

In the Footsteps of Napoleon

THE MAKING OF FRENCH FURNITURE



Wallrocks
FINE FURNITURE • ANTIQUES • INTERIORS





In the Footsteps of Napoleon

THE MAKING OF FRENCH FURNITURE

For Christopher Beem





THE STORY	9
THE VISION	11
THE TRADES	17
THE STEPS	25
OUR STORY	31



Joy





“

...furniture to a great degree, is the product of a community. From this standpoint, two favourable conditions were to be found in the 18th century. First, patrons existed who, because of their prestige, of their way of living, and of their income were destined to order luxurious furniture of high quality. But strong professional traditions also existed among the craftsmen, and their trade organisation was so designed as to perpetuate them.

- Connaissance des Arts Editorial Staff
'French Cabinetmakers of the 18th Century'

These professional traditions continued into the early to mid 19th century.



| *The Story*

When Christopher (Chris) first approached Wallrocks, he was seeking a set of 19th century French Empire library steps to complement his beautiful French inspired apartment, and was frustrated with what had to date been an unproductive search. After much discussion over suitable styles and availability, Chris agreed to take a giant leap of faith and allow Wallrocks to design a bespoke set of French Empire inspired library steps, made to the exceptional and exacting standards of the early 19th century where furniture was made by hand and was made to last. With this lofty standard set, there was nothing left to do but for Wallrocks to execute, by first establishing a design and then ensuring that this standard of outstanding craftsmanship was met.

In an age of mass produced furniture, where the hand skilled artisans of the 18th century are a thing of the past, this was no small challenge. Added to this monumental task was the challenge of overcoming the obvious supply chain barriers produced by a once in 100 years pandemic - Covid 19.

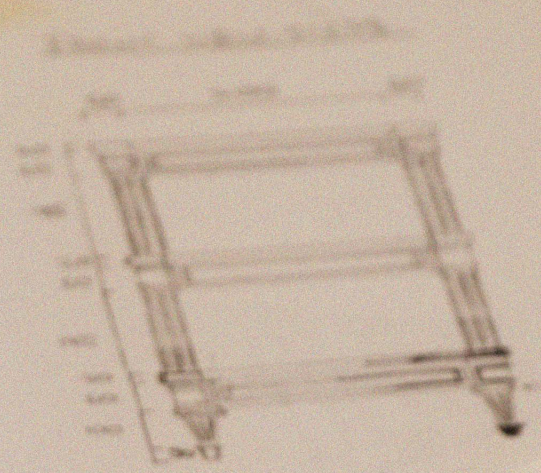
It is with extreme patience and understanding that Chris allowed Wallrocks to execute this and his patience has resulted in an extraordinary piece.



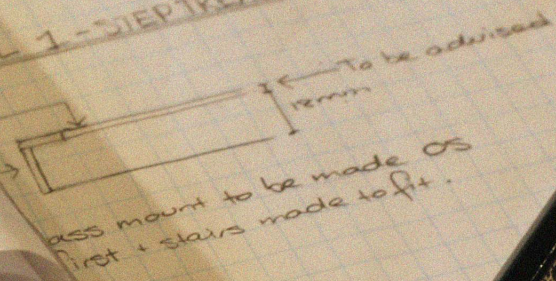
| *The Vision*

Created as a faithful reconstruction of the French Napoleonic style of the early 1800s, typified by unapologetically rectilinear design and true to the materials of the time, the steps pair the traditional techniques of the 18th century with 19th century design. The suggestion was made and Jessica's imagination left to run free, drawing inspiration from many pre-pandemic years roaming the streets and trading alleys of Paris and wider France, with father Nick, in search of rare pieces for her clientele. This influence was drawn on to combine these Empire and Louis XVI elements and inspirations in the design for Chris's approval.

A client who puts absolute faith in their designer is a rare thing and a great privilege for the designer to work with. Chris placed complete trust in Jessica and her team of tradespeople, and this faith was integral to the quality of the end result.



