

From the
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Recycling and Reusing Historic Architectural Features

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Historic Building Recovery Grant Program

Beautiful old doors, columns, windows, brackets, banisters, old hardwood flooring and other architectural features and details are a large part of what make historic buildings so appealing and valuable. Large, solid beams, framing timbers, bricks and other structural materials in old buildings are usually of a quality that cannot be matched by contemporary materials, except at very high prices. Anyone who has restored or rehabilitated an old building knows that a large part of the satisfaction from the project comes from working with these fine architectural features and details.

When any of these details are missing from a historic building or damaged beyond repair, how do you replace them? If shopping at the local home-improvement store is your answer to this question, consider another option: architectural salvage stores. In a historic house, what could be more fitting than to make repairs using appropriate historic features? This approach will not only lead to a high quality finished product, but it will also add considerable value to the building.

Reusing salvaged building materials is not a new phenomenon, but it is only in recent years that the average homeowner might easily consider this option. For centuries, architects and builders have recognized the great value in viable materials taken from older well-built structures, reusing stones and beams from castles, temples, fortresses, etc.

Roman ruins were raided for bricks to build the Saxon abbey of St. Albans in 1077, and many shuttered monasteries were stripped of materials by the Tudor monarchs in England during the great rebuilding of the 16th and 17th centuries. In the Americas, the Spanish conquistadors tore down Mayan and Incan buildings and reused the stones to build their churches and other buildings.

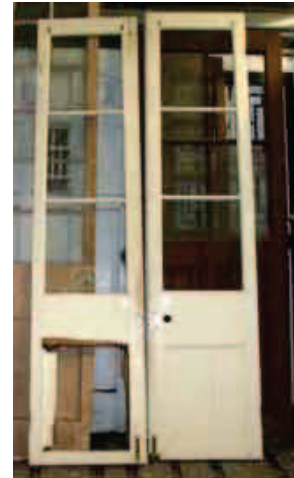
Architectural elements available today generally come from old buildings that are being demolished

for a variety of reasons. Preservationists usually lament any historic building being torn down, but fortunately, there is a growing awareness of the benefits of careful dismantling of buildings that cannot be saved intact. (See the sidebar article on deconstruction.)

Why use salvaged materials? Today's throw-away culture has for several generations led many people to discard anything old or broken and replace it with something new. With an increased appreciation for historic preservation over the past several decades, and a heightened sense of environmental responsibility, another approach to refurbishing old buildings is being rediscovered. Reusing high-quality salvaged architectural features and other materials in historic building projects can replace lost historic details, as well as add value to the structure. Also, used in new construction, salvaged structural materials, architectural features and decorative pieces can add strength, style and beauty to a building, making it uniquely different from the average new home.

Another important reason to use salvaged materials is to protect the environment — don't forget the second word in the mantra: "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle." Whenever salvaged beams, flooring, doors, fixtures, bricks or tiles are reused, it reduces the amount of energy and expense associated with manufacturing and transporting similar or equivalent new materials. This is an example of the embodied energy that is often referred to in discussions about the environmental benefits of historic preservation. (To read more about this, see "Historic Preservation is Inherently Sustainable" in the Summer 2009 issue of *Preservation in Print*.)

Historic preservation of buildings is inherently green itself, and reuse of salvaged architectural elements makes the restoration or rehabilitation project even more environmentally responsible.



The window sash and French doors were purchased at a salvage store and refurbished and installed on this cottage in the Faubourg Marigny pictured above.

What is Deconstruction?

Deconstruction is the careful dismantling of a building, salvaging valuable or usable materials. This differs from typical demolition operations, which usually discard all or most of the building's parts.

Historic preservation aims to avoid demolition of architecturally or culturally valuable structures. In the event that a building is damaged beyond repair, the preferred way to remove it is through deconstruction, since most buildings have at least some valuable, salvageable materials.

Deconstruction is the most environmentally friendly way to remove severely damaged, unusable structures, as it allows for the reuse of materials and architectural features and reduces the amount of waste that goes into landfills.

Beyond the altruistic reasons for deconstruction and salvage, it is also less expensive than standard demolition. Studies have shown that deconstruction costs are approximately 10 percent lower than the costs of typical demolition and disposal operations. And there can be another payoff in some situations as well: A recent study showed that Katrina victims whose homes were deconstructed rather than demolished had measurable psychological benefits from the experience. They got a better sense of closure when losing their home and found satisfaction in realizing a material benefit from the salvaged building elements, whether they used them or not.

