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Score Used Floors or Doors

Homeowners save money (and the planet) buying recycled materials

On a sizzling Saturday, inside a toasty warehouse, Eunice Youmans walks past the vintage fireplace mantels, unhinged doors and light fixtures at Community Forklift, a nonprofit store in Prince George's County that peddles reusable housing materials. In one hand is her 10-month-old son, in the other a tape measure. Her two young daughters trail behind her like ducklings.

She zeroes in on a used kitchen cabinet. It needs some work. It has been sitting for months. One door is chipped. The white paint is old. She plans to fix it up, refinish it and put it in her dining room. The price is \$50. She gets it for \$30.

"It's much cheaper and good-quality stuff," the Cheverly resident says of the store's products, extolling the benefits of buying used rather than going to the large home stores. "I come here all the time."

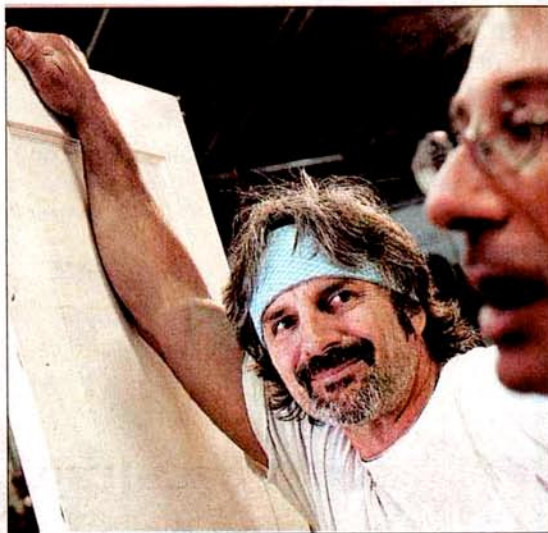
In a disposable society, where new is often equated with better and big-box stores such as Home Depot have become the temple of home improvers, a growing number of homeowners are turning to reclaimed or reused products. In the past five years, the number of reused-material stores across the country has doubled, from 150 to 300, according to the Building Materials Reuse Association.

Driven by economics, environmental concerns, aesthetics or old-fashioned quality — or all of the above — do-it-yourself homeowners, as well as contractors, handymen and landlords, are buying construction products at a fraction of the retail cost — such things as marble countertops, cast-iron radiators, sunken bathtubs, toilets and pine doors. Some come from homes built more than a century ago, some from new-home construction sites.

Sometimes there's even historic value: The Community Forklift recently landed marble from a



SHINE ON AND ON: Ruthie Mundell, outreach director for Community Forklift, holds a fancy chandelier that once glittered in a penthouse apartment in the Watergate.



WHAT'S OLD IS NEW: Doug Honkala, left, takes away a door from Community Forklift in Edmonston, Md. The organization sells recycled and surplus building goods.

federal building and a chandelier and several mahogany doors from a penthouse at the Watergate.

"Most people are proud of themselves for recycling cans and recycling newspaper and buying bags that are made out of recycled plas-

probably five customers a day. Now we probably have 150 sales a day," she said. "People are finding out about the concept. They realize how much it makes sense financially and environmentally."

In the Washington region, the Building Materials Reuse Association and Habitat for Humanity's Habitat ReStore Web site together list 60 for-profit and nonprofit operations that collect or sell reusable and reclaimed products: three in the District, 17 in Maryland and 40 in Virginia.

Nonprofit organizations such as Community Forklift, the Loading Dock and Second Chance in Baltimore, and Habitat ReStores in Virginia and Maryland get all or most of their products from donations, many of which come from homes that have been torn down or "deconstructed" instead of being demolished by bulldozers

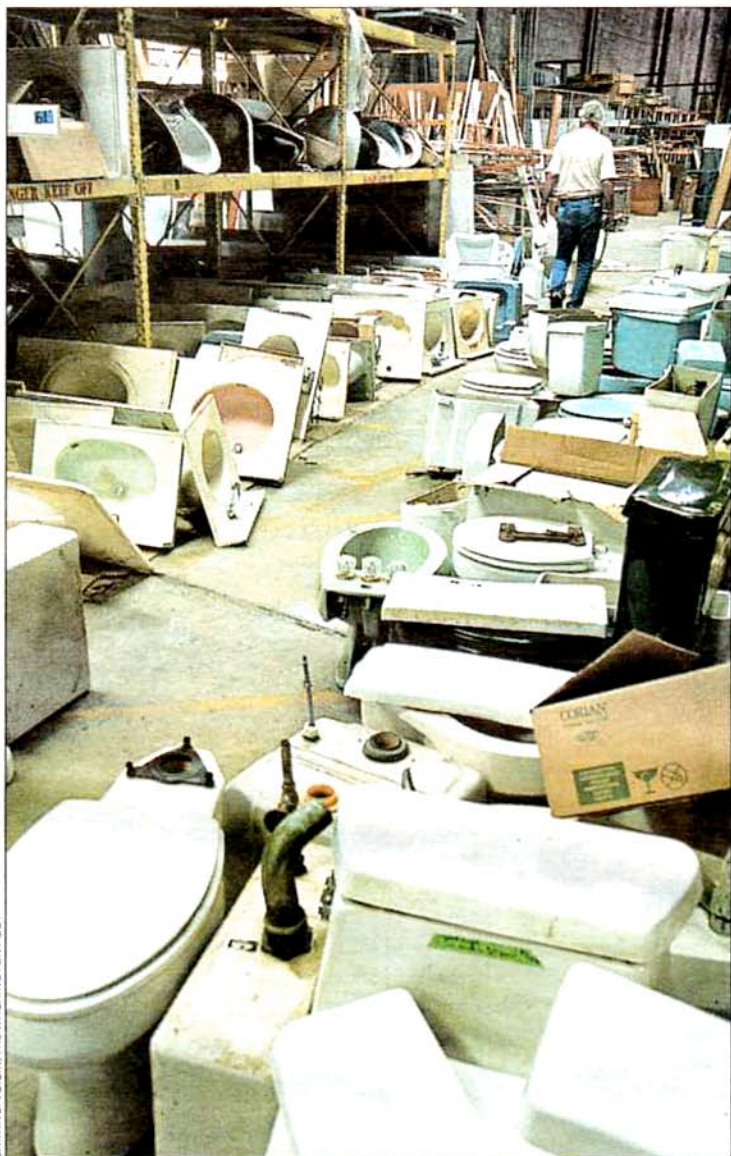
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“ People don't realize that they can recycle entire houses and buy recycled products.”

