

# MICHAEL MASCELLI

## UPHOLSTERER



### ***“Basic Upholstery”***

## **REQUIRED HAND TOOLS**

(See sources of supply list at the end)

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the wonderful things about the venerable craft of upholstery is that has been and for the most part still is, practiced with just a few very basic hand tools. Having said that, I must confess that I am something of a tool guy, and have a pretty extensive collection of both common and unusual tools related to the trade, many of which I will bring to show and explain in class. In order to complete the project for the full week class student **MUST BRING** their own hand tools. Specialty tools such as air staplers, foam cutters, spring bender and button machine will be provided for use in class.

### **TOOL LIST**

#### **TACK HAMMER**

By far the most important tool in the upholsterer’s kit is a good tack hammer. There are many on the market but my personal favorite is the industry standard C.S. Osborne #33. It has the classic shape, weight and balance needed for heavy and light tacking, and the bronze body will not rust. It also has a permanent magnet on one end, which is far superior to the “split end” style cast iron hammers, even those by Osborne. I know many old timers who literally “spit tacks” by placing them in their mouths, but I prefer to deftly pick them up with the magnet end, give them a tap to set, and a solid hit to drive them home. Almost any long narrow tack hammer will do, and you can buy them used for \$10-20 on eBay or at a garage sale. A brand new #33 is about \$35.



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### **WEBBING STRETCHER**

For all traditional and much modern work, it is necessary to install and stretch heavy jute webbing to support the springs. There are a number of ways to do this, and the one I will recommend for basic work is to use an Osborne #253 “Gooseneck” stretcher or an Osborne # 255 plain stretcher. These tools look like torture devices and can cause a nasty puncture wound if used incorrectly, so please get the gooseneck version if you are a bit nervous with the plain model. These are about \$30.

### **STAPLE / TACK LIFTER**

The tack hammer puts them in, and you also need something to get them out! There are without doubt, 100 variations of this simple tool, and Osborne makes 6 or 8 to this day, all of which have their place in certain situations. If I could only have one, it would be the Osborne # 121 which has a short handle and a blade that looks like a coarse toothed saw. This tool is wonderful for both tacks and staples and is especially useful to remove the many temporary tacks that must be installed, and re-installed as coverings are carefully stretched and fitted. You often see these for sale by folks who don't know what they are, and they were also much favored by shoemakers. If you see one marked USMC that is for United Shoe Machinery Company. (Not the US Marines!) Any of the claw foot style removers will work, and the smaller ones are generally more useful. This tool is also used to remove old work. About \$20

### **WOODEN MALLET**

A good hardwood mallet is especially important for ripping out old work, as it is used to strike either a tack lifter, or a ripping chisel placed underneath the old covers. I will demonstrate these techniques, but we will not have time enough for each team to really tear into some old work in class. My favorite mallet is a carver's type, with a tapered cylindrical head. There are some nice ones with urethane covers, such as “Wood is Good” sold by suppliers of good chisels, but pretty much any shape wooden mallet will do, as long as it is comfortable in your hand. Prices vary.



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### SCISSORS / SHEARS

Of course there could be no fine upholstery without good sharp scissors and a really complete kit would have several sizes, from big shears for heavy fabric, to tiny ones for trimming light threads. The tool I have on my hip at all times is a Wiss #20 “Inlaid”, which is 10” long. This has a bent handle for bench work, unlike the straight models meant for dressmaking and tailoring. There are several variations of the #20, such as the W which has a wider heavy blade and the P which has cushion grips. They also make a left handed (LH) model, which comes in handy even for those of us who are hopelessly right handed. There are literally zillions of these tools out there, and many good used ones can be had cheaply, though beware of any that show signs of excessive sharpening as the inlaid” cutting edge of chrome steel is not that thick. A brand new #20 is only about \$35, and there are many similar models made by very good competitors such as Clauss, Gingher or Gold Seal. If you like one with a more ergonomic design, check the Fiskars #9911 shear from South Star Supply.

### NEEDLES

The craft of upholstery is always associated with needles and you really only need TWO for basic work. A “3” curved needle, with a large eye is the secret to “blind stitching” and also useful for a lot of basic hand closing and anchoring springs to webbing. And a 3-4” straight needle with a large eye. These are widely available in fabric shops and usually sold in packs of multiple sizes. Most of these will be round shank needles which are fine for basic work, however if you happen to see ones that have a triangular shank (like a harpoon) those are useful for leather and heavy work.

### REGULATOR

This tool looks a bit like an ice pick, or a large needle, but it is not for sewing, it is for manipulating fabric and stuffing materials using both the pointed end and the rounded end. These tools come in various sized from 8” up to 12”, however an 8” regulator is a good overall choice. I do not like the ones with the plastic handles as much as the traditional ones, but they are readily available and use. About \$10.



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### OPTIONAL TOOLS

#### **PNEUMATIC STAPLE GUN**

This is the nuclear weapon of upholstery, and more than any other tool has transformed the trade. The standard of the industry is made in Germany by BeA, model 71/16-401 and shoots a 3/8" crown fine wire staple referred to as a "C" or #71 series. This gun is about \$150-\$200 new. Senco, Bostitch and many others (including cheap imports) make similar tools, which use the same staple and are OK. Porter Cable makes the UP-56 which is a nice gun, and Sears also has a good one which shoots a 1/2" crown staple. You can find some of these on EBay. I will bring several guns that everyone can try, and we will go over the various sizes of staples and their uses. Heavy wire staplers for construction work or electric units for carpet installation are not appropriate.

### **PROJECTS**

If you have the ability to bring a project piece to class for discussion only, I will do my best to give advice and guidance on how to approach it, during the breaks, lunch or after class. There will not be time to complete student brought-in projects during this class. I will also do my best to provide answers to questions via Email, for all students.



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