

DetailsDC

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by Denise Liebowitz

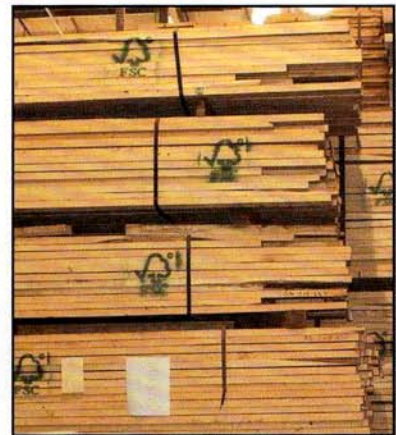
What used to be counterculture niche marketing has become mainstream retailing, and Washington-area homeowners who want to go “green” now have several local sources for eco-conscious building and remodeling materials.

At **Eco-Green Living** (formerly Future Green), owner Keith Ware bills his welcoming Logan Circle shop as “DC’s green and fair trade home and living store for lifestyle, personal care, and home remodeling.” Tucked among the eco-friendly knitting yarns, hemp clothing, and organic bedding are sustainable building materials and equipment including **Rheem Tankless Water Heaters**. Long popular in Europe, gas-fired tankless water heaters produce hot water on demand. So you always have hot water when you need it, but you don’t waste money and energy keeping 40-50 gallons of water hot all the time. If your existing water tank heater is gas-fired, replacing it with a Rheem Tankless Water Heater can reduce your energy cost by 17 percent; if your tank is electric, the savings can be as high as 39 percent. Prices vary by size, but until December 31, 2007, Rheem Tankless Heaters qualify for a tax credit of up to \$300. Eco-Green Living is at **1469 Church Street, NW; (202) 234 7110; www.eco-greenliving.com**.



Jason Holstine of the **Amicus Green Building Center** in Kensington, Maryland, is making it easy for environmentally conscious homeowners to “walk the walk.” Amicus seeks to be a one-stop resource for green building supplies. One of its most popular products, **Kirei Board**, has many applications. Made from the stalks of the sorghum plant, Kirei Board is a durable substitute for wood that can be used in cabinetry, flooring, wall panels, wainscoting, and counters. Once the sorghum is harvested for food, the stalks, which would otherwise be discarded or burned, are heat pressed with a non-toxic adhesive to form lightweight but strong sheets and panels. In Japanese, “kirei” (Kee-ray) means “clean” and “beautiful.” The aptly-named Kirei Board helps preserve trees by making use of a waste material, and reduces environmental damage caused by wood harvesting. Depending on thickness, a 3 x 6-foot sheet costs \$165-260. Amicus stocks a wide range of other products, including healthy paints and finishes, counters, LED lighting, and flooring. The store is at **4080A Howard Avenue, Kensington, Maryland; (301) 575-8590; www.amicusgreen.com**

Also in suburban Maryland just across the District line is **Community Forklift**, a unique building supply store based on the premise that one person’s trash is another person’s treasure (for more about Community Forklift, see the feature article that begins on page 40). Operated by the non-profit **Sustainable Community Initiatives**, Community Forklift sells surplus, salvaged, and green construction materials at affordable prices. It also carries new green products by **Nature Neutral®**, including **UltraTouch™ Cotton Insulation**, and low- or no-VOC paints, stains, and sealants. The store also carries Nature Neutral’s selection of **lumber, trusses, plywood, subflooring, and roof sheathing** certified by the **Forest Stewardship Council** for having been harvested and manufactured using environmentally and socially responsible methods. Until now, FSC-certified lumber has been relatively hard to find in the DC area. At Community Forklift, you can also donate building materials and receive a tax deduction. Visit them at **4671 Tanglewood Drive, Hyattsville, Maryland; (301) 985-5180, www.communityforklift.com**. ♻️



HomeSense:

Courtesy Nature Neutral, LLC

Nature Neutral
Green Building Supply



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LUMBER &
PLYWOOD

Jim Schulman, AIA, receives a shipment of sustainably-forested lumber at Community Forklift in Bladensburg, Maryland.