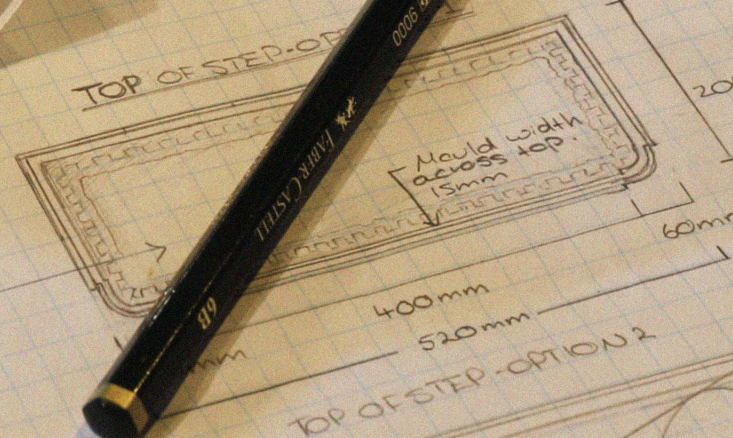
DETAIL 1 - STEPTREAD



520mm W

BRASS MOULD.

LEATHER INSET - GREEK KEY.



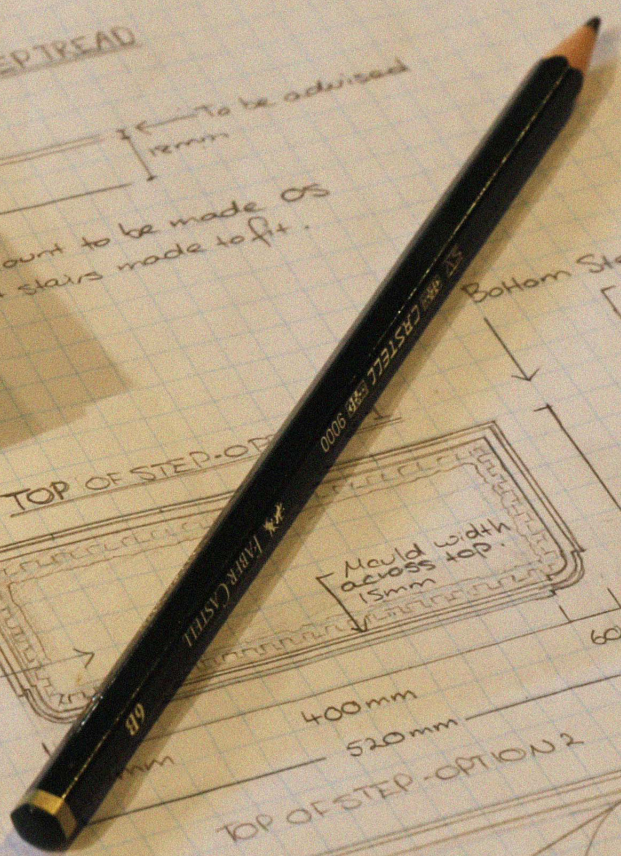
TOP OF STEP - OPTION 1

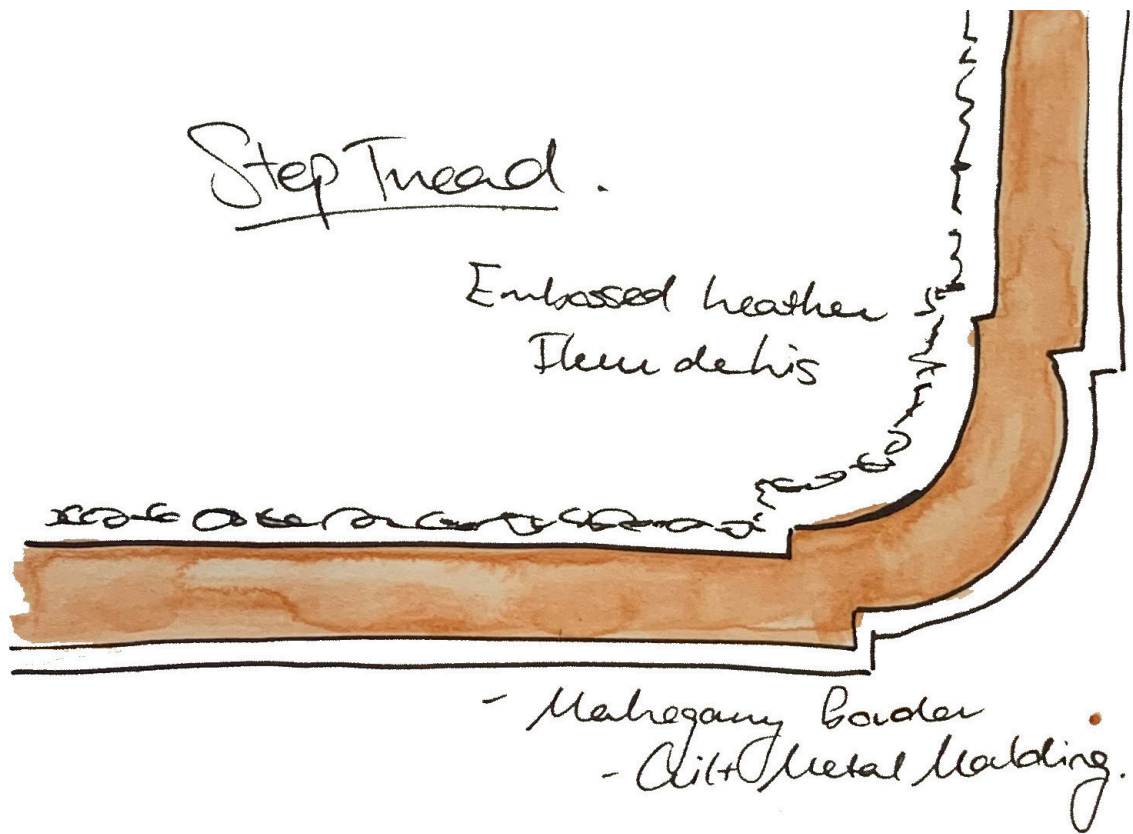
TOP OF STEP - OPTION 2

BRASS MOULD AS ABOVE

FACETED CORNERS

LEATHER INSET W/ EUROPEAN

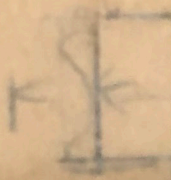




Chris and Jessica share a rare passion for French furniture that is of beautiful quality. Nothing about French Empire design is quiet. It does not recede but rather stands forward, triumphant and unapologetic. Jessica began with a series of concept sketches and styles that progressed to technical drawings. Collaboration with the cabinetmaker provided a deep technical knowledge and woodworking proficiency that ensured the structural integrity of the steps...no small challenge to overcome. To create something that looks not only beautiful, but that has structural integrity was immensely challenging and devising a method that produced strong supports between treads, sufficient to take a grown man's weight, was the first of many difficult tasks.

Tapered
Fluted Mahogany
Cilt Metal Foot.





