

Unhandiman's answer to the antique blues

By SUSAN KAUFFMAN
Feature Writer

Do you love antique furniture but hate the cost of restoring it? Would you like to have the skill to do some of the restoring yourself, but are weary of the often prohibitive cost of materials and tools for many popular crafts and hobbies? Have you once again threatened to throw out that old rocker or dining room chair you found during Spring housecleaning which has the caning missing or damaged?

Then, learning to cane chair seats may be the answer for you.

Weaving a chair seat with cane takes time and patience, but the work is not hard. The cost is very low when you do it yourself. At a recently conducted series of three, two hour sessions instructed by Linda Franz of the Lancaster County Extension Service, 14 individuals learned the basic steps to chair caning.

Mrs. Franz, who usually works with youth in the 4-H program at the extension office, shared her skill in caning with these adults who soon realized that patience rather than the cost or technical skill was most important for developing this art.

The cane is sold by the bundle or hank with about 1,000 feet to a hank. This amount will be sufficient to cane four seats at a cost of less than two dollars a chair. Having a chair caned by another craftsman can cost anywhere from \$35 to \$50 and more depending on the size of the chair and the cost per hole that the weaver charges.

Obviously, since the material is inexpensive, the hours spent in fashioning the finished product make caning valuable.

According to Mrs. Franz the steps in caning are very simple in technique. It takes some practice or good guidance to create a well finished seat but the basics are fairly easy to master.

The list of equipment needed to cane is short. A chair with holes in the frame of the seat, the weaving cane and binder, an ice pick or screw driver, shears or a sharp knife, a cloth or sponge, caning pegs or old golf tees or pencil stubs, and a pan of water for soaking the cane, complete the list.

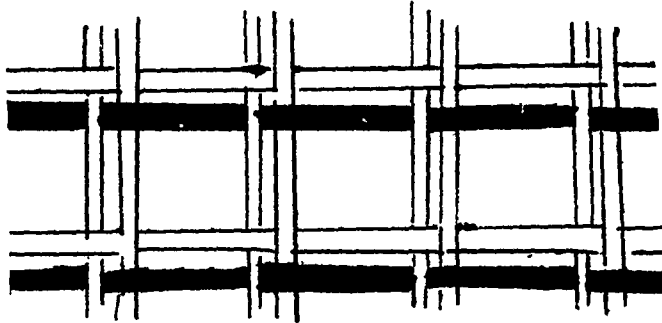
Natural cane is the bark of rattan cut into strips. The smooth side has eyes or bumps where leaf stems grew. It is necessary to run the cane between the thumb and index finger to determine which direction to pull the

strip so that the eyes will slip through rather than catch and fray the cane.

Selection of the different widths of cane depends on the size of the holes in the chair frame and the distance between the holes. A medium width will be used for one-quarter inch holes, three-quarters of an inch apart. These are the most common size holes. Fine cane is used for three-sixteenths inch holes, five-eighths of an inch apart. Binding cane is heavier and wider than weaving cane and is used to cover the holes around the outside of the finished seat.

Before starting to cane, the chair should be refinished, if needed. Soak the cane in warm water about five minutes before using and keep adding pieces of cane to the water as you weave.

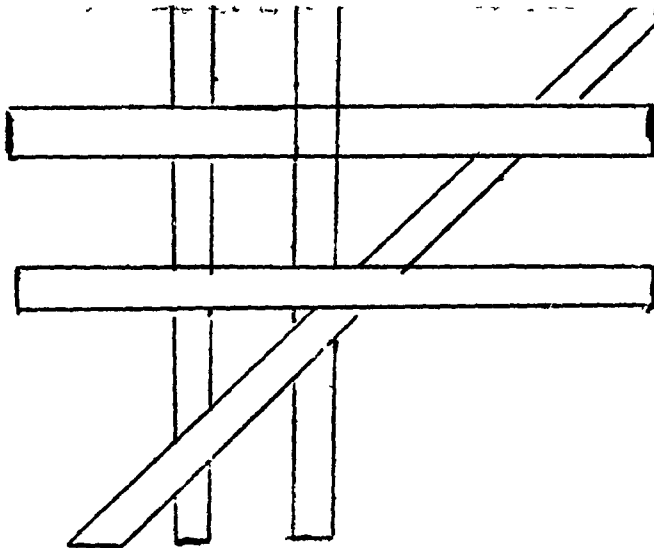
Step 4



Work with the smooth side of the cane on top and be sure to start each strand so that the eyes slide through rather than snag. Do not allow the strands to twist and keep the lines created straight and parallel. Don't draw the cane too tight at first since the cane will tighten as it dries and the weaving progresses.

To start caning a square or rectangular seat, put the end of the cane down through the center hole in the back of the seat allowing the end to extend three or four inches below the frame. Place a peg in the hole to hold the cane firmly. Thread the other end of the cane through the center front hole. Pull the cane snug but not too tight and peg this hole to hold cane. Bring the cane up through the hole on either side of the front center hole and across to the back, down through the corresponding hole in the back of the seat. Continue working this half until all holes front and back, except corners, are used. Start cane in the hole on the other side of the center back hole and complete other half of seat in the same way. In an irregular shaped seat and a round seat some of the side holes will not be used. Judgement is needed to keep the strands parallel and the same distance apart.

