



Think Outside the Big-box

Want a home as unique as you are?

Two words: creative reuse.

BY JESSICA RIDENOUR

It's happened to a lot of us: We drop by a friend's pad for the first time and immediately notice his place looks suspiciously like... our place (which is to say, an uncanny replica of an Ikea showroom). Our homes are not only a place to rest our heads at night, they are an expression of who we are, and a house full of pre-fab particle board doesn't exactly scream, "I'm a conscientious eco-citizen with incomparable taste." Instead of beating yourself up over it — after all, Ikea does fulfill the ostensibly basic human desire for modern, easily assembled, affordable Swedish wares — you can think outside the Ikea box with a little creative reuse of what's already out there.

Which, according to the statistics, is quite a lot. The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) reports that for every one truckload of goods manufactured, 32 truckloads of waste are produced. That stat is even sadder when you consider that, also according to ASID, 90 percent of everything manufactured in this country ends up in the landfills within one year. Just think of all the orphaned furniture, salvageable building materials and other treasures out there in need of good homes.

"Just because it's on the curb doesn't mean that it's dysfunctional or at the end of its useful life," says Grace Hawthorne, president and publisher of *ReadyMade*, a how-to magazine for design-minded do-it-yourselfers. Inspired by Marcel Duchamp, who famously turned a urinal into an ingenious piece of art, *ReadyMade* encourages its readers to re-imagine uses for everyday objects — from sculpting an outdoor couch from dirt and sod in your backyard to fashion-



green scene

If you like the DIY aesthetic but worry you're all thumbs with a hammer and a paintbrush, these artists and innovators have cleverly reincarnated unloved remnants of glass, steel and wood so you don't have to.

London-based TING melds luxury style with sustainability. Here, end-of-the-line seatbelt webbing was saved from a life in the landfill by becoming cheerful, candy-colored **Seat Belt Pillows** (\$144), available at branchhome.com or tinglondon.com. »



« Brooklyn's **Uhuru** uses materials with the least environmental impact possible in its designs, including the **Stoolen** (shown here) fashioned from collected workshop scraps and an old bicycle rim. Starting at \$2,000 at uhurudesign.com.



Bicycle aficionado Andy Gregg turned a lifetime hobby into an art form. His **Modulus Loveseat** (\$900) was constructed from recycled chrome bicycle rims and tubing and is available online at bikefurniture.com.

Israel's **Reddish Studio** "helps objects feel better about themselves" by reworking them in unexpected ways. This **Bath & Beyond Chair** was repurposed from an old bathtub that was cut, bent and dressed up with steel legs. Available by special order at reddishstudio.com. »



Samuel Moyer takes 100-year-old wood and introduces it to the 21st century at his downtown LA studio. His **Brothers and Sisters Table** (\$5,600) was constructed with antique black walnut and maple butterfly joints. samuelmoyerfurniture.com.



« Justin Parker and Andi Kovel use wind power fueled furnaces in their Portland-based studio — called **Esque** — to hand-make unique, functional art out of recycled glass. These **Slumped Vases** start at \$314 and are available at branchhome.com or esque-studio.com.

ing takeout chopsticks into a mod clock.

The concept of reclamation isn't really new; it harkens back to a time when there were simply fewer resources available. Now, after a few decades of gluttonous overconsumption, people are finding value not only in reusing an item, but in the creative satisfaction that goes along with it. Hawthorne points to the popularity of home improvement shows as evidence of the renewed interest in repurposing materials, as well as the growth of *ReadyMade*, whose circulation numbers have ballooned from 50,000 to 300,000 in just six years. "Appropriating found or reclaimed materials is rooted in the need for self-expression and individualizing one's envi-

ronment. Especially because we live in such a mass produced society where rising above the clutter of me-too products has become more challenging," she says.

Not only can you unleash your inner *artiste* and save materials from the landfill, but creative reuse reduces the need for something new to be produced. Plus, considering most new furniture is loaded with VOCs and other harmful chemicals, vintage finds have likely already off-gassed any noxious fumes they might have once held. They're now safe to be gussied up with a coat of nontoxic paint, or whatever accoutrements you see fit. "There's that element of knowing what goes into it, knowing

RESOURCES

Pasadena Architectural Salvage
30 S. San Gabriel Blvd.
Pasadena, CA 91107
pasadenaarchitecturalsalvage.com
626.535.9655

Silver Lake Yards
1086 Manzanita St.
Silver Lake, CA 90026
323.667.2875


Habitat for Humanity ReStore
2200 S. Ritchey St.
Santa Ana, CA 92705
restoreoc.org
714.434.6202

LA County Online Materials Exchange
ladpw.org/epd/lacomax

Other useful sites include freecycle.org,
craigslist.org and ebay.com

where it came from, knowing nothing was exploited in the process," says Sarah Rich, editor of *Dwell* magazine. "And there's usually some kind of cool tale of where something came from when you get it secondhand."

Todd Phelps probably has a few stories to tell. His Santa Monica, Calif. apartment is a veritable showcase of reclaimed and repurposed décor. "The best deals I find are from people who don't know what they have," says Phelps, who scouts LA-area yard sales, alleys and craigslist for fodder. Among his many projects, Phelps counts an antique radio made into a stereo storage unit, dresser drawers reborn into a television cabinet and old 35mm film canisters reworked into stepping stones for his courtyard using concrete, tile and glass.

Next time you feel drawn to that big blue furniture emporium with its funny cartoon assembly instructions, first check out some of the salvage resources listed here and think of all the repurpose-able treasures they hold. You're a unique, aware worldchanger, after all, and your habitat should reflect that. 

Although writer Jessica Ridenour isn't embarrassed to admit that half the furniture in her house is from Ikea, she'll likely flex her creative muscle with a DIY project next time around.