



# HOME & GARDEN

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## Furniture changes as public gets bigger

By Mary MacVean  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

The question can be delicate to pose to a furniture shopper: "Oh, sir, um, maybe, ah, you'd like to see something a bit, um, sturdier?"

We are, as a people, as a sitting-in-chairs public, big. Bigger than we ought to be, health authorities frequently tell us. And bigger than many standard chairs of years past were made to hold comfortably.



EKORNES

Makers are building wider, sturdier recliners with heavier cushioning.

So the scale of furniture has increased during the past decade — to suit both the size of homes and the size of their occupants, said Max Shangle, professor and chairman of the Furniture Design Department at Kendall College of Art and Design in Michigan.

Some plus-size furniture proudly flaunts its generous proportions, but in many cases, manufacturers and retailers rely on subtle marketing.

Shangle said he knew of a company that made a "wonderful" dining room table and chairs, but the chairs were a bit fragile. So the company added three other styles of seating, including a bench it said would suit families with children.

"In reality, the bench was for folks who wouldn't fit in the chair," Shangle said.

He also cited a popular "mother-daughter" chair, the chair-and-a-half advertised as a cozy spot for two people to sit.

"I know full well the chair was also sold to folks for whom a single chair would be a little tight," he said.

Consider those inexpensive folding chairs that parents often tote to their kids' soccer games, said Kevin McGrain, senior vice president and general brand manager of KingSize/BrylanceHome. His company did and realized its customers could be left standing on the sidelines.

So it introduced the Plus Size Living Collection last year that includes a portable cloth chair that the company said can hold up to 800 pounds.

"The initial response was phenomenal," McGrain said. The chair has a much stronger construction than the typical \$40 version — and

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GAVIN JACKSON | DISPATCH

Sean Clarke, of the restoration firm Clarke Co., prepares to spray one of several coats of varnish on an 83-year-old oak door removed from a Bexley home.

## DOOR PRIZE

### Craftsman restores entryways — vintage or modern — to just-new brilliance

By Jim Weiker  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Sean Clarke studied the front door of David and Clair Reich's Bexley home for a few moments before pronouncing: "It's a quality door."

That's high praise from a man who approaches doors the way Wolfgang Puck approaches entrees: with an aficionado's eye combined with an eager desire to understand the materials.

The trim 42-year-old Englishman runs Clarke Co., a furniture restoration business on the Northwest Side that is also one of the few central Ohio companies specializing in restoring old doors.

Clarke estimates that he has tackled 30 doors in the past six years, mostly decorative walnut and oak monuments in older, affluent areas. In his quest, he combines business with a missionary's zeal for salvation.

"As I drive around the Downtown area and areas like German Village, Victorian Village, etc., I see so many beautiful doors that I would love to get my hands on before they rot beyond saving," Clarke said.

One afternoon in early February, Clarke

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**BEFORE**  
The Bexley door was covered in 11 coats of paint — including this shade of dark green — before the Clarke Co. restored it.



**AFTER**  
Six weeks later, the door was rehung after a restoration that involved stripping the paint, replacing damaged strips of wood and refinishing hardware.

SHARI LEWIS | DISPATCH PHOTOS

### WILD THINGS



ERIC ALBRECHT | DISPATCH

A zebra swallowtail rests on dogbane in southern Ohio.

## Right plant can lure butterfly

Butterflies often give the impression that they've no particular place to go. They drift lazily through our gardens, stopping here and

there to sip nectar before rambling on.

But when they need to, butterflies can put on the speed.

Their bursts — up to 30 mph

for skippers, a class of butterfly named for quick, darting moves — come in handy when trying to escape predators. Even their cruising speeds — 12 mph for migrating monarchs — can impress.

Recently in Texas to escape the last gasps of winter in Ohio, I enjoyed watching swallowtail butterflies dip, dive, twirl and spiral in aerial acrobatics worthy of a World War I dogfight.

Seeing the zebra swallowtails and stunning black and turquoise pipevine swallowtails at play made me recommit to attracting more of the winged beauties into my garden.

Like any other species — and that includes humans — butterflies simply want a place to live where they can eat, play and raise their young in relative safety.

That means flowers for the adults, tasty leaves for the larvae and absolutely no pesticides for anyone.

A great book to rely on when planting a butterfly garden is *Stokes Butterfly Book: The Complete Guide to Butterfly Gardening, Identification and Behavior* (Little, Brown, \$13.99). Although originally published in 1991, the book's advice remains current.

It speaks in terms of creating a butterfly sanctuary, not just a garden. That's a good way to address the pursuit. When gardeners plan this kind of refuge, we are doing it as much for the butterflies as ourselves. It is conservation of species on a small scale, a commitment to important members of our world.

