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The 7 Steps of Restorations and Restomods

Phase 1- The Project Profile

The owner of City Classic Cars is a preacher who uses the Who-What-When-Where exegete method on cars. Sabra Johnson and his team will find out the full story on your car. Carol, the GM, will start by authorizing the lead restoration technicians in each department to access various systems of the car. Once that 8-12 hour pre-restoration report is completed by the technicians, Sabra and his GM often meet together with prospective clients to discuss more of what he terms the exegeting of the car story. The initial consultation is a laid back atmosphere where the report is discussed, the client's budget highlighted and most importantly the vision for the project. Very few final decisions are made in this phase. We purposefully make an attempt to pick paint colors, tires/rims, upholstery, and even power train choices. This is a vision casting session where the experts of City Classic Cars listens and documents your vision for your project. City Classic Cars has built a reputation for creating graphic drawings and sketch illustrations to showcase the dream on paper. If we hear it wrong, we make edits until we get the vision right. This profile phase which may be one 20 minute meeting or consume multiple gatherings over a few weeks is where the direction of the build is decided. Some clients arrive with all the ready details while others do not make final decisions until we get into phase 2 or 3. Once we are all agreed, the second project begins.



Phase 2- Professional Process of Disassembly, Documentation and Delayering

Sabra Johnson has an internal standard of having the three D's of phase 2 (the teardown, media blast and primer phase) completed within the first 60 days of your classic car's arrival. Project 2 is a job- this process is the definition of drudgery but we love it! This is where the car is separated into smaller pieces for review and restoration- even in Restomods, much of the old parts are reused. The Disassembly itself will take anywhere from 4 to 8 full working days depending on scope and condition of the car and the cooperation of its parts. Every bolt is removed. Every panel is removed. Every piece of glass is removed... This is the nuts and bolts of restoration. One of the key steps in the disassembly phase is constant pausing to "tag and bag and label" which is common industry wide- at City Classic Cars we add photo taking to help in the later reassembly phase. During this phase, Sabra and his team intentionally look for damaged or suspect parts and note them as well as check for authenticity of parts. Every piece is separated from one another whether that be the frame, a large fender, the coach or the smallest of bolts and then documented, bagged up and organized in containers for your project prior to storage.



Once the car is tagged, bagged, labeled and stored, the car moves immediately to the media blasting stage. This is the process where stripping of the body surface happens. As Mr. Johnson shares, "everything that glitters isn't gold, so through media blasting we are able to determine the true condition of the body... truth is found in the bare metal". The City Classic Cars team uses a multiplicity of methods and media to get the best outcome- some of their favorites are black diamond, green diamond and in some special cases chemical dipping. Remember, budget and scope of work are a guiding factor throughout every phase of the project. During the delayering phase (stripping of paint phase), the Restoration Technicians at City Classic Cars are able to view previous repairs and obtain a better insight to assess full body damage. Photos are taken along the way for further documentation.

Project two is the first milestone in this joyous journey of restoration. Often Carol, the GM, will coordinate a consultation in person or through modern technology to discuss the team's findings.

"The initial intake and first assessments are more of a restorative X-Ray while the delayering (media blasting) is more of a Restoration MRI"- Sabra Johnson, owner City Classic Cars

Phase 3: Part 1 of Preparing the Body through Metal Work and Fabrication

This is the phase of rust repair. “The previous phase of media blasting eradicates most of the cancer so this phase can be the healing process.”- Sabra Johnson

Often a cab comes out of media blasting looking like Swiss cheese. This phase of the build allows us to make those holes disappear. We are running a cost analysis of replacement cost versus fabrication cost through this phase- the office and administrative team is very active in this phase of the build. Again the correct strategy will go back to that initial vision to determine the right step as well as availability of aftermarket parts. For example on a classic chevy truck a client may determine it is more advantageous to purchase new panels, yet on a 37 Hudson there are little to nothing available in the form of aftermarket parts...

How long does this take and how much does it cost? “It takes as long as it takes and cost what it cost” because one classic vehicle may have as little as 50+ hours of metal work and fabrication while another antique or vintage restoration project may require 300+ hours of metal work. Again, that initial intake on vision, quality of car and budget will prove to be a guiding factor throughout this phase of the build. This is another huge mile marker in the journey where clients are encouraged to visit to view the work in progress.



