



the original and the best

Ali Fell salvages some interiors ideas...

PHOTOS: CHRIS NEELY

Keeping you up to date with interiors trends, sometimes we visit old properties, presented in a manner in keeping with their age, or perhaps given a modern edge. And sometimes we visit new homes, sleek and shiny, or given a more traditional look. This month we decided that, rather than visit a property, we would look at the issue of aged things. Things that can be used to restore period detail to an ancient property, or to add the illusion of age where it has not yet been. We are talking salvage...

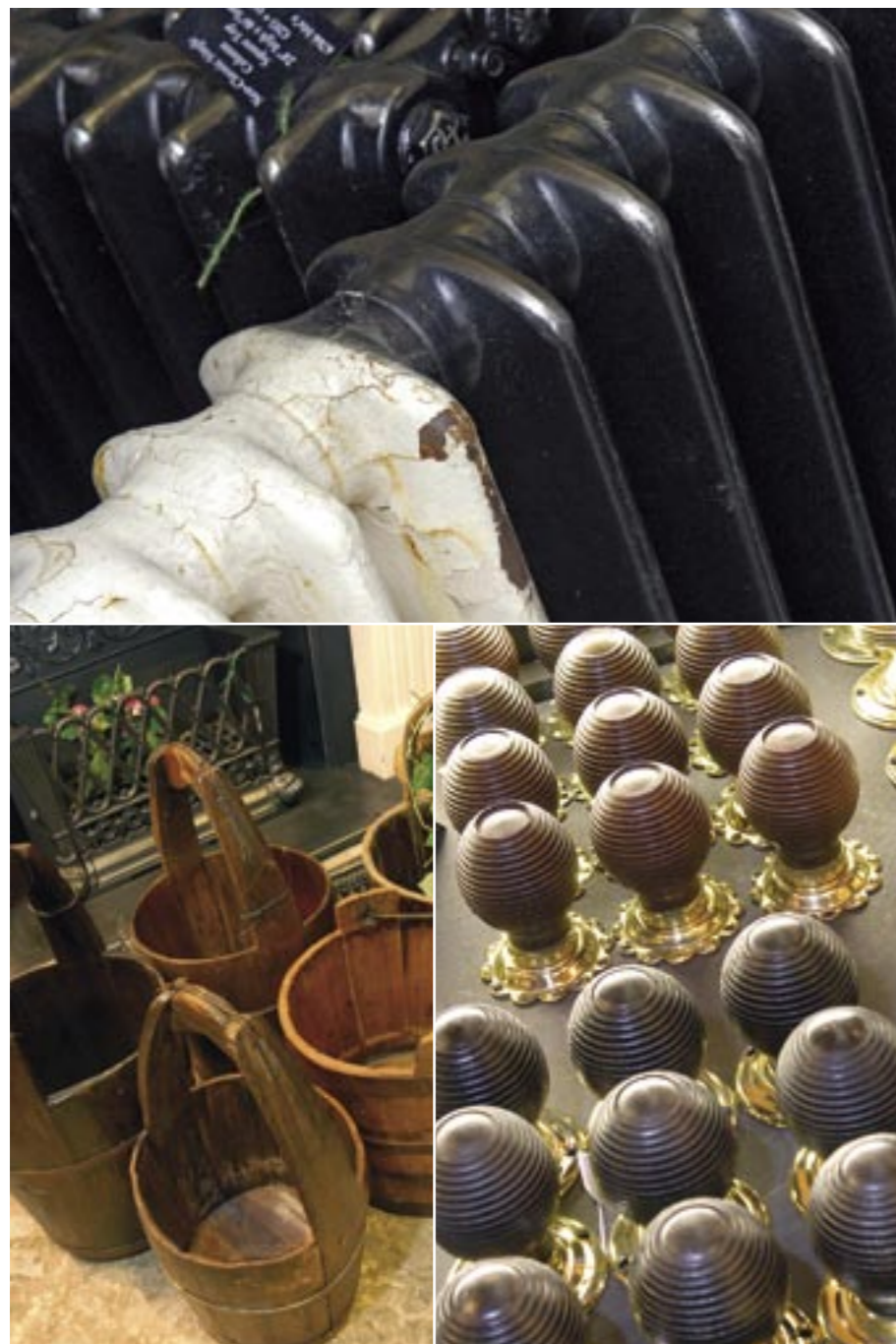
My own first trip to a salvage yard was in search of a period fireplace. I will never forget that experience - it was like walking into an Aladdin's cave, albeit a rather dusty one that smelt faintly of rust. But for a lover of old things, worn things, pre-loved things - it was a treasure trove of possibilities. But what exactly is salvage? Nigel Wilson, of Wilson's Conservation Building Products explains: "I suppose the definition is something which has been previously employed in one use, which is then removed and used for another purpose or in another place."

At their yard near Dromore I find a huge selection of such 'pre-used' goods - a massive clock tower greets me on the way in the gate, and as I walk through the grounds to find Nigel, I pass old chimney pots and phone boxes and wall plaques. Inside, I make my way past a confessional booth, a number of fireplaces and a glass-topped cabinet full of door handles. Feeling like a kid in a sweetie shop, I find it hard to keep my mind on what Nigel is saying, and I readily agree to his suggestion that we take a tour around the yard, to see what we can find.

