



2001

Architectural Salvage: Saving or Stealing?

Carol Henkels
University of Pennsylvania

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ARCHITECTURAL SALVAGE: SAVING OR STEALING?

Carol Henkels

A THESIS


In

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

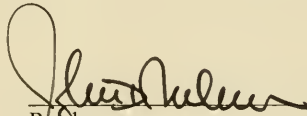
2001



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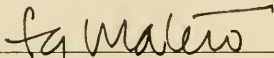
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*To my mom, Barbara Brass Henkels,
who inspired in me a love and respect for things of the past.*

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I would like to acknowledge the numerous individuals who contributed to this thesis. Each interviewee who took time out of his or her busy schedule to meet and freely share with me their business and opinions has made this thesis worthwhile. Gail Winkler's patience and tolerance with my drafts allowed me her invaluable direction. John Milner, my reader, offered a fresh perspective. Stephen Wagner, my business partner, was incredibly understanding of my numerous absences from work. My mother and sisters thoughtfully assisted me plan my June wedding, and the unending generosity of my father enabled me the privilege of attending graduate school. Finally, the daily support and encouragement of Michael Lilley, my fiancé, kept me plugging away to the bitter end.

1. The first part of the book is a general introduction to the subject of the history of the English language. It discusses the various factors which have influenced the development of the language, such as contact with other languages, internal changes, and the influence of social and cultural factors.	
2. The second part of the book is a detailed account of the historical development of the English language, from its earliest roots in Old English to the modern forms of the language. It covers the major changes in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation over the centuries.	
3. The third part of the book is a study of the English language in different contexts, such as in literature, in science, and in everyday life. It examines how the language has been used to express different ideas and emotions, and how it has changed to meet the needs of different communities.	
4. The fourth part of the book is a collection of exercises and examples designed to help students understand the historical development of the English language. These exercises include reading passages, grammar exercises, and vocabulary exercises.	
5. The fifth part of the book is a glossary of the most important words and phrases used in the book, along with their historical origins and meanings.	

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ARCHITECTURAL SALVAGE: SAVING, or STEALING?

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The history of salvage and the reuse of building materials is about as old as the art of building itself. Historically people reused building materials and parts for several reasons including lack of raw material, high costs of new materials and aesthetic value. Later Romans helped themselves to stone from the Coliseum and other ruins to build or add on to their own homes.¹ The Saxon monastery, St. Albans, in England was rebuilt in the eleventh century using roman bricks from the nearby ruins of Verulamium, a Roman British town. Considerable quantities of stone bearing the marks of Norman masons were used to reconstruct the south transept gable at Gloucester Cathedral. William Randolph Hearst pursued “parts of old preferably gothic” for his mansion at San Simeon, California (**figure 1**) and his medieval castle at St. Donat’s in Wales.² By the early

¹ Matthew Schultz. “Salvaging Heritage: The Non-Profit Way.” *Living Cultural and Natural Heritage*. Petersburg, Ontario: Trent University, 1992.

² Carol Rosier. “Architecture and Junk: the Archeology of Reuse.” *Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain* 65 (1998): 1-2.

nineteenth century England had a thriving trade in ancient woodwork, stained glass and other architectural antiquities that has lasted into the present and traveled west across the Atlantic to the United States.

Architectural salvage as a booming *commercial* industry is a recent development.³ Today the sale of building parts includes paneled rooms, decorative trim, flooring, doors, windows, stained glass, interior and exterior light fixtures, and vintage bath fixtures such as sinks and tubs. Even old bricks, wooden shutters, fireplace surrounds, iron grills, gates and fences are bought and sold for money. This thesis will concentrate on how salvage is gathered and reused, with particular focus on pillaging of occupied and unoccupied buildings in Philadelphia for their valuable architectural features.

There is much written about the design issues that incorporate salvage into new space but there is relatively little written about the commercial side of salvaging and reuse of architectural fragments. Carol Rosier, an English woman, has written two articles on the subject in the United Kingdom, one in 1996 and one in 1998. The work is based on her dissertation submitted in 1992 to the University of Bristol titled “Any Old Iron? A Study in Architectural Salvage.” Rosier states that in the last twenty years the resale of

³ In Britain there has been a well-established trade in architectural antiques and second-hand building materials since at least the 18th century. The last 20 years, however, have witnessed a massive expansion in both the number of outlets and the variety of items available. From a mere handful of dealers in the mid 1970s, Britain alone now has over 1,000 outlets offering items as diverse as genuine Tudor paneling, historic bricks and terracotta through to 1950s bathroom fittings. Salvage is a big business: the combined turnover of dealers is in the region of £75 million a year. Carol Rosier. “Architectural Salvage: Historical Tradition or Chronological Confusion?” CRM 17:5 (1994): 14.



Figure 1. Salvaged stone windows and balconies on the rear façade of Casa Grande from the Hearst Castle, San Simeon, California. The square Doge's Suite loggia is 15th-or 16th-century Venetian. Two levels above, at the back of the third-floor Gothic Suite is a set of windows from a 14th-century French church.⁴

⁴ Built between 1922 and 1939 for William Randolph Hearst the architect is Julia Morgan. San Simeon is an eclectic American Castle built in a southern Spanish Renaissance style. It incorporates many Gothic influences and utilizes endless, architectural pieces and fragments from Europe. Thomas R. Aidala. *Hearst Castle: San Simeon*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1981.

fragments has become a booming business in England, in excess of over \$100 million a year.⁵ A similar trend is apparent in America where the number of salvage outlets has multiplied in the 1990s and an increasing amount of salvage is being imported to the United States from countries such as France, Indonesia, China, and India.⁶ In the age where Home Depot and Lowes allows each homeowner to do-it-himself, building new is cheaper than recycling the old; but, as seen in the numerous interior design magazines, old building parts are being incorporated into new construction to give an accent or to bring a little flavor of the past into a space equipped with modern conveniences.

