

CONSERVATION OF A BAROQUE-STYLE CUPBOARD

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The inventory list of the Art Museum says that they obtained the cupboard on 5 July 1946, when the palace administrator passed it to the museum. It might have belonged to the president's residence but it could have also been a museum property already earlier. In this case it might have been left in the palace when the museum was moved out in 1934. Or it might have been brought there at the time of the war. Unfortunately, it has been impossible to detect more about the history of this piece.

Technical explication of the cupboard

It is a cabinet-cupboard with two doors and two drawers, made of oak-wood. The whole-wood panels in the lower part have been fastened with dovetail tenons. The turned legs have been linked with a connecting support to make the construction stronger. The lower part is decorated with a jigsaw ornament. The doors that have been covered with precious wood veneer have a frame construction and a whole-wood cornice. The connecting line between the frame and cornice has been covered with a profiled slat. Pinewood has been used to make the inside constructions and the boards at the back, hidden from view. The cornice that crowns the cupboard has been made of pinewood boards joined with dovetail tenons and covered with a strong protruding oak-wood slat. The upper part has been joined with hooks. The upper and lower parts have grooves for setting up the sides and back of the cupboard. More hooks fix the sides onto the upper and lower parts.

Technical explication of the cupboard



Fig. 1 - 3 The baroque cupboard before conservation. Estonian Art Museum, EKM j 2018 VMö 39.

Damages in the structure

- deformation and cracking of the wood due to drying
- missing details, lost when the piece has been in use
- earlier repairs
- the doors initially had tendon hinges. The upper parts of the hinges that were fixed with screws had got lost and have been replaced with rough details of thick tin
- the spirally turned legs made of deciduous wood had damages of woodworms. That is why the legs have been repaired with added pieces of wood and gluing the breaks.
- the glue of the connecting support had weakened and the details had been fixed with screws. The ends of the turned legs that had been fixed underneath the connecting stick with dowels had lost part of the glue and some details.

Damages on the surface

- scratches and crushes
- abrading in the covering varnish
- the natural oak-wood and surfaces covered with veneer had lost their natural colour beneath the dark brown spirits-based varnish
- overall grime and dirt



Fig. 4 Birds' excrements heaped here and there on the surface



Fig. 5 One leg of the cupboard was severely damaged by woodworms and the weight of the piece had shifted the axial construction.

Aim of conservation – to guarantee that the object could be displayed

Our museums have few pieces of baroque furniture in their collections. The Stollenschrank i.e. the cabinet-cupboard on spiral legs that was the forebear of the sideboard is a respectable piece and its conservation for Kadriorg Palace was a significant assignment indeed. The cupboard will serve as a museum piece but also as a supporting element for many an exhibition in the palace.

Conservation/restoration

Restoration of the missing details, strengthening of the constructions that had suffered insect damages. Cleansing the initial finishing off the later-day layers of finishing and restoring the original shellac varnish finishing.

Methods

- Dry cleaning.
- Damp cleaning with a slightly damp cloth and later with a cloth dampened with ethanol.
- Metal fittings were removed, cleaned and finished
- ferrous metal fittings – electrolysis, mechanical cleaning, chemical processing (EDTA), ultrasound cleaning, mechanical polishing, oxidation with linseed oil.
- bronze fittings – chemical processing (EDTA), ultrasound cleaning, polishing, waxing.
- The construction of the cupboard was set in order.
- The joiner's glue that had been used by the maker had weakened and a part of the construction needed new glue (cold glue Tite-Bond).
- The cracks that occurred due to drying were left untreated to avoid the changes in the general look. On the other hand, this method helps the wood to react better to the environmental changes.
- One leg had severe insect damages that the weight of the cupboard had brought along an axial shift in the construction. In order to strengthen the construction a wooden dowel was inserted in this leg.
- The missing parts were made after the retained ones to restore the whole.
- The new details were fixed in the way that allows them to be quickly removed if necessary.
- The surfaces were toned and finished with shellac varnish. The cupboard was mantled.



Fig. 6 - 7 The cupboard when it was being conserved. The restored details create a visual whole.



Fig. 8 The cupboard when it was being conserved. The restored details create a visual whole.



Fig. 9 A wooden dowel was inserted into the damaged leg to strengthen it.



Fig. 10 - 12 Furniture fittings after conservation.



Fig. 13 The baroque cupboard after conservation.



Fig. 14 The cupboard is in the Estonian Art Museum collection in Kadriorg Palace. It is used for exhibiting the museum's silver collection..

Result

The initial form of the museum piece was restored. The layers of later surface finishing were removed down to the first original layer.

Materials used

WOOD – a vacuum cleaner, ethanol, distilled water, wood detergent Nostalgia (Finland), turpentine, acetone, glue Tite-Bond (Franklin Hyde glue, Kremer Pigmente), shellac resin (Baoschellack, Germany).

METAL – electrolyse, chemical processing EDTA (Triloon-B, Russia), turpentine, linseed oil, acetone

