At the moment, I'm experimenting with other materials, like maps, computer generated graphics and fabrics. But I'll really have to like what I'm creating or it simply won't happen."



1 This dramatic wallpaper by Riva Positano for Today Interiors gives this chest a rich Moroccan feel 2 An old chest looks far more contemporary when covered with a black, gold and cream Alhambra wallpaper by Zoffany 3 This unloved bedside table, now covered in Mono Rose wallpaper by Cath Kidston, was John's first creation 4 Two unwanted pieces get a new lease of life when covered with a distinctive Flora Satin wallpaper by Jocelyn Warner 5 A heavy looking, traditional chest before it was transformed 6 Many layers of lacquer give this pretty Arizona wallpaper by Suzy Hoodless for Osborne & Little a practical finish 7 Wallpaper, paint and lacquer can completely transform an old piece of furniture 8 Attention to detail is obvious in the seamless matching of paper and the co-ordinating paint trim