

**The Arts Society Sussex
Spring Term Report, 2019 – Samuel Matthews**

Student Report

Since starting at West Dean College of Arts & Conservation, I have found that my knowledge for furniture design and making have expanded to include techniques and ideas that I haven't encountered before. I find myself more able to work at a consistently high level while still learning and improving on what I already know.

One of my proudest achievements has been the design and manufacture of a Mahogany travel artist easel. Even though the initial design of the piece was relatively simple, I found that there were many ways to add finer detail and increase the appeal and aesthetic value of the piece. I challenged myself not only to include many different wood joints, but to also make a lot of the hardware myself, for example the brass escutcheon and lock mechanism. I experimented making these pieces so that the finished items would be of the best quality and functionality I could achieve.

The easel also challenged me in regards to the finishing of it which I determined needed to be hardwearing and attractive but should also be able to be repaired easily in case it becomes damaged due to the nature of its use. For this I chose to stain the Mahogany and then French Polish it to a satin shine and then finally wax with a pigmented wax over the top to allow it to be repaired easily if necessary. Previously to this I did not know how to pigment wax, so learning this skill will allow me to use it again when I follow conservation/restoration next year.

As part of the course we visited Standen House which is owned by the National Trust and is a Grade I listed building. It was designed by Philip Webb who was a friend of William Morris and houses a large collection of Arts and Craft furniture. For this reason, the visit was very interesting from both a conservation, restoration and furniture making point of view. Being able to see amazing examples of the Arts and Crafts movement inspired me greatly. It opened my eyes to a different way of working with veneers for instance, and when I came back to the workshops at West Dean I experimented with different patterns and designs that I saw at Standen. Overall the trip was very interesting, and I learnt a lot, I will be going on a week-long study trip to Vienna which I am greatly excited about and I cannot wait to experience the culture and learn about their furniture and conservation.



Since being at West Dean College I have attended multiple short courses, for example, wood turning, wood carving, observational sketching and technical drawing. The two I enjoyed the most were the Advanced Furniture Making short course with Bernard Allen and the Blacksmithing short course with Andrew Smith.

When attending the Advanced Furniture Making short course I designed and made a jewellery box with a sliding front and hidden drawer, it was made from Cherry and American Black Walnut and had brassware that I designed and made myself. By talking to other students, I had some ideas for making a mechanism to eject the drawer when the front was slid upwards. After going to the Clocks department, I received a part of a clock spring which I used for this task and which worked very well.



The Blacksmithing short course with Andrew Smith was completely new to me, the task we had was to make a cranked chisel out of tool steel in three days. Even though blacksmithing does not relate directly to furniture making or conservation, learning how my tools were made and the amount of effort required to make a simple chisel was enlightening. It was helpful to learn about the different types of steel and how they are treated changes the properties of them. I was very proud of my chisels once I finished.



The experiences I have gained from the short courses are invaluable, and it has allowed me to implement them into my assigned practical pieces. By experiencing the techniques being taught by experts within their own fields, the knowledge I gained about these different areas will help me further improve in furniture making. Due to my experiences in furniture making I know that it will give me an in depth understanding of how antique furniture is made which in turn will allow me to implement that into my restoration and conservation.

With my time at West Dean College going so well it has confirmed in my mind the intention to stay here to eventually achieve my Graduate and then Post Graduate in Conservation. I have enjoyed furniture making greatly but I wish to aim towards an area that I have very little knowledge in at this time, which for me is conservation. Watching the other students in my class who work at a higher level has inspired me even further to do this and being taught by such a knowledgeable lecturer I feel that I will learn a great amount from following this path. If I can achieve my aim at West Dean College I intend to then go into work either for a current conservator or museum, and once finding my feet in the working world eventually set up my own workshop taking on commissions of my own.

Receiving the funding from the Arts Society Sussex has allowed me to attend West Dean College of Arts and Conservation. Without it, my financial situation would have meant that I would have been unable to attend at all. I find that my goals of being a furniture restorer/conservator are now becoming very realistic with the amount I am consistently learning and developing within my craft. Due to the intense way learning is provided at West Dean every day brings a new lesson and it is important to be able to experience and apply the information that had been gained from this into my work. Even though there is a great amount of information and techniques for me to learn I feel that I am in the best place to do so and with the help of the other staff and students at West Dean I can expand and explore my potential. I am very excited to see what the next few years hold for me.