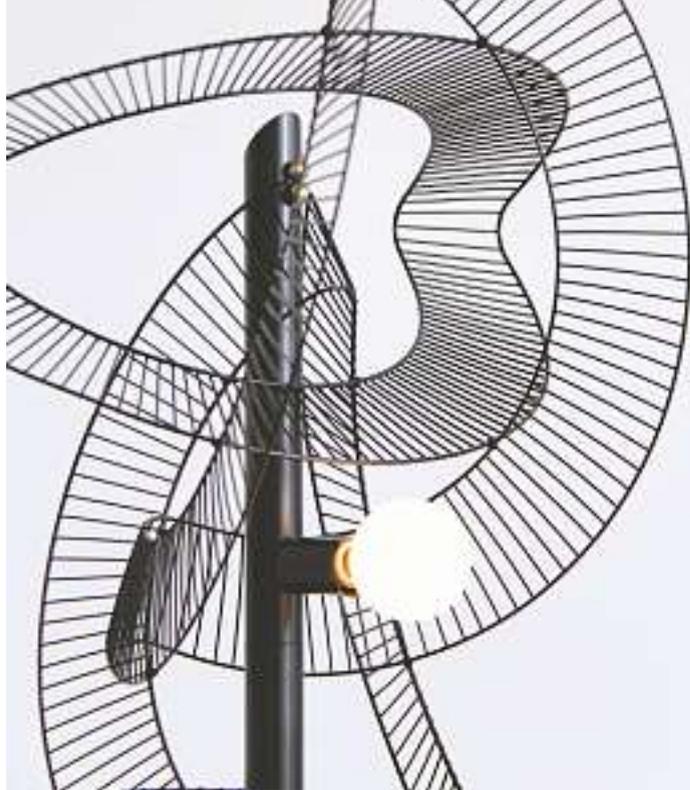


Homes

SUN



Seen here (above and below), examples of two high-end lighting fixtures made from used window blinds and fan guards by Montreal-based artist Philippe Charlebois-Gomez of 'studio botte designs.'

THE ART OF REUSE

Turning recycled materials into stylish home decor is a labor of love for these local artisans

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Special to Postmedia Network

When you choose building materials and fixtures made with recycled or reclaimed materials, you're not only reducing your carbon footprint and saving things from the landfill. You may also be incorporating a bit of local history and unique style into your home.

Take the products manufactured by Logs End Inc., a lumber mill in Bristol, Quebec, that uses logs reclaimed from the Ottawa River. From the 1820s until well into the 20th century, logging was a major industry in the Ottawa Valley. Countless felled trees, mainly pine, were floated down river to Ottawa to be milled. However, many sank to the bottom before reaching their destination.

That fact intrigued Shawville electrician Gord Brown, who was also an amateur scuba diver. After spotting some of these logs while diving, he started researching historical log drives using records at the National Archives of Canada and elsewhere, says Steve McCord, Logs End's business development manager. In 1997, Brown started Logs End to reclaim these lost logs and turn them into flooring, panelling, mantels and other products.

The fact that this wood has been lying at the bottom of the river, sometimes for over a century, doesn't make it any less valuable.

"Essentially, it's perfectly preserved under the water, because there's no oxygen and no sunlight, and those are the key factors that rot wood," McCord explains. Like any wood, it just needs to be dried after it is sawn.

He says these reclaimed logs have several advantages over freshly hewn wood. For one thing, they were cut from old-growth forests, meaning they are denser and thus more durable than younger trees harvested now. In addition, tighter growth rings can make reclaimed wood products esthetically appealing. "There's also beautiful mineral streaking in the wood," McCord says. "You'll see some colours, like some blues and some greens, that you just don't see in today's commercially grown pine boards."

Logs End makes engineered flooring, comprising a wood veneer bonded to a core. It's suitable for a wide range of settings, including basements and bathrooms. "It can go down over concrete, it can be installed over radiant-heated floors, so the applications are diverse," says McCord.

It can also be tailored to a customer's vision for their particular space. For example, the company can provide the planks of the same wood in a variety of widths so the client can mimic the look of a heritage floor in a newer home.

Most of Logs End's clients are located within 300 kilometres of the mill, says McCord, and many are drawn to the products because of their association with the region's history.

"We have customers that their father, their grandfather, might have worked on the timber drive, so I think they love that idea ... that someone in their family may have cut the tree or dragged the tree with horses down to the river," he says.



A home in Ottawa's Glebe neighbourhood features homes and stairs made with seven-inch engineered reclaimed pine from Logs End. The planks were wire brushed and finished with Logs End's Bristol stain.

Local connections are also important to Philippe Charlebois-Gomez, founder of Montreal's studio botté. He designs and makes high-end lighting fixtures from used materials, such as window blinds and fan guards (the cage-like guards that protect a fan's blades).

"I've chosen not to ship my lamps beyond 650 kilometres from my studio," says Charlebois-Gomez, who founded his company in 2017. "The goal here is to get to know my clients, to avoid any type of breaking during shipping for the custom pieces and to reduce the carbon footprint."

He points out that a particular aspect of Montreal's culture inspired him to start the business. Montrealers moving house usually put discarded items on the curb for passersby to take, and Charlebois-Gomez began gathering those items and repurposing them. Today, he has thousands of items stored in his materials library.

These days, manufacturers and others also offer him collections of identical unwanted items, which allows him to make multiples of particular fixtures. For instance, he created a series of pendant lamps from the frosted globes of 1960s Montreal streetlamps that now light up Buvette Daphnée, a trendy restaurant in Ottawa's ByWard Market.

In addition, he makes unique custom items for individual clients. One of the most unusual pieces? "I used a bunch of ski poles to create a chandelier for a ski cottage. And it was quite an adventure. It's a very difficult material to work with ... but I'm pretty happy with the results."

Despite the eco-friendliness of his approach, Charlebois-Gomez isn't an environmentalist first and foremost. "I'm not a purist. I'm not an eco-warrior. I really just am inspired by materials," he says.

In fact, he works hard to ensure that his pieces don't broadcast their humble origins. "The idea with studio botté is always to have the aspect that the piece has been reclaimed or that the parts have been reclaimed as sort of a second degree," says Charlebois-Gomez. "From the inception, the goal has always been to have a beautiful piece."