Don't Demolish and Dispose; Deconstruct and Donate

Save Money on Your Home Renovation
As You Help the Environment

by Alan Dessoff



To the casual visitor, it probably looks like a junkyard, a flea market, or a primitive version of the massive emporiums that sell home remodeling and building supplies today. But to architects, builders, and homeowners who know better, Community Forklift is a treasure trove.

"You could build an entire house from what's in this place," said Tim Lyons, principal of Lyons & Associates, a residential design firm in Takoma Park, Maryland. On a cold January afternoon, he was among a handful of customers poking around the place—an unheated 34,000 square foot warehouse in an industrial area just north of Bladensburg, Maryland, about a mile from the DC line.

He might be right. Just about everything one might need to put a house together can be found at Community Forklift, one of the more unusual retail stores in the DC area. Most of it came from houses in the first place—doors, windows, lumber, masonry, plumbing and electrical fixtures, lighting, and hardware. There are radiators, flooring, cabinets, washers and dryers, wallpaper, decking, countertops, granite, tubs and toilets, and just about everything else it takes to build a house—and then some.

Need a spiral staircase? Porch columns? Iron gates? A Jacuzzi tub? That's just part of the "cool stuff," as Jim Schulman, AIA, describes it, that shoppers might find on any given day. It's all for sale, at prices up to 80 percent off retail value. Schulman, who founded the nonprofit business, calls himself a "recovering architect" because he no longer has time to practice his profession these days. "This business is all-consuming," he said in his cluttered office above the warehouse.

Saving Treasure From the Trash

Schulman's business plan for Community Forklift is built on the premise that one person's trash is another person's treasure. A key element of sustainable design and construction is to rescue the "trash" so it can become a treasure again. In the process, the useful life of perfectly serviceable materials and products is greatly extended, less trash is dumped into landfills, and the energy and raw materials needed to create new products and materials is eliminated. When you buy from Community Forklift for your home renovation or new construction project, you score a sustainable design "hat trick" before you even begin.

The building materials found at Community Forklift are salvaged mostly from homes, and some commercial properties, that are "deconstructed" instead of being demolished. About half the inventory in the store is salvaged this way, said Schulman, who cites firms such as Deconstruction Services, Inc., in Fairfax, Virginia, that take buildings apart carefully, for a fee. The property owners then donate the materials to Community Forklift, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity, and take a tax deduction for it. "If you subtract the tax deduction from the fee you paid for the deconstruction, it's competitive with the cost of [conventional] demolition,

and maybe less," said Schulman, "and you don't have to pay dumping fees."

Most of the other items that come into the warehouse also are donated, some by construction contractors and suppliers and some by homeowners cleaning out their attics, basements and garages. "Instead of keeping the stuff and waiting 10 years to figure out whether you will use it or not, you can bring it here, get a tax break, and make space in your garage," Schulman says. "We'll find somebody who needs it and is willing to pay for it and get a super deal, maybe less than half of what they would pay at Home Depot."

In addition to salvaged items, Community Forklift is beginning to sell environmentally friendly "green" materials such as sustainable bamboo flooring, paints and sealants low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and cotton insulation.

Sustainability as a Business Model

Though it operates as a retail store open to the public, Community Forklift's mission runs much deeper. Opened in November 2005 by Sustainable Community Initiatives (SCI), a nonprofit organization that Schulman also founded, it seeks to foster community revitalization by making building materials and repairs more affordable for homeowners, small businesses and community groups; reduce construction industry waste; promote environmentally-friendly building materials and methods; and create construction or deconstruction jobs for nearby low-income residents.

