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Instant History for \$200,000

Todd and Debbie Martine spent \$397,500 for their house in Tiverton, R.I., in 2013.

They spent another \$800,000 on an addition that included various reclaimed items.



To add character to their 21st-century homes, owners buy architectural artifacts and face the reality that installation is both tricky and costly.

BY CANDACE TAYLOR

Wealthy homeowners are spending big to make brand new construction look old. The trend that started with reclaimed wood flooring is now moving to a whole new level, as homeowners integrate huge architectural artifacts—from intact staircases to 20-foot-long wooden bars—into newly built homes.

Salvaged from old buildings or junkyards, these items ensure a home's uniqueness, proponents say, and can boost resale value if done well. But incorporating large artifacts into a 21st century home demands willing and skilled craftsmen, lots of patience—and plenty of money.





Building the spec house cost more than \$4 million, according to Mr. Roylance, who said his aim was to make the home resemble an ancient structure.

“I thought my plumber was going to kill me,” groans Liz Tiesi of Threshold Interiors in New York City, recalling the process of installing a vintage sink in her Manhattan apartment. Ms. Tiesi happily paid about \$800 for the oversize sink, which hailed from the old Tastykake factory in Philadelphia and worked perfectly with the industrial aesthetic she wanted. But then she learned it was nearly impossible to find a drain and drain pipe to fit. When her long-suffering plumber finally got it to work, “I was so happy,” she says. “A sink like that—you will not see another one of those for a long time.”

Joel Zettler, owner of Oley Valley Architectural Antiques in Denver, Pa., said until five years ago most of his clients were restaurants, hotels and other commercial venues. Now, roughly half of his customers are homeowners snapping up his most popular items—antique wooden bars from old hotels and saloons that usually span 14 to 24 feet and sell for \$50,000 to \$200,000 (not including shipping and installation).

Salvaged items can add an instant sense of history to an otherwise bland new house, said Jessica Engholm,

founder of architectural salvage company Cultheir. “We’re going into an era of building where a house can be put up overnight,” she says. Reusing older items can “introduce character that otherwise wouldn’t be there.”

Todd and Debbie Martin bought seven stained glass windows, salvaged from an 1870s church in rural Pennsylvania, before they “even had the blueprints” for the addition to their house in Tiverton, R.I., Mr. Martin said. After spying the ornate windows in the Philadelphia showroom of Provenance Companies, which specializes in reclaimed materials, the couple was determined to use them in the new structure.

It took multiple craftsmen nearly a year to prepare the 150-year-old glass for installation. One firm reinforced the delicate glass with zinc; another built custom wooden window sashes and a third fashioned clear glass windows in the same shape as the stained glass, to protect it from the elements and provide insulation. Meanwhile, the home’s walls had to be carefully designed to accommodate the arched windows. “It’s almost like putting the space station together,” says Mr. Martin, a 48-year-old retiree.



The Rhode Island home of Todd and Debbie Martin contains a number of salvaged artifacts. The kitchen island was once a church altar; the lights above it also came from a church.

While the Martins paid about \$4,000 for the windows themselves, it cost about \$15,000 to retrofit and install them in the house. Altogether, the Martins spent about \$800,000 on the addition—more than double what the project would have cost if they'd skipped the reclaimed items they gathered on various road trips, Mr. Martin estimated. It was also twice what they spent on the house itself; they paid \$397,500 in 2013.

Building “the Monastery,” a Sundance, Utah, spec house that includes a number of salvaged pieces, cost more than \$4 million, according to developer Bron Roylance, who said his aim was to make the home resemble an ancient structure. “I love to take old pieces and retrofit them and bring them back to life rather than letting them die in a dump,” says Mr. Roylance.

After paying approximately \$6,000 for four, roughly 200-year-old stained-glass windows from a now-abandoned French colony in Egypt, Mr. Roylance—a 62-year-old Hollywood makeup artist who also dabbles in development—insisted they be installed in their original dirty and broken state.

He spent about \$3,500 on a set of iron gates from the same colony for the home's subterranean wine cellar. The gates didn't come with the clasps necessary to close them, so a blacksmith created them from an old piece of metal he found along the railroad tracks in the area.

Then there was the early-1900s cabinet from an old general store. Mr. Roylance wanted to use it as a bathroom towel holder. Recessing the 5-foot by 5-foot piece into a wall required calling the HVAC crew to move an air duct that was in the way. Eventually, “I was able to get my way,” he says, but at a cost of about \$1,500—several hundred more than he paid for the cabinet itself.

The Monastery has been on the market asking \$9 million for roughly a year with Paul Benson of Engel & Völkers Park City. Marcus Wood, a member of Mr. Benson's team, says the strategy is “waiting for that perfect buyer to come along.”

Mr. Wood says reclaimed artifacts don't necessarily increase a home's value by themselves; they have to be

installed in a tasteful way. “People can take an old antique piece and try to integrate it, but they don’t piece it together well,” he says. Mr. Roylance’s skill in selecting and integrating the artifacts adds value in his projects, Mr. Wood says.

