

people



Left to Right:
Scott Little,
Margaret Bennett
and Chris Blott

SWEET salvation

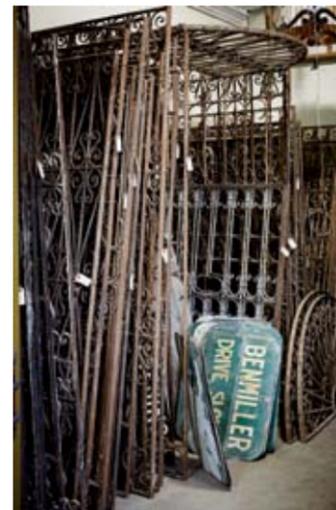
BY ADRIENNE BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLY HORKOFF

It takes a special eye to see the beauty in the skeletal remains of a pre-demo home or building. For most people, it's difficult to imagine how floor grates, staircase spindles, floorboards or tin shingles might be reappropriated or repurposed for their own homes. Luckily, there's a team of salvagers in St. Jacobs who have the ability to see past the dust and destruction and reimagine the best parts of any building.

Scott Little and Chris Blott are so good at what they do, in fact, that a handful of different television production companies have approached them as potential subjects for a series on architectural salvage. They're at the top of their field (but no, they won't be hitting your TV screens any time soon).

Little started Artefacts Salvage & Design in 1986, "mostly because he needed some elements for his own house," which he wanted to salvage from a home nearby, says Blott. He realized there must be a market out there for salvaged items and he started to amass interesting materials.

Soon after, Blott joined Little's team as an employee. They clicked and have been partners ever since. Blott says they balance each other: "He's far more the creative end and I'm the business end," he says. "It really wouldn't work without either one of us."



Little and Blott salvage most items from demolition sites in Southern Ontario – in fact, they started with a radius of about 300-400 kilometres from Waterloo Region, but that has expanded. For years, they've also sourced from Quebec and Great Lakes states, and they also bring in some items from places like Egypt and South Africa.

However, their clientele tend to come in looking for local pieces with local stories. Blott does his best to provide as much information on each piece as he can. Many items have labels indicating where the piece came from and what year it might have been built or installed.

The Artefacts team visits about one site per week. After more than 25 years, that's well over 1,000 homes they've scoured for treasures – and clearly, it's been well worth it. They also salvage fragments from churches, old schools, hospitals and factories when they can. The latter is where Blott says they've been finding their most sought-after pieces lately.

On any given day, visitors to Artefacts can find hundreds of doors, endless hardware and a wide selection of reclaimed barnboards and flooring. You might also stumble on organ pipes, pretty patterned tiles, glassware or old equipment like an antique ophthalmometer (the instrument your eye doctor uses to measure your eye). You never know!

You'll also find plenty of furniture – more and more all the time because the Artefacts team is increasing its custom work. The store is now filled with finished shelves, mirrors and cabinetry. Little is always busy in the back of the shop transforming finds (sometimes recently salvaged, sometimes pulled out from the depths of storage from long-ago demos) into unique pieces. His wife, Margaret Bennett, is the resident cabinet specialist and also works in the shop.

Little has been the driving force behind this change. He knows Artefacts needs to cater more to what customers are looking for: finished products. Where once he and Blott would salvage anything they thought someone might be able to transform into something useful or beautiful, they now look for parts and pieces they can transform in the shop and offer as ready-to-hang or ready-to-use items.

Many homeowners are looking for interesting found elements for their homes but they don't have the tools, the imagination or possibly the time to execute their ideas. They often bring photos of items they like and ask if Artefacts can make something similar.

"A lot of our customers like what we do because they have a hand in the piece," says Blott. "They can get the same thing from China but they don't want that." So they head to Artefacts and come away with everything from mantels and front entrances to chalkboards, headboards, decorative columns and fencing.

Exploring Artefacts is almost as much of an adventure as Little and Blott have on demolition sites, although not quite as challenging. Their jobs are not for the faint of heart. They've fallen through floors, broken bones and travelled thousands of kilometres to investigate interesting properties with stories to tell before they're gone for good. **OH**

