

HOMEBUILDING TRENDS

Old wood floors are resurfacing

Planks that are salvaged from tear-downs provide a historic look in expensive new homes

By KATE GOODLOE
Special Contributor

To give new homes a historic feel, builders are installing decades-old floors.

Reclaimed floors, which use wood salvaged from homes and other buildings that are being demolished or re-done, are most common in high-priced homes, said Maribeth Peters, a senior vice president with Ellen Terry Realtors in Dallas.

They're seen more frequently in the Park Cities and other areas with lots of teardowns, Ms. Peters said, because builders can sometimes reuse the floors of the older home they're tearing down in the new home they build.

Mark Alexander, owner of Alexander Hunt Distinct Homes, reuses the floors in about one of every three houses he tears down to build a new home. The old homes are roughly 1,000 square feet — about a quarter of the size of the new homes Mr. Alexander builds — so he uses the reclaimed wood in high-impact areas such as dining rooms, studies and hallways.

"We're getting to recycle and reclaim the wood, and it's better wood, also," Mr. Alexander said. There's no cost benefit, he said, because what's spent on la-



Alexander Hunt Distinct Homes

Reclaimed wood gives extra character to high-impact areas in homes built by Alexander Hunt Distinct Homes.

bor equals or exceeds the savings on new lumber.

Gary Gene Olp, owner of Dallas-based GGOArchitects, said he uses reclaimed floors in 20 percent to 30 percent of his projects.

Because many older homes have wood floors made from 100-year-old trees, Mr. Olp said it's a waste to only use the material in a single home for 50 years.

"It's marvelous wood. By salvaging it

and reusing it, you are not harvesting new trees and you are extending the life of that original material."

Others simply like the look. Terry Woldt, owner of Woldt Homes, said reclaimed floors work particularly well in Hill Country-style homes, Southern-style homes and New Orleans-style houses.

"It gives a real nice feeling of bringing the past into our lifestyle today," he said.

WOOD WORKS

Floors aren't the only wood being reclaimed for use in new homes. Builders reclaim old mantels, moldings, beams, even cedar shingles.

Reclaimed flooring doesn't always end up as flooring, either. Builders sometimes turn the wood into cabinets, railings or other decorative elements.

And the wood doesn't always have to come from an older house.

Gary Gene Olp of GGOArchitects said he has used white German oak from an airplane shipping crate for flooring.

Kate Goodloe

Removing the floors from an old home takes about three days, Mr. Alexander said, and some wood is always lost because it breaks or has flaws. Before it's installed in the new house, the wood is sometimes remilled, then refinished, sanded and stained.

It takes more labor to install reclaimed flooring than new, Mr. Woldt said, because damaged areas must be repaired so the boards will fit together.

The overall effect, though, isn't supposed to be too finished. Nail holes, for example, are usually visible.

"If you're using a floor like that, then you are going for the rustic quality," Mr. Woldt said. "Trying to make them look perfect isn't really what the clients are looking for."

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MORTGAGE TIPS

Clarify costs

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has released a study showing that confusion during the mortgage process generally leads to higher closing costs for consumers.

Those costs vary widely, even among borrowers with similar traits, the study by the Urban Institute found. HUD wants to see home loan closings standardized.

The institute found significant variations in loan charges, title fees and other costs. And it found that minority buyers pay hundreds of dollars more in total loan-origination fees than do nonminority homebuyers.

"This report demonstrates once and for all that the process consumers endure when they buy their homes is entirely too confusing," said Roy Bernardi, HUD deputy secretary.

What can buyers do? "Say, 'Once we find a deal, I'd like to have the option of two or three different title and escrow companies,' and the pricing and the pros and cons of each one," said William Brown of the California Association of Realtors.

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