



by Judi Burton

The New Year is here and suddenly everything looks a bit old. Maybe a nice home makeover “Do-it-Yourself” style is in order, but this year, you have decided to be more green. So while you would love to go to the nearest furniture store and pick out something brand new, you are faced with the dilemma of what to do with the old furniture—and do you really want to spend all of that money just so that your new wall color will coordinate with your furniture? The more economical and greener option is to keep the old furniture and change the fabric.

Interior decorators know style and are supremely resourceful. They can spot a beautiful piece of furniture when they see one, even if it’s in pieces and covered in cobwebs in the back of a thrift shop. Ryan Smith of Upholstery Inc. in Myrtle Beach works with many interior designers. “Much of my business is from people who have

no intention in keeping the piece. They have a great eye for fantastic furniture and keep me busy. It’s a good bet that if the piece is less than 10 years old, it is not worth buying. Older pieces tend to have been made with better materials and with more care.”

Looking for that perfect piece of furniture can be fun and rewarding. Some tips on finding upholstered treasures are to lift up the skirting and look at the legs. If they are wood and in good shape that is a good sign. Pull up the seat cushion and see if the piece has coil springs. They should be “eight-way hand-tied springs,” which means they are all connected with twine. Feel the back cushion for feathers. Even if you want to replace the feathers, this will tell you the piece was custom made. Look for tags like Baker, Stickley, Century or Hickory White. These companies are well known for their craftsmanship. Some things to avoid are plastic parts; the legs are a dead

give away. Side of the road discarded furniture was fine to pick up years ago, but now we are facing a bed bug epidemic, and an infested piece might not be worth the trouble. Discount furniture store items are not as well put together, so if you are making an investment in heirloom furniture pieces that isn’t the place to go.

If you already have furniture that you would like to brighten up, the first thing you should do is call an upholstery company and get a yardage and labor quote. Then, you can consider fabric choices. Beyond color and pattern options, part of your decision should include whether or not the material has been recycled. There are hundreds of companies that offer recycled fabric specifically for furniture. You can also go the organic route and adorn your favorite love seat with organic cotton and natural latex filling. Both are all-natural alternatives, which will not cause harm to your health.

Whatever you decide to pick, make sure to keep the old material. You can recycle that into new pillowcases or make crafts with it. Smith suggests you go to a local fabric store, such as Rose Arbor Fabrics on 70th St N and Kings Hwy. "They will help you pick out the best fabric for your color scheme. They know what they're doing and have helped hundreds of others. Plus, when you buy local, they have more to gain if they treat you right."

Next, find a professional upholsterer. Some things you can do yourself, such as dining room chair seats. If you have a staple gun, it is easy to pop out the bottoms and change the fabric; but for the big upholstered pieces, it's safer to rely on an expert who has done it a thousand times before and

will do the work properly, protecting your investment and guaranteeing a professional result. They will repair framing, refinish wood trim, replace missing trim pieces, and take a lot less time. Heavier fabrics take a heavier sewing machine, especially when piping, fringe and other materials build up to a very thick stitched seam. For a professional-looking job, you need the right equipment, a lot of time, and experience.

It's a joy, in the end, to be able to sit back and enjoy your resurrected treasure, complete with new fabric, cushions, trim and finish. And the best part of redoing furniture is you can do it over again in time. Furniture should last for ages, especially considering how much you invested in a well-built and crafted heirloom quality piece.

And your house guests will always be impressed with your green attitude for recycling, and sense of style. You can keep your conscience clear for another year.

For more info on upholstering recycled treasures, call Ryan Smith at 843-283-8517; and for fabrics, call Rose Arbor Fabrics at 843-449-7673. See ad page 10.

