

Reclaimed wood a hot design trend

Wednesday, 18 September, 2013, 2:22am

Lifestyle › Interiors & Living TRENDS

Kavita Daswani property.post@scmp.com

The interior use of reclaimed wood is a hot design trend, with bowling alleys becoming ceilings and wine barrels turning into quirky stools

A shipwreck off the coast of Indonesia, old US railroad cars, the remnants of demolished Balinese village houses - the wood from all of these is being salvaged and used for everything from whimsical bar stools to tables and flooring.

The use of reclaimed wood in interior spaces is one of the hottest design trends right now, and not just because it is less damaging to the environment to make do with what's already been felled.

Repurposed wood, especially if it's a century old or so, has a patina and pedigree that would be impossible to replicate in new wood.

"Wood is an amazing material, and how it's used comes in and out of fashion," said Brooks Atwood, adjunct professor of product design at Parsons in New York. "With the current trend in heritage-looking design, it's easier to do that with reclaimed wood. There is the sustainability angle, but you're also building in a story to your project."

The wood itself is sometimes salvaged from unusual places: Atwood has used the remnants of demolished bowling alleys to create an all-wood ceiling for a house in Los Angeles.

Elmo, a Hong Kong-based company, uses otherwise unwanted ornate elm doors and beams from old houses in China, and turns the material into modern furniture.

Vinoture, a company based in the US state of Montana, uses old French oak wine barrels for unconventional sconces, coat racks and bar stools.

In Australia, a company called Walk the Plank Collective salvaged wood from a shipwreck and fashioned it, along with wood rescued from Indonesian lumber yards, into kitchen and coffee tables, entertainment shelves, and consoles.

William Chiang, managing director of Elmo, attributes the rise in popularity of reclaimed wood to the escalating costs of raw materials, increased interest in sustainability and the "distressed" look of pre-used woods.

The aesthetic has seen Los Angeles designer Rey Viquez, of The Rey3 Design Company,

salvaging old wooden trims and moulding at local junkyards and sending them off to be transformed into ornate mirror frames and chandelier bases.

Urban Hardwoods, a Seattle company, showcases furniture using trees felled in the Pacific Northwest owing to hazard or disease. The wood, which would otherwise be discarded, is used to build one-of-a-kind pieces: the wood is minimally processed, and the grain patterns and colour variations are retained.

Architect and interior designer Brad Friedmutter sources wood from old barn siding, railroad cars and oak barrels, to recreate Irish pubs or to bring warmth to a sleek, modern restaurant. His company has worked on the Ritz Carlton and The Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas as well as the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City.

Friedmutter, who is currently finalising a number of commercial projects in Hong Kong and Macau, says that an increasing number of hotel and resort properties are interested in the idea of recycling wood.

"Provided it is compatible with contemporary design, we always try to use it wherever possible," he said. "Often reclaimed wood is a contrast material to a very sleek and contemporary glass and steel look - just enough to warm it up so it's not too cold a space."

He says the concept is taking off even in commercial or resort applications in Asia partly because of its perceived spiritual value.

But it's not enough simply to break down the wood and reassemble it elsewhere, says Friedmutter.

"It has to have the right look and quality and value; it has to be treated and reconditioned."

There is a lot that can be done to recycled wood that will endow it with the qualities it needs to fit into a current space. Atwood has "improved" timber using oil rubs and chains: she bashes the wood until she has the desired effect.

While using reclaimed wood might appear to be more cost-effective than buying something brand new, that is not necessarily always the case. Designers say that everything depends on how much the wood is treated or restored, although Viquez finds that locating old wood in salvage yards is budget-friendly more often than not.

"The raw and rustic look has always been popular among some people," says Chiang. "It's just that nowadays more and more people go for that look because they happen to be green as well."

New York designer Kathleen Perkins says she was first introduced to the concept of reclaimed wood during a trip to Bangkok, where she visited the Jim Thompson house, built by the legendary silk designer. The house is made of teak first used in 19th-century mountain houses and taken to its location from different parts of the country and reassembled.

"It was a huge influence for me," she said. "It gave me a real respect for wood."

Earlier on, she said, the look "was not to everyone's taste" and, with the exception of sustainable applications for fencing and decking, it wasn't being used front and centre in a space.

But now she uses reclaimed woods from Indonesia, the Philippines and Africa, and hunts for old-fashioned parlour doors "as opposed to just going to a dealer".

The craftsmanship of a century ago is far superior, she believes, and it's a look that appeals to a discriminating eye that appreciates the beauty of older things.

"That's why these pieces are harder and harder to find," she said.

Source URL (retrieved on Sep 18th 2013, 6:40am): <http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/interiors-living/article/1312017/reclaimed-wood-hot-design-trend>