RUTHIE MUNDELL, COMM. FORKLIFT

tic, but people don't realize that they can recycle entire houses and that they can buy recycled products for their homes," said Ruthie Mundell, outreach director for Forklift, which opened in November 2005.

"When we first started, we had



GOING TO POT: Community Forklift offers toilets, doors and other building goods.

Salvaged Stuff

CONTINUED FROM E12

and wrecking balls.

"I would say about 85 percent is donated," said Desiree Carter, general manager of the Loading Dock. In addition, "We get some materials from landfills" and buy some from places going out of business, such as plumbing supply shops.

Often, about 80 percent of a disassembled home can be salvaged or recycled, experts say. In that case, donating the materials is a boon for everyone, recycling advocates say. Homeowners get a tax write-off by donating the disassembled materials to the nonprofit stores and save on trash fees at the landfill. The environment benefits, as do the people who bought the products.

"Some homeowners can't stand good material just being dumped in a landfill," said Paul Hughes, president of DeConstruction Services of

Fairfax, which tears apart homes and donates the materials to nonprofit organizations. "Many builders are starting to feel the same way."

For many people, such as Gregory Cavanaugh, the savings are

“What you buy in the stores is pine, and it's junk. In two to three years, it can start to rot.”

GREGORY CAVANAUGH, CONTRACTOR

attractive, but more important is "the durability of the product."

Cavanaugh, a contractor, said he saved more than \$1,000 recently by buying six used doors — five from Community Forklift and one from Second Chance — for a restoration job at a Capitol Hill home built in

the 1800s.

He said he paid \$58 for an entrance door instead of about \$300 new and \$260 for a walnut Victorian-style door that "you'd probably pay upwards of \$1,000" for at a lumber store.

On top of that, he said, he got a good deal on used yellow pine, a couple hundred years old, that he used for door and window frames. He said the quality was superior to that of lumber sold today. "What you buy in the stores today is white pine, and it's junk," he said. "In two to three years, it can start to rot."

Still, not all reusable material is cheap.

Mountain Lumber in Ruckersville, Va., which manufactures products from reclaimed wood, charges an average of \$3,000 for flooring for a 300-square-foot kitchen and about \$8,000 for an 800-square-foot one. And that's just for the product — the company does not do install it.

Willie Drake, president and founder, said the wood averages 100 to 600 years old and comes from barns, ancient temples, buildings and schools around the world, including countries as far away as China. Recently, he said, the company bought 25-by-25-foot wooden Guinness beer vats from Ireland to convert to flooring.

"We have never cut down a tree to make our product," he added with pride. "It's all from 100 percent reclaimed wood."

Some places specialize in certain products.

The Brass Knob, a for-profit store on N Street in Northwest Washington, has an impressive collection of cast-iron radiators, some from the early 1900s, that cost about \$85 to \$500. It also has more than a thousand used doors. There's a second location, in Adams Morgan, that operates under a different owner.

Ron Allan, owner of the N Street shop, said he attracts a lot of homeowners, architects and contractors who work on old homes.

"I've almost become a Victorian Home Depot," he said.

Sometimes, even the do-it-yourselfers bump up against a task too great. That was the case with Pamela Preston of Clinton, who was at Community Forklift one recent Thursday hunting for kitchen cabinets.

She had been to Home Depot,

STORE GUIDE

Here are some local stores that sell used or salvaged building materials.

WASHINGTON AREA

Community Forklift

→ 4671 Tanglewood Dr., Edmonston, 301-985-5180

The Brass Knob Architectural Antiques

→ 2311 18th St. NW, 202-332-3370

The Brass Knob Backdoors Warehouse

→ 57 N St. NW, 202-265-0587

BALTIMORE

The Loading Dock

→ 2 N. Kresson St., Baltimore, 410-558-3625

Second Chance

→ 1645 Warner St., Baltimore, 410-385-1101

Habitat For Humanity's Habitat ReStores

→ 9100 Gaither Rd., Gaithersburg, 301-947-3304

→ 8101 Fort Smallwood Rd., Pasadena, 410-437-7755

→ 4531 Rhode Island Ave., North Brentwood, 301-779-1912

→ 9506 Center St., Manassas, 703-369-6145

→ 7770-G Richmond Hwy., Alexandria, 3-360-6700

For more locations:

→ Building Materials Reuse Association: Buildingreuse.org/ directory
→ Habitat ReStore: [Habitat.org/ env/restores](http://Habitat.org/env/restores)

which wanted about \$5,000 for new kitchen cabinets. She picked out used cabinets at the Community Forklift for about \$500.

They needed refinishing, which she said her husband would do. She seemed excited. "I'm going to put him to work." She took pictures and measurements. She asked the store to put the cabinets on hold.

By the next day, it was a no-go: Her husband thought it would be too much work. ALLAN LENGEL (WASHINGTON POST)