



In a space outfitted with reused finds (such as pop cans flattened into a tabletop, above), Jeffery Roberts adds nostalgic flair.

BLENDING WITH NATURE, Repurposing the past

Today, “green” also means finding new uses for architectural artifacts.



IN YPSILANTI, home to Michigan's oldest architectural salvage store, Materials Unlimited's 16,000-square foot warehouse is stocked with reclaimed hardware, lighting and plumbing fixtures, and thousands of other architectural items. Its owner, preservationist Reynold Lowe, has a similar goal: “I want to help preserve the flowering of American architecture.”

Lowe, who opened Materials Unlimited in 1971, accidentally started his salvage career when he rescued several architectural details from an Ann Arbor building slated for demolition. As many more structures became wrecking ball victims, he saved their plasterwork, floors, windows and moldings. “Turn-of-the-century houses were filled with detailing by European artisans,” Lowe says. “Today, we don't see that in contemporary architecture.”

Though the majority of his inventory is from the 1800s, tastes are changing. “When we opened, the trend was for Victorian pieces,” he said. “Now we're seeing an interest for post-war items. That's a bit of an adjustment.” There are other concessions to the 21st century, too. “Our collection of restored period lighting is rewired and ready for installation,” he says.

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— Jeffery Roberts

Anchored by Schmidt's, a longstanding member of the reclaimed furnishings community, the area has attracted other antique stores in the region, such as Bowbird Mongo and Silver Spoon. Nearby Ann Arbor is host to the Ann Arbor Saline Antiques Market, a monthly super-



A limestone mantel repurposed by Jeffery Roberts adds farmhouse charm.

store of regional vendors, based in a local fairgrounds.

Jeffery Roberts, an East Grand Rapids-based builder, designer and all-around Renaissance artisan, regularly reinvents yesterday's artifacts into today's homes. A lifetime fan of repurposed materials, Roberts recently shipped two antique limestone mantels to a lakefront home in Grand Rapids as part of its reinvention into a French farmhouse.

"To enhance the country atmosphere, I also added a variety of vintage light fixtures procured from salvage yards," he shares.

In addition, reclaimed white oak barn timbers found new life as flooring. "The rough cut, splits, knots and nail holes show the floor's heritage," Roberts says. "It helps give the house its personality." The timber was also reborn as hand-hewn beams for the dining room and new tables for a potting shed. According to Roberts, "These varied textures became a motif for the house itself."

For Roberts, being green is nothing new. "I've always liked to reclaim architectural pieces and use them," he says. "But now I'm glad there's more awareness, which makes them more accessible, and more appropriate, for today."

—Emily Tennyson