

Salvaging Existing Materials During a Restoration

MAKING PLANS FOR a historic restoration is a way of looking at an old building with fresh eyes. To determine whether you can salvage existing materials, whether they are to be used in the restoration or not, you must look at the building's parts as well as its whole.

In fact, the best way to salvage materials -- bricks, wood, glass, and more -- is to remove them in the reverse order they were put in, according to George Libby, Sr. of George M. Libby and Sons masonry. "If you've got that game in mind from the outset, you will be less likely to have to destroy something, doesn't matter if it is stone, wood, or brick."

While it seems obvious to caution that materials can only be reused if they are in good condition, it takes forethought, advance planning, and sometimes extra effort to remove beams, bricks, or window sash intact. "The culture of preservation is to repair and reuse, so it is important to consider how to recycle materials that will be not be reused by the project itself during the planning process," said Hilary Bassett, Greater Portland Landmarks Executive Director.

If you are unlikely to reuse materials yourself, which depends on your physical and historic requirements, you may be able to sell or donate them to people who will. That also takes thought, and arrangements must be made before materials are removed. Many contractors will assume that unwanted items are bound for the dump. How materials are handled, stored, and disposed of should be part of the discussion with your contractors and may need to be spelled out in the agreement.

"Usually people are looking to sell wood," says John Rousseau, owner of Barnstormers, located at Thompson's Point, which deals in antique and salvaged wood. "To a



With advance planning, discarded construction materials can be salvaged for reuse by collectors and restorers.

point it's feasible to buy, but it depends on the type and condition of the wood. In other cases I have to charge to pick it up."

Outlets like the Building Materials Exchange in Lisbon, or Habitat for Humanity's ReStore shops in Bath and Portland are eager for salvaged building materials in good shape and in some cases will pick it up.

Greater Portland Landmarks' recent roof replacement project highlighted the opportunities and challenges of reusing salvage materials. The original plan was to repair and reuse as much original material as possible. The chimney bricks were cleaned up to rebuild two of five chimneys. George Libby bought some. Old copper flashing from the chimneys was salvaged and sold.

But a lot of older wood sheathing left from the removal of a secondary roof was cut into short lengths to take them to ground level, drastically reducing their desirability for salvage. With advance planning and labor,

longer lengths of wood could have been saved.

Old-growth wood and antique glass are two examples of materials that, if they are decades old, cannot be found anywhere and are of value to many craftsmen.

"Roof boards on an old house can be beautiful but studded with nails. It may be that the boards can still be used with limited application," says Rousseau. "Heavy timber stock of certain species, often flooring, usually has more value. If there's a great patina, we can preserve that and people love that."

Rousseau said he can tell a lot from photos and encourages emailing him to determine whether wood can be salvaged.

"We are always looking for antique glass so we can repurpose it. We use salvaged glass and not reproduction because it's just not the same," says Ann Bagala of Bagala Window Works, which has restored windows in historic properties all over Maine, including Greater Portland Landmarks' Safford House. "We have a tough time finding glass because too many people discard it. It's criminal how much antique glass is being smashed."

Some materials that seem unusable for historic preservation may be valuable to collectors, says Heather Caron at Portland Architectural Salvage on Preble Street in Portland.

"As much as it can be, preserve it in its original state, keeping the length it is. Keep all the hardware from doors and windows. People think it's damaged when sometimes that's just as valuable," Caron says. "For us what's useful or not useful sometimes doesn't matter because we have people buying doors who aren't necessarily using a door as a door."

Rousseau agrees: "People want accent pieces, something that tells a story." ■



GORDON SMITH

Clipperways Demolished at Prouts Neck

CLIPPERWAYS, ONE OF THE QUINTESSENTIAL coastal summer cottages at Prouts Neck, was torn down in October 2011 to make way for a new house. Built in 1898, the house commanded a site on the Atlantic Ocean that was highly visible from the public path along the coast. In 2004, the historic house next door and a World War II military observation tower were torn down to make way for new construction. These demolitions mark a continuing tear-down trend along the coast of Maine, including the greater Portland area, which is eroding the historic character of shoreside neighborhoods one property at a time. Just a few houses away is the Winslow Homer studio, currently under restoration by the Portland Museum of Art, to preserve the legacy of the artist and the place that inspired much of his later work. ■

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