

Local builder literally borrows from the past

Old materials in new home

By EILEEN DALLABRIDA

BUSINESS LEDGER CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Not long ago, Tim Dewson built a new house, a waterfront getaway in Chesapeake City for his family.

But the custom builder didn't have to wait years for the home to acquire the patina of time. He integrated salvaged and reclaimed building materials into the design to create an instant ambience of age.

That reflects a growing trend in residential building and restoration at Dewson Construction Co., a high-end custom builder with offices in Wilmington and Stone Harbor, N.J.

"We're using old doors, old mantels, stained glass," he says. "The list goes on and on."

Consider it the ultimate in recycling. Reclaimed materials appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, as well as homeowners intent on stately abodes.

Opportunities to repurpose pieces of the past aren't restricted to building materials. Architectural artifacts include antique lighting fixtures, garden

ornaments, hinges and hardware.

Homeowners can literally take a bath in recycling with a vintage tub.

"At one house, the owner brought in a cast-iron fountain from Europe," Dewson recalls.

To help realize his personal vision of a retreat with modern amenities and the character of a long-established home, Dewson turned to pros he had worked with for years, architect Art Bernardon of Bernardon Haber Holloway and designers Ron Fenstermacher and Zach Davis.

The exterior design incorporates such elements as curbstones salvaged from the centuries-old streets of Philadelphia. Davis came up with the plan for a walkway of antique red brick inset with a decorative circle of pavers. Reclaimed cobblestones border the driveway.

"Zach is a real pack rat when it comes to old stone and brick," Dewson says. "When he finds something good he tucks it away for just the right project."

Inside, repurposed materials are found throughout the house, designed to give the home an immediate sense of age and stature. The flooring in the great room and through much of the house is 5-inch wide planks of salvaged white oak. Slabs of rescued wood went on to new lives as tops for vanities and built-in

cabinetry.

"See the knots and the little imperfections?" Dewson says. "That's what gives the wood character."

Reclaimed brick and stone form a



DEWSON
Construction Company

deep arch leading from the two-story foyer to the great room; the arch is lined with shelves that display decoys and models of sailboats. Native stone from a tumbledown barn was planted in both an accent wall and a floor-to-ceiling fireplace. The hearth in the master bedroom was a curbstone in its previous life. In the family room, the fireplace was made from salvaged bricks set in a

modified herringbone pattern.

The rustic conference table at Dewson's office was crafted from wormy chestnut, a species prized for its distinctive holes and small fissures, caused by beetles gnawing tunnels through dead trees after the devastating American chestnut blight of 1904.

"This table was reclaimed from an old log," he says. "It's hard to write on because the pen keeps getting stuck in the holes but it's worth the trouble because it's so beautiful."

Many of the materials the Dewson team incorporates into homes come from Pennsylvania, including cobblestones from Philadelphia and wood and indigenous stone from barns in Chester County. A millstone that is now part of a large outdoor fireplace ground floor in New England a century ago.

One homeowner who was preparing to host a large wedding at his home discovered antique pavers in Chicago and decided they would make the perfect patio for the event.

"We brought in three tractor trailer loads of pavers and installed the patio in time for the wedding, which was three weeks away," Dewson recalls. "It turned out to be a very impressive patio."