Even less has been written on the salvage industry in the U.S. than has been written abroad. Because of the lack of written documentation on the commerce of buying and selling building parts, the primary tool for gathering information for this thesis has been through interviews with a range of individuals working in or acquainted in the field in the Philadelphia area. They include proprietors of salvage businesses, investigative reporters, law enforcement officers including the police and Federal Bureau of Investigation, and members of various non-profit agencies. As a supplement to first hand investigations and interviews, off-site library and online research has been done to gather additional information about this new growth industry and related issues.

This thesis is composed of six chapters, the first and last is the Introduction and

⁵ Carol Rosier. "Architectural Salvage: Historical Tradition or Chronological Confusion?" CRM 17:5 (1994): 14.

⁶ Dianne Donovan. "From Ruin to Riches: Salvaging Architectural Fragments Is Bigger Business than Ever." *Preservation* 52:1 (2000): 19.

Conclusion. Chapters Two, Three, and Four each discuss one of the three main topics in this paper. Chapter Two deals with who buys architectural salvage retail and how they use it. Chapter Three defines and explains proper avenues for acquiring architectural artifacts and Chapter Four details the recent pillaging properties in Philadelphia for their parts. Chapter Five discusses solutions to the theft addressed in Chapter Four. It also introduces ethical methods for obtaining and introducing salvage in the for-profit sector. The Conclusion, Chapter Six, proposes possible solutions not yet tried in the prevention of artifact theft and suggests related issues that need to be researched.

Chapter 2

Who Buys Architectural Salvage

Most of the merchandise sold by salvage retailers such as the Architectural Antique Exchange in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Artefact Architectural Antiques in Furlong, Pennsylvania and Sylvan Brandt in Lititz, Pennsylvania is sold to homeowners and professionals renovating older houses or building new ones. The majority of these consumers are not concerned with creating period restorations. The buying market is the upper and upper-middle class. Less affluent households find these prices too high and use flea markets and auctions where salvage is generally sold at lower prices.⁷

Rick Fehrs established Artefact Architectural Antiques in 1987. Specializing in stained glass, mantles, and garden ornaments, they attribute 60% of sales to private homeowners and about 40% to the trade, specifically architects, designers, and builders. Most of their clients come from within a two-hour radius that includes New York City, Philadelphia

and their respective suburbs.⁸ Artefact Architectural Antiques does have a website⁹ but they mainly rely on more traditional forms of advertising like trade publications, word-of-mouth, and repeat customers such as designers and architects.

The Architectural Antique Exchange, which among other things sells whole paneled rooms and full vintage bars, has clients across the country. When Mark Charry opened the Architectural Antique Exchange in 1971 he promoted his business through direct mail and trade publications. Early on he found a niche for outfitting theme restaurants with bars, paneling, mirrors and mantles to create rooms with lots of period atmosphere. By the 1980s his customer base included some private residential users, many of whom had found his store through the yellow pages. The customer base for Architectural Antique Exchange expanded through the eighties to include hotels, clubs, golf courses and movie theaters, most of which extended the theme restaurant idea from the 1970s. Charry even found himself buying back and reselling some of the same items that he had sold and installed ten years earlier. In the 1990s the Architectural Antique Exchange customer base grew to include wealthy homeowners from across the country: these individuals bought grand mantles, mirrors and paneling to fit out the “great room in the 10,000-square-foot trophy house (**figure 2**).”¹⁰ By 2000 Charry’s main advertising venue had

⁷ Rick Fehrs. Proprietor of Artefact Architectural Antiques, interview by author, 7 February 2001.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ www.artefactantiques.com.

¹⁰ Dianne Donovan. “From Ruin to Riches: Salvaging Architectural Fragments Is Bigger Business than Ever.” *Preservation* 52:1 (2000): 18.

shifted from the yellow pages and trade publications to his website¹¹ which has proven just as effective and far less expensive than advertisements in shelter magazines.¹²

Sylvan Brandt specializes in antique wood floors. Dean Brandt of Sylvan Brandt sells about 25% of his newly milled antique flooring to builders, 45% to architects, and 30% to homeowners. Brandt attributes most of his business with builders and architects to a well established repeat customer base who use old floorboards in high-end new residences to add an ambiance that is a big draw to buyers. The majority of Brandt's new business is generated by either word-of-mouth or through his new website.¹³ Like the Architectural Antique Exchange Brandt has watched his customer base spread to a national level in the 1990s, both he and Charry attribute this expansion to their presence on the Internet.

In her January/February 2000 article for *Preservation*, the magazine published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Dianne Donovan illustrates the recent change in climate to embrace salvage. In 1972 the Chicago Stock Exchange Building came down and killed Richard Nickel who was inside desperately trying to gather architectural artifacts from the remains of Louis Sullivan's 1893 masterpiece. In the 1970s few people were interested in saving building parts, Nickel was one. Thirty years later in 2001, five miles north of where Sullivan's Chicago Stock Exchange once stood, Stuart Grannen's Architectural Artifacts is selling a single Stock Exchange copper-over-iron stair baluster

¹¹ www.architecturalantiques.com.