In planning such a garden, it's easiest to start with the blooming things. Butterflies are readily satisfied, visiting a wide variety of flowers from which they draw nectar with their long proboscis.

They like flat, open-faced flowers that offer a place to rest and feed (asters, black-eyed Susans, purple cone-flowers). But they also like

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SHARI LEWIS | DISPATCH PHOTOS

After the Reichs' front door was removed from their Bexley home for restoration, a fake door was temporarily installed.

## DOORS

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sized up the Reichs' door, left untouched since the couple moved in two years ago.

"Clair and I talked about doing something with the door ever since we moved here," said David Reich, a dentist in Westerville.

It's easy to understand why they held off. The 89-inch paneled wood door, with a rounded top, 24-inch black metal hinges, leaded-glass windows and inlaid "bow-tie" trim, is a far cry from a standard steel door.

The door should have been a highlight of the home. Instead, it was painted dark green on the outside and white on the inside. Cracks ran down the interior panels, and the base of the door was rippled from water damage.

In other words, it was perfect for Clarke.

"This will end up being a completely watertight, beautiful door," Clarke said in February as he prepared to remove the door and replace it with a temporary plywood panel painted to resemble a door.

Back at the shop, Clarke and his assistant, Jeremy Mills, launched into some forensic work.

After removing the hardware and glass, they stripped the paint — all 11 coats, in a cavalcade of colors including gray, white, magnolia, yellow, peach and green. (Paint isn't a bad thing, noted Clarke, because it protects the wood.)

Clarke had guessed the door was oak but discovered after the paint was removed that only the surface facing the outside was oak. The indoor surface was pine.

Clarke replaced two badly cracked pine panels and the exterior pine frame.

After the repairs, the door was ready for the heart of Clarke's operation: the finish. He follows a stain, if



ABOVE: Sean Clarke, left, and Jeremy Mills replace damaged panels on the Reichs' front door.



LEFT: One of nearly 40 "bow-tie" pieces is hammered into the door.

there is one, with a two-step coating. First, he applies a thin, clear epoxy that is absorbed into the wood, providing a sealant against moisture.

He then sprays on the first coat of varnish before the epoxy dries, allowing the two to bond. The key to his process, Clarke said, is Epifanes wood finish, designed for marine uses.

"The problem with door finishes is they break down with the sun and rain," Clarke said. "I was in Beaufort, S.C., several years ago when I saw someone varnishing a boat. That's when it dawned on me: If boats can sit in water, why not use this varnish for doors?"

The time-consuming part of Clarke's work is the varnish. Each coat must dry and be sanded before the next is applied. Most doors receive three coats.

Depending on the door's condition, restoration can take three to eight weeks.

Clarke's level of detail doesn't come cheap. Most doors cost \$1,600 to \$4,500 to restore. For the same

amount, homeowners can buy high-quality new doors, although not ones with historical value.

The Reichs considered replacing their door but found it was less expensive to restore it.

"It would have required a custom-cut door," David Reich said. "And it would have been just as expensive as restoring this one — more if you wanted the same detail, the leaded window and other things."

Two years ago, Hyla and Tom Griesdorn paid about \$5,000 for Clarke to restore double entry doors on their German Village home. The walnut doors, which Clarke estimates are 140 to 150 years old, were originally on a Broad Street mansion.

"The varnish was peeling off, and the doors had some cracks in them," Hyla Griesdorn said. "The only thing we considered was just having it finished."

Griesdorn learned of Clarke from the German Village hair salon Teez, whose doors Clarke restored. (He also did the entry doors



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to Lindey's Restaurant and Bar.)

Griesdorn said she has no regrets about restoring the doors.

"I think the doors change the whole exterior of the house," she said. "When people come to the house, they say, 'What's on your doors? They're so shiny.'"

The Griesdorns' doors are vintage, but Clarke said many doors he works on are newer but losing their finish.

Clarke restored three doors, for instance, on the 27-year-old home of Richard and Geraldine Lembach in Upper Arlington.

None of the doors is older than the home, but "the varnishes they used commercially just didn't hold up," Richard Lembach said.

The couple were considering replacing the doors when their kitchen remodeler suggested they ask Clarke about restoring them.

"I thought that was impossible and that it made no sense," Lembach said. "The doors were actually splitting. The painters deemed them dead on arrival three years ago."

Last fall, Lembach hired Clarke, who ended up rebuilding the badly worn front double doors. Lembach said he can't recall what the project cost.

"It wasn't cheap," he said, "but it was a lot cheaper than replacing them."

Recently, Clarke and Mills returned the completed door to the Reichs' home.

"Holy snickerdoodles — it's so shiny," Clair Reich exclaimed as Clarke pulled the door from his van.

After a few adjustments to the frame to help the door fit, David Reich stood outside to reflect on the work.

"It's exactly what we hoped for," he said.

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