For information about deconstructing a building, contact either of these two local nonprofit organizations involved in deconstruction activities:

The PRC's Rebuilding Together Deconstruction/
Salvage Program: <http://www.prcno.org/programs/rebuildingtogether/rtdeconstruction.php>

The Old City Building Center: <http://ocbcnola.org/>

This built-in cypress bench is being salvaged from a Craftsman-style house in the Broadmoor National Register Historic District. The house is being deconstructed by the PRC's Rebuilding Together Deconstruction and Salvage Program, and salvaged materials will be offered for sale in the PRC's Salvage Store.





Top: Cypress door trim is removed from a Louisiana Land Trust house slated for demolition in the Broadmoor National Register Historic District.

Middle: An AmeriCorps worker inspects a window in its casing that was just removed from a Louisiana Land Trust house slated for demolition in the Broadmoor National Register Historic District.

Bottom: This AmeriCorps worker carefully prepares to remove a window from a craftsman house in the Broadmoor National Register Historic District.

Tips for Utilizing Salvaged Architectural Materials

1. Assess What Is Needed

- Do you need a door, a window sash, a porch column?
- Determine what style is appropriate for your building.
- Get the proper permits for the work to be done.
- The Historic District Landmarks Commission may need to approve your plans. They have an online guide and their staff will gladly help you determine what style of door, window, etc., is appropriate for your building. There are books that can help with this as well.
- The Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation staff can help with additional information on architectural style.
- Take accurate measurements for the piece needed; this very important step will help ensure that the door or mantel you buy will be successfully installed in your building.

2. Shop At Salvage Stores

- Salvage stores are similar to home-improvement stores, but filled with antique and vintage pieces.
- Arrive at the store with exact measurements of the needed elements; take a tape measure and camera with you.
- Bring along photos from your house if you need to buy something to match surviving pieces.
- Be sure to ask the store's employees for assistance.
- Shop around at different stores, but don't hesitate too much since the beautiful door you see one day may well be gone the next, and in salvage stores all sales are usually final.
- There are for-profit and non-profit salvage stores; the for-profits usually are a bit pricier than non-profits, but some of them include paint stripping and repair of items in their purchase price, so be sure and ask about this, as it may save you time.

3. Consider Hidden Costs And Additional Concerns

- Does the item's paint need to be stripped, repairs made or parts replaced, and is this work included in the purchase price?
- Bring your contractor with you to confirm that the items you select can be used in your project.
- Plumbing or light fixtures may require special parts, hardware or careful installation.

4. Prepare And Install

- Refurbish and repair the item if necessary, and install it in your building.
- Enjoy the beauty of your new door or mantel and be satisfied knowing you have helped the environment by incorporating high-quality vintage materials in your historic building.

Resources to Consult When Searching for Salvaged Materials

Architectural Salvage Stores in New Orleans:

PRC Salvage Store 2801 Marais St. 504.948.0038	The Green Project 2831 Marais St. 504.945.0240
Ricca's Architectural Sales 511 N. Solomon St. 504.488.5524	The Habitat ReStore 2830 Royal St. 504.943.2240
Ricca & Puderer 2645 Toulouse St. 504.822.8200	Strip-Ease of New Orleans 3301 Lafitte Ave. 504.484.3040
The Bank Architectural Antiques 1824 Felicity St. 504.523.2702	

To Locate Architectural Salvage Stores Beyond New Orleans:

Architectural Salvage Store Directory from the magazine Traditional Building
<http://www.traditional-building.com/814.htm>

Store listings from the Building Materials Reuse Association
<http://www.bmra.org/reuse-stores>

Store listings from Old House Web
<http://www.oldhouseweb.com/suppliers/architectural-salvage/>



This door was purchased at a salvage store in a somewhat rough condition pictured on the left. After investing a lot of elbow grease and TLC, the owner was able to transform it into the beautiful door pictured on the right.

Resources for Identifying Architectural Styles:

Blumenson, John J.G. *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide for Styles and Terms, 1600-1945*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Foster, Gerald. *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

McAlester, Virginia & Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Vogt, Lloyd. *New Orleans Houses: A House-watcher's Guide*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub. Co., 1985.

Residential Architecture Style Guide
http://www.realtor.org/rmoarchitecture_guide/residentialstyles

Architectural Styles of America
<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~twp/architecture/>

Identifying Architectural Home Styles
<http://www.designevolutions.com/architecturalstyles/homestyles-index.html>

New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission Style Guidelines:
<http://cityofno.com/pg-99-4-guidelines.aspx>
Call to consult with staff: 504.658.7040

Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation
Call for advice on historic building styles: 225.342.8160

For further reading and research on salvage and deconstruction, refer to the Division of Historic Preservation's Web site:

<http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/hbrgpfurtherreading.aspx>