¹² Mark Charry. Proprietor of Architectural Antique Exchange, interview by author, 30 January 2001.

¹³ www.sylvanbrandt.com



Figure 2. Cherry room paneling with fireplace mantle and leaded glass library cabinets for sale at the Architectural Antique Exchange. Acquired from salvage rights to an estate. (Photo taken by author, January 2001.)

for \$4,200.00. As Donovan has noted, salvage “isn’t a guy-in-a-pickup-truck kind of job anymore. It’s big business – and it’s lucrative.”¹⁴

In 1991, Clem Labine published an index and directory of suppliers of architectural salvage in *Traditional Building: The Professional Source for Historical Products*. That year there were forty-three listings for salvage suppliers from across the country. Each entry included the address and description of items the retail salvage company offered. By 1997 this index and directory became an annual inclusion in *Traditional Building* and the following year there were sixty-one salvage suppliers listed. By 2000 the number of salvage outlets listed had increased to ninety-one, over two thirds of which have websites.¹⁵ In addition, *Traditional Building* has its own website with a permanent easy-to-use page that posts their index and directory to salvage suppliers online.

Mark Charry from the Architectural Antique Exchange credits this boom in demand to increased public awareness spurred by various new media attention. The PBS hit, the *Antiques Road Show*, the *Martha Stewart* lifestyle phenomenon, *This Old House* show and the dozens of shelter magazines have all brought the world of foraging for old buildings and their parts into the mainstream, so that vintage and antique items are now valued by a broad spectrum of people. Charry believes the media have really supported and promoted the glamour end of the salvage business and states, “the media have people

¹⁴ Dianne Donovan. “From Ruin to Riches: Salvaging Architectural Fragments Is Bigger Business than Ever.” *Preservation* 52:1 (2000): 19.

¹⁵ Gagne, Cole. “Architectural Antiques Source List.” *Clem Labine’s Traditional Building: The Professional Source for Historical Products* 4:6 (1991-2000).

so tuned in that it makes the sale easier.” Charry also sees the current recycling trend as an additional stimulus to the salvage industry.¹⁶ The continued popularity of architectural salvage is evidenced in Mary Wagner’s article. “Make me an offer,” featured in the recent February/March 2001 issue of *Restoration Style*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Mark Charry. Proprietor of Architectural Antique Exchange, interview by author, 30 January 2001.

¹⁷ Mary Wagner. ““Make Me an Offer!” *Restoration Style* 7:1 (2001).



Figure 3. Salvaged Eagles from the roof of Penn Station in New York City, reused for the Market Street Bridge in Philadelphia. (Photo taken by author, March 2001.)

New York's Penn Station designed by McKim Mead & White was destroyed in 1963 to make way for a large tower. The huge building was two city blocks large and built of pink granite. Before the demolition a few things were salvaged, among them were fourteen granite eagles designed by Adolph Alexander Weinman who also designed the 1916-dime and half-dollar. The eagles had been on the roof of the station and weighed 5,500 pounds each. Four of salvaged eagles were given to the Fairmount Park Art Association who had them installed on the Market Street Bridge by 1967.¹⁸

¹⁸ Penny Balkin Bach. *Public Art in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

Chapter 3

Legal Sources of Architectural Salvage

A simple online search yields hundreds of salvage websites posted by retailers from coast to coast.¹⁹ All of the salvage retailers interviewed for this paper agree that the industry has become increasingly more competitive in the last ten years. Their businesses have grown exponentially and as demand has increased so have supply prices. They are finding it increasingly more difficult to offer a steady quantity of merchandise as more salvage businesses compete for a shrinking supply of artifacts. As demand increases these retailers are coping in different ways, including expanding their product base, importing salvage, and even manufacturing reproduction items.

The Architectural Antique Exchange, Artefact Architectural Antiques, and Sylvan Brandt acquire most of their inventory from buildings slated for demolition, meaning they

¹⁹ www.google.com: search for “architectural salvage”.

purchase salvage rights from the demolition company in charge of tearing down a particular structure.²⁰ Dean Brandt of Sylvan Brandt buys salvage rights for floor joists and ceiling beams in old commercial and industrial buildings. The Antique Architectural Exchange and Artefact Architectural Antiques both obtain the majority of their merchandise by purchasing salvage rights to residential buildings, usually entire estates. Thus, they have lawful permission to enter a building scheduled for demolition and to strip it of architectural items they view to be of value such as mantles, doors, paneling, windows and door hardware. Often the time permitted to enter and dismantle a building is extremely short, perhaps only a day or two. Additional sources of salvage include flea markets and auctions as well as other dealers offering their own merchandise. A less common source of salvage is individuals who sell specific items in their houses.

Vintage flooring accounts for 90% of Brandt's business with the remaining 10% devoted to a variety of old house-parts including, hardware, doors, and plumbing fixtures, as well as built-in hutches, cupboards and cabinets. Sylvan Brandt tries to maintain constant quantities of several antique woods but is sometimes limited by short supply.²¹ Raw materials once common and popular in America have been overused to the point of extinction. Brandt offers white pine, yellow pine, oak, poplar, and chestnut flooring. Long leaf yellow pine flooring noted for its straight grain and density is Brandt's most popular wood and because it is not available new it makes his vintage boards highly

²⁰ Several Philadelphia demolition businesses, including Geppert Recycling and the National Association of Demolition Contractors (NADC), were contacted for this thesis. The author was unsuccessful in finding anyone willing to discuss the salvage aspect of the business with her.

