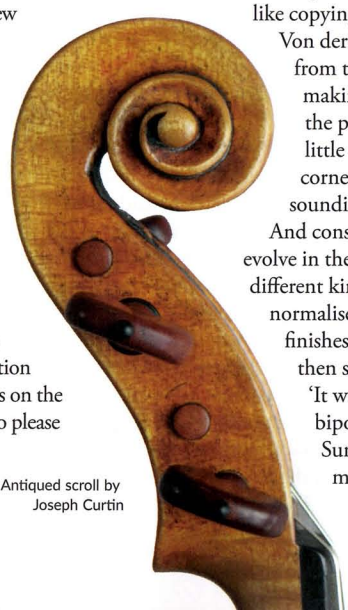
Artificial craquelure (left) and patina (right) on a Joseph Curtin violin

'SO MUCH DEPENDS ON THE REFLECTIVITY OF THE WOOD. DULL WOOD GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF VARNISHING ON PLAIN PAPER' – *JOSEPH CURTIN*

under the hand, the quality of the set-up, what the bridge and soundpost are like, and how the neck feels. These are things you learn from exchanges with your customers.' For Roth, who has had a long career building only straight-varnished instruments, antiquing is simply unnecessary. 'The creed that we grew up with, that you can't sell instruments as easily if you don't fake them, is just that,' he says. 'It's an act of belief.'

Detractors have argued that antiquing reinforces the notion that old instruments are always the best, in which case it could be seen as undermining the cause of contemporary making. Does antiquing make sense in a world where musicians have been priced out of the rare violin market, and where double-blind tests have challenged ideas of old instruments being sonically superior to new ones? Simmers says: 'The most positive thing I see in the market is that new instruments are becoming much more acceptable to players, and just that fact alone decreases the necessity to antique.' If players moving from old to new instruments can influence a shift away from antiquing, so too perhaps can makers who have moved on from building copies to making their own models. Von der Lippe says: 'Doing straight varnish, for me, has been tightly linked over the past ten years to making my own model, and finding my own style and voice. Going in a more personal direction is not an easy choice, but you have to focus on the idea that you're not making instruments to please your colleagues – you're trying to make great-sounding instruments that please musicians.'



Antiqued scroll by Joseph Curtin

For all that antiquing and copying divide opinion, as long as the market supports all options, there will surely be space for fully antiqued bench copies, straight-varnished new models and everything in between. If makers can make good-sounding instruments and sell them, are they not free to go in whichever direction they choose, and varnish in the way they and their customers like? There's no justification, some say, for anyone to take the moral high ground. Preuss observes: 'You could even say there's a mismatch going on when makers who don't do antique finish are using old models rather than their own model. What is right and what is wrong? Everything is a personal choice, and as long as customers are buying the instruments, everybody is happy to serve their own market.'

And yet, if makers want to evolve the craft, then antiquing, like copying, might still be seen as a retrograde approach. Von der Lippe says that everyone can celebrate and learn from the great Italian masters, but wonders how violin making can move on if makers are always looking to the past: 'I think if we as makers could maybe focus a little less on how Stradivari made his bee-stings in the corners, and talk more about what makes great-sounding instruments, then that would help all of us.' And considering how the finish of instruments might evolve in the future, Curtin believes in the search for a different kind of look, something that reaches beyond the normalised expectations of either antiqued or straight finishes. 'If one wants to consider the violin a work of art, then some measure of originality is expected,' he says. 'It would be disappointing if we remain stuck in this bipolar swing between the new look and the old. Surely we can come up with something beyond the more literal forms of antiquing, but what that might be I do not yet know.' ●

ALL PHOTOS JOSEPH CURTIN