Step 5



The second step in caning begins at a corner. Put the cane through the hole and allow the end to extend down three or four inches and peg in place. Carry the cane over the weaving already done and insert in the opposite corner. A grid effect will result with the second strands always on top of and at right angles to the first layer.

The third step is exactly the same as the first step. Cane extends across the frame in the same direction and in the same holes as the first strands with the strands of step two lying between. Fasten cane ends securely under the seat frame after completing this third step by dampening the loose ends until pliable and using a halfhitch on the underside of the frame. The weaving really begins with the fourth step. The strands in the fourth step run parallel to those in step two and in the same holes, but rather than lying on top of the other strands, these strands in the fourth step go over and under various strands to form the weave. Weave the cane over the strands of step three and under the strands of step one.

In step five the first diagonally woven strands are placed. Start at the right hand corner of the back, as



Instructor Linda Franz holds some cane. She learned the technique of caning chairs about five years ago.



Dussinger, 163 N. Ronks Road, Ronks, Pa. in the background.

you face the chair, and weave diagonally across to the left front of the chair. Weave under the pair of strands that run from side to side and over the pair of strands that run from front to back. Continue to weave until the left triangle of the seat is finished. Finish the other triangle in step five you may need to use the same hole twice or skip a hole to keep the diagonal lines straight. What you do will depend upon the shape of the seat and the spacing of the holes. Judgment and practice will make these decisions easier.

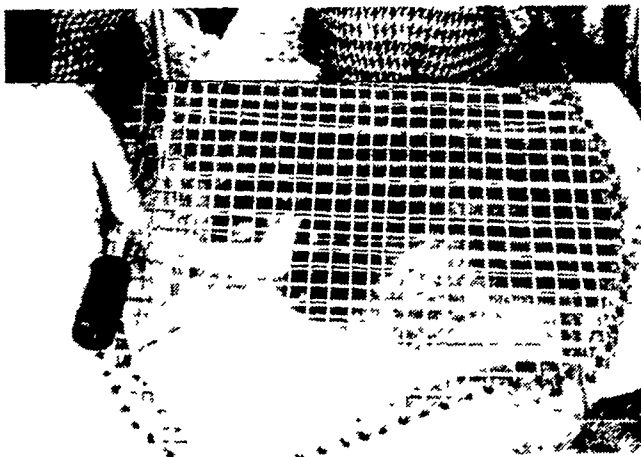
After weaving a short distance, stop and check for mistakes to avoid real problems in later steps. In a square seat, two diagonal strands will run into each corner. This is known as the fishhead. When the seat is round, start in a hole between back and side center holes and weave, keeping strands straight and diagonal.

Step six is the reverse of step five. Begin at the left back corner hole and weave under the strands that run from back to front (steps one and three) and over the strands that run from side to side (steps two and four). Make sure you have two diagonal strands running into the corner hole on a square seat. Check your work after working a short distance. This step completes the hexagonal shape of the hole created by the weaving. Dampen the cane and line up strands with a hexagonal pencil or peg. Dampen ends and tie securely.

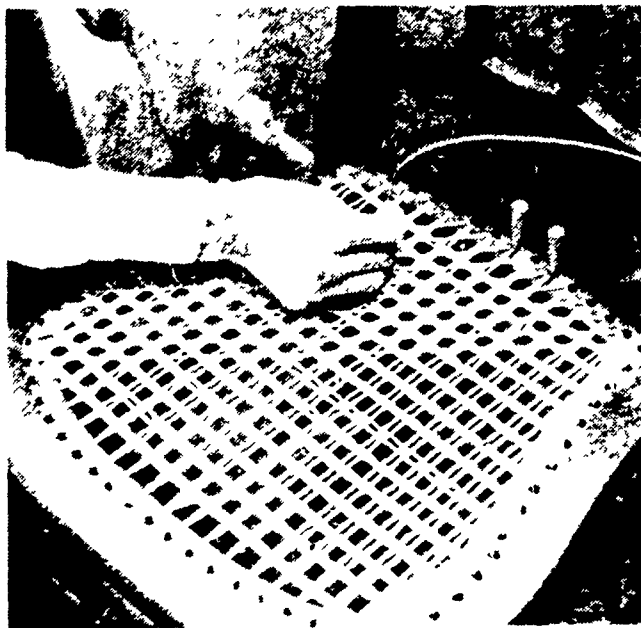
The final step in caning is to finish the seat by covering the holes with a strip of binding cane. This is done by taking a piece of the larger binding cane and strand of the cane used in weaving. Insert the end of the binder cane into a corner hole and peg temporarily. Lay the binder along the frame over the holes. Fasten the end of the weaving cane securely under the rail or frame. Pull the other end of the weaving cane up through the first hole from the corner where the binder cane was inserted, over the binder and down through the same hole. The loop formed over the binder holds the binder to the frame securely in place. Continue

(Continued on Page 44)

Homestead Notes



The chair caning process looks like this prior to diagonal weaving.



The above is an example of diagonal weaving using authentic cane pegs.