

## KARLA WINCHESTER TRANSFORMS ARCHITECTURAL SALVAGE INTO SAVVY DÉCOR

**K**arla Winchester insists she is not a dumpster diver. “I’m a dumpster diva,” she says with a laugh.

The interior decorator and owner of a new Rocheport shop — Grace: A Place Of Restoration — has built a following for her imaginative use of architectural salvage. The proof is all over her store: in the wooden umbrella frame hanging upside down from the ceiling, bedecked in lights and greenery; in a matching set of old black doors that become elegant parentheses for the artwork between them; and in a sturdy pair of staircase spindles recreated as candleholders.

Winchester admits she rarely sees things as what they are; she sees them as what they could be.

When this Mizzou alum left Columbia after graduation in the 1980s, she moved to St. Louis and launched a decorating business. She gave up her design work for a while when a divorce made it necessary for her to find a job with benefits, but as she traveled around the Midwest as a college recruiter, she’d stop in at antique shops along her route. The relationships she formed with those antique dealers were helpful when she decided to return to decorating work full time and to start her own store in Rocheport. Her plan is to rebuild her interior decorating business while also stocking her store with antique salvaged items she has transformed into “exceptional and unique treasures.”

Her attitude may seem unusual for someone who owns a retail business, but Winchester says it’s not all about sales. For her, it’s as important to build relationships with customers and teach others what she has learned about interior decorating.

“When I first started my design company, I had no money to advertise,” she says. “I became a guest speaker. That’s how I built my business.” She plans to employ that philosophy again by hosting design workshops at her store.

Winchester believes the time is right to introduce mid-Missouri to the pleasures of decorating with architectural salvage. “There’s a lot of beauty in it,” she says. “These are imperfect things but

they are full of color and texture. More and more people are staying where they are and want to bring that warmth, texture and nostalgia to their home.”

She does offer a few caveats to amateur salvage-seekers, and first on her list is to beware of lead paint. “I don’t encourage people with small children to use these pieces. By stripping the objects, you can take care of that problem.”

And take care that you’re not getting more than an interesting *objet d’art* when you bring salvaged wood into your home. “Make sure you don’t have active ants or termites,” she cautions.

Not every architectural salvage project is right for the inexperienced do-it-yourselfer, Winchester says. She recommends leaving the installation of antique windows and reclaimed wood floors to professional installers. There are still plenty of opportunities for the average weekend warrior to introduce the charm of yesteryear into modern spaces.

“You don’t have to have a lot of money,” she says. “These things are already around.”



### WHAT'S IN KARLA WINCHESTER'S B.A.G.G.?

Karla Winchester says if you include these elements in a room, good interior design is in the B.A.G.G.

**B = Black:** Just a touch can create depth and drama.

**A = Artwork and Accessories:** These can add your personal stamp to a room.

**G = Glass:** It adds lightness to a room full of wood and deep colors.

**G = Greenery:** Plants add life to a room.



**"These are imperfect things but they are full of color and texture."**