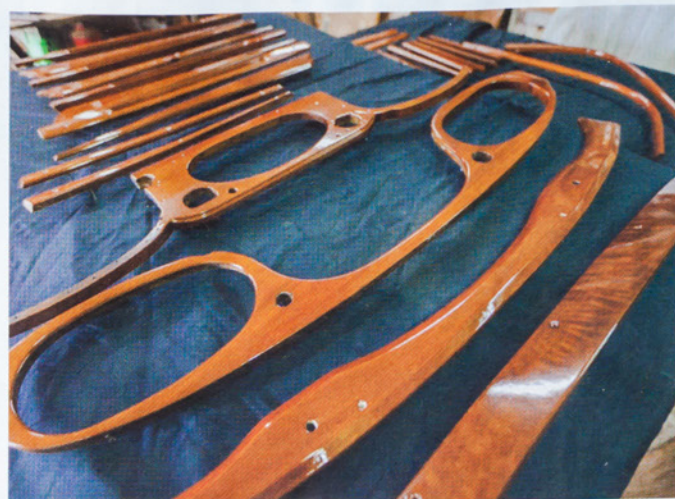


# ARTISAN TAKES A SHINE TO WOOD



Clockwise, from main: restoring a wood panel; Derby Bentley set; Lorkin has become a master at replicating the painted-metal pattern for Facel Vegas; beautiful Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud pieces

## Simon Lorkin Classic Dashboards

**Location** Le Ménage,  
50410 Montbray, France

**Staff** One **E-mail** simon@  
classicdashboards.com

**Prices** Restorations are  
individually priced, but start  
at about €700 (circa £613)

As a child, Simon Lorkin's dyslexia meant that school was sometimes tough, but he found sanctuary – and a lifelong career – in the woodwork room. After studying at the London College of Furniture, Simon set himself up as a professional restorer at the age of 21, but found that his customers had other things that they wanted him to refurbish.

"From time to time," Lorkin recalls, "clients would ask if I could

restore the woodwork on Jaguar Mk2s, and that's when I realised that there was a market for it."

Simon and his family moved to Normandy in 2004, where he works out of their 17th-century barn. From there, he has gone on to become the first Englishman to be awarded the 'Maître Artisan' title in the Manche *département*, and has become the go-to person for the painted-wood finish for Facel Vegas. As he explains: "A car owner at a show saw that I did a painted burr-walnut wood effect on a metal dash and asked if I could do Facel Vega. It's a very specific style, so I offered to give it a go. I spent about three weeks trying to work out not only the method, but also the products used to make this effect."

About 3000 Facel Vegas were built in the '50s and '60s, with one man responsible for all the dashboards. Many are coming up for restoration and Simon works with three of Europe's four Facel experts.


His technique is heavily drawn from his experience with furniture and, having trained to National Trust and museum standards, he understands the sometimes delicate requirements of a classic vehicle.

"When you remove the existing finish of any component of a car, you can have many colours of the timber underneath, especially when parts may have been replaced from other cars or are sun-damaged," he says. "It could be all walnut or mahogany, but it may be from a different part of the tree so there are variations of colour. All of my light-fast stains are mixed by hand, then I apply them directly on the wood and during the early stages of the lacquering process – so that when I've finished the dashboard there's a uniform colour, otherwise it looks like a patchwork quilt."

Lorkin says that the polyurethane or PU lacquers favoured by modern car companies make the wood look too plastic and not

in-keeping with the age of the car: "I use water-based lacquer; it sinks into the woodwork and is almost like French polish. I spray about 15-20 layers, thinly, then it's all cut back by hand. It's labour-intensive, but I want to make it still feel as if you're touching wood, while at the same time protecting the dashboard. I'm a bit of a perfectionist."

Each job has a bespoke price-tag and can take between a week and a couple of months, but the results are impressive. Simon admits that he goes the extra mile to make sure his dashboards look their best, and he has attracted work from around the world. When we visited, he was renovating 26 pieces of timber for a 1963 Bentley S3 from Australia.

Lorkin says he'll never get rich, but that's not the point: "It's about people's reactions when they pick up their dashboards. Whether I speak much French or not is immaterial, because the work speaks for itself." **Scheenagh Harrington** 



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