

BARRY REMLEY

SALVAGING BEAUTY AND CHARM



IF YOU'VE EVER SEEN THE MOVIE classic *North by Northwest* and recall Cary Grant stepping into that New York hotel elevator, you have an idea of the type of work furniture designer Barry Remley is known for. The designer used that very pair of cast iron grills on Cary Grant's elevator to design a pair of tables. "It was fun to be able to tell the client who was purchasing the tables about the history of the cast iron grills," she says.

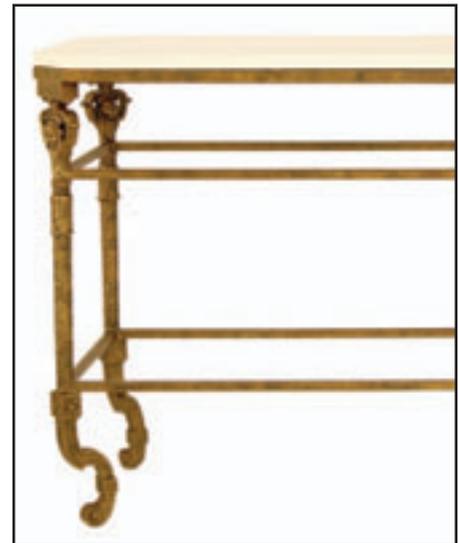
Remley calls her architectural furnishings company "Salvations," because she takes old architectural pieces and gives them new life. Using found objects such as historic cast iron heating grates, most of which date back to the Victorian era, she designs new pieces such as dining tables, coffee tables, occasional tables, consoles, headboards, pedestals, chandeliers, drapery hardware, garden benches, fire screens, mirrors, and whatever else she might feel moved to create. "I love old architectural pieces. There are reproductions made today but not with the delicacy and level of craftsmanship of the 1800s . . . it's fun to incorporate [these old pieces] into furniture." Remley's works grace not only homes throughout the United States, but her custom-designed pieces also stand proudly in American embassies across the globe, representing a piece of Americana in remote corners of the world.

It's difficult to picture this slim, petite woman collecting "found objects." She spends countless hours rummaging through salvage yards here

in the United States and around the world. "Whenever I travel, I love going to the salvage yards. France is the epicenter because of their beautiful balconies . . . a lot of our pieces incorporate French balcony parts." In fact, well-known interior designer Susan Gulick and Remley spent hours together rummaging through the salvage yards in New Orleans, where Remley was able to collect some beautiful pieces for her work. In short, her work is truly one-of-a-kind.

"I'm always pleased when an interior designer calls and asks me to do something for their home," she says. Right now she is working on a piece for a designer in Richmond—"he wants a dining table base for himself: 96" long and 42" wide with a steel top; so there's a whole engineering component to it, because he only wants four legs. We want to create the clean line he wants in a piece that will hold 400 pounds of metal while still looking delicate."

Remley loves old pieces and classic shapes; yet she also has a flair for creating furniture that extends from extremely contemporary to extremely traditional, fitting a range of interior styles. "Some are more blacksmith looking and some are more refined." And while she uses a lot of old architectural elements in her work, she designs equally as many pieces that retain a classic feel but are crafted without those elements, offering something for everyone's style and taste. "While many people want the architectural grill, many people opt out—it depends upon the client and what they fall in love with."



OPPOSITE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Occasional table crafted from an antique heat register; fire screen made from a New Orleans, 1890s, wrought iron grille; custom bench created from a cast iron colliery panel (a hinged door to a coal chute)—this particular pattern is still seen on row house basement windows on Capitol Hill in DC.

THIS PAGE (TOP TO BOTTOM): Custom bench; the legs of this console are castings from a cast iron baluster thought to be salvaged from a New York staircase, circa 1880; Paris Occasional Table.



One of her favorite table styles she calls “The Rope Twist Coffee Table.” The table has a rope twist trim on all sides, with a glass center. “I love this type of table because it has two shelves, and you can put pretty pieces down below and still see them through the glass.”

So how exactly does the process work from conception through completion? An interior designer or architect contacts Remley through one of three showrooms in the United States that represent her. The interior designer provides parameters for the size, describes what they have in mind, and indicates whether or not they want to use an antique architectural element. Remley draws the designs, which are presented to the client for approval. Once Remley gets the green light, she writes a detailed work order for the blacksmith at the foundry on how the piece is to be fabricated. She spends a great deal of time at the foundry overseeing fabrication. The piece then comes back to her studio, where two painters design a unique finish for it. Salvations has developed its own custom finishes—“about 20 are part of the regular line”—but they are always working on custom colors for designers who have special requests. The finishes are all hand-painted. If it’s a table with a glass or limestone top, the table is



TOP: Two-tier Rope Twist Coffee Table, one of Remley’s favorites

BOTTOM: Nepal Coffee Table

measured in the studio or sent directly to the fabricator to ensure a perfect fit. Once the furniture piece is done to Remley’s standards, it is shipped to the customer.

Equally as exciting as Remley’s tables is her expansive range of custom projects such as her sought after, one-of-a-kind beds and headboards, drapery hardware, vanities, mirrors, and fire screens. For example, she’s done vanity bases in bathrooms, for which she provides the base, and the architect inserts the stone of their choice. Another favorite

is her mirrors. “We do beautiful custom mirrors—sometimes we use old grills, beautiful pieces of architectural fragments. We use them to either frame the mirror or as decorative elements on the frame and then insert the glass behind... these are beautiful, and no two are ever alike.”

As for materials, nothing is off limits. In one console, Remley inserted a crystal ball; in “The Oculus Table,” she incorporated a convex lens from a science warehouse, creating a truly unique effect with a surprise element. She’s even used min-



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After rummaging through salvage yards, furniture designer Barry Remley crafted this hand-forged fire screen for interior designer Susan Gulick; the combined look of metal and stone strikes a balance to the many cushions and soft materials in the room.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN GULICK INTERIORS AT 2004 NSO SHOW HOUSE. PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOACHLANDER DAVIS.

erals such as Calcite and Pyrite in custom mirror frames.

Remley looks at a little end table. “This is a valuable little table—a pair of matching 1800s, oval, iron heating grates of this particular shape is really hard to come by. The legs have been heated in the forge and hammered down; the blacksmith tapered the legs down to 3/8 of an inch at the bottom; that takes a long time at the foundry, with a blacksmith hammering away on them. That’s what I love about the iron—it can be made into really beautiful, delicate looking pieces, despite the fact that it’s a hard material—and I think that’s what appeals to a lot of people about our work. The difference between wrought iron and cast iron is that wrought iron is heated and shaped—it can be reproduced. But with cast iron, you theoretically make a new mold, which is very costly. Our clientele prefer having an antique grill that is truly one-of-a-kind. This brings an artistic value to it. These pieces are made one at a time; they are not production line pieces. And the pieces that incorporate old architectural pieces meld both art and history together.” ❖

Donna Cedar-Southworth is a frequent contributor to ChesapeakeHome.

CONTACTS:

Remley’s work is available to consumers through interior designers, architects, and select retailers throughout the United States. Salvations is an American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) Industry Partner and a board member of the Washington, DC chapter of the International Furnishings and Design Association (IFDA). She is represented at the American Eye Showroom in the Washington Design Center (202-554-5744), The Menagerie in Philadelphia’s Marketplace Design Center (215-561-5041), and the SJ Collection in the New York Design Center (212-683-0380). For more information visit salvationsaf.com.

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