

## Recyclers 'unbuild' couple's house, add to their own

Instead of razing their old home, the Pearsons find takers for reusable parts

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**Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Saturday, December 25, 2004, Metro Section, 1B-2B**

*Posted to jsonline.com: Dec. 24, 2004*

When Dick and Noel Pearson of Madison reluctantly decided to tear down their old house to put up a new one, the normal route would have been to call in the bulldozers and send the debris to a landfill.

Instead, the Pearsons launched a modern-day scavenging expedition. "Take our home. *Please*," the couple said in fliers and ads.

Their "deconstruction open house," as the late October event was dubbed, didn't make much money - less than \$300 after advertising costs were factored in, according to Dick Pearson. But profits weren't the point. The idea was to unbuild, in an environmentally responsible way, a house that had outlived its usefulness. And by that measure the session was a success: More than 95% of the salvageable materials in the house were removed and recycled.

"Demolition is cheap: Out of sight, out of mind," Pearson said in a telephone interview. "We didn't want that. We knew there were a lot of things in this house that people might like to have and that could be reused."

Walnut doors, for example. Carpeting. Kitchen counters and cabinet doors. Windows. Knotty pine paneling. Ceiling tile. Recyclers eagerly dismantled all of it and carted it away to be reinstalled in their own building projects. The Pearsons saved the upstairs maple floors, light fixtures and some mechanical equipment to reuse in their new house, which will be ready for occupancy in June. They also salvaged stone piers, which will be part of a landscaping project.

The recycling instinct came naturally to the Pearsons, who are both 66. Dick runs Pearson Engineering, a heating and air-conditioning business that focuses on retrofitting existing buildings. He has had a longtime commitment to energy conservation. Noel, who also works for the firm, is a fan of resale shops. "The thought of perfectly good stuff just being thrown away is just awful," she said.

### Recycling a Home



*Photo/Contributed*

Karen Jankowski (left) recycles a corner desktop from the Madison home of Dick and Noel Pearson, who launched a deconstruction of their home in late October instead of having it demolished. Although they made only about \$300, more than 95% of the salvageable materials were recycled.



*Photo/Contributed*

Dick Pearson

### Quotable

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**- Dick Pearson**

So why didn't the couple, with two grown children, just renovate their old house, a 1,500-square-foot Dutch Colonial built in 1938 on a sloping site overlooking Lake Mendota? They thought about it. The house had been in the family for years, and the land had been owned by the Pearson clan since 1852. But the dwelling was halfway down a hill, and the only view of the lake was from a back porch used just part of the year.

Plus, Dick Pearson said, there was no bathroom on the first floor, "and we're getting older. We wanted a house we could live in for the rest of our lives. To make this one work, we would have had to spend tons of money and been left with quite a few liabilities we couldn't get around."

The Pearsons' new house, while twice as large as the old one, is a one-story. Besides great views of the lake, it will have a more efficient heating and cooling system, plus many other "green" features, such as bamboo flooring.

Pearson thinks housing deconstruction is "the wave of the future," especially in eco-conscious cities such as Madison.

Frank Byrne agrees. Byrne is deconstruction manager for The Habitat ReStore, a Madison center for used and surplus building materials. The 3-year-old center, run by Habitat for Humanity as a way to fund construction of Habitat homes, estimates it has kept 750 tons of demolition materials out of landfills, thus extending their life.

Byrne says housing deconstruction has been going on for decades. But it's now becoming a national movement, fueled by environmentalism and resistance to the siting of new landfills. Byrne's group led the push for a Madison ordinance that requires demolition projects of any kind to have a recycling plan in place before they can proceed. If he had to do it over again, Pearson says, he would have planned his own deconstruction project a little further ahead and maybe enlisted some Amish families near Portage who dismantle and reuse entire houses.

"We wanted to involve them this time," Pearson said, "but they were all busy. It was their harvest season."

From the Dec. 25, 2004, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel