

RENOVATE

INNOVATE



A poster for the exhibition "MOIRA ORFEI" is mounted on a wall. The top half features a portrait of Moira Orfei with a large black hairdo and a red background. Below the portrait, the name "MOIRA ORFEI" is written in large, stylized green letters with a black outline. Underneath, the exhibition dates are listed: "DAL 25 SETTEMBRE" and "AL 1 OTTOBRE". The word "PIACENZA" is prominently displayed in the center, with "PIACENZA EXPO" below it. At the bottom of the poster, the phone number "TEL. 533.540227 - 348.3466334" and the website "www.moiraorfei.it" are printed.

**MOIRA ORFEI**  
DAL 25 SETTEMBRE AL 1 OTTOBRE  
PIACENZA  
PIACENZA EXPO  
TEL. 533.540227 - 348.3466334  
www.moiraorfei.it







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# CONTENTS

Introduction  
7

## RECLAIMED

**Atlanta Treehouse**  
12

**Collage House**  
18

**Whitehorse**  
26

**747 Wing House**  
32

**Saigon House**  
38

**Remisenpavillon**  
44

**The Love Art Studio**  
50

**Cañon City Container Cabin**  
58

**Telegraph Pole House**  
64

**Hut on Stilts**  
72

**Tiny Texas Houses**  
78

**El Mirador House**  
84

**The HemLoft**  
90

## REVIVED

**York House Apartment**  
98

**The White House**  
104

**Tiny House**  
110

**Milanese Apartment**  
116

**Astley Castle**  
122

**Eixample Apartment**  
130

**Russell-Fontanez Apartment**  
136

**Home B**  
142

**Berlin Summer Apartment**  
150

## REIMAGINED

**Alpine Barn Apartment**  
160

**Light Studio**  
168

**Garage Loft**  
176

**La Fabrica**  
182

**Tribeca Loft**  
190

**Carlton North Apartment**  
198

**The Chapel**  
204

**The White Room**  
210

**Kent Reservoir**  
216

**Le Moulin et Le Four**  
224

**Fitzroy Loft**  
230

**Pavilion d'Été**  
236

**The Berlin Loft**  
242

**Directory**  
251

**Picture Credits**  
252

**Acknowledgements**  
253



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# INTRODUCTION

*Renovate Innovate* features a collection of one-of-a-kind dwellings from around the world realized through the innovative reuse of existing structures, materials and objects – a process otherwise known as upcycling. In my previous book *Upcyclist: Reclaimed and Remade Furniture, Lighting and Interiors*, published in 2015, I presented upcycled designs primarily for their aesthetic merits, independent of their association with the environment or thrift. Similarly, in the book you are holding right now, upcycling for residential architecture is observed through the same lens, proving that there is an artistry to reuse and that good design lasts. The designers' motives for each of these projects combine desires to preserve architectural heritage and reap energy-saving benefits or, in some cases, are born out of a necessity for low costs and for convenience. Each design tells a story of how a beautiful and timeless home can emerge out of doing something unpredictable with materials and buildings that others might consider unrecoverable or redundant.

In the dawn of a sharing economy, in which independent homeowners compete with the traditional hotel industry via websites like Airbnb, our curiosity about extraordinary dwellings is growing. With the opportunity to stay in unusual, more personalized, 'lived in' homes now at our fingertips, we are offered rich experiences in places that generic hotel rooms cannot match. Staying in homes rather than hotels opens our eyes to non-commercial, impromptu architectural and interior styles, while increasing our appetite for unique spaces that are a break from the norm.

Another shift that is a sign of the times is the new wave of websites and books fetishizing cabin and tiny house living, indicative of our desire for an escape from urban excess. The charm of these dwellings is that they hint at the simple life, a luxury that many of us crave. Most of the designers in this book have a similarly romantic view towards the homes they have created. The act of stripping things back to the bare essentials and using up what already exists offers respite in a world that is already overwhelmed with too much stuff and too much information. The tiny house movement in particular is suggestive that more of us are realizing the joys of owning less and being in touch with nature. Perhaps for some it also invokes memories of a childhood spent building dens out of whatever materials were on hand.

