



In our opinion, no modern beds equal the grandeur or the beauty of a mother-of-pearl inlaid bed

Never say 'never'... a restorer's viewpoint

Every piece of antique or period furniture is unique. It is unique because it has survived the test of time, gathered its own history, and has the scars to show for it. Every restoration of an antique or period piece is unique—a 'one size fits all' approach simply does not work.

As an example, we recently completed the restoration of a unique brass and mother-of-pearl inlaid bed from Charleville in western Queensland. The owners had managed to piece the bed together enough to email us a photo. They wanted to know if the restoration could be done and if the bed could be extended to a Queen size. The frame, in general, was in reasonable condition; the bends were to be expected. The brass was bent and dented, but the ornate mother-of-pearl inlay work—the main feature—was missing. Fortunately, the owners had found a single

piece that had fallen off into the base of the central medallion.

Despite the bed's condition, we replied 'Yes' to both questions—yes it could be done and yes it could be extended to a Queen size. The bed arrived shortly after for restoration.

We have done a number of mother-of-pearl restorations, including a set of French opera glasses and a bed where, as the client admitted, she had chipped the jigsaw off the bed and then wanted us to restore the now missing mother-of-pearl.

Mother-of-pearl is not often worked with today and Mark taught himself how to cut, polish, and replace the mother-of-pearl pieces that are usually a diamond shape, about 25 mm x 25 mm and the thickness of a fingernail. Mother-of-pearl restoration is time consuming, but the end results are always worth it.

Sourcing the pearl shell is an adventure in itself. Sometimes New Zealand paua shell is used, although not as commonly as mother-of-pearl. The shells need to be large enough to have a natural flat surface, and the colours need to match or blend into any existing or original pieces. Through working with original pieces of mother-of-pearl, we learnt that some have dyes placed behind them to reflect through the thin layer of shell.

The only existing piece of mother-of-pearl from our bed restoration project was cut in a diamond shape, which gave us our first clue where to begin the restoration. We began researching visual materials for photographs and sketches to help us to create an authentic restoration. It was time consuming, but finding original material is invaluable. On the original bed, the mother-of-pearl was cut and glued onto the square tubing of the bed and also on the centre medallion of the bed head. The glue had given way a long time ago and with it went small pieces of mother-of-pearl.

In our opinion, no modern beds equal the grandeur or the beauty of a mother-of-pearl inlaid bed. We also believe that the bed's personality reflects through its scars and that the owners should cherish its distinguishing features.

Two years after completing this restoration we came across a mail order catalogue from F. Tritton Limited, with an exact sketch of the same bed,

described as 'Double bedstead, 2in foot pillars, The latest bow front foot rail, Mother of Pearl centre, and 7 Mother of Pearl spindles, 2 fancy scrolls, patent running castors. Cost £10/10/-.' Finding this catalogue, long after we had completed the restoration, gave us a wonderful sense of satisfaction that our original research was valid. As part of our service to our clients, where possible, we supply them with a copy of how their bed appeared in an original catalogue. In this particular case, the catalogue picture made its way to Charleville two years later.

So when someone tells you that a restoration piece can 'never be done', and before you throw it out or give it away, take a photo and email us. We are always up for a new challenge. To date, we have conquered all the challenges thrown our way, although we admit there is often a lot of head scratching sessions and time spent in research. The only time we hesitate is when the restoration exceeds the market value of the piece, although when sentiments are involved, this rule does not always apply ■

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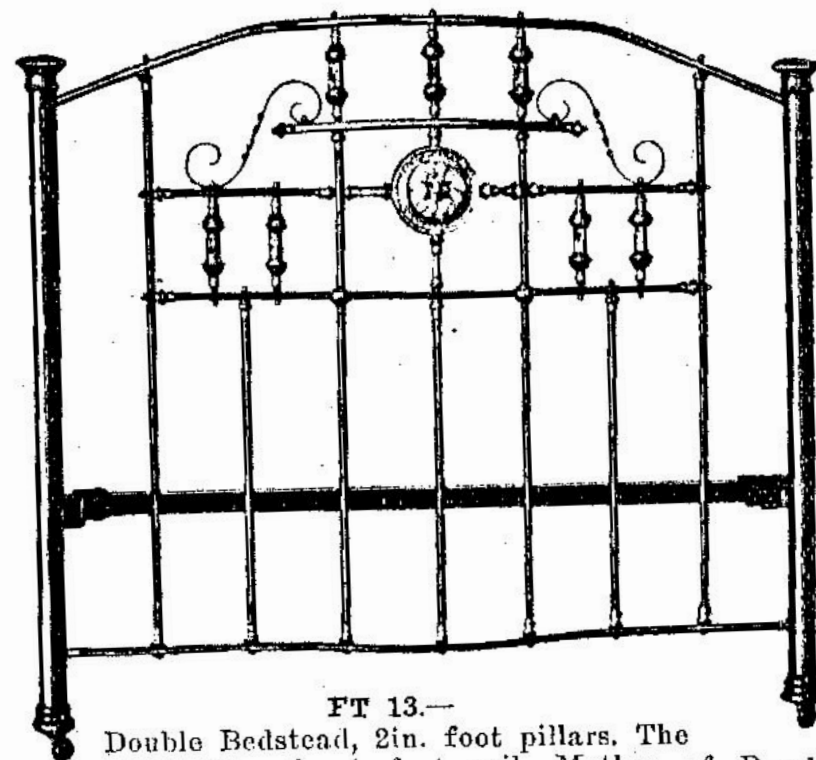
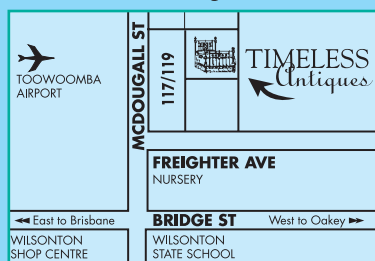
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Bed in Tritton's catalogue