

# RECYCLING AND REUSING MATERIAL

How to find the best ways to manage job site waste

**IN TODAY'S WORLD OF GREEN**, what can a remodeler do to save money, help the environment and become green-friendly to their customers? The three Rs: reduce, recycle and reuse. This discussion offers information that will help you incorporate this important process into your remodeling.

**Tom:** Don, define with examples recycling and reusing — is there a difference, and what is that difference, if any.

**Don:** There is a difference, Tom. Reuse is the better of the two, typically. For instance, on a job where we're going to have some lumber — 2 by 4 studs, 2 by 6 ceiling joists or whatever it is — we establish a location, that if anything is cut, if it is 6 feet or longer that is left, it goes in this pile so we can reuse that somewhere else. The recycling would come in if we can't use it. There are two different options we use. One is a company in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex that has a packer grinder. It's like a wood chipper, but it's a big monster of a thing! They will take all the wood scraps, Sheet-

rock and some cement, things like that. They'll grind it up on the job. It becomes a mulch that we incorporate in the landscaping. The other one is Silver Creek Materials. We have it hauled out to them and they grind it up and put it in a mulch that they will resell.

**Tom:** Michael, I said recycling and reuse and you added a word, reduce. What is the difference to you?

**Michael:** Don nailed it in the difference in reuse and recycling. With the reduce component, when we look at a project we start with the reduce, then we move to reuse and then recycle. In terms of importance, the very first thing we can do is find out ways to reduce the overall impact of the project. That may mean that the project is smaller; it may mean that we tear out less material than we normally would. In the traditional project, we'd gut everything. We're going to have an eye to try to keep materials in the house, so we reduce the amount of waste we have to deal with in general. By keeping the project smaller, we reduce the amount of material that we buy in the first place. The reduce category is the area where you can have the greatest amount of impact.

**Tom:** Does it save or cost more money to recycle and reuse?

**Michael:** In general, we look at this as a cost-cutting measure. We have smaller Dumpsters on site, and we have fewer Dumpsters coming to our projects. We did a second-story addition, so essentially a one-story single family house built on top of an existing house. Our total waste on the project was 9 cubic yards. Where we would normally have had two 40-yard Dumpsters,



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**MICHAEL:** "When it comes to the reuse of the material or going out and finding something that already exists, it's usually a lot less expensive than buying something new off the shelf."

we had 3, 3-cubic-yard Dumpsters.

**Tom:** How does it happen?

**Michael:** When we look at buying material and bringing it to the job site, we try to be a little more careful in terms of what we're ordering. We try to keep the job order waste down as much as possible. That may mean using something like a cut list, being

## This month featuring:

**Michael Ansel, Owner**

Otogawa-Ansel Design-Build, Minneapolis  
The firm focuses on green building and urban living and has been in business for 13 years. It has 11 employees and expects volume for this year to be \$2 million to \$2.5 million.

**Don Ferrier, Owner**

Ferrier Companies, Fort Worth, Texas  
Ferrier Builders and Ferrier Custom Homes offer remodeling and new construction, with about \$3.5 million in combined annual revenues.

**DON:** "The biggest obstacle to us has just been getting the people to understand why we're doing it and commit to do it."

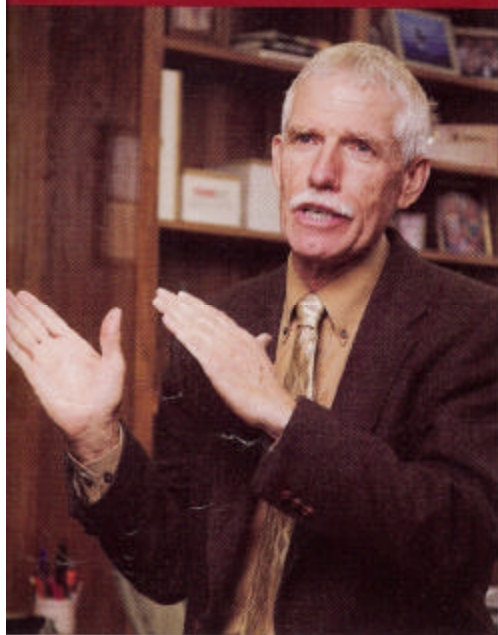


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strategic with the material we buy so that we have as little waste as possible. When it comes to the reuse of the material or going out and finding something that already exists, it's usually a lot less expensive than buying something new off the shelf. I can pick up doors, nice two- or three-panel solid core doors from 1920 that would cost me \$1,000 to buy. I can pick them up for \$100. So that's all cost savings for us. Less waste means money in our pocket and less expensive materials to bring into the project.

**Tom:** How do you find the costs when it comes to recyclable and reused materials?

**Don:** I think that what you find, in our experience, is when you initially start on it, you're going to have more. There's a sales aspect to this to your own people, your

superintendents and your subs. The construction industry typically is used to throwing it in a pile that some subcontractor comes in with a dump truck or a Bobcat, in our area, and takes it to a landfill, or it's going into a Dumpster. It is a new thought process. What we have found, very similar to Michael's, as we have done this now for about seven years, is that it becomes second nature. If you properly train your subs, and they come on board, then even they see how it does help and that, in the end, it does save us money. But there is a learning curve to it, in our experience.

**Tom:** Don, how do you market that to your customer? Do you pass the costs on to your customers? Do you mark it up? Do you mark it up the same?

**Don:** We're marking it all up the same. As far as the recycling and projects like that, how do we market that?

We've been very fortunate to have had last year about 58 newspaper and magazine articles written about us. People come to us primarily because they want that. A common comment we have among the clients or prospective clients that come to us: "We've looked and looked for a builder/remodeler who knows how to do this, and we're so thrilled we found you." They've gone to so many who said it's overrated, they don't do that or it's going to cost way too much money. I tell them basically what they're saying is, "We don't know how to do it — we've never done it."

**Tom:** Talk about the good, bad and the ugly. We talked about the good. I'm interested because it sounds like if you're smart and strategic about it, you could save some money. That might be a good point. Michael, what are the major drawbacks to recycling in terms of time cost?

**Michael:** There is no drawback to sending your stuff out to be recycled. Just so everyone's clear on that. If you want to sort on site, it takes some training. You've got to have some guys who are going to pay

attention and are going to think about it. Most old-school carpenters want to do that by nature. They hate the idea of throwing out half a sheet of plywood. They hate the idea of throwing out half a stick of lumber. The younger guys tend to want to just throw it away. If that's where your crew's at, make a selection with your Dumpster company with your rolloff to select one that actually engages in the process of sorting the material and recycling. You can get 60 to 65 percent of the material in the Dumpster recycled. That means you don't have to do anything different in your business. Some Dumpster companies will give you money back if you sort materials into three different boxes. We get, for example, steel and copper, we actually get money back from the Dumpster company.

**Tom:** Don, what kind of drawbacks to you see for a remodeler who wants to get into recycling and reuse and be more green?

**Don:** I think it's what we talked about earlier, Tom. It's the education. Subs, vendors aren't going to be used to that; your own people aren't going to be used to it. There are going to be some that feel like this "green thing" is way overrated and a bunch of hype. There will be some resistance, some passive aggressive and some pretty blatant. But there will be a lot who see the wisdom in it and jump on board. That's my experience. The biggest obstacle to us has just been getting the people to understand why we're doing it and commit to do it. Like Michael said, if you've got three different bins out there, either they put it in the right bin or you're going to have to come back and put it in the right bin. **PR**



Tom Swartz  
Contributing Editor

## TALK BACK

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