

FOCUS ON...

Louise Folkard

The Cane Workshop



Located in the historic market town of Alston, and housed in an idyllic shop that dates back to 1611, Louise Folkard at The Cane Workshop specialises in the re-caning and restoration of all traditional rattan cane and rush furniture.

WHAT WAS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND SETTING UP YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

When I was 15 I was a Saturday girl at Blackfriars Pottery in Newcastle. Watching Syl Macro the ceramicist run her shop and make her beautiful pottery inspired me to hopefully one day have a shop like Syl's. I was determined that when I did, it would have an old-fashioned bell on the door!



I had a full time job in Manchester working as an Environment Artist for computer games, and used to come straight home from work and start on customers' chairs. At one point we had 15 chairs in our (quite small) dining room, and Matt joked then that maybe I should have a shop! A few years later we got a phone call that would change our lives: Syl and Ray Macro the potters offered us the chance to buy Stokoe House in Alston, which was currently their ceramic studio. I went straight on Ebay and found my antique shop bell, and here we are, the best move we've ever made.

HOW DID YOU START?

My mother asked if I would have a go at re-caning a pair of her great grandmother's bedroom chairs, so I bought a book called The Cane Bible, and that was it, I was hooked! I did many chairs for the family and friends before I was brave enough to tackle 'real' customers' chairs though, that was very daunting!



WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

The real joy comes from the stories attached to customers' furniture, and why they want it repaired so it can be passed on in the family. I've done rocking chairs for grandmas that no one has been able to sit on for more than 60 years, and child's chairs as presents for new arrivals. The pleasure of handing back the customer's furniture and obvious joy at how it now looks is so rewarding.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Every chair is different, and has certain challenges that make you really think about how to tackle it. I'm always learning new techniques and trying out new materials. Learning about the history of the furniture is also a passion, and I've met Bill and Karen at the Corbridge Antiques Centre who are steering me in the right direction. I've also found inspiration from my family and friends who have been so supportive to Matt and I in starting this new way of life and career in Alston.

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

I've just finished a William Morris 'Sussex' arm chair, which needed a new rush seat and a spruce up, I'm also working on a child's correction/deportment chair c.1840, which is being treated by my fabulous cabinet maker Jo Lister before I can re-cane the seat, as there were spindles and stretchers missing and some very bad splits.

