

FURNITURE SALVAGE

Salvage: To rescue or save artifacts from wreckage/disaster.

Furniture - primarily wood

But it is often a composite of many materials:

- Textiles - such as upholstery
- Leather - desk tops, upholstery
- Metal - hardware, decorative elements (brass, iron and steel most common, sometimes copper)
- Paper - maker's label, or could be integral to the object (shoji screen, for example)
- Gilding or metal leaf
- Plastic

Salvage Priorities

Wood is relatively durable:

more so than paper, textiles, paintings

less so than ceramics, metals

High priority furniture

- Veneered furniture
- Gilded objects
- Upholstered pieces
- Composite pieces, because of other materials

Wet Furniture

Wood is hygroscopic - absorbs water and gives up water (dries out)

- Expands when wet
- Shrinks when drying out
- Gains weight when wet (water weight)

Things To Look for with Wet Wood

- Wet furniture will be heavy, especially upholstery
- Mold -activated by high humidity
- Lifting or detached veneers (water soluble adhesives)
- Loose joinery or old repairs (water soluble adhesives)

- Swollen wood, drawers/doors stuck shut
- Blanched coatings (sometimes called "finish" or "varnish")
- Metal hardware may corrode and stain the wood

Salvage Efforts - wet furniture

- Move the furniture to a dry location if possible - handle with care and use helpers to lift heavy or awkward pieces
- Of set pieces on blocks to raise them above wet floors
- Use dehumidifiers to dry out a wet room
- Dry the wood surface using paper towels - blot the surface, don't wipe, to avoid scratching
- Open doors and drawers of objects to allow circulation inside cabinetry. If they are already stuck shut don't force them open; wait for them to dry out
- Circulate air (fans) to promote drying
 1. Don't use hot air -

It promotes distortion of wood, deteriorates finishes, glues, causes rapid shrinkage of veneer and gilding
 2. The idea is to dry the wood slowly to prevent distortion or cracking/splitting

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Upholstered Furniture

- Upholstery holds lots of water
- Requires LOTS of air circulation with fans to dry (3 weeks recommended)
- Decide whether to keep upholstery intact or to remove (curatorial decision)
- If the show cover is ruined it may be worthwhile saving foundation materials - such as springs, webbing, horsehair stuffing, cotton batting, muslin covers
- Upholstery and foundation materials can be dried while still attached to the object but it must be started as soon as possible.
- Or remove everything down to the frame

Most likely it will not be possible to reinstall any of the upholstery. It could be saved and stored as documentation.
- Document upholstery profiles and materials before removal

Removing Mold

- This is starting to get into the realm of treatment but is straight forward
- Can be undertaken when you have the time to devote to it

Steps for removing mold

- Dry the object - the mold must be dry before attempting to remove it. Wet mold will smear on the surface
- Vacuum the surface using a HEPA filter vacuum bag. On delicate surfaces use a soft brush to brush mold into the vacuum nozzle.
- Wipe away remaining mold
 - 1) Use a solvent dampened cloth or paper towel - use correct solvent to avoid damaging coatings
 - 2) Bare wood - alcohol/water mixture 1:1 ratio (isopropyl okay too). Alcohol kills remaining spores.
 - 3) Coated wood (has a finish) - mineral spirits (neat). Mineral spirits does not kill spores but will help wiping the surface clean.

Fire Event

Things to look for:

- Carbonized wood (charred) - very fragile; friable, crumbly
- Soot deposit - On outside of object and will seep inside
- Ash - abrasive particles

Salvage Efforts - fire

- Avoid touching the surface of soot and ash
 - Touching soot/ash causes the material to become further embedded
- Wet soot or ash must first be dried
- Vacuuming with HEPA filter
- Dry-cleaning methods only
 - 1) smoke sponges, erasers
 - 2) probably best to consult a conservator
- Air circulation to remove smoke odor
- Use activated charcoal deodorizer to absorb odor