Reuse may not always be the most straightforward or cost-effective solution. Materials sometimes need to be extracted, cleaned and treated. Old spaces must be stabilized, damp proofed and insulated, all of which can be labour-intensive, expensive work. But as this book demonstrates, those who do take on the challenge can produce homes with an appeal that couldn't be achieved with brand new materials.

This book is divided into three sections: Reclaimed, Revived and Reimagined. Reclaimed features dwellings that have been built using partially or entirely upcycled materials, such as shipping containers, telegraph poles, railway sleepers and even a Boeing 747. Revived features existing residential properties that

have been renovated in intelligent ways to highlight the original characteristics of the buildings, in some cases with the application of reclaimed materials and vintage pieces. Reimagined features buildings that used to serve another function and have been converted into living spaces. Examples include a former Methodist chapel, an old chocolate factory, a garden atelier and a cattle barn.

With millions of tonnes of construction waste ending up in landfill each year, common sense dictates that finding ways to divert it is crucial. An adaptable approach and a creative eye, exemplified by the architects, designers and tastemakers in this book, offer a wealth of exciting opportunities and housing possibilities. They are not just utilizing what we've already manufactured and built, but are finding inventive ways to connect the past and the future; the old and the new.

This adaptability is key to home design, because living spaces are extensions of ourselves that inevitably grow and evolve. Relics of the past don't have to be preserved in a time capsule, but can evolve with us. Upcycling and adaptive reuse honour our romantic appreciation for our heritage while respecting the needs of a changing world.

**ANTONIA EDWARDS** FOUNDER OF [UPCYCLIST.CO.UK](http://UPCYCLIST.CO.UK)





# RECLAIMED



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# ATLANTA TREEHOUSE

PETER BAHOUTH | GEORGIA, UNITED STATES

The secluded Atlanta Treehouse, situated in a quiet location in the heart of Intown Atlanta, has been named Airbnb's most wishlisted property in the world, and guests frequently describe their experience of sleeping there as magical and transformative. The designer behind one of the world's most desirable lodgings is former environmental advocate Peter Bahouth. Bahouth has served as the Executive Director of Greenpeace USA, the Ted Turner Family Foundation and the US Climate Action Network. He is also a stereoscopic photographer. Sixteen years ago he fulfilled his ambition to build three treehouses in the wooded lot next to his house.

The reclaimed materials used to build the treehouses were gathered as Bahouth went along; there were even serendipitous moments of stumbling upon used windows that fitted the exact spaces which needed filling. He found the first treehouse window left out for trash about a block away from his home and replicated it at salvage yards. He also picked up some old, wooden restaurant doors.

He says, 'I didn't want it looking like a prefab and felt it would be a bit contrary to build structures within seven trees that were not respectful of the trees themselves. I think that, when using items made from wood, they should be utilized for longer than the time it took for the tree to produce it.'

Bahouth's interest in one-of-a-kind-ness partly stems from his mother frequently taking him to flea markets as a child. 'I grew up being a collector and preservationist,' he explains. 'I like old, well-crafted things. For me that has always provided some satisfaction; things that don't look like what everybody else has. In Atlanta and in America generally, you can find the same shirt in any city you visit. It's strange how you can be driving down a street that looks just like a street 15,000 miles away. I think people react to that.'

Bahouth believes the popularity of the treehouse is simply down to it offering an experience that's a little bit different. He says, 'We live in a homogenized, pasteurized and franchised kind of world and I think people have a sincere desire to stay in something unique. People know that when they go to a hotel, the rooms above and below them are usually exactly the same. They want to do something special and there aren't many ways to do that.'