More than 50 other North American cities and towns have stores that sell used building materials, many of them run by Habitat for Humanity chapters under the "ReStore" name. In the Habitat model, profits are channeled toward the construction of new affordable housing. For Community Forklift, the relationship between sales and affordable housing is more direct: by making available a high volume of affordable building materials in the economically disadvantaged area where the store is located, the organization hopes to spur the direct revitalization of local neighborhoods.

Schulman, who grew up in the Midwest, came to the Washington area in 1985. Fresh out of the University of Minnesota's architecture school, he was fascinated at the time by adobe architecture and was looking for work in the Southwest until a Washington firm called and offered him a job. "It was another 15 years before I got to see the Southwest," he said.

In Washington, he gained "a smattering of experience" in residential, commercial, and institutional architecture with several small firms but became frustrated because he "couldn't find many people interested in pushing the envelope on environmental sensitivity in construction." That led him to start SCI and then Community Forklift. "I haven't abandoned architecture completely, but it's a side path to what I do now," he said. "A lot of architects are our customers and I think my background is sometimes helpful in communicating with them."

Finding The Pearl in the Oyster

Schulman ran into Tim Lyons on the warehouse floor in January. Lyons, who is not a registered architect but has associates who are, was poking around the "Table of Luck," so identified by a sign that Schulman posted because "you never know what you're going to find here." Schulman selected from the table an old video case that contained a four-inch wallpaper scraper and blades. "It's perfectly good," he commented. The price was \$4.

Lyons, whose firm specializes in residential projects, was looking at doorknobs. He has been to Community Forklift at least two dozen times and has found many useful materials for clients as well as for his own house.

"I've gotten some lumber for a deck here. I bought a bunch of columns and found some crown moldings for a lot less than what you would have to pay for them somewhere else if you were even able to find them," he said. "I've been to other salvage places. This probably has the most practical stuff and is a lot more reasonable."

According to Schulman, an architecture firm found pieces of glass from former jalousie windows that were perfect for a client's office layout. "They came up with a design that involved little slots of glass to bring light into the offices behind curving sheetrock walls," he said.

Schulman recognizes that Community Forklift's inventory is better suited to renovation and repair jobs than to new construction. "We don't have the volume of materials for that," he said. But many of the products are unusual, hard-to-find artifacts that can add a distinctive design element to the most modest renovation project. They include a huge wooden fireplace mantel salvaged from the home of a former cabinet secretary after a fire, and a set of curved windows from the home of a founder of a prominent local business. Some items, like crystal door knobs, qualify as antiques.

Packaged in two cartons in an outside yard is an 80-year-old, 1,100 square-foot log cabin, complete with instructions for reassembly. Schulman said it was "lovingly deconstructed" and removed from a property in McLean, Virginia, to make way for construction of a "McMansion."

"We have made some mistakes," said Schulman. "I don't have a retail background, and running a store is not for the faint of heart. Coming up with a price is kind of an art. A lot of it is off the cuff. Our bias is to just give somebody a deal." There is a 14-day return policy but Schulman said returns have been few, "five or ten out of the hundreds we have sold." He never knows what might come in or go out on any given day. He cites beech hardwood flooring from an abandoned local public housing project that he sold, sight unseen, to a shopping center builder in Ohio. "They wanted it to look like an old factory, so they wanted wood boards that looked rough, with paint on them. We sold that flooring without having to strip off the paint or mill it or anything."

"Sometimes we'll get really nice things," he continued, like a new water heater, still in its box, or a leaded glass chandelier. "That stuff is not part of our mission, but it sells quickly and helps to pay the bills." He also never knows who his customers will be. Many are small contractors, and he would like to see more of them, as well as architects, designers, and crafts people. In Community Forklift's first week, one customer was a laborer who walked away carrying four wood studs on his shoulder. The next customer was the chief of staff for a U.S. Senator, who bought a load of bricks for her garden. "There are some people who will never want something that's been used," said Schulman. "It's not in their nature." Community Forklift is for shoppers with a different outlook, bent on finding bargains that are kind to the planet. 🌱

