



Items for old houses such as faucets, doorknobs, and hinges can be found at salvage shops or stores specializing in reproductions.



# History in the Remaking

More and more, homeowners are renovating with period-style pieces to bring back the look of their houses' past.

LIKE MOST PLACES, MINNESOTA TELLS stories through its homes. Wind-battered prairie farmhouses stand testament to a generation of German and Scandinavian immigrants carving out lives in a harsh land. Nineteenth-century city mansions conjure up images of lumber and railroad barons basking in opulent excess. Row upon row of post-war ramblers reflect the mid-century's suburban attitude of economic efficiency.

When remodeling fever swept through the 1970s like brush fire, no one seemed to be listening to the tales told by houses. History, in the form of moldings, windows, and fireplace mantels, went out the back door while shag carpet and bifold doors came through the front. Grafting new onto old was the order of the day. But now, as the next millennium approaches, the trend has changed. People are looking for a sense of history in their houses, seeking to replace the pieces of them that were tossed out just 20 years ago. "Most of our clients are sensitive to the architectural style of their home," says Dan Nepp, an architect at the firm TEA<sub>2</sub>. "We're seeing a real longing for tradition."

Fortunately, renovating Minnesota's older houses with a sensitive hand has never been easier. Among the growing number of salvage yards, reuse stores, and retailers selling reproduction

items, you'll find an astonishing number of old and new products that replace or replicate the elements you want.

Before you shop, however, heed the advice of experts on how to approach your project. "You need to begin by learning to listen to your building," says David Heide, a Minneapolis designer who specializes in period-style projects. "Understand that historically-minded remodeling doesn't always mean pure restoration. And remember, a 1905 worker's house in [St. Paul's] Dayton's Bluff or a 1940s bungalow in south Minneapolis are as worthy of preserving as a Summit Avenue mansion. It's about preserving heritage, not just museum-quality windows and walls."

Architect Martha Yunker, partner in Yunker Asmus Architecture, agrees with the sentiment. "Remodeling older houses does not mean applying a universal approach," she says. "Every house calls for its own solutions."

## GOING SALVAGING

The most obvious first step in any renovation is to begin with what you've already got. Heide's remodeling mantra is, "It's better to repair and reuse than buy new," which means that if you have to remove architectural elements such as doors, windows,

by BARBARA KNOX Photographs by BRIAN SCOTT HOLMAN

or hardware, save them to put elsewhere in the house. Original stairs and banisters often can be relocated to accommodate new floor plans; cabinetry can be refinished or reconfigured.

However, when you want to bring in unique decorative pieces such as columns, mantels, or stained-glass windows, the salvage yard may be the place to start.

The word "salvage" means something different to every homeowner. If you're budget-minded and want to put in extra work, you can dig through piles of stuff in indoor/outdoor salvage yards such as Bauer Bros. Salvage or All State Salvage, both in the metro area. Places such as Project for Pride in Living and the ReUse Center, both in Minneapolis, offer more orderly, indoor inventories. And, for those who want even more organization when they shop, there are salvage shops filled with period-style pieces.

"It wasn't too long ago that only people thought of as eccentrics shopped here," says Scott Anderson, owner of Architectural Antiques, a well-known 20-year-old Minneapolis salvage store. "Now we're part of the mainstream." With stores in Stillwater, Denver, and soon in Seattle, Anderson casts a wide net in his search for inventory, which includes old doorknobs, cornices, light fixtures, mantels, and hinges. His specialists even seek out pieces for clients, in answer to the increasing demand.

#### RENOVATING WITH REPRODUCTIONS

Admittedly, salvaging just the right door hinge or wall sconce can mean investing serious time and effort. As Anderson says, "going to a salvage store and hunting for just the right piece is about the love of it; going to a home center and buying off the shelf is about getting it done." Somewhere in between are the stores that offer new products designed to replicate the old, and they're more plentiful than ever. Many of the home furnishings showrooms in International Market Square offer reproduction products; others can be found in smaller specialty shops.

The good news is that advances in computer-aided manufacturing and high-tech tools such as lasers have

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revolutionized how reproductions are made, slicing costs in the process. But, watch out for so-called "historical reproductions" that are extremely inexpensive, especially in complex mechanisms such as locks. They may be beautifully designed but will only last a few years. As with anything, if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Good reproductions are now being made and sold all over Minnesota and the country. Here's a thumbnail sketch of the sorts of things you'll find.

