

Builder Robert Pierson used reclaimed wood (left, above) to plank a floor (left, below) that became a rich addition to a renovated living room (right). Photos by Bill Wehland.

STONE FROM A DECONSTRUCTED barn near Manchester now graces the exterior of a \$2 million-plus house in Baltimore County. The enhancement is part of a growing trend in reclaiming and reusing building materials: Old barn beams become joists for new houses, pine planks are transformed into gleaming heart pine flooring, and pieces of a tin roof reappear as a kitchen backsplash.

Some Carroll builders, remodelers and renovators are finding ways to keep old, still-useful building materials out of landfills. They create fireplaces or exterior stone veneers from foundation stones of houses that no longer stand, fit old bricks into walkways as pavers and, after removing the lead paint, transform single-pane windows into mirrors.

The construction industry generates an estimated 350 tons a year of construction and demolition debris across the United States, making job waste a major issue for builders who must dispose of it

and local governments that must provide disposal facilities. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 35 percent of American landfill space is filled with construction detritus. Green builders work to reduce the total, although as Carroll builder **Robert T. Pierson** pointed out, it is impractical to build a whole house out of reclaimed materials.

Green building in general, including use of reclaimed materials and energy-conserving design, adds about 2 percent to the up-front cost of construction, according to a California study. One major cost factor in using reclaimed materials is the labor involved in, for example, removing nails from old wood and stones from the foundation of a house being torn down, then cleaning or refinishing the materials for reuse.

Reclaimed materials are not for every home buyer. Not everyone wants an old claw foot tub with a fresh porcelain coating as a dramatic bathroom fixture. Not every buyer is in the market for a

custom home, and sustainable building is generally the province of custom builders and remodelers.

“It takes the right kind of buyer. Not everyone is into old stuff, but that’s what I do,” said Pierson, owner of Robert T. Pierson Construction, Finksburg. His grandfather reclaimed old building materials long before it was called “green building,” and young Robert grew up with an appreciation for reuse and repurposing.

Builders and renovators who practice sustainable or green construction draw on a variety of sources to find reclaimed materials that they can reuse for the materials’ original purposes or repurpose for a new function.

Pierson finds old barns, houses and mills to dismantle rather than demolish, and stores the materials until his imagination sparks a new use for them. Builders also turn to suppliers of reclaimed materials such as Vintage Lumber, Woodsboro, or the nonprofit

deconstruction and salvage business Second Chance Inc., Baltimore. Or they scour the Internet.

"Everyone goes for a manufactured pattern but you put it up on the wall and it's the same old, same old. I don't do that," Pierson said. For example, he acquired a set of old library doors – 5 feet high and 9 feet wide – and spent a week removing 12 layers of paint. The refinished doors became the dramatic front entrance to a house. "It's an incredible look. You'll never find anything like that," he said.

Sykesville builder and restoration expert **Jonathan Herman**, owner of Herman Construction, Inc., saves "everything I can," and finds that some reuses can actually save time and expense. Removing unique moldings for reuse is faster than making reproduction moldings, he said. If Herman has leftover hardware from a project on a 19th Century house, he saves it to use on another house from the same time period. Doors – dipped and stripped down to the original finish – may go back into a building.

"There is a tendency for people just to tear everything out and do everything

over. I don't think that's as cost-effective as salvaging, but I'm trying to make everything historic," Herman said.

The reuse of old windows is an ongoing subject of debate, particularly among restoration experts. Herman's take on the subject is that the difference in energy efficiency between reusing an old single-paned window and buying a plastic double-paned window may not justify the new window's cost, if the builder or renovator has already put in ceiling and wall insulation to reduce air infiltration into the building.

"We install a simple kind of weatherstripping so [the owner] can keep the old window and sash and make it more energy efficient," he said.

Hampstead builder Robin Ford, owner of Robin Ford Building and Remodeling, Inc. likes to use old light fixtures, sinks or vanity fixtures and beams to give modern houses what he calls, "an old flair."

The impetus for using reclaimed materials seems to come about equally from customers and from his own ideas, Ford said. "Once people see [the reclaimed material], it has a character that nothing new can match. It has a

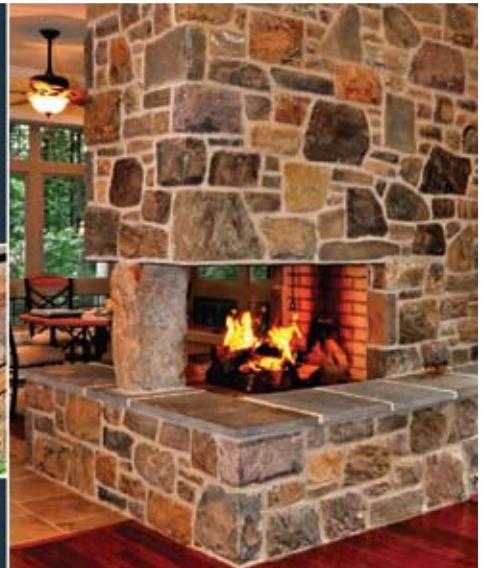
charm you can't buy new," he said.

Customers bring remodeling project ideas to Owings Home Services, Eldersburg, "in every different level of green," said **Joseph Smith**, managing partner. Some want all new materials. Others see green as chic, and still others are committed to environmentally conscious living. In one recent project with homeowners who wanted to minimize waste, Owings was able to reuse nearly 50 percent of the wood that was torn out to enlarge the kitchen and open up the dining room.

"To us, recycling is cabinets, doors and trim," Smith said. Reusing trim can be a challenge. If it is cut up into small pieces, it will not look good in the finished project. Reusing hardwood flooring is impractical because of the cost of pulling up boards one by one and removing nails, he said.

Smith has seen an increase in green building among homeowners. Interest is also growing nationally. The U.S. Green Building Council estimates that green building has multiplied from a \$7 billion market in 2005 to \$36 billion in 2009.

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