

# Castoffs get a second chance through ‘repurposing’

**BY PAT STEIN**  
Copley News Service

In the midst of our increasingly disposable society, there is an emerging group of artisans and entrepreneurs who want to preserve the past, rescue castoffs and turn trash into treasures for the home.

“We call it repurposing. Found objects, salvaged parts and recycled materials are transformed into innovative, usable pieces of art and accessories for the home,” said Carole Carden, owner of SoLo in Solana Beach, Calif. “Repurposed items are the hottest trend in home decor today.”

Repurposed items can include anything from lamps made from old car, computer and guitar parts; lamps and clocks made from vintage cameras; photos mounted in an old ceiling tin or barn wood, and picture and photograph frames made from old bike chains and recycled steel.

Old iron headboards

become tables and glass laboratory slides become night lights in the hands of the new breed of repurposing artists who are dedicated to finding new uses for discarded materials.

“As a country, we throw a lot of stuff away that cost millions of dollars to design and produce and it’s beautiful,” said Steve Bewley, who has turned his hobby of repurposing discards into a business called ReRun Productions, based in Arroyo Grande, Calif.

Bewley teams with his mother and father, both age 70, to fashion lamps from discarded materials. The pedestals of the floor lamps are made of brake rotors and computer hard drives; copper plumbing pipe serves as the lamp’s pole; guitar strings are the pulls and pennies “pounded by hand with a ball-peen hammer” the finials.

Guitar strings are also woven into the handmade lampshades that Bewley’s

mother makes using a Japanese paper-making process. The lamps cost about \$450 and have gained a celebrity following.

“(Actor) Kevin Spacey bought one of our lamps; Joe Walsh, the guitarist from the Eagles, has one; and Herb Alpert of Tijuana Brass fame has commissioned us to design the lighting for his new studio in Hollywood,” said Bewley, who also has designed chairs made out of discarded snow skis and coffee tables made with crutches.

“Repurposed items are unique, they’re novelties and they’re conversation pieces,” he added.

Graham Bergh is founder and chief executive officer of Resource Revival, the Portland, Ore., studio that produces picture frames and other items made of bicycle chains, cogs and gears. The company also transforms discarded car, computer and bicycle parts into candleholders and coffee tables.

Bergh came to repurposing through a desire to help save the planet by recycling.

“We believe everything should be made of sustainable or renewable products,” he said.

Plus, he notes, repurposed items “make people smile” because, unlike recycled materials, repurposed items still resemble the original.

“Bicycle chains are still recognizable when they’re made into picture frames. But they look different because we’re used to seeing bicycle chains as ovals and pieces of machinery, not squares or rectangles that are decorative,” Bergh said. That’s one reason he believes bicycle-chain items make great gifts for people who are avid bicyclists.

Nostalgia and a desire to preserve personal history

motivated Tracy Gelvin and Leslie Seifert to start repurposing. The two decorating consultants own a home furnishings and accessories store and sell slipcovers and duvet covers made out of grandmother’s fine linen tablecloths; upholster sofas out of “fabric” made from grandfather’s sweaters and pillows out of heirloom satin wedding dresses and old Girl Scout uniforms.

“The idea is to take keepsakes that would otherwise be stuck away in a box in the garage and bring them into your everyday living environment where you can enjoy them and where they’ll remind you of loved ones,” said Gelvin.

Seifert used the satin gown that she and her mother wore at their weddings for pillows.

“The dress was tattered and couldn’t be used again as a wedding gown so I had it made into pillows — one for my mother, one for myself and one for my daughter,” said Seifert.

Gelvin paid tribute to her mother who passed away a few years ago by making pillows out of her mother’s linen tablecloths and giving them to family members and friends as keepsakes.

“My mother loved fine china and fine linens, so I decided to have the linens made into pillows that friends and family members could have as part of their home decor — something that would remind them of my mother,” said Gelvin.

After her mother’s death, when she was going through her possessions, Gelvin discovered that her mother had saved many things from Gelvin’s own childhood, including her Girl Scout uniform and sash with all its badges.

These items, Gelvin believes, add warmth to



CNS Photo by Crissy Pascual

**A new design trend recycles dated or outgrown sweaters to make items for the home, including pillow covers, cozy throws and one-of-a-kind upholstery for a chaise.**

home decor and provide an element of comfort that makes a home the haven for people who lead busy lives.

“Everyone has a box of stuff that means something to them that they rarely see,” Gelvin said.

“Repurposing is a way to bring those things into part of your everyday life in a way that enriches your home.”

### HOME FACTS

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- Cabinets to store detergent and other products in finishes that match the kitchen.
- Bigger, high-end appliances, even two dryers to keep up with the washer.
- A laundry room hidden within built-in cabinets or closets when not in use.

SOURCE: National Association of Home Builders

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