

Once a Curb, Now a Countertop: Creative Uses for Reclaimed Materials

by Scott Smith, Experienced Brick & Stone

Reclaimed brick and stone were originally manufactured for a specific purpose, such as curbing. But in their second life, these salvaged materials can be used for many more creative applications, as we've seen countless times supplying brick pavers, cobblestones and other reclaimed materials for impressive projects that grace large estates, modest backyards and public spaces.

This article wraps up a three-part series about reclaimed materials in the landscape industry, which previously highlighted these materials' unique history and how to install them.

Tudor Transformation

In Upstate New York, the owners of this 1927 brick Tudor wanted to transform their backyard into an outdoor entertainment space, while simultaneously maintaining the historic charm of their city property. Previously, a few pieces of Medina curbing and sidewalk slab were used as stair treads and stepping-stones around the small lot. (It's likely these antique stones were scavenged from the contractor who removed them from the front of the house decades before.) As such, it made sense to build upon the historic use of Medina stone to construct an outdoor room and complement the house, as well as the gardens the homeowners meticulously maintain.



Large sidewalk slabs now cover the patio surface, some of which even bear the initial of the original mason who skillfully made and placed the stone more than a century ago. Medina curbing was used for window wells, seating wall caps and stair trends, with chisel marks—still visible from when the curb was carved—adding character to the curb's top and face. The seating/retaining wall was constructed from cobblestones laid sideways to expose their worn top side. Even the countertop around the grill is reclaimed, a sidewalk slab.



Elsewhere, the adjacent driveway is exposed aggregate, chosen to match the color palette in the reclaimed stone. Medina cobblestone is deployed as a mowing strip along garden edges and as stepping-stones throughout the lush gardens.

Overall, by consistently using one type of reclaimed material of the same vintage as the property, the homeowners have created a more comfortable, welcoming space that seems to have happened naturally. Now, with the Medina stone throughout, the outdoor space feels like it belongs. In fact, visitors often mistake the patio for part of the original house construction.



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From Supporting Player to Star

At the edge of roadways, curbing prevents pavement from moving laterally and separates the adjacent green space. It's a bystander to all the action passing by. However, salvaged curbing often takes center stage in its second life.

The owners of this Connecticut estate sought to bring a rustic, yet elegant, character to their property, shunning manufactured materials in favor of warmer natural stone and the patina only reclaimed materials can provide. Reclaimed curbing is the centerpiece of their new driveway. Laid flat, the curbing stones act as oversized pavers that work well in the expansive parking space. They also installed traditional cobblestones as banding to create interest and vary the texture.

Antique curbing also is a veneer on the gate posts and wing wall, making efficient use of the small pieces that were cut off during installation and might otherwise have been wasted. The walkway to the front door continues the use of curbing to create a dramatic path that welcomes guests. To tie the back and sides of the property in with the front, landscaping staircases were also constructed from reclaimed curbing.



You can even create intricate designs and artwork with this versatile material. Here, in front of the garage, an eye-catching compass medallion made from salvaged curbing breaks up the large paved area and adds a point of focus.

Endless Possibilities

Even small-scale landscape elements

can go from ho-hum to incredible with salvaged materials. For example, a secluded corner of a garden is a great location for a bench made from curbing, as its rustic surface invites you to sit for a while and appreciate the scenery. A retaining wall built from stacked curbing offers a unique pattern of stone and sturdy construction. And, salvaged hitching posts bring the history of a place front and center, encouraging passersby to consider the decades of memories created on that property. The possibilities for reclaimed materials are only limited by the designer's creativity and imagination. What will you create?



Scott Smith, a professional Engineer, founded Experienced Brick & Stone in 2009 to prevent street bricks and other usable materials from being dumped in landfills.

Scott has been involved in numerous projects reclaiming street bricks, cobblestones, curbing and stone building elements. These archaeological digs have created a wealth of knowledge about historic installation methods, available materials and their history. He also provides advice on material selection and installation methods to support other design professionals.

