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A Restoration Holiday

BY BURT BOLLINGER | FEBRUARY 15, 2024



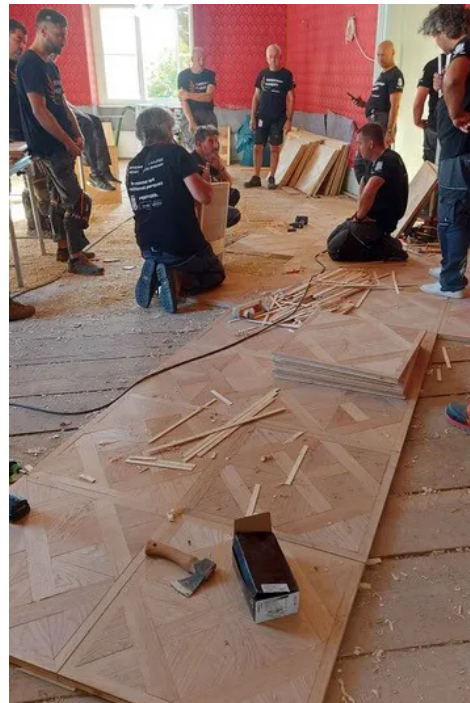
Photos courtesy of Delbert Adams |
Sheffield Hardwood

Donna and Delbert Adams of Sheffield Hardwood in Ontario, Canada, recently embarked on a remarkable journey to a castle in Hungary that combined their passion for hardwood flooring with a deep sense of craftsmanship and history. Adams' story is a testament to the legacy of skilled tradespeople, the power of collaboration, and the restoration of centuries-old treasures.

“My original trade was as a toolmaker, and I am used to working with hand tools. Making things with close tolerances is something I have done all my life,” says Adams. “It was that attention to detail that was ingrained in me from an early age that eventually led me to where I am today.”

Adams’ path to hardwood flooring was not a straight one, but rather intertwined with his father, a builder, who introduced him to flooring during Adams’ high school years. In 2015, Delbert’s life took a turn when his father passed away, leaving behind his tools and a connection to craftsmanship. Delbert decided to retire early, and in 2017, he found his way back to hardwood floors. However, he didn’t just return to traditional flooring; he also ventured into parquet floors.

“I had heard about Workcamp Parquet, and I sent pictures in the hope we would be considered as a participant. They looked at our website and liked what they saw, and we were invited,” says Adams. “It was quite an honor to be included with these experts worldwide. It became a working vacation for my wife and me.”



Held annually, Workcamp Parquet gathers professionals from all corners of the globe and serves as a platform for master artisans, seasoned professionals, and enthusiastic apprentices to come together, share expertise, and carry forward the tradition of fine craftsmanship.

The year 2023 marked a special edition of Workcamp Parquet, with the event in the historic Bishop’s Castle in Győr, Hungary. Their mission was to restore a 150-year-old antique parquet floor spanning 2,100 square feet within the Bishop’s Palace. Additionally, they aimed to craft a new 800-square-foot parquet floor in an adjoining room hidden beneath carpeting for 75 years. This endeavor culminated in a broader post-war reconstruction project, as the Bishop’s Palace had endured

extensive damage during World War II.



“The intent was to restore the floors using period techniques and tools. For example, the tiles are mounted on a rough subfloor instead of our current flat plywood. We end up shimming each tile,” says Adams. “It’s quite an involved procedure, as each tile has four corners to level up. Of course, the adjoining tiles must be flush, so getting the tiles aligned requires a lot of fitting and fiddling.”

The repair work was equally demanding. Worn, chipped, or broken parquet pieces had to be removed carefully and replaced with century-old white oak that matched the original. Precision fitting, hide gluing, shimming, leveling (no filler), and a finish of oil and wax were all part of the process to honor the original craftsmen and authenticity of the floor’s age.

“The floor was around 150 years old. There was a completely different approach taken to the floor as it was seen as an antique floor worthy of repairing,” explains Adams. “It was second nature to them. Over here,

hardwood floors of similar vintage have not been restored.”

One distinctive aspect of the restoration was the commitment to use period-appropriate techniques and tools. For instance, the parquet tiles were mounted on a rough subfloor, a departure from the flat plywood used in modern installations. Each tile had to be meticulously shimmed and leveled, ensuring the corners aligned perfectly. It was a labor-intensive process, with craftsmen dedicated to preserving the historical integrity of the flooring.

“Despite us being from all over the world, there was a common drive to accomplish something. Everyone was keen on producing a beautiful floor. There was a language barrier we were able to overcome by technology,” says Adams. “Between hand communication and this sort of technology, we muddled through it. It was not a barrier to having a good time and getting things done.”

Despite language barriers, they shared a common goal: to create a beautiful floor that would stand as a testament to their craft.

“For many there, this restoration is a big part of what they do. They were serious about what they were doing and very good at it,” says Adams. “One craftsman spent two or three hours preparing a damaged tile and fitting a piece of parquet as big as your hand, testing it repeatedly until it was perfect. He was taking it to the next level, respecting the antique he was working with.”

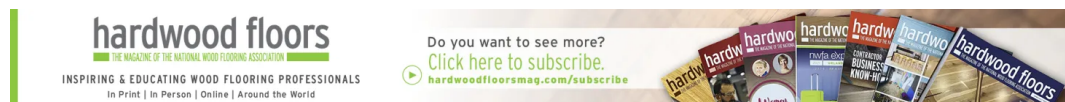
The journey in Hungary was more than a labor of love for the Adams and their fellow parqueteers. It was a journey through history and a deep dive into the culture and resilience of a country that had faced its fair share of challenges. Adams was struck by the generosity, friendliness, and love displayed by the people he met, many of whose families had experienced war trauma.

“While in Győr, we met many people whose families had experienced war trauma, and the common behavior was generosity, friendliness, and love for their families, their marriages, and their church,” says Adams. “It began to resonate with me what the people of this country

(Hungary) had gone through, things that we have no concept of over here in North America.”

Bishop András Veres of Győr, the host of the restoration project, expressed his gratitude to the participants and regarded the room’s restoration as a symbol of healing following the ravages of World War II. It was a testament to the resilience of the historic floor and the skilled craftsmen who had come together to restore it.

Adams’s participation in Workcamp Parquet 2023 became a profound chapter in his life. It was an opportunity to connect with like-minded artisans, delve into the intricacies of his craft, and contribute to restoring a tangible piece of history. As he returned to Canada, he carried with him the memories and a deeper appreciation for craftsmanship that transcends borders and generations.



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