

ASK THE EXPERT

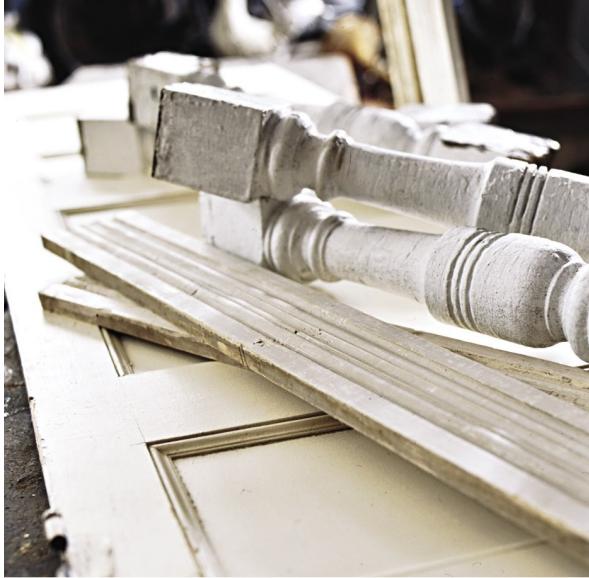


"Nothing is made with the quality of a hundred years ago," says Alice Dunn, at left, owner of Portland Architectural Salvage in Maine. She sits among the array of reclaimed items in her shop. "When I'm around it, I feel warm. I feel like I'm home."

PUTTING A SPIN ON SALVAGE

BY KRISTINE KENNEDY PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLLEEN DUFFLEY

Discarded relics are this woman's decorating treasure. She shows how remnants from old buildings can add eclectic chic.



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When Alice Dunn scans with excitement and curiosity the inside of a defunct department store, condemned city hall, or falling-down barn by the roadside, she sees home decor in the rough. Curio cases are china hutches. Marble wainscoting is a countertop. Iron tools are light fixtures.

As the owner of Portland Architectural Salvage in Maine, Dunn finds and sells leftover bits and pieces that will take on new life in a customer's home. Take bobbins, for instance. "I bought 2,000 industrial bobbins from a defunct mill," says Dunn, who sells them in her shop for \$10 a pair. "I could get 10,000 more tomorrow. I'm selling them as candlestick sets. They're gorgeous." Much to Dunn's delight, a customer one-upped her: He bought hundreds of bobbins, planning to stack them together for a unique balustrade.

In her work, Dunn repeatedly sees the way salvaged items add character and personality to architecturally common homes. For example, a builder kitchen can get a more custom look with an idiosyncratic island made from reclaimed beaded board. "It gives a home additional depth and texture," says Dunn, who has turned her passion for renovating homes into a full-scale business. "Salvage makes a space more human."

Newbies to the salvage scene should "have a playful attitude going into it," Dunn advises. When perusing a salvage site, two-story columns may catch the eye, but smaller items can have just as much impact. >>on 108

Clockwise from top left: Antique balusters, moldings, and a door are the makings for a new coffee table; period furnishings, such as a wood table with a mellow patina, lend instant comfort to a room's style; iron gates and grates often feature unique motifs to highlight walls or become tabletops; knobs in clear or colored glass, or in well-worn metals, boost design personality.



Painting old items an of-the-moment color—such as the chartreuse green on this screen—makes salvage a natural fit in homes with a modern or eclectic design. Other trend-setting paint hues include aqua blue, brown, orange, and pink. Make the screen by framing out sections of pressed tin ceiling, then add hinges.



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Curvy iron hinges make standout accents against pale painted kitchen cabinets. An ornate crystal chandelier turns a small space, such as a bathroom or home office, into a jewel. Old lockers and factory shoe racks transform a back landing into a mudroom without the need for remodeling.

Currently in demand are old doors and hardware, which are being used for everything from desk tops to wall art. Reproduction hardware and doors abound in mail-order catalogs, but “why not get the original?” Dunn says. “It’s usually cheaper.” Dunn also sells a good deal of stainless-steel restaurant equipment, which adds contemporary cool to the kitchen. In addition, old shutters with whimsical cutouts can be combined to make a bedroom headboard, or a pocket door for a kitchen pass-through bar.

Of course, it’s also OK to use an item for its original purpose. But with salvage experience comes the creativity of seeing everything as something else. >>on 112

BEYOND THE ORDINARY

Instead of using salvage as-is, Alice Dunn suggests imagining how to make the piece work for you.

- Clean, slick surfaces make salvage contemporary looking. Think about repainting in lacquer finishes, exposing metal, or adding accents of beveled mirror or glass.
- Gather several finials of different heights, paint them black, stand them on end, and use the grouping as a dining or coffee table centerpiece.
- In a master suite, switch out the bathroom door for an antique French door that allows more light through. Or set a stained glass or leaded glass window into an interior wall so light travels from the lighter room to the darker.
- Line your mudroom with copper spigots for humorous coat hooks.
- Take a richly detailed door and hang it horizontally on the wall for an instant headboard.



GOOD TO KNOW

Architectural salvage shops can be found in the telephone directory under “Salvage and Surplus” or “Building Materials—Used.” Local historical societies also have good contacts. Buyers even can go directly to the source: buildings being torn down. On-site contractors will frequently allow items, such as old bricks, to be hauled away for free or a small fee.

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“Everyone wants to do tables now,” says Dunn. “Desks and tables made from doors with pieces of glass on top.” A gardener may find that terra-cotta acanthus-leaf friezes from the facade of an old office building would give a garden wall a completely different look. There are no rules. And if there are, they should be broken.

Says Dunn: “To use salvage, you have to take a little bit of a personal risk.” The results, however, are a thrill and very fulfilling. @

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“Creative repurposing” is the mantra of all salvage lovers. In her store, Dunn offers tables (*top left*) made from 90- to 220-year-old flooring. Regional wood species from that time include Douglas fir, pumpkin pine, hemlock, and Southern yellow pine. For a do-it-yourself project that offers lots of personality for little effort, buy a pair of decorative wood brackets (*top right*) and attach them beneath a kitchen island overhang (*right*).

