

Picking up the pieces after a smashing time

By GREG NINNESS

NOEL MCGREVY knows some of the deepest, darkest secrets of many of the country's finest families.

He could tell you which son of one of the country's most respected businessmen inflicted ghastly damage to a priceless antique during a night of drunken revelry. And which politician broke his wife's treasured porcelain figurine during a spirited romp with his mistress.

McGrevy could tell you about these potential scandals but he won't. Because his job is not to talk about them but to pick up the pieces — literally.

Ten years ago McGrevy founded Wrightway Studios, an Auckland-based company specialising in the repair and restoration of everything from bone china to oil paintings, marble statues, antique furniture and silk wall hangings.

The company has grown into the largest restoration business in the southern hemisphere, attracting business from as far away as Europe.

Three years ago the company was bought by businessman Ross Stewart, but McGrevy stayed on as studio director.

He says the company has grown not so much from one big break as lots of little ones.

However, a spectacular accident several years ago certainly sent plenty of business its way. A car ploughed through the window of a Lladro showroom in Auckland's Remuera, smashing \$40,000 worth of figurines. The shop's insurance company turned to Wrightway to salvage what they could, keeping the company's restorers busy for months.

Usually, pieces are brought to the studios in ones or twos, often by



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someone frantic they be repaired within a few days — before parents or spouse return.

The most common repair work is for ceramics. Glass is the most difficult — there is no way of replacing a broken piece of clear glass without the crack being visible.

Stone statues, especially marble, can also be difficult and costly. A small repair, using a bonded resin, can produce a convincing result. But a larger repair, such as replacing a hand or head, may require a new piece to be sculpted, and this needs not only exceptional skills in sculpting, but also in matching the marble.

Recently the company pioneered a method of repairing and replacing lace work on Dresden figures (precisely how is a closely guarded secret) and is now being sent Dresden from around the world.

Another reason its overseas business is growing is price. Most work is charged at \$90 an hour, but in the UK the same work would cost £90 (\$NZ264) an hour, says McGrevy.

When customers bring in a damaged piece, they are usually offered two options — repair, which is much cheaper, or full restoration.

McGrevy says repair may be



PHIL DOYLE

GENTLE TOUCH . . . Catherine Muir restores a Capodimonte grenadier

more suitable for a piece with sentimental rather than monetary value.

The item will still look good on display but close examination reveals the repair.

Full restoration can take weeks and cost thousands for complex jobs, but will return the item to its

former glory with no one being any the wiser. Unfortunately this leaves philandering spouses and rambunctious children between a rock and a hard place — either pay the high price of restoration or 'fess up.

Usually they'll opt for the former, says McGrevy.