

Once More, With Savings

Homeowners increasingly are selecting used building materials to make projects look better, cost less and save resources.



PHOTOS BY SARAH L. VOIGT — THE WASHINGTON POST

Emily Schoenbaum of the District picks out a board. Old wood is particularly popular.



Doug Honkala takes away a door. At right is Jim Schulman, head of Community Forklift.



Community Forklift in Prince George's County is one of 60 for-profit and nonprofit operations in the Washington area that collect or sell reusable and reclaimed products.

By ALLAN LENGEL
Washington Post Staff Writer

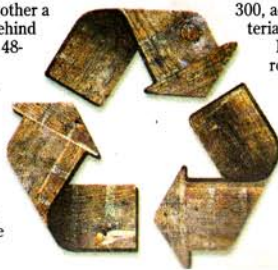
On a sizzling Saturday, inside a toasty warehouse, Eunice Youmans walks past the vintage fireplace mantels, unhinged doors and light fixtures at Community Forklift, a nonprofit store in Prince George's County that peddles reusable housing materials.

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 48-by-17-inch 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."

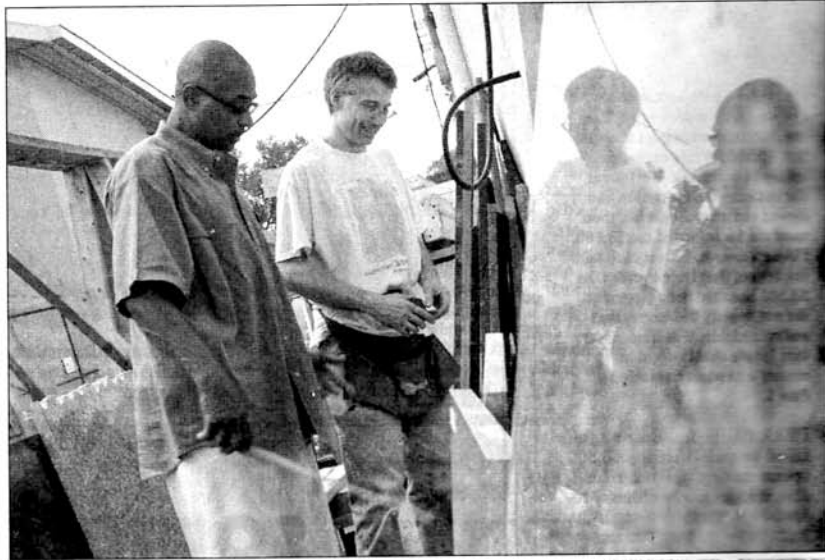
In a disposable society, where new is often equated with better, where big-box stores such as Home Depot have become the temple of home improvers, a growing number of homeowners are turning to reclaimed or reused products. In the past five years, the number of reused-material stores around the country 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 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



Pamela Preston of Clinton looks at kitchen cabinets. She found ones she liked for about \$500, but the prospect of refinishing them proved daunting.

See REUSE, F16, Col. 2



PHOTOS BY SARA HILL, ABBOTT — THE WASHINGTON POST

Jim Schulman, right, talks with Greg Sumner of Mitchellville about the price of a piece of granite.

Less Cost, More Character Feed Growing Reuse Market

REUSE. From F1

bathtubs, toilets, sinks and solid five-panel pine doors. Some come from homes built more than a century ago, some from new-home construction sites.

Sometimes there's even historical value: The Community Forklift recently landed marble from a 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 plastic, 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 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 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 dis-

assembled 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 — hardwood floors, kitchen cabinets, and on and on — 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 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; \$260 for a walnut Victorian-style door that "you'd probably pay upwards of \$1,000" for; and \$25 each for the interior doors that would run "upwards of \$150" each at a lumber store.

On top of that, he said, he got a good deal on used yellow pine, a couple of hundred years old, that he used for door and window frames and windowsills. He said the quality was superior to that of lumber sold today.

"Basically, 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 about \$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 installation.

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.

Drake said most customers are from the United States, particularly the mid-Atlantic, but he "just shipped an order to Moscow and just sent an order to Italy."

"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, which 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.

Jim Schulman, president of Community Forklift and a big believer in the reuse business, concedes: "This place is not for everybody. Not everybody is a do-it-yourselfer."

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 with her 9-year-old son Jan, hunting for kitchen cabinets.

She had been to Home Depot, which wanted about \$5,000 for new kitchen cabinets. She picked out used cabinets at the Commu-

Store Directory

Looking for a place that sells used or salvaged building materials? Here are some local options:

Washington Area

■ Community Forklift
4671 Tanglewood Dr.
Edmonston
301-985-5180

■ The Brass Knob
2311 18th St. NW
Washington
202-332-3370

■ The Brass' Knob
57 N St. NW
Washington
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
703-360-6700

For more locations:

■ Building Materials Reuse Association: buildingreuse.org/directory
■ Habitat ReStore: habitat.org/env/restores



The supply of materials at Community Forklift and other resale stores is extensive and variable, including such items as standard toilets, marble countertops, cast-iron radiators and solid five-panel pine doors.

nity 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 said with a smile. "Five thousand dollars is ridiculous when you have other things to do with

your money."

She took pictures and measurements. She asked the store to put the cabinets on hold until she could talk to her husband.

By the next day, it was a no-go: Her husband thought it would be too much work.