²¹ Dean Brandt. Proprietor of Sylvan Brandt, interview by author, 2 February 2001.

sought after. When Dean's father, Sylvan, started the business in the 1960s he acquired old wood by dismantling local country homes and barns that needed to be torn down. Initially Sylvan Brandt found these buildings by word-of-mouth. Soon he began to advertise on Christian radio stations, which had a large following of Amish, and Mennonite farmers in Pennsylvania. By the 1970s they began to advertise on Christian radio in Ohio, West Virginia, New York and eventually in Canada. Most of their flooring came from old Pennsylvania Dutch-like farms and homes. In the 1980s father and son Brandt began purchasing salvage rights to old industrial and commercial structures from which they use the floor joists and roof rafters to mill into floorboards (**figure 4**). In the last ten years, Dean Brandt finds that he has to go further afield and pay more to acquire stock. As flooring becomes scarce he feels the demand for a broader range of salvage products. In order to not be solely dependent on such a specialized item as antique flooring Brandt is planning to open a large warehouse to the public in 2002 where he will sell a wide range of salvaged building parts including, doors, shutters, windows, tubs, pedestal sinks, hardware and built-in cabinetry. Customers will be able to stroll the aisles and help themselves to whatever salvaged items he has available.²²

In the 1970s Architectural Antique Exchange obtained their supply through dealers listed in trade publications. By the 1980s Charry also began to acquire much of his merchandise at auctions. Mark Charry with the Architectural Antique Exchange and Rick Fehrs from Artefact Architectural Antiques have both turned to imports and

²² Dean Brandt. Proprietor of Sylvan Brandt, interview by author, 2 February 2001.



Figure 4. Salvaged floor joists and roof rafters from demolished industrial buildings before being milled at Sylvan Brandt's workshop and warehouse. (Photo taken by author, February 2001.)

reproductions to bolster their supply in order to keep up with demand. The Architectural Antique Exchange imports shipments from France several times a year that include antique furniture and lighting. He used to import from England but says that source has already been cleaned out of salvage and antiques. Charry now attributes 10% of his business to reproduction mantles and doors. People come to him searching out hard-to-find period items, doing reproductions allows Charry not to turn them away.²³ Rick Fehrs of Artefact Architectural Antiques provides reproduction mantle pieces for the same reason. Like Mark he also imports, his imports consist of garden statuary, iron patio furniture, trellises, and fences (**figure 5**).²⁴ He imports from Morocco, Indonesia, and India. Charry feels that salvage retailers import cheap reproductions from third world countries.²⁵

Another source of salvage comes from domestic mega-auctions.²⁶ The Great Gatsby in Atlanta is billed as one of the largest auction houses in the country. They have a constant supply of items for sale 24 hours a day on their website and eBay. In addition, they schedule onsite auctions that draw dealers from across the country throughout the year.²⁷ The Internet has greatly aided the search for specific salvage items. Dealers, builders, architects, designers and homeowners can now navigate the industry and search out hard to find items with out spending day after day in antique and salvage malls, markets, and

²³ Mark Charry. Proprietor of Architectural Antique Exchange, interview by author, 30 January 2001.

²⁴ Rick Fehrs. Proprietor of Artefact Architectural Antiques, interview by author, 7 February 2001.

²⁵ Mark Charry. Proprietor of Architectural Antique Exchange, interview by author, 30 January 2001.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ www.gatsbys.com

stores. This is significant to the salvage industry, which primarily deals with one-of-a-kind items.





Figure 5. Salvaged domestic and imported iron fencing and garden ornament for sale at Artefact Architectural Antiques, Furlong, PA. (Photo taken by author, February 2001.)

Chapter 4

Illegal Sources of Architectural Salvage

Salvage rights, auctions, flea markets, and private sales are the avowed sources of salvaged materials but these sources are frequently supplied by illicit activity.

As mentioned in the previous chapter the architectural salvage industry has grown considerably and become increasingly more competitive in the last ten years. This frenzy for architectural salvage seems to have spurred a whole new crime wave that has pervaded Philadelphia and seems to be spreading across the country. Tom Ferrick, Jr. is a staff writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, whose column appears twice a week in the “City and Region” section. In the late 1990s his articles addressed the issue of stolen architectural items as he chronicled numerous cases of artifact theft in the neighborhoods of Philadelphia.

Perhaps the most infamous story began late Tuesday night, February 23, 1998, when a pair of eighteenth-century iron gates was stolen from Saint Peter's Church in Society Hill at Fourth and Pine Streets. These gates, each seven feet tall and weighing between 300 and 400 pounds apiece, hung at the west end of the burying ground at Third and Pine and were padlocked the night of the theft (**figure 6**). Their replacement cost was estimated at about ten thousand dollars. From the outset experts speculated that the gates were stolen to fill an order for a dealer or for a collector from another state. Their disappearance was widely broadcast and within a week an "informant" returned the gates to the church. It is now believed that within that week the gates had been stolen, sold and resold, but because of the publicity they had become "too hot to handle"²⁸ and were therefore returned. Another set of gates, stolen a few weeks earlier from an unidentified apartment building near Eleventh and Spruce Streets in Philadelphia did not get as much publicity and were never recovered.²⁹

In October that same year, an entire collection of identical brass and amber glass light fixtures were removed in one evening from homes in Oak Lane along Stenton Avenue, Smedley, and Sixteenth Streets.³⁰ These fixtures had been in place for over seventy years. More than a dozen lights were taken with a value estimated at \$150 to \$200 each.

