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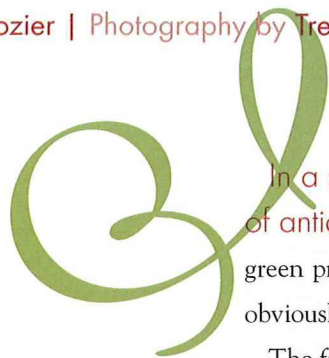




# Rescued and Ready...

## Renovation, Restoration and 21st-century Design

Text by Barbara Crozier | Photography by Tre Dunham



In a summer 2008 *Texas Home & Living* article about the green aspect of antiques, I boldly stated that selling antiques is truly one of the very first green professions. Immediately, I heard from antique dealers across several states. I had obviously articulated exactly what they had been thinking for years.

The first person I heard from was Suzanne Kittel of Discovery Architectural Antiques, located right down the street from my own shop. Suzanne called to chime in with a new bit of green gossip ... Gonzales, Texas is quickly becoming known as the Emerald City among environmentally conscious, architectural antique shoppers. Suzanne's architectural antique business, one of the largest and most extensive resources in the Southwest for antique architectural salvage, flourishes just off one of seven historic town squares.



The 8,000-square-foot showroom attracts shoppers by the thousands each year. It draws builders and designers searching for beauty and craftsmanship—for the rare and the unusual in our world of mass-production conformity. More often than not these days, Discovery beckons to those looking for better building choices, ones that reflect a growing commitment to environmental sustainability.

They arrive ... home owners, designers, builders, artists ... heady with plans for their projects. They dream of designing, restoring, and building homes, business spaces, studios, and even art installations fashioned with the old things they have come to Discovery to find. They are always staggered by the enormity of the inventory of old things they find. They find the mother lode of one-of-a-kind treasures, remnants and reminders of generations past, to enliven their projects and inspire generations of projects to come.

They create a room around a warehouse window or a kitchen around a piece of copper. They see an entire home in a doorway or a dining room in a silo. Just ask Zoe Compton, a Texas replant and acclaimed architectural designer from Aspen. Zoe's latest project, her own home and design office, is picturesquely positioned on a knoll just south of Gonzales. The entire property speaks volumes about how the beauty and simplicity of a single item, often discarded or abandoned for decades, can be the catalyst for a design of exceptional beauty and startling freshness.

Like nearly all the rescued building materials at Discovery, Zoe's windows come with a story. Ironically, the windows are brand new old windows. They were originally purchased for a warehouse in Galveston that was never built. They had been stored in their original crates for over a hundred years before Zoe spotted them among the warehouse of windows at Discovery.

Hundreds of windows, ranging from the stunning example of Art Noveau stained-glass, pictured on the next page, to the sleek cypress warehouse windows of Zoe's to-die-for dining room, await the shopper at Discovery. And windows are just the start of the salvage shopping story.



The simple symmetry of the silo that is now Zoe Compton's dining room, bathed in the constantly shifting streams of light from the rescued windows she found at Discovery, dazzle diners with the breathtaking beauty of 21st-century design.







Rows and rows of doors of all shapes, sizes, materials, colors, and stories await to be selected for a special project.

Colorful stained-glass panels hang in the store windows and are stacked around the shop.



Standing testament to the creativity and craftsmanship of the prolific American Industrial Revolution manufacturers are a few of the cases of embellished doorknobs, backplates, and hinges that greet visitors to Discovery.

A dizzying array of fine decorative architectural elements were manufactured during the later part of the 19th and early 20th-century to meet the increasing demands of an emerging middle class. Important stained-glass commissions in public buildings and commercial installations fueled a growing demand for decorative windows, not only in East Coast mansions, but in mainstreet homes of the Midwestern and Southern states.

American manufacturers created not only exceptionally beautiful windows, doors, and architectural glass and lighting, but fine decorative hardware of bronze, brass, and iron. The craftsmanship of the hardware produced by companies like Yale and Towns and Mallory and Wheeler remains unsurpassed.

Today Discovery offers thousands of pieces of exceptional 19th-century hardware. Shoppers can find doorknobs and backplates of every imaginable description, along with hinges and hasps, and locks and keys. Over 5,000 doors wait in the warehouse walkways and showroom aisles. Suzanne has rescued doors from businesses across the street and across the continent. She stocks doors made of oak, pine, and walnut; doors with etched glass and stained glass panels; doors of simple beauty; and embellished beauties of Victorian excess. There are doors from churches, courthouses, and convents. There are doors from Texas ranches and New York brownstones. There are doors from the Midwest, Mexico, and the middle of nowhere. There are doors in all shapes and sizes, and almost every color imaginable.

In the comfort of the used-book nook she keeps in an almost secret corner of her showroom, I quizzed Suzanne about how she got started in this industry. She says her passion for rescued things started with her love of old books, and has simply grown into this huge business of all things reclaimed. Throughout eight historic structures, Discovery now encompasses over 150,000 square feet of rescued lumber, flooring, structural beams, bead board paneling and embossed metal ceilings, fireplace mantels, columns and newel posts, light fixtures, and hardware. The list goes on and on. The inventory at Discovery of decorative architectural elements and rescued building materials is as vast and varied as the taste of the 19th and 20th centuries.

When asked if she had a favorite, Suzanne confided it is probably her doors. She finds the nostalgic images they conjure impossible to resist. Images of brides crossing thresholds and the holiday homecomings of intrepid travelers and returning soldiers, linger in the very patina of the wood. As she talks, one realizes it is not merely the craftsmanship



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of these rescued recyclables that drives their purchase appeal. The history and romance of the moments in time and place they reflect add to their enduring allure.

Reveling in that kind of poetic imagery, sifting through the masterpieces of polished wood and gleaming brass and glass, one understands what draws builders and designers to Gonzales today. It is certainly no coincidence that Missouri native, Suzanne Kittel and returning Texas designer, Zoe Compton discovered Gonzales. There is evidently something green going on in this new Emerald City of antique recyclables. *TH&L*

*Barbara Crozier, a frequent feature writer for TH&L, owns and operates Laurel Ridge Antiques in Gonzales, Texas: specializing in American furniture of the 19th century. For questions email barbaracrozier1@gmail.com.*

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Suzanne Kittel, owner of Discovery Architectural Antiques, in her used-book nook.