

Paper Labels for Furniture by Tom Meiller

After seeing several paper labels on Period Furniture in various museum catalogues (e.g. American Furniture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), I decided I wanted to make my own. I wasn't sure what the best approach would be. I didn't want to use my inkjet printer because it just didn't seem appropriate, and I was concerned about the longevity of the ink. I figured the labels will still need to be there in 2204! I thought about making a wood cut by carving the background on maple end grain, and rolling ink on it. This seemed like a rather long process, and I wasn't sure how well the small letters would come out.

During a break at Don William's Shellac workshop, I talked to Don about my dilemma and asked if he had ever done restoration work on 18th century furniture with labels – he had. When I asked how he would go about it today, he suggested using 100% cotton paper, and printing them on a laser printer. The laser printer fuses the carbon black into the paper. He suggested using Elmer's kid's gel glue, and then shellacking over it.

After some experimenting, I've finalized my label making method. Here are the details:

- 1) Print the labels on a laser printer (I suppose a copier would do the same thing). I used Southworth Exceptional Resume Paper (32 lb., 100% cotton) available at Office Depot.
- 2) Coat the face of the labels with garnet shellac.
- 3) Apply glue to the back of the label. (I used hot hide glue because it seemed most appropriate for me, but I imagine the gel glue would work fine if Don suggested it.)
- 4) Set the label in position and put a piece of clean wax paper over it.
- 5) Use a flat piece of wood and flow the glue out from the center of the label to the edges. The hot hide glue gels quickly. I think this simulates "hammer" veneering.
- 6) Peel off the wax paper.
- 7) Let the glue dry until it is no longer tacky.
- 8) Brush several light coats of garnet shellac over the label.

NOTE:

Since I'm trying to reproduce Period Furniture, I leave the un-exposed sides of surfaces (e.g. underside of table tops) unfinished. The hot hide glue works well. I'm not sure how well it would work on a varnished or oiled surface. I would probably scuff those surfaces first. I based my label on one by John Townsend, as shown in "American Furniture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art", page 366, item 100.