²⁸ Thomas Ferrick Jr. "Thieves Lift Historic Church's Gates: There's a Market for Wrought Iron. The Fixtures were Irreplaceable." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 February 1998.

²⁹ Joseph A. Slobodzian. "Retired Labor Agent Accused of Fencing: Charles Kass is Expected to Plead Guilty to Charges of Dealing in Such Items as the Gates from a Church." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 October 2000.

³⁰ Thomas Ferrick, Jr. "Stealing Philadelphia Grate By Grate." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 October 1998.



Figure 6. Gates at Saint Peter's Church, Pine Street between Third and Fourth Streets, Philadelphia. (Photo taken by author, March 2001.)

Also in October 1998 police discovered what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse near Dauphin Street in North Philadelphia. Inside over 300 architectural items were stored. The majority of items were iron grates for cellar windows as well as a few iron gates and parts of fences. These items were apparently awaiting shipment to out-of-state flea markets, auctions and antique stores, many in Maryland and Virginia.³¹ Such iron pieces could retail for several hundred dollars each. Also in 1998, along North Broad Street, numerous large ornamental lanterns designed as part of the architecture of commercial buildings, banks, libraries and other important public and private buildings to which they belonged were discovered missing.³² Such grand lanterns could bring in thousands of dollars each on the private market.

This month it is antique lights and cellar grates. Last month it was brass doorknobs in West Philadelphia. Last year Germantown had a serious problem with iron grates being stolen. The dismantlement of Philadelphia proceeds at a rapid clip. For a city whose history is its saving grace – not to mention its most marketable asset – we've done precious little outside Center City of make sure it stays in place. The city has become – involuntarily – a major exporter of architectural ornament. Our stolen concrete planters sit in gardens in Canada. Our ornamental gates grace fences all over the South. Our terra cotta gingerbread adorns apartment walls in Soho.³³

In April, 2000, a young couple, John LaVoy and Susan Finkelstein, decided to buy an abandoned Queen Anne house near Fiftieth Street and Springfield Avenue in West Philadelphia. The 110-year-old house was in a state of disrepair but still retained vestiges of its elegant past including a dozen stained-glass windows and an original oak fireplace

³¹ Apparently a truckload of salvage was carted out of this warehouse to an unidentified location in Maryland each week. Thomas Ferrick, Jr. "Stealing Philadelphia Grate By Grate." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 October 1998.

³² Thomas Ferrick, Jr. "Stealing Philadelphia Grate By Grate." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 October 1998.

³³ *Ibid.*

mantle in the master bedroom. After working evenings and weekends on the house for a month the couple was planning to move-in in June. One afternoon in late May the couple arrived at the house to discover four of the stained glass windows had been stolen from the first floor. The couple reported the theft to the police, secured the doors with new locks, and left late that night: when they returned the next day they found the remaining stained glass windows and mantle expertly stripped from the second and third floors. The loss was estimated at \$18,000 to \$30,000.³⁴

Also in April, 2000, decorative wooden columns were stolen from the front porches from the Logan section of Philadelphia. The month before, all of the carved finials had been stolen from the porch newel posts from the 4600 block of Spruce Street in West Philadelphia. A coalition of civic groups collected funds in order to offer a \$7,500 reward for information that would lead to the arrest and conviction of thieves who have pilfered architectural ornaments from West Philadelphia.³⁵ They are especially hoping to recover the stained glass windows and mantle stolen from LaVoy and Finkelstein.³⁶ So far there have been no leads.

In October, 2000, a year and a half after the stolen gates were returned to Saint Peters Church, federal labor agent Charles Kass was charged with fencing more than \$120,000

³⁴ Ferrick, Thomas Jr. "Stripping a City of Its Treasures." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 May 2000.

³⁵ The University City District and the University City Historical Society each contributed \$2,500 to the fund. Cedar Park Neighbors, the Spruce Hill Community Association, and the Powelton Village Civic Association also donated money. Philadelphia Newspapers Inc. – which publishes the *Inquirer*, gave \$1000 to the fund. Thomas Ferrick, Jr. "Reward Thieves with Jail Time." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 June 2000.

³⁶ Thomas Ferrick, Jr. "Reward Thieves with Jail Time." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 June 2000.

worth of stolen architectural items between January, 1997, and August, 1998, including the historic gates from Saint Peter's Church in Society Hill. It turns out that Kass had paid a man \$600 for the gates, which he resold to an antiques dealer in Havre de Grace, Maryland, for \$1,100 stating they had been obtained legally from a demolition contractor. Later the dealer heard of the theft at an auction and suspecting his gates to be the ones in question, he drove to Philadelphia to verify that they matched the church. He then called Kass and told him that he had 48 hours to pick-up and return the stolen gates. Kass did refund the \$1,100 and return the gates to St. Peter's but managed to hide from the police his true role in the incident and was not investigated until he was caught on tape in an unrelated federal probe.³⁷

In fact, Kass had been buying a great deal of architectural salvage including mantles, doors, stained glass, grates, moldings, and decorative switch plates. He is said to have carried wads of cash, used no receipts and typically resold the items to antique dealers. Kass bought stolen items five to six times a week from two or three thieves who seemed to have a regular supply of stolen artifacts. Kass contacted his suppliers from his phone at the office of the U.S. Department of Labor and met the thieves at lunchtime behind his office building. He bought items for a few hundred dollars and resold them for two to four times that amount to antique dealers. He always told the antique dealers the items were obtained from demolished buildings.

