Salvaging Furniture

Decide which pieces are worth restoring. Make your decision according to these factors:

- extent of damage
- cost of the article
- sentimental value
- cost of restoration

Consider each piece individually. Antiques may be worth the time, effort, and expense of restoration. Unless damage is severe, you likely can clean, reglue, and refinish antiques at home. Extensive repair or re veneering should be done at a reliable furniture repair shop.

Solid wood furniture can usually be restored unless damage is severe. You will probably need to clean, dry, and reglue the piece. You can remove and straighten slightly warped boards.

Wood-veneered furniture is available in many qualities. Extensive damage may be costly to repair. If veneer is loose in just a few places, you may be able to repair it. Upholstered furniture may be salvageable depending on its general condition. Flooded pieces will need to be cleaned and dried, and mildew removed. If damage is extensive, you may have to replace padding and upholstery. This is expensive, so it might be wiser to apply the money toward new furniture.

You don’t need to repair all pieces right away. Any furniture worthy of repair should be completely cleaned, dried, and stored in a dry, well-ventilated place until you have time to repair it.

Flooded Upholstered Furniture

Upholstered furniture that has been covered with floodwater may be impossible to salvage if it has been badly soaked. But if the piece seems worth the effort, clean and oil the springs, replace the stuffing, and clean the frame.

Stuffing and Covering

1. Remove furniture coverings using a ripping tool, hammer, or tack puller, and a screwdriver or chisel.
2. Remove all tacks from the frame.
3. Wash coverings.
4. Throw away all cotton stuffing. You can dry, fumigate, and sometimes reuse padding made of materials other than cotton.
Springs and Frame

1. Wipe off springs and frame. Dry all metal parts and paint them with rust-inhibiting paint. Oil springs.
2. Store wood furniture where it will dry out slowly.

Mildew

Mildew may have developed on damp or wet furniture. Mildew is a gray-white mold that stains and rots fabric unless you remove it promptly. Here’s how to remove mildew or mildew spots:

1. Brush with a broom to remove loose mold from outer covering. Do this outdoors, if possible, so you don’t scatter mildew spores in the house.
2. Vacuum the surface to draw out mold. Dispose of the vacuum cleaner bag or empty the collection cup outside to avoid scattering spores in the house.
3. If mildew remains and fabric is washable, sponge lightly with thick soap or detergent suds. Wipe with a clean, damp cloth. Get as little water on the fabric as possible so the padding doesn’t get wet.
4. If mold remains, wipe the furniture with a damp cloth dipped in diluted alcohol (1 cup denatured alcohol to 1 cup water) of a chlorine bleach solution (1/4 teaspoon bleach to a cup of water). Test in an area that is hidden.
5. Dry the article thoroughly.
6. Use a low-pressure spray containing a fungicide to get rid of musty odors and remaining mildew. Moisten all surfaces thoroughly. Re-spray frequently if mildew is still a problem. Spraying rooms with an aerosol material does not eliminate mildew problems.
7. If molds have grown into an inner part of furniture, send furniture to dry cleaning or storage company for thorough drying and fumigation. Fumigation kills molds present at the time but will not protect against future attacks.

Flooded Wooden Furniture

Wooden furniture damaged by floods can best be salvaged through slow drying and proper repair.

Submerged Furniture

1. Take furniture outdoors and remove as many drawers, slides, and removable parts as possible. Drawers and doors will probably be stuck tight. Do not try to force them out from the front. After allowing to dry for a brief period, use a screwdriver or chisel to remove the back and push out the drawer from behind.
2. After you have removed movable parts, clean off mud and dirt using a hose if necessary.
3. Take all furniture indoors and store where it will dry slowly. Furniture left in the sun to dry warps and twists out of shape.
4. When furniture is dry, reglue it if necessary. You need woodworking tools and clamps to reglue some pieces. Before you start, decide whether you have the time, equipment, and ability to do the work. Consult an experienced cabinetmaker if necessary. To reglue loose joints, thoroughly clean joints of old glue so the area will be as clean and free of glue as possible. Use white all-purpose glue, following the directions on the container. Hold parts together with rope tourniquets or suitable clamps. To prevent damage from ropes or clamps, pad contact areas with cloth protection.
5. Dry the article thoroughly.
6. Use a low-pressure spray containing a fungicide to get rid of musty odors and remaining mildew. Moisten all surfaces thoroughly. Re-spray frequently if mildew is still a problem. Spraying rooms with an aerosol material does not eliminate mildew problems.
7. If molds have grown into an inner part of furniture, send furniture to dry cleaning or storage company for thorough drying and fumigation. Fumigation kills molds present at the time but will not protect against future attacks.

Damp Furniture

Furniture that has been submerged in floodwaters often shows mildew or mold that you can remove with warm, soapy (mild detergent) water and a soft cloth. White spots or a cloudy film may develop on damp furniture that has not been under water. Here is how to remove white spots.

1. If the entire surface is affected, rub with a damp cloth dipped in a solution of ½ cup household ammonia and ½ cup water. Wipe dry at once and polish with wax or furniture polish.
2. If color is not restored, dip 000 steel wool in oil (boiled linseed, olive, mineral, or lemon). Rub lightly in direction of wood grain. Wipe with a soft cloth and rewax.
3. For deep spots, use a drop or two of ammonia on a damp cloth. Rub at once with a dry cloth. Polish. Rubbing powdered pumice or a piece of walnut into spots may help remove them.
4. If spots remain after all efforts to remove them, strip off all the old finish and refinish the piece.

**Veneered Furniture**

Thoroughly dry furniture. If veneer is loose in just a few places, carefully scrape glue under loose areas.

1. Press veneer back into place. Place waxed paper over affected area; heat with warm iron. Remove iron, and place weights on the area.

2. If veneering doesn’t stay in place or is bubbled, carefully slit the loose veneer with a razor blade, and apply a good-quality glue. Cover the glued spots with wax paper, and put weights on the wax paper to prevent extra glue (which may spurt out when pressure is applied) from gluing the weight to the furniture. Repairing badly damaged veneered furniture requires special skill and tools.

**Warped Furniture Boards**

Slightly warped furniture boards, as in table or dresser tops, often can be straightened if they are solid wood. But don’t try to straighten severely warped parts, veneered parts (veneer usually separates), or parts with a fancy grain such as curly maple. If such pieces are worth the money to salvage, send them to a reliable furniture repair shop. Get a cost estimate first.

Follow these steps to straighten slightly warped boards:

1. Remove the warped board from the furniture.

2. Strip the board of its old finish. A clean board straightens better than a finished board. You may have to strip the entire piece of furniture to get an even finish when the board is straightened, refinished, and replaced.

3. The principle of warp removal is to add moisture to the dry side (concave) and remove it from the wet side (convex). Here’s how you do that:
   - Place the board with the wet side down on a radiator or heat vent in the winter.
   - Place dry side up in the direct rays of the sun. Keep the concave side moist with damp cloths, place bricks or other weights on top of the board, and leave it for several days or until the board is straight.

4. Clamp the board in a flat position when it has straightened. Place clamps 12 inches apart or less. Use small pieces of wood or pads between board and clamps to protect the board. Loosen clamps and move them slightly once or twice a day to prevent splitting. You may place several boards in the same clamps. Insert small wooden blocks between boards for air space.

5. Stand the boards on end and leave them in the clamped position until thoroughly dry. This will take several days to several weeks.

6. Paint or refinish as desired. Apply the finish to both underside and top of board. This keeps the board from absorbing moisture and warping again.