

How to save money on building materials

Wily homeowners planning renovations are noticing something different this summer: lower prices on all types of building materials.

Some of the brand-name, bargain-priced materials – like the yards of pre-cut granite countertops recently stranded at the Vancouver docks – were destined for shiny new condos that were never built.

One Burnaby kitchen supplier had to unload \$100,000 worth of custom kitchen cabinets this May, days before it shut its doors forever. Overstocked retailers are pitching Italian ceramic tiles and laminate hardwood onto Craigslist.org for half the price they were bought for. And home renovators are snapping them up.

The only problem with tracking down the bargains is that it can be time consuming and frustrating. You may find 12 linear feet of discounted inlaid Subway tiles, but you need exactly 16 feet for the backsplash.

ReStore

Fortunately, Metro Vancouver has a ground zero for the explosion of bargain-priced home-renovation products.

"We used to get a carload of material, mostly from homeowners with leftovers from a renovation," said Tom Riessner, director of operations for Habitat for Humanity's ReStores in Vancouver and Burnaby, which opened three years ago. "Now we get 50-foot trailers."



The Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Vancouver has seen a huge increase in donated building materials, from retailers, designers and home-builders. Prices are discounted 50 to 95 per cent.

Riessner credits the economic downturn for what he calls "an avalanche" of donated products now spilling into the local ReStores. Since last spring, Lower Mainland housing starts are down 67 per cent. Starts of new condominiums have plunged 70 per cent.

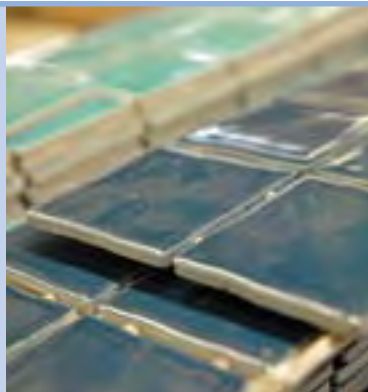
The sudden slide has left a mountain of unsold building products in its wake. Just days earlier, Riessner had taken in enough pre-cut granite countertops for 22 new townhouse kitchens. He was selling it for \$30 per linear foot – at least 60 per cent below retail. Forty thousand square feet of three-foot-square carpet tiles were selling for less than \$3 each. There are stacks of laminated hardwood still in packaging; scores of lighting fixtures dangling from the ceiling; there are at least 20 flats of paint cans; and truckloads of bedding plants.

"We are getting the same type of things

DESIGN DETOUR

If you haven't decided on a colour scheme for your bathroom or kitchen renovation, start your research by going to the Habitat for Humanity ReStore. Finding tiles you like that are on sale could be a determining factor.

Walk through with an interior decorator to get more ideas on how to use marked-down material.



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BUYERS' GUIDE

as before, but the volume has increased," Riessner said. As an example, he pointed to complete sets of solid-wood kitchen cabinets, ReStore-priced at \$1,695.

As Riessner toured *Home Makeover* through the 20,000-square-foot ReStore in South Vancouver – which now acts as a clearing centre for 10 ReStores across the province – a trailer backed up to the loading dock, full of Italian marble tiles.

"We don't care what the brand is, or what kind," Riessner said, "we sell 12-inch-by-12-inch tiles for a dollar each." Smaller ones are 50 cents.

The ReStore pricing policy is half-price off retail if the material is new; from 75 per cent to 95 per cent off it is even slightly used.

The tiles were among truckloads of quality materials donated by the Interior Design Institute of B.C., which held a huge "garage sale" at the Vancouver ReStore on June 20. Riessner gestured to a stack of black chairs by the loading dock. "If those are real Herman Miller chairs, they retail at \$1,500 each," he said.

Other donated items from the designers included Persian hand-knotted wool carpets and reams of silk wallpaper. Don't despair about missing out – a second designer sale is planned at the Vancouver Restores next spring.

ReStore not only diverts hundreds of tonnes of material and furnishings from landfills annually, Riessner said, but is also the main fundraiser for Habitat for Humanity, which is completing a 27-unit townhouse project for low-income families in Burnaby.

It makes saving money on renovations especially rewarding. 

The sweet deals

The biggest discounts at ReStore, Vancouver*:

- new laminate hardwood flooring (half retail price);
- imported ceramic and marble tiles (\$1 per 12-by-12 tile);
- granite countertops (\$30 per linear foot);
- kitchen cabinets (70 per cent to 80 per cent discounts); and
- "mistinted" paints (20 litres for \$35).

* Prices may vary.

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