

CHALKING UP SUCCESS IN FURNITURE RESTORATION

Shabby chic is hot right now, but such exclusive furniture pieces are expensive and hard to come across in the region.

Meet Dubai-based hobbyists and chalk paint enthusiasts, Joanne Hughes and Heather Rezek, who are turning their love of furniture, interior design and painting into something more than a hobby, via their Facebook page, 'The Imperfect Parlour'.

Hughes and Rezek restore and upgrade second-hand pieces turning dull, generic furniture into fashionable, stylish pieces that would grace the most sophisticated of villas.

A key element of restoration and upgrade is the use of paint by Annie Sloan, a world-respected paint and colour expert, and one of Britain's most influential female designers.

Aimee Wakenshaw was instrumental in growing

the love and demand for chalk paint in Dubai and is the creator of the Dubai Annie Sloan Facebook fan group, with a rapidly growing membership. She is bubbling over with enthusiasm for her hobby, having grown up in the UK among a family who dealt in antiques. Seven or eight years ago, she first got into painting furniture as a hobby, but was disappointed on moving to Dubai to discover chalk paint wasn't available here. "I tried mixing my own," she said, "but it just wasn't the same. Then before Christmas last year, I discovered Annie Sloan paint here. I was so excited!"

Aimee created the Facebook fan group as she was keen to find fellow enthusiasts and share ideas, tips and tricks, and to help them look at old furniture in a new way. It was through Aimee's passion and fan page that The Imperfect Parlour came to be.

While Jo is currently working

and both Heather and Jo are juggling young families, they see the 'Imperfect Parlour' as stress relieving; and very much a relaxing hobby. "It's a creative outlet for me, you can let your inspiration loose," Jo said. The Imperfect Parlour offers upcycled quality pieces for resale on Facebook and Instagram, with the concept of ensuring pieces are accessible for all.

"It's our hobby that has spilled over, our homes are fit to burst with our own painted pieces and we may as well make them affordable for others. We want to offer it to everyone. Furniture like this in the shops can be hugely overpriced as it has the tag 'shabby chic' or 'vintage'. We want to be able to pass it on, at a good price" says Heather.

Jo and Heather love making people happy with their furniture, which is often seen as a statement piece or talking point.


"It's a wonderful

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feeling seeing someone fall in love with a piece and wanting to take it away," Jo said, "giving old furniture new life is fantastic – that's why we give each piece its own identity and character name."

"I looked into it as a hobby when Aimee started the fan page last year, then started buying the paint in February this year, and trying it out. You could say I found my vocation at 40!"

"There are always new techniques to learn – and we've learnt a great deal from YouTube tutorials," said Heather.

Hughes and Rezek scour Dubai for quality pieces that have potential, then decide on a style and a finish. The quirky pieces are then stylishly photographed, and given names, such as Florence, Goliath, King Louis, Jean Claude and Juliet, adding to the refreshed character they exude. 

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