

PETER ADAMS CHAIRMAKER

Restoring Margie's Windsor

In the 1800s the English Windsor chair industry was centred in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, a transport hub to London and within easy reach of the markets at Windsor (hence the chair's name) and the area had a plentiful supply of elm, sycamore, yew and beech. At the height of production over 400 small factories were turning out 4,500 chairs a day, all made by hand, without access to machinery.

Margie's chair could be up to 250 years old and the fashions of the time involved very full skirts and petticoats. When this chair came to me for repair it had developed a character of its own: worn down and twisted over the centuries and repaired with blacksmith forged metal straps and cut nails, it nevertheless had great charm. The seat was split through in three places, the back was detached and the original leg stretchers had disappeared. Some time, possibly around the 1900s, the chair had been 'agriculturally' repaired. Along the back bow and the under side of the seat blacksmith's shaped metal straps and cut nails had been used. While there was very little added rigidity in these straps, they were part of the life of the chair and so I elected to return them to their original positions as part of the chair's history and provenance.

A final wood stain to blend the colours of the various timbers both old and new, followed by two coats of French Polish and a final polish with Carnuba Furniture Wax and Margie's Windsor will be around for centuries to come.



Margie's Windsor chair



Huon pine 10-seater dining table:

Built in 2006 from Huon pine that had been seasoned in my workshop for five years. The timber was sourced from submerged logs in Tasmania's Franklin River. Helicopters and divers rescued these logs and when they were retrieved from the water they were black. However, 5 mm below the surface the timber was in perfect condition. The trees were well over 1,000 years old and had been felled over 100 years ago and were considered unusable by the loggers. In 10 years there has been no shrinkage in the planks.

For ease of movement, Huon pine wheels have been fitted at one end so the table can be moved by one person and the legs can be removed for ease of transportation.

Handwritten signature or mark.



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Peter Adams makes and restores chairs.

My handmade Windsor chairs feature seats and splats made from selected elm, a timber which has been difficult to source since the Dutch elm disease decimated elm trees throughout Europe and the United Kingdom. The elm I use was rescued from 140-year-old trees in Mount Wilson, NSW, which were knocked down in a 2010 storm.

The seat blanks are shaped using a chairmaker's scorpe and traditional chair-making methods. The bows are made from selected European ash or beech (because of their straight grain and strength) and then steam bent in my workshop. The legs and spindles are made from various timbers—Tasmanian myrtle, which is wonderful to work with on the lathe, or local Blue Mountains ash. Chairs are French polished and waxed and the legs, stretchers, spindles and bows are stained black and polished...

The fact that Windsor chairs have remained popular for 200 years is a testimony to their design, construction and comfort.

Peter Adams in his workshop (photo Jacqui Dean 2016)





This page:
Margie's Windsor chair
restoration in progress

Opposite:
Peter Adams with half-
size Windsor chair
(photo David Oliver
2014)

Excerpts from
Peter Adams Chairmaker,
a 36-page booklet
about chairmaking
and restoration which
is available for \$13
(includes postage inside
Australia) from
peter@peteradams.com