TOP

12 FLU
OR

LEAVE

13



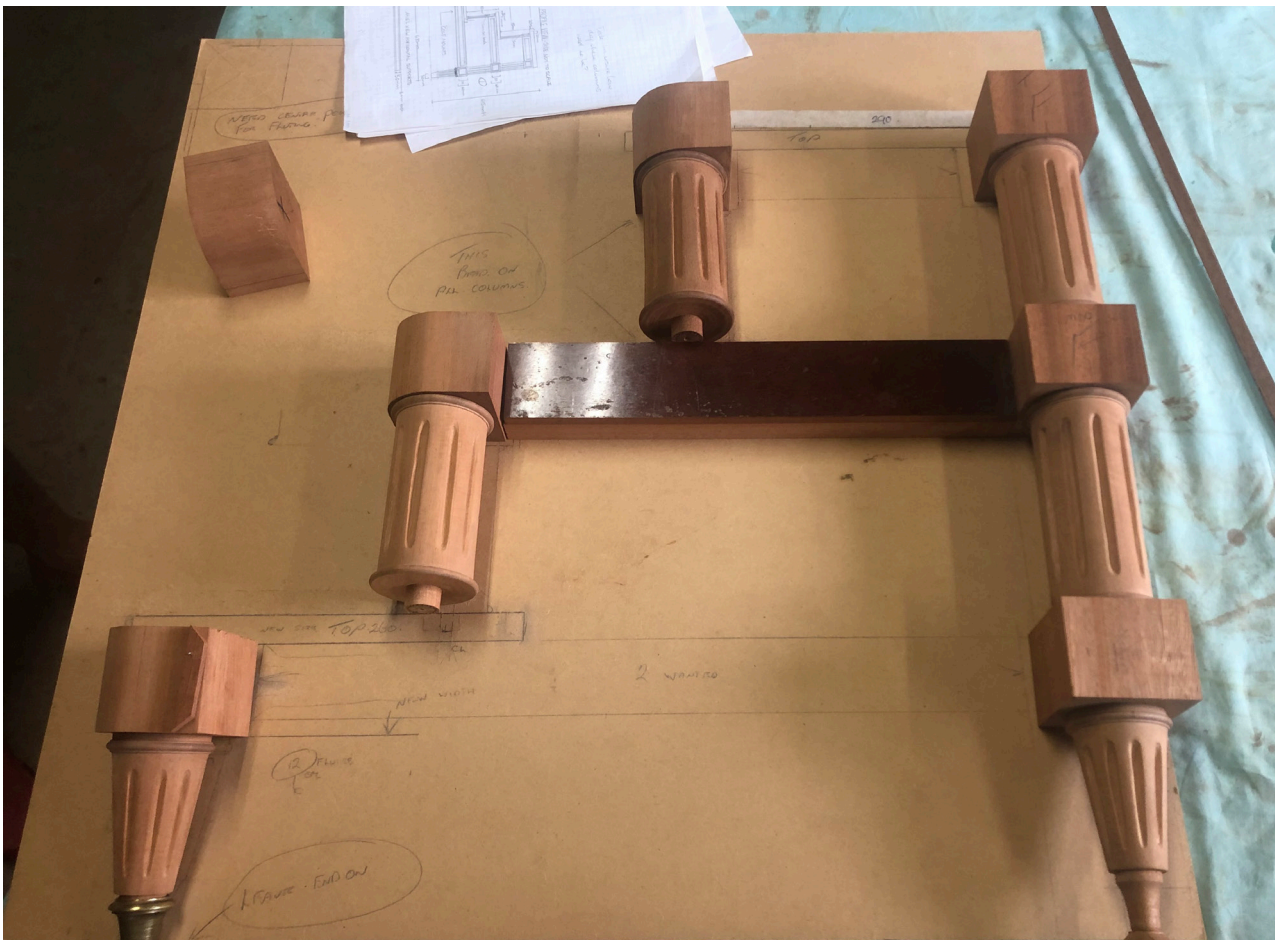
