

Yours Truly Reclaimed: The new label for authentic reclaimed products

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Presentation by Sara Morel during the FCRBE final event in Brussels

“There’s lots of buzz about reclamation and reuse. Reclaimed materials are desirable, but often people need help to realise their reuse ambitions. I’m Sara Morel from Salvo, and I’m going to take you on a quick jaunt of our journey creating the Truly Reclaimed campaign and why we feel its time is now.

Flashback Seven years ago, I was walking through mud in the rain, circling stacks of reclaimed radiators. You might guess that this was my first time in a salvage yard because knee-high boots with tassels to the floor don’t usually pass for sensible footwear in this situation. But I was hooked. Yes, my tassels had physically hooked me to pieces of salvage whilst walking around the yard. But seriously, from then on, I was committed to designing with reclaimed materials.

The perfectionist in me might have picked through to find the most “perfect” ones, but having been won over by the fact that the radiators were reclaimed from a school and dated back to the 1920s, I just marvelled in the story. And I was excited about the transformation that I would witness from this moment, through to restoration to the final look.

Like all customers looking to reuse reclaimed products, my purchasing decisions were driven by many factors, including price, sustainability, heritage value, the joy in finding something unique, and the look.

Before 1950, reuse was more ingrained in human nature, and it has gradually been degraded as less of a necessity and more of a consumer choice. The reuse market that we recognise today with stockholding reclamation dealers started to crop up in the 1970s, and desirability grew from designers to DIYers. People were choosing reclaimed materials for the look and for environmental reasons as a backlash to the waste that they witnessed from mass demolition in the 60s and 70s.

Now I’d like to focus on the look for a moment, what is it about the appearance of reclaimed materials that attracts us? Why are these interiors of Settle Norfolk’s restored railway carriages for holiday stays so friendly and inviting? Does wellness for the planet through the reuse of materials equal wellness for us?

“I just have to touch it.”

“that wood is talking to me.”

“people’s wish to stroke it.”

No, this is not the tease for a new sensual Netflix series. These are words that designers and customers have used to describe reclaimed materials.

And we have seen a big trend towards reuse of reclaimed materials in the design of shops, restaurants and hotels - because these materials connect with customers.

I’d like to elaborate on the thoughts of Ivan Speight, a London based designer who gives each client their own identity via his designs. He presents the reclaimed materials, in his words, “in a manner that seduces the public.” And he would often double his client’s turnover.

The look, is of course, just one part of the sensory difference we get from reclaimed materials. Like us, they have a past, whether their story spans continents and across many decades or if the material was recently dismantled and reused on the same site. Reclaimed materials have a story to communicate that gives us a unique sensory perception.

During a 2016 TEDx talk *Creating Meaningful Memories Through Sensory Experiences*, Rebekah Matheny of Ohio State University outlined the importance of designing with purpose to create engaging spaces which speak to the customer. Her research couples the sensory perception of reclaimed materials in hospitality and retail spaces to make a case for design that is both sustainable, and commercially successful. For example, Rebekah's research shows that the use of reclaimed wood sets the customer at ease.

Truly Reclaimed wood connects to customers on a human level. Her case studies show that whether conscious or subconscious, reclaimed interiors help humanise a brand.

She uses Starbucks as an example with some great case studies for the reuse of authentic salvaged materials, but there are also many coffee shops, including some Starbucks that use fake reclaimed to get the look.

Now I'll admit that most customers grabbing a coffee won't be examining the fact that marks of wear don't usually come in perfect formations. But there is something about the feeling of being too perfect that doesn't sit easily with us as humans.

I don't know how many of you can remember the evolution of the Starbucks logo but their current, albeit still simplified logo was revised to humanise the face of the Siren and make it more asymmetrical, less perfect and more approachable.

Like all consumer decisions, they are intertwined with different drivers for different people. But the rising commercial appeal has led to a rise in faked reclaimed materials.

Reproduction of antiques is nothing new, but by the mid-2000s reuse became recognised as "the reclaimed look" and demand was outstripping supply. People began seeking cheaper faked alternatives. Beyond misleading customers with pretend eco-friendliness, the issue is the environmental cost, not simply of the new, but the additional cost of making the new look reclaimed. Without a strong and varied reuse market there is also a danger that high-value materials may follow lower value routes like recycling or be disposed of.

So how do we know what is true? Sometimes looks deceive us. Take one of the reclamation businesses we visited in Wales. Cardiff Reclamation had no online presence until we visited them and added them to the new UK&Ireland500 directory as part of this project. Even Google was confused as their geo location had been linked to a totally unrelated sister business. To today's customer, can this business be trusted as they have no website, no Instagram? Does that mean that their stocks of materials don't have stories? It just so happened that they had plenty. As my colleague Becky and I approached the docks in Cardiff, we discovered one of the largest salvage yards with everything from fine sanitary ware to architectural woodwork and one of the biggest collections of doors we saw on our visits.

Now take one of Europe's largest manufacturers of new construction materials that use words like 'heritage', 'olde', 'antique' and even 'reclaimed' in their product names of new

materials that are made to look characterful and aged. Many reclamation businesses offer some reproduction items, but the importance is that they distinguish them for the customer to choose freely. This is part of our ethical Salvo Code, a peer-reviewed community of businesses that meet high standards in responsible sourcing.

This new material manufacturer doesn't set the customer up for a free choice. Instead, they publish warnings about the dangers of working with reclaimed to fight off the competition with statements like "it is better to fake it with new." It's a free market, customers must have the choice to decide which products suit their requirements and their budget, but it also needs to be a fair market.

