



If These Floors Could Talk

By Sarah Binder

Restoration of the Palais Larisch-Mönnich, the Iraqi Embassy in Vienna, Austria.

“If these walls could talk.” It’s a phrase frequently used to describe places of historical significance, from seats of government to opulent palaces. One unique restoration company believes floors can tell stories just as intriguing as walls.

Antique Parquet, based in Austria, rescues, collects and expertly restores historic parquet, plank and geometric parquet flooring across Europe. Clients from around the world can welcome the 18th and 19th centuries into their homes by working with the company to carefully select rare antique flooring in a variety of stunning patterns.

“Our founder Thomas Reiner began his career as a furniture restorer, soon expanding his workshop and restoring whole museums, which were often left in a most neglected state (their exhibit pieces as

well as the buildings themselves),” explains Roland Hemedinger, head of international sales. “He soon saw that many antique parquets were not preserved, but rather demolished and discarded. He sensed a unique chance and started Antique Parquet to specialize in the restoration, preservation and trade of antique floors.”

Antique Parquet prides itself on possessing the largest variety of patterns and stock available for purchase. For clients of the most discerning nature, the company has a portfolio of floors with a particularly prominent provenance, which are presented to special clients upon request only. “Our clients acquire an artifact that was carefully restored and preserved. Incorporating this into modern architecture poses a unique chance to stand out,” says Hemedinger.

The company not only rescues and restores flooring, it also performs meticulously skilled installations after a thorough, personalized assessment with each client, which begins by determining the preferred pattern, square footage needed, and availability of the

product. “We also communicate the historical background, forgotten technical details, and, if available, the provenance, to our clients,” explains Hemedinger.

The historical significance of Antique Parquet’s inventory and portfolio of work is astounding. Early this year, the team completed the restoration of one of the largest and best-preserved castles in Europe, Austria’s medieval Hohensalzburg Castle. It is currently working on the ongoing restoration of the parquets of a private apartment at the Place des Vosges in Paris, the oldest planned city square in the city, built from 1605 to 1612.

Antique Parquet salvages flooring from equally impressive locales, such as an ornamental inlay centerpiece made of mahogany, maple, rosewood and nut from the late baroque residence of Empress Maria Theresia, the Hetzendorf Palace. The material is highlighted by rich ornaments and a thick veneer.

Despite these prestigious landmarks, Hemedinger’s favorite project was for a private client. “The project I liked most was the flooring in a penthouse we did



19th century Salzburg Versailles



Rothschild: maple and oak inlay



Johann Strauss: checkered oak

in one of the fashionable residential skyscrapers in an international metropolis,” he reflects. “The interior was done in kind of a Brutalist style, and our 18th century parquet gained more attention as an artifact, rather than serving as a simple floor.”

Upon installation, clients should expect the need for minor adjustments and restorations. Hemedinger recommends that such precious parquets be serviced by specialist restoration companies rather than flooring companies.

In addition, Antique Parquet uses wax as a final treatment on its products, the historical surface treatment of choice for preservation. Modern lacquers may cause damage and also eliminate natural reflections occurring as sunlight strikes the patterns. “The unique patina that was gained over the years is carefully preserved and can’t be replaced or replicated,” notes Hemedinger. “It’s also the visual proof that our floors witness the centuries pass.”

Antique flooring presents homeowners and interior designers with the versatility to recreate a classic interior or to integrate a historic element into a contemporary setting. “By using truly antique materials, the former option leads to a truly authentic atmosphere,” he says. “The latter usage blends elements of history in a most eclectic way, highlighting craftsmanship and quality, much like an artifact in a museum.”

Moving forward, the company hopes to publish a book in the next few years containing insights into its large, varied collection; restoration expertise; and selected notable projects. In recent years, Hemedinger has observed a shift in clients’ thinking

to embrace modern uses for these historic materials.

“We certainly see a raised international attention in our unique parquets compared to a few years ago, and we’re always keen to communicate and realize other applications for our parquets, such as wall paneling,” he says. “We’re starting to see a change of taste and a whole new awareness of the quality that historical floors hold within.” **UH**



Thomas Reiner, owner and chief restorer of Antique Parquet, at work.



Antique Parquet’s warehouse is in a 17th century alpine chalet near Kitzbühel, Austria.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY ANTIQUE PARQUET