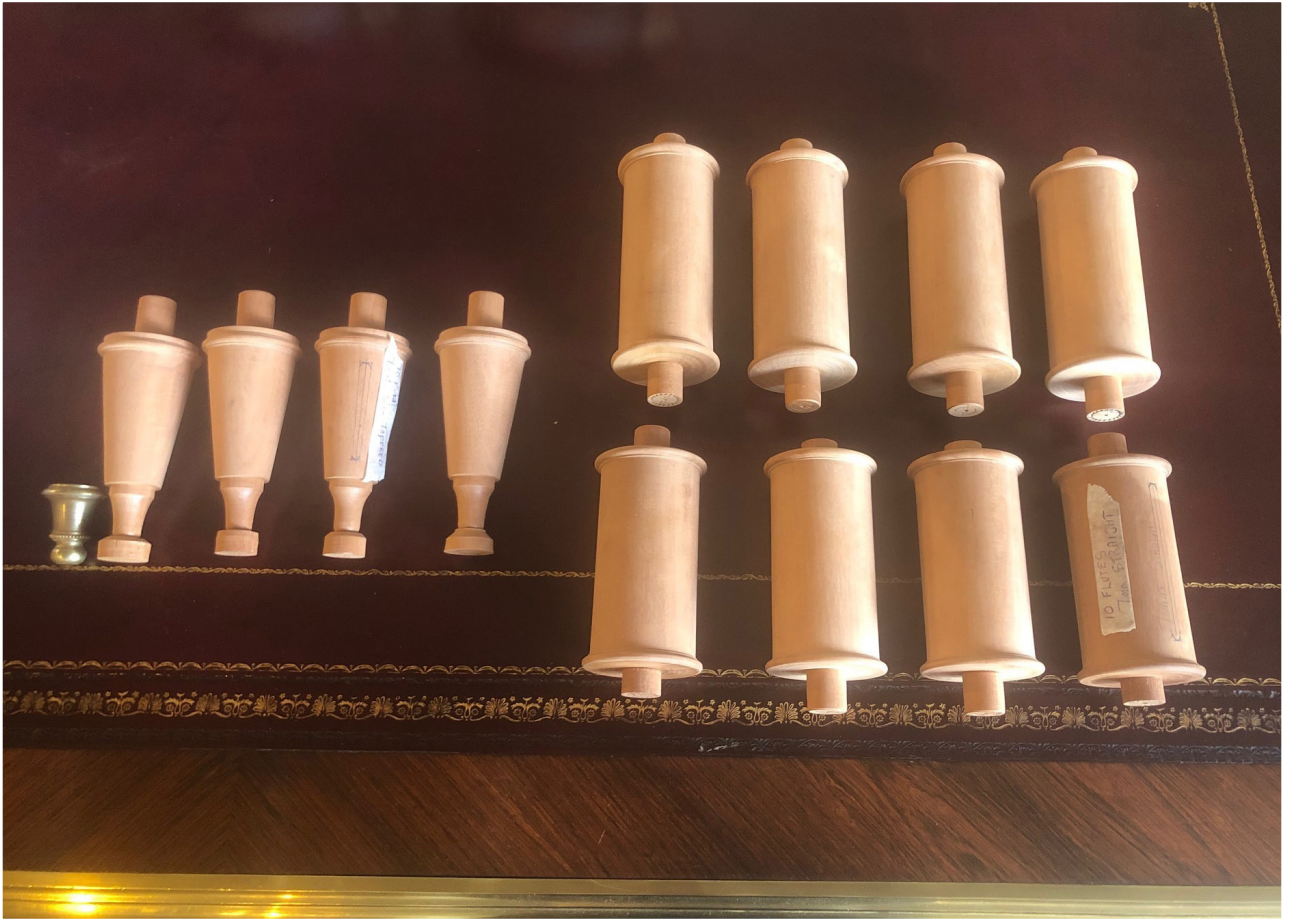
| *The Trades*