Now before I unveil our Truly Reclaimed label, I'm taking you to McDonalds on the side of a motorway. Don't judge me! I might add that the only reason I was there was because we needed to charge our electric car, and as it happens the groundkeeper told us that McDonalds is speedily installing as many electric chargers as possible.

However tenuous the connection between this fake exterior and truly reclaimed wood, the fact that they are looking to attract eco-conscious customers might somehow explain the look of their design choice. So although this is an extremely vague impression of reclaimed wood. It shows that reclaimed is a brand worth protecting. These examples all show that it is hard for the customer to navigate and know what deserves their trust, and that's where Truly Reclaimed comes in.

The new Truly Reclaimed label verifies that a product or batch of material is genuinely reclaimed. Salvaged materials have always been celebrated for their connection with history, but they are increasingly recognised for the environmental value that reuse brings to projects. So the label provides assurance that an item is genuinely reclaimed and therefore offers a genuine reduction in carbon emissions.

The Truly Reclaimed campaign will increase the visibility of reclaimed products. You'll also notice the QR code as the aim of the label is not only to verify authenticity, but also connect people to the products they are buying, or experiencing in the places they visit that feature Truly Reclaimed materials.

The information accessed through the unique QR codes can range from the past life of the material to reclamation rescue stories to the embodied carbon that was saved through reuse.

The label provides confidence to;

- an owner planning reuse
- a specifier who would like certainty
- a designer keen to be eco-friendly
- And a visitor interested in the story and environmental benefit of reuse

The Truly Reclaimed label has grown from Salvo's experience regulating and administering the Salvo Code for high standards in responsible sourcing since 1995.

The new label was first conceived by Salvo in 2012, and subsequent market research supported by the UK's Building Research Establishment proved favourable for continued development. But funding was later cut, so it wasn't until Rotor invited us to be part of the futuREuse FCRBE project that work could continue.

We're pleased to say that the label is currently in a soft launch with some Salvo Code members using the label in their showrooms, including BCA, a major reclamation business in France.

Dealers are also reaching out to hospitality spaces to carry the Truly Reclaimed label on pieces they have supplied. So far, items range from doors to urinals, and you can see here that early tests to laser print the logo and QR codes onto different materials have been pretty successful.

It is up to the owner of the premises, say a shop or restaurant and the dealer supplying the Truly Reclaimed materials whether they join a map of eco-conscious destinations. They can also choose whether or not they wish to display a QR code, and that information can vary from - basic details about reuse and environmental benefits - to the provenance and specific carbon savings of reusing that product or batch of material.

Often information is lost with the exchange of owner, but the label can speak of history or processes to immerse curious customers in the stories and impact of reuse. The mission is to encourage more business for sustainable companies and to grow awareness of the vast amount of reclamation and reuse which is unrecorded and therefore goes unnoticed.

We also see the future potential in the label for projects and professionals that want their commitment to reuse recognised. The label may document a long journey from dismantling to reclamation yard, or it may also record a simpler switch from demolition to reuse on the same site or another nearby site by an architect or engineer.

By amplifying the voice of the reuse economy we can improve the impact of our shops, workspaces, hospitality and entertainment spaces. Now more than ever people want to trust the built environments they visit and the brands they buy from.

The phrase 'circular economy' in practice often means recycling and not reusing - which means embodied energy is lost. We prefer the term 'reuse economy' which has a much clearer aim.

By linking products to protocols and allowing people to easily see and share the stories behind reuse, Truly Reclaimed builds trust. We have definitely reached a tipping point, customers are savvy and most people want to reduce waste. It's not enough for companies to shout about their eco-credentials, customers want you to help them reduce their carbon footprint and inspire their choices.

Just because we're talking about the reuse of old things, it doesn't mean that they can't incorporate technological capability and new desirability. If you've got a smartphone, please try scanning the QR code now. Truly Reclaimed.org and the French website Reemploi Atteste will be populated to hold everything about the label.

As it grows there is the potential for take-back schemes and deeper reclaimed product declarations if it is deemed that RPDs will generate more reuse. But the focus for launch is on the consumer-facing angle of the label because that's where we see the immediate potential with the power of the campaign to influence decisions in construction.

There's a long list of tools and resources to discover from the FCRBE project, which support the aim of increasing the current level of 1% of reuse of reclaimed materials within construction. And I definitely encourage you to explore the futuREuse publications that were developed with our project partners.

Salvo's booklet 'Fashion for Reclamation' gave us a precious insight into stories of reclaimed materials used in retail destinations in London. I want to take you through a few of our case studies and for you to imagine that with the Truly Reclaimed label, these stories wouldn't be hidden, but instead highlighted.

Take Gabriella Hearst's first international store outside of the US. The designer worked with Foster + Partners to adopt materials reclaimed within the UK for her London store. Sourcing materials locally might sound obvious, but this sustainable fashion brand is actually in the minority as global brands tend to opt for homogenised interiors which makes using reclaimed materials less likely.

A Truly Reclaimed label could share that Gabriela Hearst's commitment to sustainable design carries through to the design of her stores with features like the reclaimed floor, which was salvaged from the Copthorne Barracks in Shropshire. At Stella McCartney, a sustainable luxury fashion store on Bond Street, a Truly Reclaimed label could show that the shoes and accessories sit on display plinths made of bricole salvaged from waters in Venice. And at Coal Drops Yard, an exciting retail and restaurant quarter in Kings Cross, a Truly Reclaimed label would reveal that the arches were restored with 250,000 bricks reclaimed for reuse from the same site.

It is true that not all stories will be extraordinary, sometimes stories are simple, but sometimes places have been blended, borrowed and reclaimed from one shop fit to supply another. Amazing stories or important carbon savings that have come together because people rescued, reused or repurposed to build a new narrative that is truly reclaimed."