A Renovation Style Built Around Reclaimed Building Materials

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An eco-friendly renovation style is green in two ways: better for the environment and better for your wallet. Construction and demolition waste has been a significant factor in terms of filling landfills, but it also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. You can do your part to keep unwanted but valuable materials out of the landfill and reduce emissions by salvaging and reusing building materials.

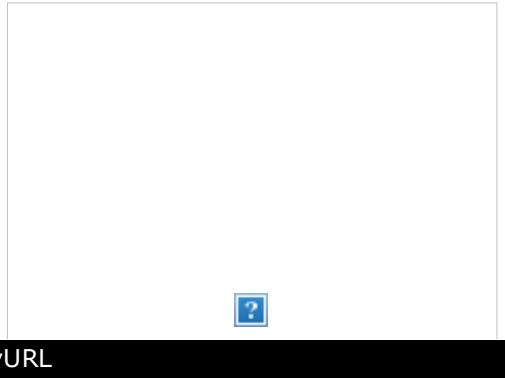
The Waste of the Home Renovation and Construction Industry

Believe it or not, the construction industry uses 60% of raw materials other than food and fuel, in the entire US economy. That's close to 170 million tons of annual building renovation, construction and demolition debris (called C&D materials) or 60% of the country's non-industrial, non-hazardous solid waste.[i] To put that into perspective, that's 2.8 pounds per person every year.[ii] In fact, for every 2,000 square feet of house, up to 8,000 pounds of C&D debris is produced.[iii]

The home renovation craze is having a big impact on landfills. In 2003 alone, 240,000 residential buildings were demolished, creating over 17 million tons of waste.[iv] Deconstructing buildings instead would have significantly reduced that waste. And yet the recovery rate for wood and concrete is only 50%; 28% for drywall; 85% for steel.[v]

Reusing reduces greenhouse gas emissions by minimizing the need to extract, process, ship and use raw materials when we reuse and salvage existing building materials. It also reduces landfill costs and climate change mitigation for society. For example, reusing a base kitchen cabinet instead of buying new would avert 26 pounds of carbon dioxide for each linear foot, which equates to an SUV driving 27 miles.[vi]

So how do you go about incorporating reclaimed building materials into your renovation style to reduce the amount of C&D waste your community produces (and save money)?



1. **Use the calculator**: Find out how much you help the environment by re-using building materials. Enter

materials in the Environmental Impact Calculator provided by Second Use to see your impact.

2. **Reuse common materials:** Go into a used building material store and you'll be amazed at what you find. Kitchen cabinets, windows, doors, lumber, tubs and sinks, appliances, flooring, carpet, tiles, lighting and paint are just some of the items that you can save money buying used. Actually, sometimes the items are new and just left over from a construction job. For outside projects you can find landscape ties, siding, pavers and more. Get your creative juices flowing and go on a treasure hunt. You never know what you'll find – and how much money you can save while keeping items out of the landfill. These materials can be used for more than renovations. Here's some creative ReUse Ideas on Flickr and from the ReStore blog.
3. **Buy used building materials**: The Building Materials Reuse Association includes a list of locations where used building materials can be purchased by state. In Canada, Habitat for Humanity ReStores are located in various cities across the country. Architectural salvage and individually owned local shops are also worth searching for.
4. **Look for secondhand building materials online**: Online groups like Freecycle and Craigslist are a good option for finding used building materials. Non-profit re-use stores like a Habitat for Humanity ReStore are another great resource.

If you are planning to remodel your home, have a look at the EPA's Remodeler's Field Guide which describes planning a waste management and recovery plan. And get inspired by watching Reuse It: The Movie.

Images via Flickr: anoldent and JonDissed

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[i][i] *Choosing Green Materials and Products*. (2010). Retrieved from US

Environmental Protection Agency: http://www.epa.gov/greenhomes/SmarterMaterialChoices.htm#recycled

[ii] *Basic Information: Construction and Demolition Materials*. (2012). Retrieved from US Environmental Protection Agency: http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/industrial/cd/basic.htm

[iii] *Deconstruction & Reuse Facts* . (n.d.). Retrieved from The ReBuilding Exchange: http://www.rebuildingexchange.org/resources.html

[iv] *Maximizing Reuse and Recycling of Construction Materials*. (2012). Retrieved from Associated Schools of Construction: http://ascpro.ascweb.org/chair/paper/CPRT135002012.pdf

[v] (Maximizing Reuse and Recycling of Construction Materials, 2012)

[vi] *Environmental Impact Calculator*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Second Use: http://www.seconduse.com/environmental_calculator

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Tags: C&D, construction & demolition debris, reclaimed building material, recycled building materials, secondhand materials

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