

## DEVELOPMENT

# The green beauty of salvaged treasures

**Charlotteans are harvesting heart pine, handmade bricks and more, dating to 1835, at historic Old Crow Distillery**

DOUG SMITH

[dougsmith@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:dougsmith@charlotteobserver.com)



Photo courtesy of Bourbon Boards

The Old Crow Distillery near Frankfort, Ky., shown in this photo, is being dismantled for its vintage heart pine, brick, limestone and other materials. Charlotteans John Vieregg (from left), Jubal Early and Monte Ritchey bought salvage rights to the 14-building complex and are marketing the reclaimed materials through a South End showroom. Their company, named Bourbon Boards, shares space off South Boulevard with Interiors Marketplace.



Wood, brick, stone and fixtures from one of Kentucky's oldest distilleries could soon start turning up in houses, commercial buildings and home furnishings in the Charlotte region.

Three Charlotteans recently acquired the 14 buildings in the Old Crow Distillery in Woodford County near Frankfort to salvage and market through a new company called Bourbon Boards.

They're starting with five barrel warehouses from the distillery, which dates to 1835.

Crews are removing and preparing heart pine wood, handmade brick, cut limestone, original fixtures and historic memorabilia for storage and shipping.

The partners -- John Vieregg, Monte Ritchey and Jubal Early -- say the 1.75 million bricks, 1 million board feet of wood and other warehouse materials could sell for \$10 million to \$15 million.

To manage this Next Big Thing in reclamation, they've created a showroom with three grades of heart pine on the floor inside Vieregg's Interiors Marketplace off South Boulevard in South End.

The partnership is unusual, considering that Vieregg is an antique furnishings dealer, Ritchey is a residential developer experienced in preservation projects and Early is a commercial real estate broker.

But the partners say their varied skills and research prepared them for this fast growing business, fueled by a desire to preserve a piece of history, create one-of-a-kind dwellings and do something for the environment.

They started putting the deal together in spring 2005 after Vieregg learned of the distillery's availability from a salvage dealer.

The seller, Jim Beam Brands, had determined that the buildings were obsolete and had serious limitations -- seven foot ceilings, for example -- that would thwart restoration and reuse.

Vieregg, motivated by a sense of history instilled during his 15 years of selling antiques, saw opportunity in reclamation and contacted Ritchey and Early, with whom he had previously participated in real estate deals.

In addition to the salvage rights, the partners own a portion of the distillery's 250 acres on the Kentucky River and have options to buy the remainder. They didn't disclose their investment in the business, which will join a crowded market of Internet purveyors of antique hardwoods and salvaged materials.

The Building Materials Reuse Association estimates the number of businesses salvaging vintage materials and fixtures for reuse has doubled in the past decade to about 1,200.

In South End, twins Dick and Bob Fuller began Crossland Studio, an architectural salvage business, 32 years ago to reclaim antique mantles, doors, stained glass, hardware and other items for reuse.

The market for those materials has grown over the past 20 years, said Dick Fuller.

"The first 10 years, almost everything went into renovations," he said. "Now 90 percent goes into new houses. So many houses are cookie cutter. People want something to distinguish theirs from the one next door."

Charlotte home builder Ray Killian of Simonini Builders said materials such as heart pine typically appear in custom-built houses in which owners are seeking a unique look.

"Somebody will get turned on to something they've seen somewhere and learned something about it," he said. "They will find a place to put it in their house."

The popularity of recycling and the movement toward green construction are contributing to a resurgence in demand for reclaimed wood.

"Hardwood is sustainable and renewable, and heart pine is a precious thing," said Anita Howard at the 4,100-member National Wood Flooring Association. "There is a rare limited supply. You can't buy it at Lowe's or Home Depot."

Reclamation companies say as much as 80 percent of a salvaged structure can be kept out of the landfill and reused.

And every board recycled helps save a tree.

By some estimates, reclaiming 1 million board feet of lumber could prevent the cutting of 1,000 acres of forest.

Reddish-tinted heart pine comes from old-growth longleaf pine used in the construction of barns, mills and other structures in the South from the 1800s until the mid-1920s.

But it's not just the beauty of the wood that appeals to home owners. Heart pine is as durable as oak, builders say, because it has a core of dense hardwood that resists insects and decay.

In the Old Crow Distillery, heart pine harvested in the early to mid-1800s shows up in everything from flooring to keg rails.

Bourbon Boards anticipates heart pine will be the No. 1 attraction among home owners, architects and builders who visit its South End marketing center and showroom.

The partners have divided their salvaged wood into three grades and priced it from \$6 a square foot to \$22 a square foot for boards three to five inches wide.

They estimate that flooring a 3,000-square-foot house with their heart pine could cost from \$30,000 to \$50,000, depending on the grade.

Bricks sell for 50 cents to 75 cents each; limestone, for \$250 a ton.

Initial orders indicate builders are buying the brick for exterior construction.

The limestone likely will be used outside for facades, walls and paving.

To reinforce a sense of history, Bourbon Boards gives buyers a certificate of authenticity.

One of the first questions buyers ask, of course, is: "Can you smell the bourbon in the wood?"

You notice it in the sawdust when the wood is being cut, the partners say, but not in the finished product on the floor.

If the venture unfolds as expected, the partners believe they will sell out in about two years.

After that? They're already scouting for other opportunities.

Also, they still have to determine what to do with 250 acres of distillery land adjacent to a 350-acre wildlife preserve.

Any suggestions?

### **Bourbon Boards**

*Three partners -- John Vieregg, Monte Ritchey and Jubal Early -- formed Bourbon Boards to sell salvaged heart pine, brick, limestone and other materials from the Old Crow Distillery near Frankfort, Ky. • Vieregg founded Interiors Marketplace in South End in 1993 with his wife, Kelley.*

- Ritchey is president of Conformity Corp., which specializes in mixed-use development and preservation projects.
- Early is senior vice president-brokerage at Charlotte's Lincoln Harris, a real estate development and management firm.
- Bourbon Boards' showroom is at 2000 South Blvd., Suite 200, inside Interiors Marketplace.
- Information: [www.bourbonboards.com](http://www.bourbonboards.com).
- Grand opening party: March 13, 5:30-8 p.m. at the showroom.

### **Old Crow Distillery**

- Scottish chemist Dr. James Crow arrived in Kentucky in 1823 and worked at a variety of whiskey makers before perfecting the sour mash process used by most bourbon distillers today. Many consider him to be the true father of bourbon.
- Old Crow was one of the first nationally known whiskey brands and one of the first nationally marketed brand-name products.
- His brew supposedly won the adoration of such notables as Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson and Ulysses S. Grant.
- The distillery that bears his name on Glenn's Creek dates to 1835. It shut its doors in 1985.
- More than 1 million board feet of heart pine were used to construct the 14-building complex.

In salvaging the initial five buildings, Bourbon Boards expects to also retrieve handmade wood-molded brick, cut Kentucky limestone, original lighting fixtures and other memorabilia.

---

Doug Smith: 704-358-5174; [dougsmith@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:dougsmith@charlotteobserver.com)

---