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Home & Interiors Style in the City

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In coming weeks, we will talk to four people whose work is decorating Melbourne homes and buildings.

Artisans: Upholsterer Mark Castaldi

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Sarah Marinos

In a world of convenience, mass production and quick fixes, some people are bucking the trend and maintaining traditions and skills handed down through generations. In coming weeks, we will talk to four people whose work is decorating Melbourne homes and buildings.



Mark Castaldi.
Scott McNaughton

When Mark Castaldi left high school and was deciding what to do next, he remembered the hours he'd spent watching his mother sewing cushions.

At age 17, he began a four-year apprenticeship at a French upholstery store.

"I didn't like school much but I liked doing things with my hands," says Castaldi, now owner of Martel Upholstery.

He learned how to sew, how to cover a chair from start to finish, how to sew in springs and how to stitch edgework and do diamond button work – where you make a pattern with the fabric and the pleats form a diamond.

"These are traditional handworks that are dying out."

In his workshop off Church Street in Richmond, Castaldi works with a team of upholsterers in restoring pieces of expensive furniture to their former glory.

Two imported and collectable Danish chairs are getting the full treatment. Castaldi has stripped off the old covers, repadded the chairs and sewn new covers.

"They are complex in the way they are constructed and how the fabric has to be applied," he says.

Castaldi has also worked on Featherston chairs – also collectors' items.

"I enjoy getting something that is worn and not looking its best and transforming it to how it should look," he says. "We keep things original-looking but with a new lease of life."

Castaldi has also worked on restaurant fit-outs and he is pleased to have had two apprentices complete their training with him.

But he laments the lack of young people coming into the trade.

"That worries me – the skills won't be passed on," Castaldi says.

"I went to Paris recently and the upholstery trade there is quite buoyant. Here it seems to be fading away. It takes a bit of patience and time to develop the skills and maybe people don't have as much of that these days."

www.martelupholstery.com.au

HANDMADE: Mark Castaldi has been an upholsterer for 25 years. At his workshop in Richmond, he restores antique and classic furniture from some of Melbourne's finest homes.



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