

MORE THOUGHTS ON ARTIFACT RESTORATION

By Scot Stoneking

Artifact restoration has been the subject of many debates in recent years and whether you are a novice or a long-time collector, you will find no shortage of opinions on the matter. Like most on-going controversy, the trends of popular opinion will sway and bend, and eventually come full circle before starting all over again. When it's all said and done, the decision to restore an artifact or not will fall to the personal preference of the individual, and rightly so.

As a full time restoration professional, I can certainly be accused of bias but that doesn't bother me in the least. My point of view on the matter is clear and it is founded in fairness and honesty. I believe it is important to offer different schools of thought when asked if an artifact should or should not be professionally restored, even if I sometimes seem contradictory. After all, how can anyone be objective with a closed mind?

There are several factors to consider if a collector is thinking about restoration. To the novice, I would encourage you to talk to your collector peers. You probably won't have to go far to find a very diverse and puzzling array of widely different opinions, but it's a start. Once you have gathered enough information, you will simply have to trust your gut because there is no black and white. Every situation, and every artifact is different; so each should be considered on an individual basis. Unfortunately, there are collectors at every level that are steadfast in their beliefs that no artifact should ever be restored, and they are more than happy to try and persuade you to follow that dogma. If you run into such a stone wall, please don't stop there. Try to keep in mind

that the top collectors in the world not only use restoration services, but use them often. That alone should give you some peace of mind that your consideration may be justified.

Your first consideration should be to decide what your intentions are for your relic. If it is a personal find and you have no intention of selling it, then it is a prime candidate for restoration. You will enjoy your restored artifact much more than if you had a broken relic in your display that you are always apologizing for. Wouldn't it be better to show it off in its original condition rather than having to say "it sure is a heart breaker" or simply leave it hidden in a drawer? On the other hand, I often tell potential clients that if they intend to sell it, then it is sometimes best to leave the restoration consideration up to the new owner. It is entirely up to you to decide if you think it will sell better as a restored relic or not. Some collectors would never buy a restored piece and some would never buy a broken one.

There are many collectors that purchase damaged artifacts at drastically lower prices so they can restore it and display quality authentic pieces in their collections without spending a fortune. There are others that buy and sell restored pieces all the time. The trend in the last few years has moved toward a broader acceptance of finely restored artifacts and they are realizing higher and higher prices in the market. This is due in part to the increasing scarcity of new finds which is driving the prices for quality relics through the roof. It is also fairly well known that

the market is saturated with fakes that have been produced for more than a century, so collectors are hungry for authentic pieces even if they have major damages.

The question of value is an important consideration as well. The primary focus of many relic debates is whether or not a restoration has an adverse effect on the value of an artifact. I believe that a quality restoration will always increase the value of a damaged relic for two reasons. We have to first consider that the artifact is already damaged and therefore devalued. In most cases, the restored artifact's visual appeal is greatly improved which adds to its value. Second, if you only consider the value of the broken relic plus the cost of restoration, the value naturally increases. And in both cases, the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts.

Are there damages that are better left alone? Absolutely! Minor or old damages that were reworked or repaired in ancient times should always get a second look. I believe they can add to the overall character of a piece. With that being said, I have no problem repairing any relic as the client has requested. He has every right to do so. If he wants it returned to a perfect state, then so be it. I am aware that some restoration professionals set limits to the amount of restoration they will do on a relic. I'm not sure what their motives are, but that seems a little strange to me. I'm technically a rock artist; what concern is it of mine if you want 75% of a fluted Clovis repaired? If you have a nice base and want a nice piece to display, then who am I to say you can't have it? Perhaps replacing more than 25% keeps me from going to heaven? Anyway, I will do what the client wants . . . within reason. How and what to collect has always been personal preference, so any collector should be free to feel comfortable with his decision to build his collection any way he sees fit.

The key to good value in restoration is like anything

else . . . **QUALITY!** In the past, poor restorations have given the art a bad name. About 20% of my business is reworking old repairs and that is why it doesn't surprise me when some old-timers steer clear of restorations. The materials were limited, the techniques were lacking detail, and the finishes were hard to work with. That's not the case anymore. Quality restoration is an art that requires the mastering of many disciplines that culminate into an accurate reproduction of the existing material with a minimal blend.

The business of restoration needs to address the will of the collector as well as provide the necessary tools to help ensure the integrity of the hobby through honest representation and documentation. All of my restorations are photographed before and after, and entered into a data base along with a Certificate to accompany the restored piece. As with many collector hobbies, ours is "buyer beware" and we all have a responsibility to protect our hobby from those who would seed it with misrepresented artifacts.

If you find yourself undecided about artifact restoration, consider this:

Would you repair a vintage muscle car if the fender was dented? Or would you just leave it like that because that's the way you found it? Would it be more valuable left as is? Would you be satisfied to say you had a really nice car . . . except for that crunched fender?

Professional artifact restoration is here to stay as long as people have a desire for visual appeal. There's an old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" And I would add, "But if it is, call on a professional and you'll be glad you did."



Lithic Restorations by Scot Stoneking

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