**Flooring:** Replacing hardwood floors that feature intricate inlaid borders and decorative medallions would be prohibitively expensive were it not for new manufacturing techniques that have slashed prices to about one-tenth the cost of traditional hand-cut floors. Stock borders can be had for as little as \$14 to \$30 per linear foot from companies such as Kentucky Wood Floors; large accents like center medallions begin at \$225.

Likewise, the hand-laid, mosaic-tile floors common to many older homes have long been considered difficult and pricey to replace. Recently, tile manufacturers such as Dune and Gaya Fores of Spain have begun offering many varieties of faux mosaics, available in easy-to-install modular sheets. Check with your local tile distributor for more details.

**Appliances and fixtures:** While you can occasionally find mint-condition sinks and stoves in salvage yards or plumbing specialty stores such as Frank Sales Company in Minneapolis, it's become less necessary to spend your Saturdays digging. Kohler, American Standard, and Rohl, for instance, have introduced products resembling traditional models, from "farm sinks" to art nouveau specialty basins. One hint: Reproduction stoves are rare; you'll most likely have to track down a vintage one with a name such as Kelvinator, Roper, or Chambers at an auction or estate sale. You'll find many companies ready and willing to apply new chrome or porcelain finishes for a reasonable price.

**Windows:** New windows can easily become the most expensive item in your project. If you can't reuse a window

moved from another location in the house, consider choosing one of the many simulated, divided-light windows on the market—a style that is often associated with older homes. Instead of being constructed from numerous small panes of glass, the new windows feature single panes with pop-on grilles that can be removed for cleaning; others sandwich the grid between two sheets of thermal-paned glass. Leaded- and stained-glass panels are also available in a multitude of styles from companies such as Pella, Marvin, Andersen, and Pozzi.

**Wallcoverings:** A surprising number of historic wallcoverings are still being made, mostly in England or Europe. Many are well within reasonable price ranges, but sometimes cost can be a sticking point. When David Heide was charged with replacing a damaged wallcovering in a Crocus Hill house in St. Paul, he located the original paper, still being made in France. Alas, its price tag was a whopping \$30,000 for the room. Heide chose instead to work with a local faux painter who re-created the damaged areas with clever paint work at a cost of \$4,000.

Good American wallcovering companies are Bradbury & Bradbury Art Wallpapers and Imperial Wallcoverings, well known for their high quality and relatively reasonable prices.

You also may want to check out newer products such as printable, embossed wallpapers by Lincrusta or Anaglypta at your local dealer. They replicate the look of ornamental plasterwork, tin ceilings, or decorative friezes without hiring an old-world craftsman.

**Millwork:** Custom woodworking is the most costly option in millwork, but because many shops have opened in the past five years, prices have come down considerably. A less costly alternative is to create your own decorative moldings by "stacking" pieces of stock moldings available at any major home store. Or, look for reproductions such as veneer-coated, medium-density fiberboard products that are pre-cut and milled in standard sheets to replicate paneled wainscoting. (Check with your home improvement store.) >

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**Lighting:** Traditional lighting products have grown faster than any other segment of the remodeling market, so sconces, chandeliers, and lamps are plentiful. Buying reproductions guarantee that the fixture will be safe and up to code. Look to well-reputed catalogs such as Rejuvenation Lamp & Fixture Company and Brass Light Gallery or local shops such as Creative Lighting and Lappin Lighting.

**Hardware:** Reproduction doorknobs, hinges, drawer pulls, and door knockers abound on the market, both in local specialty stores such as the Brass Handle and Nob Hill Decorative Hardware (both in the Galleria in Edina), and in national chain stores such as Restoration Hardware, newly opened in St. Paul. Also, visit the kitchen design showrooms of International Market Square.

If you're looking for something unique, metal fabricators such as Albers Sheet Metal & Ventilating, Inc. create one-of-a-kind pieces. (You'll find others in the Yellow Pages.) Additionally, check well-stocked newsstands or libraries for periodicals such as *Old House Journal*, a monthly restoration catalog offering reproduction hardware.

### DON'T GO CRAZY

However sensitive you are to your house's history, you don't need to faithfully reproduce every dentil and hinge. As Heide says, "We live differently today than people did when many of our houses were built. Don't be afraid to make changes."

Finally, when you're ready to start renovating, make sure you've done your homework. Architect Martha Yunker explains, "I've seen too many homeowners who think historic remodeling means adding detailing to every surface. For instance, everybody thinks they have to have raised-panel doors on their kitchen cupboards all of a sudden. Historically, most older homes didn't have raised-panel doors. So they put all this fuss and bother into their house, but it's the wrong kind of fuss and bother."

All of which proves: The products are out there for any historical home renovation need. It's up to homeowners to use the resources wisely. ■