It proves to be an excellent suggestion, as simply wandering around and peering in all sorts of nooks and crannies instantly reveals what a diverse range of, well... stuff is covered by the 'salvage' banner. Nigel shows me an ornate 1907 bronze cash register - as he puts his hand out to protect me from the flying coin drawer we agree it is like something out of *Open All Hours!* I wonder who this kind of curiosity appeals to. "Maybe someone who is setting up a shop or bar and wants to add an extra bit of interest to



Nigel Wilson



mindset - there is definitely a feelgood factor that comes from re-using products and not always buying things new. There is no doubt that it can be seen as a green choice, and an ethical one. The majority of our items are from the UK, so our transport costs are kept to a minimum, and you know there has been no exploitation in sourcing raw materials or craftsmanship."

Not everything that Wilson's sell is old - as Nigel points out, there are some items that need to be repeatable. For example, some people might like to buy a single set of door handles for their home, but other people will need six sets or more. So they have a number of craftsmen who make things, like door handles, in an old style, using traditional methods and materials. But for the most part, their stock dates from anywhere upwards of 40 years ago. But is this authentic antique stock a costly choice for homeowners? Not necessarily, says Nigel: "I really believe that buying reclaimed goods is no more expensive than buying new products. Of course, there are extremes for really beautiful pieces, but the same can be said of new goods. You also have to understand the craftsmanship and social history behind the piece. We had a fireplace a while ago that was priced at £27,000. That seems very costly, but when you learn that it was made in France, pre-Napoleon, and each nut and bolt was individually hand-made... it must have taken a team of people months to make. When you learn that kind of history, you begin to understand the pricing. But then again, there are lots of pieces that aren't expensive, but because they are unusual, you can really create the wow factor for very little. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it is a more exclusive option, if you like!"

When I ask Nigel and Paddy what their favourite pieces are, they have a hard time choosing. Finally Paddy admits: "My favourites change all the time - because the stock is changing all the time. But I really love the Confessional. It is a very big piece, but I think it would look great as a downstairs cloakroom, for example. There are also some street signs from Hong Kong - I can really see them in a garden. They'd be a real talking point." Nigel decides on a Mandarin marriage dresser. "You had to have one of these when you were getting married - you would have put all your possessions in here to take with you. We have a few pieces of Chinese furniture at the minute, and I really like them."

So what is a good way to begin introducing salvage style into your home? With a wooden floor, says Nigel. He takes me into a little office, lined with samples of various wooden floors, which

the display, I suppose. We had one man in recently who was building a bar at home, and he just wanted one as a kind of novelty really. Some people just won't see the appeal, but someone will just fall in love with it."

I suppose a lot of salvage is like that. What for someone will spark a flash of imagination, will inspire incredulity in the next person through the door - one man's junk is another's treasure. I am drawn to a neat little Hygena unit with a selection of little cupboards and a pull-out worktop, but Nigel laughs: "When I brought this back to the yard my mother couldn't believe it - she can remember these the first time around, and couldn't wait to be rid of hers!"

So what is the appeal of old things? Paddy Rooney of Wilson's is in no doubt:

"As you watch new apartment blocks go up, you know that they will feel new and bland, but if you add a reclaimed brick wall or floor, that adds character immediately. Old timber has life in it. New things are much of a muchness, really. You can still have all the modern conveniences, but also have that older look as well. New oak is lovely, but it all looks the same. Using some reclaimed wood instead adds a distinctive feel. And we see what some people might call flaws as character!"

Nigel adds: "Some people simply want to buy maturity. You could buy things like Bangor Blue slates new and simply let them age naturally, but they will look like new slates for a long time, and won't instantly have that weathered look... And of course there is that green



have made their way here from locations as diverse as Harland & Wolf, De Beers Jewellers in London, Royal Ascot and some pre-war railway carriages. Each has a very different look and character, and woods from places like the Arthur Guinness Brewery in Dublin and Port Dundas whisky distillers in Glasgow certainly will add a certain *je ne sais quoi* to a room...! Nigel also tells me that in his opinion the majority of reclaimed wooden floors are an excellent choice for underfloor heating, as the wood has had an extremely long time to season and dry out, and so should cope well with the rigours of an underfloor system.

But what if installing a whole new floor is a step too far? Try these suggestions:

* Begin outside. Plant up an old

chimney pot or water trough, or use some reclaimed cobbles to make a garden path. You could even build a barbecue from reclaimed brick, or a raised flower bed from old railway sleepers if you are feeling energetic.

* Reclaimed timber isn't just for flooring. Wilson's have a selection of doors made from salvaged wood, and can also create kitchen units and worktops from old wood.

* The next time you have to replace any of your fixtures, consider salvage. Restored fireplaces cost around the same as reproduction ones, and are just as easy to install. The same goes for bathroom fittings and radiators - all of which are tested for soundness and have modern fittings, so will work perfectly with your existing plumbing.

