

Watch: 3 Ways Scrap Creates Beauty + Sustainability

Television shows such as “Fixer Upper” “Property Brothers” and “Antiques Roadshow” attract millions of viewers by showing us how one person’s trash can become another person’s treasure. Beauty isn’t always easy to spot. Sometimes it’s hidden under layers of dust, often in need of a good coat of paint. Other times it can be found right under our feet — simply in need of someone to look down and see the promise in what otherwise would be thrown away.

Recently, three hidden gems shined. They show us how simple scraps of wood or cloth can be reimagined to create authentic, original and inspiring spaces. Scrap is the excess material from the manufacturing process that might otherwise have been discarded or recycled. People who led these projects saw the beauty in this previously unused material. Instead of seeking out perfection, they realized it’s the imperfections that can inspire us.

SCRAP CREATES SPECIAL TABLES

They say timing is everything. In Kentwood, Michigan the quest for perfection was leaving leftover oak and walnut pieces without a use. High standards meant wood with knots or uneven grain wasn’t always able to be used. It was either discarded, recycled or resold.

Two members of the Steelcase operations team were searching for how to save and use this extra wood and were in the midst of experimenting with a simple table using these planked veneers. At the same time, a customer was asking for a unique, unrefined table. That request crossed the desk of the team in Michigan. They promptly showed the representative their experimental planked oak table and he quickly passed it along to the customer. The customer put in a big order on the spot. Even though the tables weren’t in production yet, the team turned concept into production in a matter of weeks and their work led to a new product line using previously discarded wood.

That line called planked oak and walnut veneers are now available for everyone. The knots, visible grain and color variations are now exactly what many customers are seeking. Each table is an original and the wood creates a more informal look people want at work.

SCRAP WEAVES AWARD-WINNING TEXTILES

In Athens, Alabama, Steelcase’s manufacturing facility took leftover material that used to end up on the cutting-room floor and turned it into something elegant, durable and sustainable.

The New Black collection begins with scrap fabric from the Alabama facility. The fabric is recycled into yarn, dyed black and rewoven into new textiles for seating products. The 100 percent recycled material makes up five distinctly beautiful patterns that bring a warm, comfortable, human feeling and sustainable design to the workplace. The industry recognized New Black with the Innovation Award at Neocon 2016. New Black is scheduled to be available at the end of February 2017.

SCRAP SUPPORTS SHIPMENTS

Scrap isn't only being used to create something completely new, it's also improving quality through sustainable materials. In Michigan, Steelcase operations team members were already on the lookout for how to use melamine excess when an opportunity for improvement came along. Traditional packaging wasn't providing the necessary support for sending products from the manufacturing facility to the customer. As a result, some products were experiencing bowing. People at the plant realized they could use the leftover melamine to build better pallets on-site to make sure what the customer received was of the highest quality. The new pallets improve the support for the product during shipment. They also contribute to the circular economy by using the extra melamine to reduce waste and create something with purpose.

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Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

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