

Reusing this old house

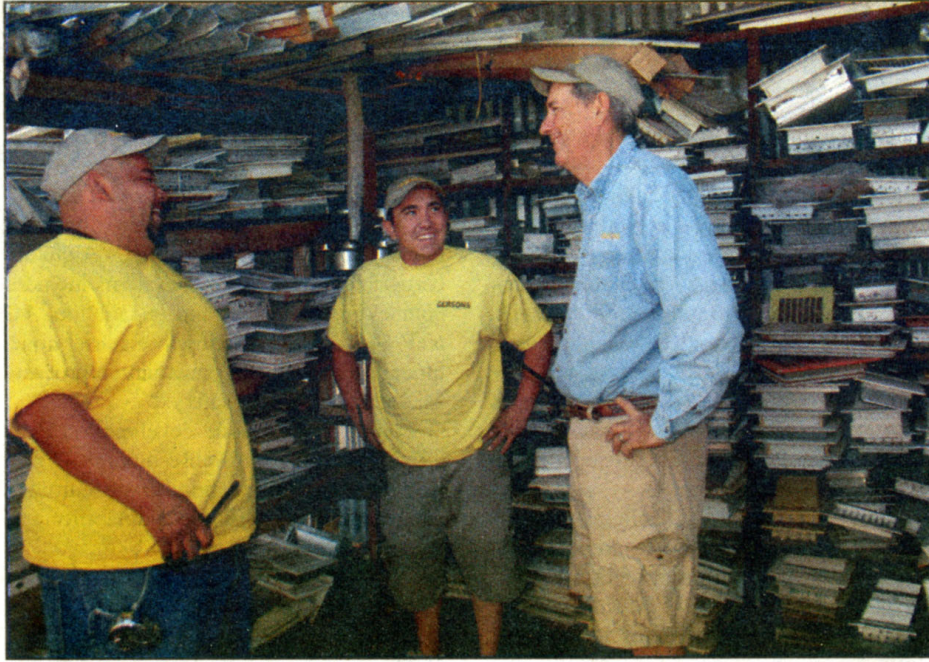


PHOTO: Jaime Richardson

Sam Fimbres (left) and Manoah Mispel (center) talk with Dean Bell, one of the owners of Gersons Used Building Materials, about restocking the store's inventory of reused building supplies.

By Michael Matz

Tucson Green Times

We talk a lot about the three R's of being green — Recycle, Reuse, Reduce. Talked little about in Green Building circles is the second of the those: Reuse. This is because the emphasis is often placed on new and innovative building technologies that include recycled materials, or using materials that result in a reduction in energy requirements or just using less altogether.

Reuse allows for the incorporation of some original building materials back into the same structure being remodeled, albeit sometimes in a new role, as well as saving something from going to the landfill, maybe keeping a tree from being cut down or another thing from needing to be manufactured. Reuse almost adds a touch of respect for the past.

The two types of material reuse are architectural salvage and raw material reuse. Architectural salvage, which some-

times has historic or cultural significance or value, creates opportunities for maintaining historical consistency in a remodeling or renovation effort, or contributes stylistically to a décor or theme. Often, too, salvaged items may be one-of-a-kind or otherwise too difficult or costly to make.

Salvaged raw materials, including lumber, brick, and corrugated tin, often find new life as architectural elements. Those beat up red bricks formerly hidden behind a layer of plaster can now be showcased in their new role as a patio floor or pathway.

I remodeled an 1898 house in the West University neighborhood that had years ago been converted into a duplex. The structure was divided into right and left halves, and the doorways between the two sides were framed in. The whole wall was then covered with drywall. I discovered this by studying my neighbors' homes on either side of me after I learned that they were built in the same year as mine and had identical inside layouts as mine except for the

RESOURCES

- **Building Materials Reuse Association**
www.buildingreuse.org/
- **Barnett & Shore Contractors**
819 W. Silverlake Rd. 791-0286
- **Gersons Used Building Materials**
1811 S. Park Ave. 624-8585
www.gersons.net
- **Habitore Home Improvement Center**
3840 S. Palo Verde Rd. 889-7200
www.habitattucson.org
- **Originate Natural Building Materials Showroom**
526 N. 9th Ave. 792-4207
www.originateNBM.com
- **Taylor Demolition**
1325 E. Benson Hwy. 623-0410
- **Restore**
2958 E. 22nd St. 326-1936

locations of the doors in some of the rooms. That was my clue.