Cabinetmaker, Woodcarver, Leatherworker & Foundry

The project required five individual trades located in far-flung internationally dispersed locations - a real test for the ambitions of the team during a pandemic. It is a mark of the significance of a project when the cabinetmaker responsible for 70% of the manufacture, offers up his own tightly held inheritance for the job. Not by way of finance but of rare, 19th century mahogany passed on from his late father to use for 'something special'. Quality, rested and aged European mahogany is a difficult commodity to get hold of, however the cabinetmaker was so inspired by this project, which allowed no cutting of corners, that this beautiful timber was offered for use.

The steps had to be extraordinary from all angles, both visible and unseen, so Wallrocks sourced the finest quality flame mahogany for the unspeakably thick flame veneer fronts of the supporting horizontal rails which would later be mounted with 23ct gilded metalwork.

The leather was supplied by the firm responsible for making desktops for the British Houses of Parliament.

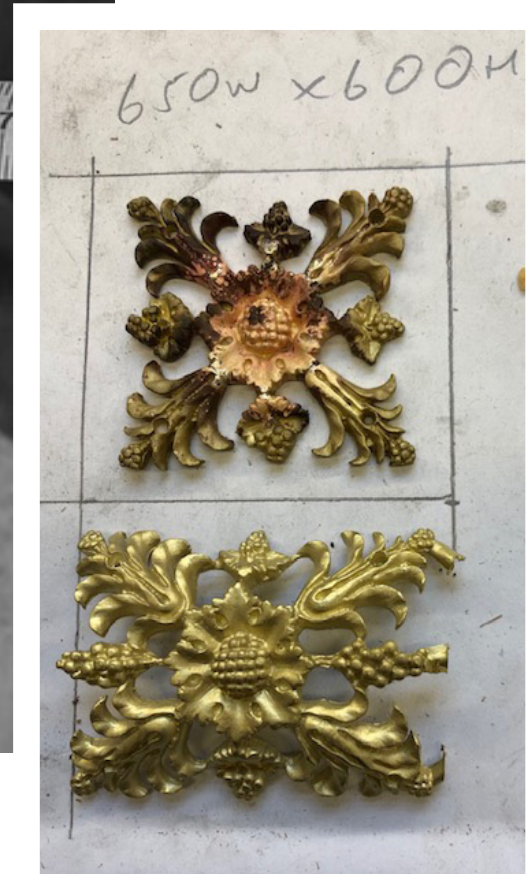




The trades required are in incredibly short supply in normal times, most having been replaced by the relentless advance of industrialisation and its tragic result...mass produced furniture. Only two of them existed in Australia and the rest located overseas.

Considerable time had to be spent evaluating the best process for producing the steps to ensure each trade had what they needed at each stage in order to be able to execute on their section. This meant the steps had to be built in sections, the design perfected without the capacity to glue it together to confirm correct build, and shipped off to all four corners of the earth. Thus the precision required by the cabinetmaker for such an exercise was extreme.





With the columns and legs made, the woodcarver was able to finely flute each leg and column by hand. Step treads were created individually and routed into complex shapes to allow for the insertion of the leather and metal moulding on the opposing side. Being done by hand, each corner had slight variations in its curve and consequently each tread had to be sent overseas to be manually fitted for leather and then on-sent to the metalworker to make individual moulds for each piece of metal.

The treads were returned to Australia for their four month wait for metal completion and the painstaking and nail biting process of gluing the piece together commenced. The big question lingered - would it all fit?



Bringing It All Together

One by one, after delays, lockdowns and international chaos, the various materials began to arrive into the country and the Wallrocks team watched with baited breath as Master Restorer and 35 year employee of Wallrocks, Lyndon Dickfos, stained, polished and assembled the various elements and inlays onto the steps. All held their breath.





| *The Steps*











“*If you want a thing done well, do it yourself.*”

- Napoleon Bonaparte



*Pr
L
Mar
A
R
R*

**WALLROCK
ANTIQUES**
33 LOGAN RD., W'GABBA.
(Brisbane's newest antique shop)

**GRAND OPENING
THURSDAY, 2nd JUNE**

Featuring regular shipments of rare and beautiful antique furniture, silver porcelain, clocks, jewellery etc.

Come and browse.

| *Our story*

Wallrock Antiques was established in 1974 by Nick Wallrock – the store would go on to become an institution in the Australian antiques world. Wallrocks is a boutique retailer of rare and luxury antiques and an institution for buyers of antiques.

The family's origins in antique dealing extend as far back as the 1920s, when Samuel Wallrock (Jessica's great-grandfather) served as president of the London Auctioneers Society and established The Blenheim Estate Offices and Auction Galleries which later became Bonhams.

In 1974, when hair was long and skirts were short, a young and adventurous Nick Wallrock boarded a ship in the south of England and set out to make a new beginning for his family. It was a time of growth, adventure and there was a growing sophistication, when worldlier tastes and outlooks were beginning to change the face of Australian culture. Coming from a long line of antique dealers, Nick was perfectly placed to act when he noticed a growing demand for English and Victorian antique furniture for the Australian market. Capitalising on his background and connections in the industry, Nick opened his first store in the Woolloongabba precinct where he later met Margaret while delivering her a 19th century desk.





They married in 1983 and Margaret joined Nick working alongside him in the business. Margaret had an artistic eye and flair for all things beautiful and organised and ran many of the events and antique fairs over the course of thirty years.

Nick has been an Australian Customs Authenticator for antiques for over 20 years. He has been a member of AAADA and QADA since 1976, and was President of QADA for many years before retiring from the position to focus on the business, retiring from Wallrocks in 2016.

Jessica started her own antique business under the Wallrocks umbrella in 2009, and in 2016, having studied at QUT while undergoing a lifelong apprenticeship under father Nick Wallrock, and also uncle - Charles Wallrock, Jessica took the reins to become Director of Wallrocks. To complement this hands on apprenticeship, Jessica completed a bespoke, one-on-one customised course in Western European Art History with Christie's London in 2016. This complements her interior qualifications with CACT and Bachelors degree in Marketing and Advertising.