³⁷ Slobodzian, Joseph A., "Retired Labor Agent Accused of Fencing: Charles Kass is Expected to Plead Guilty to Charges of Dealing in Such Items as the Gates from a Church." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 October 2000.

In a little over one year \$393,420 had been withdrawn from his checking account including over \$110,000 from automated teller machines.³⁸ If Kass had bought a minimum of \$300,000 worth of stolen items and, like the gates at Saint Peter's, sold them for only twice as much, \$600,000, Kass was a conduit for more than half a million dollars of stolen property a year. If there were five other dealers like Kass in the city of Philadelphia, that would mean that over \$3 million worth of historic architectural artifacts could be illegally stripped from city's built fabric each year, with a retail value of \$6 million. The numbers are staggering. These figures are only estimates based on one successful criminal, so far there is no way to accurately calculate monetary losses to the city, let alone reverse the aesthetic damage done to one of the most architecturally historic and significant cities in the United States.

Most recently, Tom Ferrick has brought to public attention the systematic removal of small decorative bronze lion heads from the ornate bronze fence surrounding Philadelphia's City Hall.³⁹ The fence was designed by Alexander Milne Calder, as was most of the statuary in the building including the impressive statue of William Penn atop the clock tower. At a New York antique show in January 2001, four of these lion heads were tagged for sale at \$1,300 for the set. Adam Wallacavage, a South Philadelphia photographer, recognized them as part of the City Hall fence. The dealer, who was based in Lambertville, New Jersey, said that he bought them from a friend who picked them up

³⁸ Joseph A. Slobodzian. "Labor Official Admits Role in Thefts of Relics: An Investigator for the US Department of Labor Was Recorded Making Deals to Fence Stolen Architectural Items." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 November 2000.

³⁹ Thomas Ferrick, Jr. "Oh, Where Have Our Lions Gone?" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 October 2001.

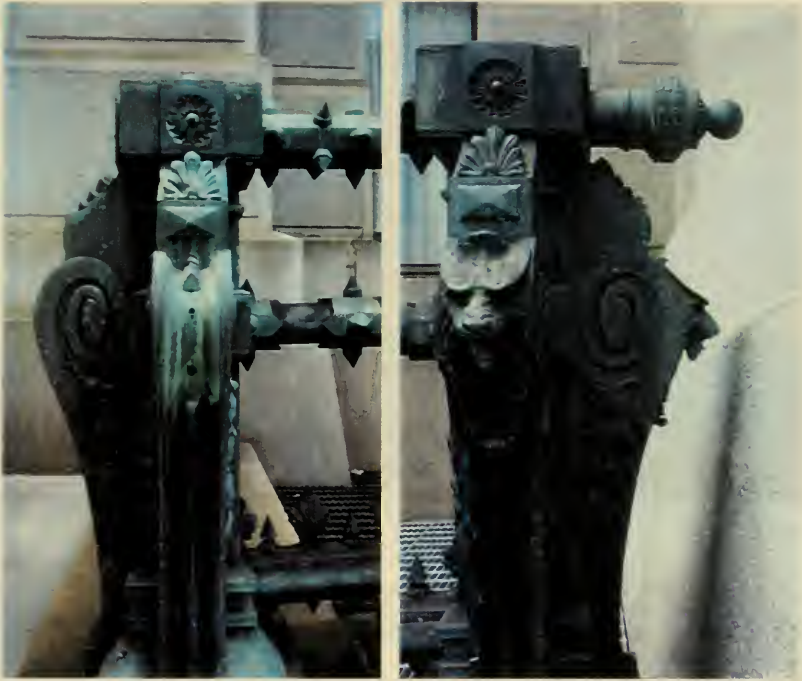
for cash at the Lambertville Flea Market. Initially the lion heads were probably removed from the fence surrounding City Hall by street thieves who sold them to a middleman like Charles Kass, who then sold them to an antique or salvage dealer. Like the other artifacts circulating in the antique trade, they may have been resold numerous times. Of the original 145 bronze lion heads, only 17 remain (**figure 7 and figure 8**).⁴⁰

For every story of theft that makes it to the newspapers there are many that do not. In 1996 Matthew Schultz⁴¹ found a section from an elaborate cast and wrought iron fence for sale in a Philadelphia antique store on Sixth Street between South and Bainbridge. It turned out to belong to the Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts. The fence surrounded the Ridgeway Library (which was undergoing a complete renovation at the time) on Broad Street between Christian and Carpenter and Streets. Schultz, who was in charge of the Avenue of the Arts Inc. at the time, had been tipped off by Peter Dobrin, columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* who had been covering the development along the Avenue of the Arts. It took four riggers to properly pick-up the fence section from the antique store in Sixth Street as well as transport and reinstall the fence to its original location at CAPA. Obviously theft of such an item was well planned and required special equipment. Many other sections of the fence were never recovered and the total restoration of the fence cost over \$250,000 (**figure 9**).⁴²

⁴⁰ Thomas Ferrick, Jr. "Oh, Where Have Our Lions Gone?" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 October 2001.