Phase 4: Part 2 of Preparing the Body through Advanced Fabrication and Mocking

If you are building a custom, purist restoration or cool restomod, this is the stage where one-off panels are designed for the vehicle.

Some cars may spend as little as a few weeks in this phase, such as in the case of a purist 55 Chevy rebuild, while a restomod Hudson Terraplane with custom chassis and electronics may spend a few months in this phase. Many Shops treat metal work and advanced fabrication as one phase which causes confusion to the consumer. Sabra thinks like a consumer not simply like a “car guy”. A casual classic car hobbyist can easily notice and appreciate the elimination of large holes in the body, but may not as easily recognize and therefore appreciate the intricacies of detailed fabrication.

“Many projects experience problems with gap and fit because ego causes one to say its right- no need to check... then when the car is painted and assembled there is an oops, so we go the extra mile in phase 4 with mocking’s and advanced fabrication, not after paint”- Sabra Johnson



Phase 5: Power-train, Mechanical and Rolling Chassis

This is where things start to rev... Once the long journey of metal work is complete the vehicle separates- the body goes to the paint department while the frame work begins. Technically, the body and mechanical often run together. But in many busy shops, the production schedule will have mechanical going first while the body gets reserved a spot in the paint department. \

City Classic Cars has one of the busiest mechanic shops in all of Houston. Sabra works to staff 3-4 capable full time experienced mechanics at all times so the mechanical work does not cease. Your frame will often move from the restoration division to the mechanic division of City Classic Cars to complete all the frame work and engine work in this phase.

"During the end of phase two the frame, the power train, and the drive train are either ordered or rebuilt so all will be ready for phase 5 of the restoration process. We either build the frame, engine, transmission, or rear end in-house or outsource to trusted brand developers such as Art Morrison, Roush, Moser, or Strange to name a few." - Sabra Johnson



Phase 6 – Paint and Body (the process is body first then paint)

This is where things start to get pretty. The paint department starts the raw body work while the car is assembled in the vicinity of phase 3 and 4. In phase 6, the paint and body department does the blocking and finishing work on each panel to ensure the highest standards “My name is on the line, so those panels will be laser straight”- Sabra Johnson

When the panels are blocked to the agreed standard, the panels and the coach are scheduled for paint booth time. City Classic Cars stocks premium top of the line PPG DBC in its mixing system as its house line of paint. City Classic Cars also regularly uses House of Kolor paints and PPG Vibrance Collection paints for more one of a kind finishes.

Booth time may be as little as 5 hours or a few days. The real magic is pre booth time and post booth time. After all the components are painted, the vehicle and/or its parts are removed from the booth for wet sanding. Carol, the general manager, probably has one of the best “paint eyes” in Houston. Carol leads the quality control team in inspecting the overall finish and quality of the work. Wet Sanding, Buffing and Quality Control Inspections are the assurance imperfections, such as orange peel or texture, are removed to ensure an award winning finish.



Step 7: People From Every Department - Assembly and Finishing Phase

This marks the final leg of the restoration relay race. After body and paint we move on to the reassembly phase. The car and frame are married again, then the mechanic finishes running the wiring systems and assembles basic interior and exterior components related to the harness. Then the trim department takes center stage. Technically, the upholstery department has had your product since the end of phase 2. At the end of phase 3, the interior color schemes are finalized so the Trim department can begin the laborious process to recreate your interior product. By the time we get to phase 7, the trim department is finished with your upholstery and is ready for

reassembly and finishing. This is the phase where 2-3 persons are on the car almost daily working in different systems to ensure a finished project.

The boss man becomes the customer and he critiques and aggressively tests every system on the car according to its intended usage. Naturally, road testing on show, track or competition is limited due to the nature of scope and intended usage.

Sabra and his team are committed to building the car of your dreams-our joy is in manifesting your automotive dreams in the earth! Call Carol Sosa today at 832-717-0774 to schedule a complimentary consultation.