I took a chance and dug in. Busting through the 70s-era drywall, I finally opened a hole big enough to figure out what was going on, and yes, there was doorway from the living room into what had probably once been the parlor. The original redwood molding around the doorway and redwood baseboards were still in place.

I had previously removed a door to open up two other rooms and kept it and its jamb, storing them for a while without knowing if I'd be able to reuse them. I decided to turn that parlor into a bedroom and stuck the door and jamb there. It all worked and I didn't have to buy a thing. I also used the redwood and trim elsewhere in the house.

What are the other benefits — besides cost savings — of reusing materials? Well, you often get better quality stuff (they really don't make 'em like they used to); keep material out of the landfill; and reduce the amount of new materials into the use stream (which later becomes the waste stream).

Natasha Winnik, owner of Originate Natural Building Materials Showroom in Tucson, echoes this fact. "Some of the materials like true 2x4s are better grade than you are going to find anywhere else," she says.

Originate sells reclaimed building materials, both architectural salvage and raw materials such as bricks and lumber, although Natasha estimates that only about 15 percent of her sales comprise used materials. For her, selling salvaged materials is more "to give them a new life. It's something I believe in."

Jim O'Grady, one of the partners at Gerson's Used Building Materials, also in Tucson, believes that using reclaimed materials helps those remodeling "offset the cost of what they're doing. I've had couples come in and sell something, and the wife might say to the husband, 'Hey, we're

going to dinner tonight.'"

Using architecturally-salvaged stuff has the benefit for those with historic homes or historic décor. Items such as claw foot bathtubs, solid multi-panel interior doors, porcelain sinks, and old handles and knobs have historic significance and great appeal in a home with similar furnishings.

But there is a benefit beyond salvaged raw materials. Few building suppliers sell reclaimed lumber or flooring, which is why resellers become valuable assets to the eco-conscious remodeler. Sure, a 2x4 from Home Depot is cheap and easy to get with their numerous locations around town, but a real 2x4 is cured over the ages to a hardened, termite-resistant state. Depending on what you are doing, you might need that full two inches for the particular project on which you are working, keeping you from having to fill in a half-inch. And you'll be able to say that you used something from some other part of your house.

Like a moth drawn to the light, the well-intentioned eco-consumer might go to a place like Gerson's, maybe without really knowing why or just "to check it out." That's great, because unlike the moth, this person can only benefit from doing so. They might leave with something they didn't come looking for, but that something might fit well with their home or neighborhood or come from the era in which the home was built.

I would say that the only drawback with the material reuse paradigm is the issue of storage; all that stuff has to be kept somewhere. But this is a minor concern considering the major benefits of reusing the things which were part of the very essence of an older house, part of its "soul." By reusing that old lumber or finding a new life for that fixture, you're saying "You're important, you're part of the history of this place, and I'm keeping you around." And in addition to everything else, that says a lot.

Author: Michael Matz is a freelance writer who contributes frequently to blogs, and is a sometimes house remodeler. He lives in Bisbee with his two canine companions and is working on his first book.



Green Interiors

By Pamela Portwood

The Healthy Bedroom

Although we spend a third of our lives in our bedrooms, they are typically a low priority in our home design. Thinking about the first impression our living room makes, our family's comfort in the den or the resale value of our kitchen is almost always higher on the

dants. Natural mattresses are available at Copenhagen (520-795-0316) in Tucson and at several Phoenix-area stores.

Whatever type of mattress you get, don't scrimp on the price because a good night's

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