

# CULTURE'S KEEPER

AN ARTIST RESTORES MORE THAN MEMORIES

WRITTEN BY PETER J. WOLF PHOTOGRAPHY BY DENNIS MURPHY

Nobody needs to tell Andrew Alden that accidents happen. As an art conservator for more than 30 years now, he's seen it all—from canvases torn nearly in half to sets of fine china delivered, in pieces, by the carton-full. And plenty of amateur repairs, too. Alden and his staff have restored pieces for artists, museums, auction houses and collectors. But family heirlooms valued more for sentimental than monetary reasons receive the same white-glove treatment. "If it's important to a client to have a piece restored," says Alden, "the intrinsic value doesn't matter. What matters is the client's desire for the work. And then it's every bit as important as a priceless museum piece."

Alden's studio, Legacy Art Restorations & Design International, Inc., located in Phoenix, has an international reputation for excellence. Appraisers familiar with Legacy routinely value the works they've restored at full market value, as if they'd never been damaged. Among Alden's most memorable projects was a large Meissen porcelain table that, recalls Alden, "looked like someone had taken an axe to it." Working on and off, it took three years to restore it. "To see it today, you wouldn't know that it had ever been broken."

There's a paradox in the field of art restoration: the greater the conservator's skill, the less distinctive the work becomes. "As an art conservator, I have to be a chameleon," notes Alden. "I have to be able to match anyone's palette, brushstrokes, texture, and their sense of composition." He's also developed many of the materials used in his studio, drawing on his own varied experiences. "I was able to take my art background and my product design background, and everything melded together. It's like I had to jump from one thing to another to have the background to do all of this." For Alden, art restoration is a service industry of the highest order. Through their work, he and his staff give artwork "renewed life," a mission reflected even in the name of the studio. "Our getting credit for the restoration," says Alden, "isn't as important as the work going on for future enjoyment."

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