

THE RE-UPHOLSTERY OF A PAIR OF BERGERES

By Bert Chapman MBE and Michael Barrington



This pair of English made bergère chairs, made in the late 18th Century or possibly early 19th, had been substantially altered, the gilded frames damaged and the upholstery poorly executed. The standard of the frame construction is good but they had been re-gilded without interlagio over the frame joints and there was much consequent cracking in those areas with deterioration of the gilded surfaces which were fairly knocked about overall, down to the bare wood and, in places, beyond. Unlike the right-hand picture these chairs were built to show the two vertical members and horizontal rail of the back which were gilded on their rear surfaces and sides. This was not apparent until the upholstery was removed. The previous gilder had taken the vertical members through the gesso stage followed by the upholsterer who covered them up. Research found pictures of the correctly exposed and gilded back frames and this is the route we suggested and which was approved. The frame pictured below has been re-gilded, this time with interlagio support and the two vertical members and one horizontal member are gilded on the rear and sides. This is plainly to be seen in the first sketch below.

Interlagio is a thin fabric covering applied to sound joints during the application of gesso. Traditionally silk is used but a fine lawn or sea-island cotton is just as good. Beware of using a material past its best which will be weak and liable to part as the joint flexes. The interlagio is pasted over the joints with a first coat of thin gesso and subsequently covered with thicker gesso as work proceeds.

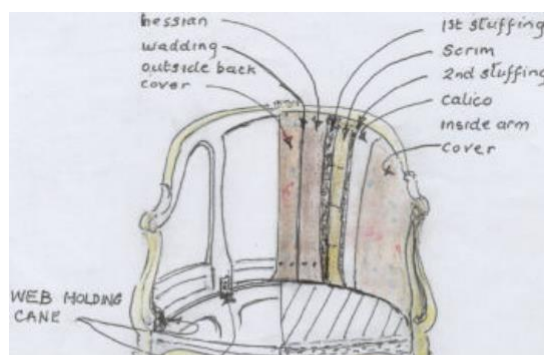
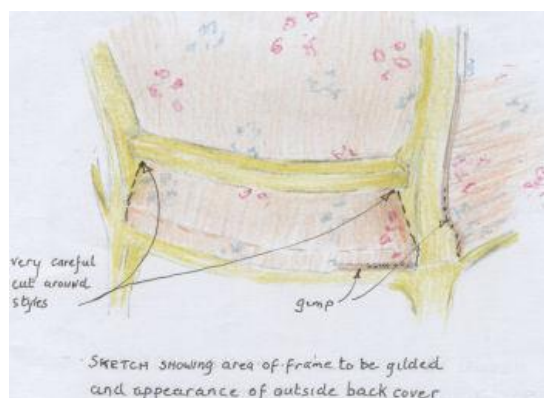
The interlagio material must not be too heavy, or it will be difficult to cover in the gesso coatings. Above all the interlagio must not be so near to the surface that when the gesso is cut back or carved (also known as cutting) that it suddenly appears—so go for a really fine material. The chairs were water gilded and the highlights burnished.

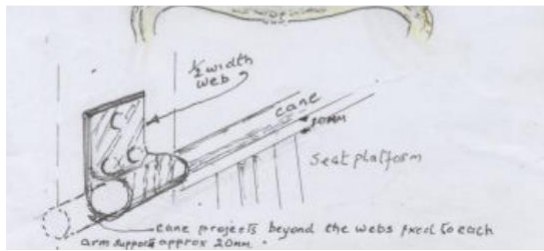
A surprise was the discovery that the cushion covers are of hand-stitched kid leather and presumably original. Bert, had come across five or six examples of white kid being used for cushion cases and quoted that King George II had a travelling bed with a ticking of kid leather. Next comes the upholstery which, in view of the restoration of the back panels, required a new approach. and I asked Bert to write a piece on the proper way to do this which now follows :



Upholstery of Bergère Chairs

Below are two sketches showing how the outside back panel, framed between the two gilded vertical members, is placed and the method of fixing a length of cane 10mm above the seat platform to allow the various stuffing covers to pass underneath before tacking to the top of the seat rail.





The top sketch shows how the back of the chairs will look with the seat cover coming through under the horizontal rail. The centre panel upholstery meets the seat upholstery snugly showing no light.

Many thanks to Bert for these two very clear sketches which should be useful references to any reader faced with the same problem.