⁴¹ Mathew Schultz founded and ran the Philadelphia Architectural Salvage Company Ltd. (1987-1992), which was a non-profit salvage company founded to salvage architectural artifacts from city condemned buildings, document the buildings, provide free preservation workshops, and sell salvage at prices affordable to the middle and lower middle classes.

⁴² Matthew Schultz. Proprietor of Philadelphia Architectural Salvage, interview by author, 28 March 2001.



Ornate bronze fence surrounding City Hall, Philadelphia designed by Alexander Calder. Figure 7. (left) shows the fence after thieves have stripped the lion heads. Figure 8. (right) shows one of the few fence sections with the lion heads still in tact. (Photos taken by author, March 2001)



Figure 9. Restored historic iron fence surrounding Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts on Broad Street between Christian and Carpenter Streets. The total restoration cost over \$250,000. (Photo taken by author, March 2001)

In the 1970s the Philadelphia Streets Department reconstructed the Girard Avenue Bridge. They disassembled the old bridge, which included removing many of the decorative bronze panels. Because these panels were not properly stored by the Streets Department during the reconstruction they began to disappear. When the thefts were discovered the Fairmount Park Commission collected the remainder of the loose panels and stored them at Memorial Hall. However, at the bridge there were several decorative sections that were left intact and even these began to disappear. Various concerned citizens including Matthew Schultz repeatedly alerted the Chief Engineer for the City who showed no interest. Eventually a chain link fence was put up (**figure 10**).⁴³ Today about 30% of the decorative bridge sections remain in place, some are still stored at Memorial Hall, and some have been spotted hanging as artwork in various residences in an around Philadelphia including a designer show house in Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia.⁴⁴

Both the Philadelphia Police and Federal Bureau of Investigation stress that architectural salvage crime is hard to prosecute because it is underreported, the items are virtually non-traceable, and their value is difficult to quantify. Captain Quinn, Commanding Officer of the Central Detective Division in Philadelphia, estimates that about 75% of all architectural thefts are not reported. In 2000, there were only eleven cases reported to his office, which covers four center city districts. He estimates there may have been from

⁴³ Matthew Schultz. Proprietor of Philadelphia Architectural Salvage, Ltd., interview by author, 28 March 2001.

⁴⁴ Amy Fritag. Development Manager at Fairmount Park Commission, 1996-2000, interview by author, 29 March 2001



Figure 10. Section of the Girard Avenue Bridge in Philadelphia protected by a chain link fence. (Photo taken by author, March 2001)

thirty to fifty thefts that year in districts under his command. When thefts are reported they are not given top priority but treated as minor property crimes unless the item is valued at over \$2,000. If the value is less than \$2,000, the crime qualifies as a misdemeanor, which in Philadelphia is punishable by probation and a fine.⁴⁵ Charles Kass, the only person convicted of fencing stolen architectural salvage in Philadelphia to date, was sentenced to an 18-month prison term, fined \$36,000, and must perform 100 hours of community service during three years of supervised release after completing his jail term.⁴⁶

Architectural theft is not a “sexy” crime.⁴⁷ It does not involve injury to people or robbery of money or items whose value is easily understood. It falls way down on the police and FBI’s list of priorities. The police or FBI might find a warehouse full of what they know to be stolen grates and stained glass windows, like the one on Dauphin Street, but unlike a stolen car whose serial numbers quickly can be linked to the rightful owner and whose value can easily be determined, there is no way to trace the items to their original owners and no way to access their real value.⁴⁸ The person who sells the warehoused items can easily hide behind the excuse that the salvage was obtained from demolished buildings.

Captain Quinn believes salvage crimes run in cycles driven by the demands of the

⁴⁵ Captain Quinn. Commanding Officer of Central Detective Division, Philadelphia Police Department, interview by author, 6 March 2001.

⁴⁶ Joseph A. Slobodzian. “Ex-labor Agent Gets 18 Months in Prison.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 March 2001.

⁴⁷ Stephen Heaney. FBI, interview by author, 1 March 2001.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

market. However, it seems that the police prevented at least some of this illicit trade when they confiscated the North Philadelphia warehouse on Dauphin Street in 1998. Since the seizure of the warehouse, reports of stolen grates in the neighborhood have subsided. In 1999 only three cases were reported. In 2000 eleven incidents were reported and one arrest was made. So far in 2001 there have been no reported cases however this crime typically increases during the warmer seasons.⁴⁹ What remains uncertain is whether the illegal stockpiling of illegally obtained architectural artifacts has simply shifted to another warehouse in another district or if the activity has been curtailed. Tom Ferrick believes this is a citywide epidemic that, like graffiti, needs to be addressed by the city as a whole, not merely individual neighborhoods. Unlike graffiti, architectural theft it is not easily reversible. A wall may be painted or cleaned but a missing artifact may be irreplaceable. You cannot pick up nineteenth-century cellar grates at the local hardware store.⁵⁰

The FBI becomes involved in salvage theft when merchandise is transported out of state to flea markets, auctions, and other dealers. According to Stephen Heaney, Special Agent in the Theft Division of the Philadelphia FBI, several cases are currently being investigated. As with the police, this crime is low on the FBI system of priorities and is difficult to prosecute. Asked whether this is a crime for hire or a crime of opportunity, all law enforcement officers lean toward the former. Ferrick believes that 80% of the stolen items are bought by 5% of the people who, like Charles Kass, act as middlemen. Ferrick,

⁴⁹ Captain Quinn, Commanding Officer of Central Detective Division, Philadelphia Police Department, interview by author, 6 March 2001.