Surprisingly, the largest group of guests that come to stay in the treehouse already live in Atlanta, suggesting that visitors are not just looking for accommodation, but are specifically looking to experience Bahouth's magical dwelling. 'I think people like the appeal of being somewhere green in the city and, here, they can almost go camping, with the luxury of a bed,' he posits. 'When I give people the tour, I tell them about the 150-year-old southern shortleaf pine called The Old Man who watches over the place. It gets people to look up, rather than down at their computer.'









## PHOTOS

**page 13 and 14, top right:** Bahouth had always wished for a bed on wheels that rolled out onto a platform so you could sleep under the stars. The bedroom of his Atlanta Treehouse also looks out on to a small stream.

**page 14, top left:** The design for the treehouse was guided by not only the trees, but the collected materials. Some of the reclaimed windows used are about 70 years old and have butterflies pressed between two sheets of glass.

**page 14, bottom:** The cluster of treehouses is comprised of three separate rooms. They are connected by rope bridges adorned with fairy lights and supported by seven trees, including a 150-year-old southern shortleaf pine referred to as The Old Man.

**page 15:** Bahouth is an avid collector, so the interior is sensitively furnished with antiques and flea-market finds. The large living-room window was one of the last pieces he sourced and, by sheer chance, fitted the space exactly.

**page 16:** The living room, otherwise referred to as Mind, contains a small balcony overlooking an acre of woods. The bedroom was named Body and the third tier, Spirit. The latter is a platform that surrounds The Old Man – the largest of the seven trees.



# COLLAGE HOUSE

S+PS ARCHITECTS | MAHARASHTRA, INDIA

Shilpa Gore-Shah and Pinkish Shah are founding partners and design principals of award-winning firm S+PS Architects. Both are alumni of the Sir J. J. College of Architecture in Mumbai and the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

The concept for their Collage House was based around an ad hoc, eclectic visual language inspired by the found objects and ‘collaged’ architecture of Mumbai. ‘We were very concerned that sustainability in architecture was heavily leaning towards a points-based system, premised on buying products that would achieve so-called “green buildings”. Unfortunately, these were dreadful, banal spaces with no soul,’ Gore-Shah explains. ‘Cameron Sinclair, the co-founder of Architecture for Humanity, once said, “When you build a beautiful building, people love it. And the most sustainable building in the world is the one that’s loved.” We were interested in exploring an approach that would lead to more delightful and joyous spaces, while demonstrating the use of recycled materials in unexpected ways. These materials carry with them the patina of time, nostalgia and memories of a life lived in another era, none of which are possible to create authentically with the new.’

The collage concept is immediately expressed in the distinctive corner facade of the building, constructed from recycled windows and doors. In and around the house, further reclaimed elements can be found at every turn. Externally, salvaged materials include scrap metal, tile samples, pipe offcuts and stone sourced from the existing site. Inside, flooring is made from old Burmese teak rafters and purlins, while upcycled furniture sits alongside colonial and antique pieces.

‘For both of us, having lived in the city of Mumbai for most of our lives, it is impossible to ignore the way half the population lives in informal settlements,’ says Shah. ‘However, if one looks closely, there are many lessons to be learnt. We were keen to upcycle not only materials but also ideas, knowledge and experience without romanticizing or fetishizing them. We also wanted to explore how these ideas could be made “acceptable” to a more mainstream audience.’

He adds, ‘In India, with limited resources, one sees examples of frugality and resourcefulness all around you every day. Nothing ever goes to waste. Everything is infinitely recycled until absolutely nothing more can be done with it. After the economic liberalization of India in the 1990s, with the onset of globalization, one has begun to see the rapid creation and production of waste, especially in urban centres, leading to large landfills. We are unfortunately repeating all the mistakes of the West, in spite of having native methods and systems that can reduce waste. This project attempts to shine light on some of these ideas, but at the same time updates them for the modern age, within the mandate of what architecture can do. We think it is imperative that we deal with this situation of waste holistically. There is a desire for the new and for anything Western in India – unfortunately, sometimes at the cost of erasing valuable local knowledge and native wisdom. Designers will have to continue to find ways to balance these aspirations along with finding new meanings, expressions and value in age-old practices.’