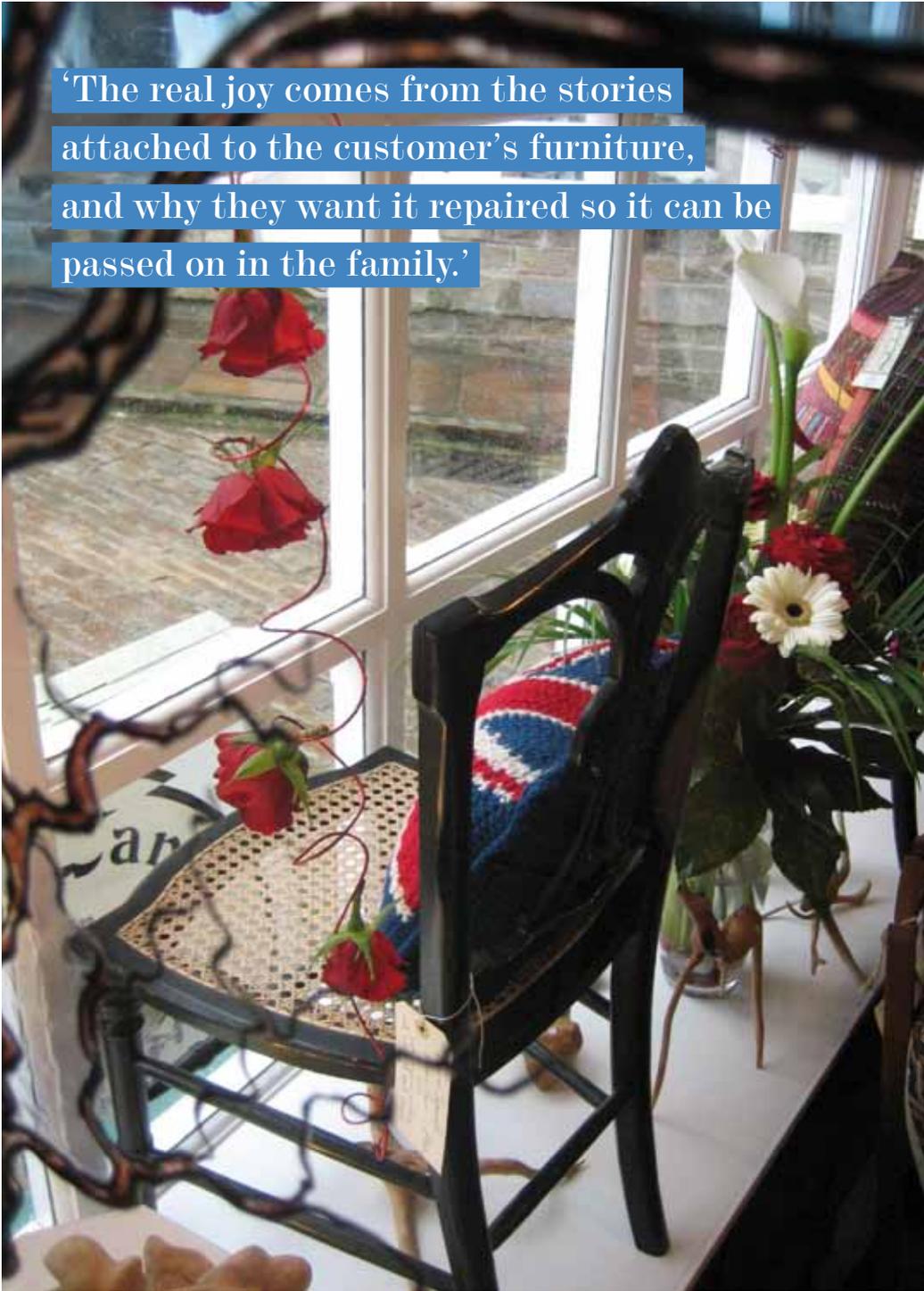
WHAT IS THE BEST THING YOU HAVE MADE AND HAS IT BEEN DISPLAYED OR USED ANYWHERE PROMINENTLY?

One of the nicest pieces of furniture I've re-seated was a Victorian nursing rocking chair which I bought it to restore and sell on, but it's such a nice shape and so surprisingly comfortable that we couldn't part with it. It was in the shop for a while as an example piece, but I had to remove it and pop it in our living room, as it was the one piece in the shop that everybody wanted to buy!

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO SEE YOUR BUSINESS GOING IN THE FUTURE?

I really hope that sometime soon I'll be able to have a trainee, so that I can provide a local job, and carry on the traditional skills of chair re-seating, just like Syl gave me an opportunity 20 odd years ago!

This year I launched our online shop too, which has many of my chairs for sale alongside a selection of local



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handmade goods – from Rachel Phillimore's Rag Rugs, to Wangchuck's Whittles. You'll have to go online to find out what they are... Alongside my chair re-seating the shop/workshop seems to have evolved into Alston Moor's art and craft centre! We will be expanding upstairs to double the shop space as soon as we can. I also hope to run chair re-seating courses to share my craft with others.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NORTH EAST?

Living in Alston Moor, an AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), I can forgive the fact that Stokoe House doesn't have a garden. Every time we walk our dog (Lekker) or jump in the car the scenery is so beautiful that it makes us stop to take it in.

The community here in Alston Moor is second to none and everyone is very keen for me to succeed, hopefully this will encourage others to start up business here too. We have also moved closer to both our mums, Pat and Patti, who have been so supportive – making sure all their friends bring me their chairs to mend!

The Cane Workshop
Stokoe House, Market Place, Alston, Cumbria
01434 382973 www.thecaneworkshop.co.uk