Homeowners hoping to integrate large artifacts in their homes sometimes face a challenge finding someone to install them.

After paying \$2 million in 2000 for a property on a rock outcropping above the ocean in Malibu, Calif., Liz Edlich and her husband spent years integrating architectural artifacts into the home they built there.

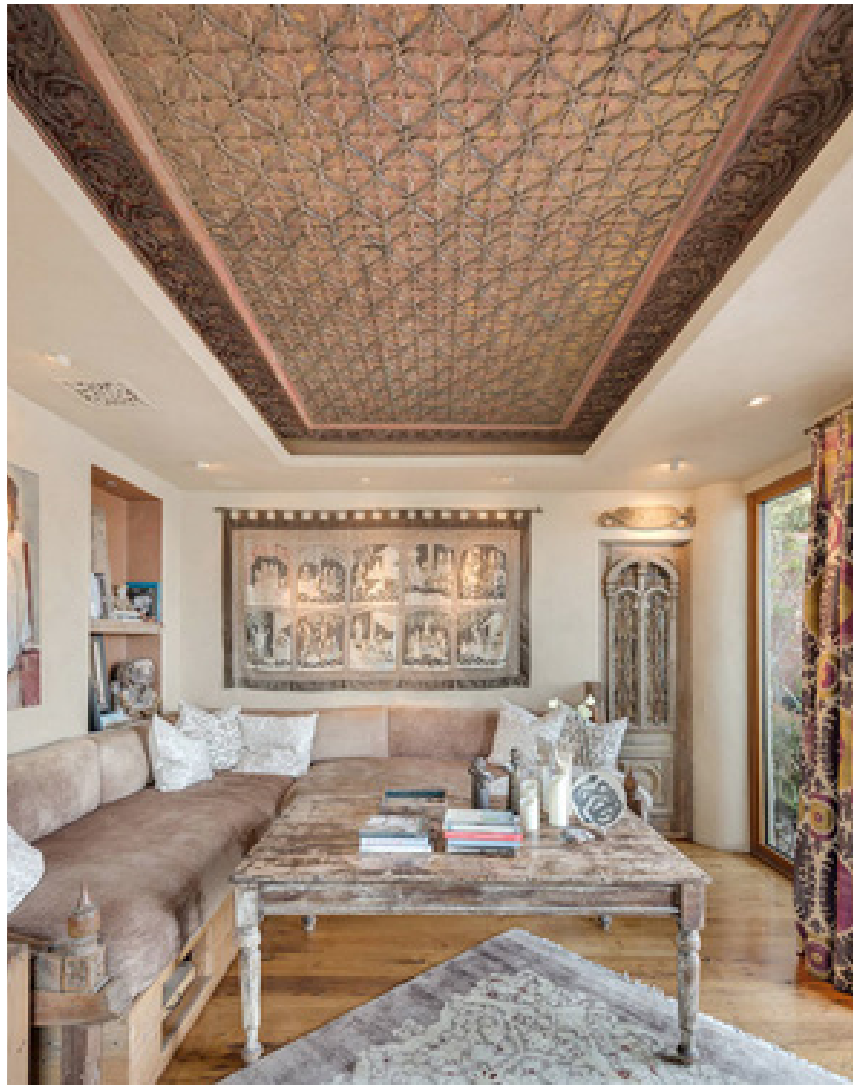
“I wanted it to be a jewel box, so when you walk in, you see treasure after treasure,” says Ms. Edlich, co-founder of the skin care line Radical Skincare.

After the house was built, she decided to liven up the den with a roughly 20-foot-long, carved wooden ceiling from Sri Lanka that she purchased at a Los Angeles antique store for “thousands and thousands of dollars.” But several contractors she approached refused to install it. “They said ‘You’re insane,’ ” she says. Finally, she found a team willing to tackle the project. It ultimately took “probably 20 or 30 guys” to transport the piece inside, she says. The custom-built house went on the market this spring for \$57.5 million.

While integrating salvaged items into their Georgia home, Carol and Randy Dupree—unlike most homeowners—were able to do much of the work themselves. The couple had purchased a roughly 130-year-old brick warehouse for \$70,000 in 2006, and converted it into a home.

When they paid \$1,000 for an intact wrought-iron staircase they found on Craigslist, Mr. Dupree—a former mechanic who now runs a motor home brokerage—was able to install it himself, adding a piece to the bottom to make it fit. Because they saved on labor costs, using salvaged items reduced the cost of the Duprees’ renovation to about \$150,000.

Despite the effort required in repurposing large artifacts, the owners invariably say their efforts were worth it. “Our friends say, ‘Yup, this is your crazy kind of house,’ ” Mr. Martin says.



Liz Edlich said she spent ‘thousands and thousands’ on this carved wooden ceiling from Sri Lanka, but several contractors she approached refused to install it in her Malibu, Calif. home. She finally found a team willing to take on the project, and it ultimately took ‘probably 20 or 30 guys’ to