



Stuart Grannen of Architectural Artifacts in Chicago stocks old doors, fireplace mantels and other fixtures he rescues from wrecking crews. AP

Old building bits good business

CHICAGO (AP) — Gargoyles from turn-of-the-century buildings now grimace wickedly in suburban living rooms, thanks to urban archaeologists who race the wrecking ball to meet rehabbers' growing appetite for artifacts.

About 100 architectural salvage companies around the country are working to fill orders from homeowners hankering for anything from a brass door handle from the old Chicago Stock Exchange building to columns from office buildings designed by the architect Louis Sullivan.

Many of the salvage companies opened within the past decade during a boom in demolition in such cities as New York, Baltimore and Chicago.

"These businesses are probably stronger than they've ever been," said Gordon Boch, editor of the *Old House Journal*, a New York-based publication for rehabbers.

"There's an increased sophistica-

tion about restoring old houses, greater demand for the product, less of a supply of good-quality mantels, stained glass, elaborate doors — things of this nature are harder to find . . . than when you had a surplus of demolition of buildings," he said.

"In some, these bits of vintage buildings are art. But for many rehabbers, they also ensure architectural integrity.

"People are realizing the value of keeping the old doors . . . or the old built-ins to keep consistency with the building," said Annie Steinwedell, manager of Salvage One in Chicago.

Salvage One is considered the grandfather of the city's architectural salvagers. Its converted warehouse has five stories crammed with 8,000 doors, more than 1,200 fireplace mantels, 1,000 decorative windows, and a couple tons of door-knobs, hinges and other vintage hardware.

Prices range from \$35 for an old

pine door slathered with layers of cracked paint to \$40,000 for a turn-of-the-century mahogany bar.

At Architectural Artifacts in Chicago, shoppers wade through rows of gargoyles and terra cotta fixtures.

Owner Stuart Grannen opened shop three years ago, aiming to save Sullivan treasures from demolition.

"I just went and introduced myself to every wrecker . . . and said, 'When you have a building, please call me,'" Mr. Grannen recalled.

When the phone rings, he and his assistants rush to the demolition site and remove doors, columns — anything that catches their eye.

Two years ago Mr. Grannen bought the rights to an entire downtown block set about to be razed. "I was up there in the middle of the winter taking huge gargoyles off the buildings," he said.

"It's dangerous, but it's also an incredible amount of fun to dismantle what's been there for 100 years." Mr.

Grannen said. "If we didn't do it, they'd just knock it into the ground."

It's also lucrative, according to Mr. Grannen, who said sales have increased about \$120,000 each year since he started the business.

Betsy Whitney of suburban Lake Forest paid Mr. Grannen \$1,800 for a restored maple fireplace mantel for her family's 1909 coach house. "It goes perfect with our decor," she said.

A reproduction would have cost at least twice as much, Mrs. Whitney said, adding, "I just like the older look and just the detail that you can find."

"It's the details that make the project nice," agreed David Fencenko, an architectural designer who restored his 100-year-old Chicago home with moldings and other vintage items, some of which had to be stripped and refinished.

"With a little bit of elbow grease, a \$35 newel post that would have cost \$300 new . . . looks brand-new."