

Greenwood

Using reclaimed timber for beauty and sustainability.

Story by Joy Underhill | Photos by Matt Wittmeyer

The reclaimed wood in this Middlesex home shows its history.

The wow factor:

It's what every homeowner craves when building or renovating.

Reclaimed wood can help get you there, whether for a new build or new flooring. Its one-of-a-kind qualities can add distinctiveness to your home, and you'll also be doing the environment a favor.

"Reclaimed" simply means wood that has been previously used. Much of it comes from industrial buildings and old barns, but you might find pieces that were used in fencing, bleachers, even bowling alleys.

"One misconception is that reclaimed flooring is only for cabins or other rustic applications," says Jennifer Young, marketing director at Farmington-

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— Paul DeHond

based New Energy Works and Pioneer Millworks, which builds timber-frame homes throughout North America. But Young says that its characteristics can juxtapose well with the sleek lines of contemporary designs. Customers have chosen the wood for countertops, paneling, mantels, cabinetry and shelving, as well.

Much of New Energy Works’ wood is reclaimed locally, but hard-to-find varieties are also available. In fact, bordering its parking lot are two huge pieces of Douglas fir, reclaimed from Welland Canal locks in Ontario, Canada. The size of these timbers means they’ll be reserved for special orders requiring wide planks.

Because some of the wood comes from very old buildings, Pioneer Millworks (the sister company that prepares the wood for use) can offer rare varieties, such as elm and chestnut, which “are virtually extinct in the United States,” says Jered Slusser, a salesman at the Millworks.

Another selling point of reclaimed wood is its stability.

“Because the wood has spent years drying and settling, it will not warp or shift from its original dimensions,” says Geneva’s Paul DeHond, owner of the web-based Finger Lakes Floors. “Working with old-growth wood is a pleasure, but it does require more hand-tooling in the finishing work.”

All this means that reclaimed wood is more expensive to purchase and install. But it’s in demand, so more manufacturers are offering new “character woods” to mimic old, reclaimed lumber, says Pete Harman, president of Harman Hardwood Flooring Company on Hebard Street in Rochester.

This more rustic-looking wood is taken from closer to the outside of the log, where knots and mineral marks appear. And some of Harman’s suppliers will distress the planks, “from hand-scraping to leaving the wood rough, to give it an old-world look,” Harman says.

Harman is also seeing a resurgence in highly renewable “green” woods such as cork and bamboo, in part because

“people are seeing the equity that it puts in the house.”

According to Albert Pelusio Jr., president of Rochester Linoleum & Carpet One (which has multiple locations in the area), “Bamboo takes just five years to grow and is an elegant, sustainable choice for today’s upscale homes. Plus, it’s harder and more durable than oak.”

And cork, Pelusio says, comes in a variety of natural stains. For those who prefer laminates, Mirror Lake Laminate is produced from recycled paper and is 100% biodegradable.

For purists, the tradeoff of using actual reclaimed wood is getting a singular look—with a history.

“I once had a client who bought some flooring that had a sizeable hole in it,” DeHond says. “I offered to fill it in, but the owner insisted that I leave it as is. That’s pretty typical of my customers—people who want the unique characteristics of reclaimed wood and a rustic look like no other.”

And maybe a tale to tell, as well. “People love to hear the stories behind the wood they are using,” Young says. “They get the look of yesterday’s rough-hewn floorboards and, in most cases, the story of how the wood was previously used.” **H**

Resources

New Energy Works and Pioneer Millworks

1180 Commercial Drive, Farmington
924-3860 | www.pioneermillworks.com

Finger Lakes Floors

455-3326 | www.fingerlakesfloors.com

Harman Hardwood Flooring Company

29 Hebard St., Rochester
546-1221 | www.harmanfloors.com

Rochester Linoleum & Carpet One

Locations in Brighton, Victor, Henrietta, Greece, Webster and Irondequoit
427-7400 | www.carpetone.com