

SHARING OUR SKILLS BY EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICES!

ADDING VALUE TO WOODEN FURNITURE: AN EXCHANGE IN KRAKOW


In September 2023, Emmaus Europe and Emmaus Brat Albert organised a one-day exchange of best practices on woodworking in Krakow, Poland. This meeting of several European groups focused on the following topics: renovation, reuse, sanding and sandblasting techniques, among others. The 15 participants from all over Europe, hosted by the Brat Albert group, left with new ideas and joint projects for the future.

Brat Albert, which means “Brother Albert” in Polish, has two sites: Nowi Sącz and Krakow. Like many groups in Eastern Europe, Brat Albert receives transported solidarity goods that supply the group’s second-hand shops on both sites, topping up local collections. These lorries often contain Emmaus furniture, in varying states of conservation.

Over the years, the group has specialised in the renovation of wooden furniture: renovating old furniture, repairing furniture when parts are missing, upcycling of furniture that is too old and unsuitable for renovation. The group launched a project to customise furniture using the work of an artist who combines furniture and collected items to produce original pieces.

Through this experience, companions have developed specialised skills, particularly in preparing varnish and French polish. Knowledge of the types of wood and furniture has helped them to develop their skills and a new income-generating activity: renovating furniture brought in by customers.

Each group contributed to enriching this exchange of best practices. The Rzeszów group in Poland provided a sandblasting machine to enable participants to try their hand at sandblasting. The Firminy group (Saint-Etienne, France), who are experts in this practice, gave a demonstration and presented the workshop that they fitted out in their own group, while also discussing safety-related issues, such as the importance of wearing masks, protective overalls, using a protective booth and maintaining a safe distance from the furniture.



Participants are renovating a wooden chest in Krakow, Poland, as part of an exchange of best woodworking practices.

WHAT WE NOTED DURING THESE EXCHANGES

Woodworking offers an opportunity to:

- Upgrade furniture in poor condition and sell it at a higher price
- Offer a furniture renovation service to customers (sandblasting, French polishing, painting, customisation, etc.)
- Enable companions to develop new skills
- Unleash artistic talents (painting, customisation, etc.)

Sandblasting

- Fit out a workshop suitable for sandblasting
- Work in a well-ventilated space to avoid the accumulation of dust and potentially harmful fumes
- Clean the furniture before sandblasting to prevent dust from sticking to it
- Repair cracks with wood filler before sandblasting and leave it to dry fully
- Ensure you have all the protective equipment: protective goggles, dust mask, gloves, overalls
- Adapt the type of sand (fine or large grain) used on the furniture depending on the type of wood
- Adapt the number of times the sandblaster is used depending on the desired result

French polish

- Wear gloves to protect skin from solvents and varnishes
- Use a mask to protect against fumes in a well-ventilated space to avoid inhaling alcohol fumes
- Make a pad by wrapping cotton wool with a piece of linen or muslin cloth
- Apply a small amount of polish to the pad. It should be damp but not dripping

- Apply the polish onto the furniture using circular movements, or a figure of eight, applying a light and even pressure
- Keep the pad moving constantly to avoid marks
- Apply even coats of varnish across the piece of furniture
- Apply several fine layers rather than a thick layer
- Leave each layer to dry: dozens of coats may be required to achieve a glossy, long-lasting finish
- Use mineral oil or olive oil to lubricate the pad. This helps to reduce friction and avoid the pad sticking

Sanding wood

- Adapt the type of abrasive paper to hand sanding (sandpaper, abrasive sponge or sanding block)
- Sand in the same direction as the grain to avoid scratches that would be visible after finishing
- Start with coarse-grain paper to remove major imperfections, then use increasingly finer grains to obtain a smooth finish
- Use a cloth or brush to remove dust between the sanding stages to avoid scratches