⁵⁰ Thomas Ferrick, Jr. Metro Columnist for Philadelphia Inquirer, interview by author, February, 2001.

the police, and FBI agree that there is an underlying “don’t ask, don’t tell” mentality between salvage suppliers and salvage retailers. If a retailer (dealer) has a customer who wants a particular style mantle or a specific size or color of stained glass window, he lets his suppliers know. And a supplier like Kass gets the word out to his street contacts who then make efforts to acquire the item, often-illegally. A supplier like Kass produces the desired item and the retail dealer typically passes the artifact along to his customer without questioning its provenience.

Unoccupied buildings present another problem; it is not usually discovered they have been stripped until much later. Both the police and FBI are more concerned with theft from occupied properties than from abandoned or neglected buildings. As one of America’s oldest settlements, Philadelphia has an incredible inventory of historic fabric. The present mayor, John Street, has scheduled 12000 vacant building for demolition from 2001 to 2003.⁵¹ When Matthew Schultz ran Philadelphia Architectural Salvage Ltd., a non-profit salvage yard, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, his company had salvage rights to strip all building being demolished by the City of Philadelphia. At that time a little over 1000 buildings were torn down a year. When he gained access to a building, his crew knew that they had only one day to work because these neglected buildings could not be secured and would be picked clean by thieves overnight.⁵²

⁵¹ Cynthia Burton. “Street Tells of Philadelphia’s Outlook on Blight.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 March 2001.

⁵² Matthew Schultz. Proprietor of Philadelphia Architectural Salvage, Ltd., interview by author, 12 February 2001.

Architectural Antique Exchange, Sylvan Brandt, and Artefact Architectural Antiques all acknowledge the problem of stolen items floating throughout the trade and estimate that 5% to 10% of all antique and salvage merchandise on the market is illegal. Tom Ferrick thinks that number is much higher. He estimates that 60% of what is on the market today has illegal origins with half stolen from occupied premises and half stripped from abandoned buildings. The Police and the FBI decline to speculate what percentage of salvage on the market might be stolen, but suggest that the numbers may fall between the estimates of the dealers and Tom Ferrick.

Chapter 5

Causes and Prevention of Architectural Theft

It is a common misconception that the theft of architectural elements is committed against mostly abandoned buildings by scavengers. Knowledgeable thieves target these architectural items with the demand of their market in mind. Some say that the theft of exterior metal work is done by “shopping cart people” who rummage and collect aluminum, copper, and iron to sell as scrap or salvage. This may be true for copper, which has a relatively high value but iron is worth only pennies on the pound.⁵³ A cellar grate weighing twenty to fifty pounds may be manageable enough to load into a shopping cart and take to a salvager, but gates such as those at Saint Peter’s Church and the Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts require special tools. And only well-equipped professional thieves could enter and carefully remove the twelve stained-glass windows and the oak mantle in the LaVoy/Finkelstein residence in West Philadelphia.

Most salvage theft in the Philadelphia area has occurred in the last 6 to 7 years, which coincides with the recent boom in the retail salvage market. North Philadelphia has been particularly hard hit. Entire rows of abandoned houses have been stripped of marble steps, wooden shutters, copper cornices, downspouts, doorknobs, iron gates and grates, terra cotta trim, stained glass, ceiling medallions, light fixtures, window hardware and mantelpieces. Even the marble door surrounds, capped by keystones have been removed and sold as far away as Texas and Canada where they are reused probably as garden ornaments. Individually most of these crimes seem like petty theft but collectively the monetary value reaches to hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars. And, market value of these items seems to be inversely proportional to their proximity of origin. Philadelphia ironwork sells for five times as much in the southern states, Texas, or Canada as it would in Philadelphia.⁵⁴

Although architectural theft in other cities has not been investigated for this paper, the FBI believes Philadelphia is particularly hard hit with North Philadelphia suffering most from the crime.⁵⁵ Agent Stephen Heaney believes that this is because Philadelphia has more historic fabric than any other city in the United States and that many of its neighborhoods, like North Philadelphia, are neglected and unsupervised. Frank Seaman,

⁵³ Captain Quinn. Commanding Officer of Central Detective Division, Philadelphia Police Department, interview by author, 6 March 2001.

⁵⁴ Thomas Ferrick, Jr. Metro Columnist for *Philadelphia Inquirer*, interview by author, February, 2001.

⁵⁵ Stephen Heaney. Special Agent for Philadelphia Division of Theft, Federal Bureau of Investigation, interview by author, 1 March 2001.

an estimator for Anvil Iron Works in South Philadelphia, states that barely a week goes by when he is not called out to a job involving theft. The widespread theft of ironwork from public and private property in Philadelphia has led the Philadelphia Preservation Alliance to post suggestions on its website to prevent such occurrences. According to the Alliance, “Philadelphia has an extraordinarily rich heritage of ironwork, from the fine wrought iron of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century through the highly ornate cast iron creations of the late nineteenth century. Much of the elaborate ironwork that makes New Orleans famous was fabricated in Philadelphia.”⁵⁶ The Philadelphia Preservation Alliance recommends building owners document their ironwork with photographs and mark it in some unique manner so if it is ever stolen, it can be easily identified if it is recovered.⁵⁷ Eighteen-century and nineteenth-century gates were designed to lift off for easy maintenance; because they have no secured hinges it is important to secure the gates with some sort of bicycle or pad lock or have a skilled ironworker weld a cap to the top of the pintle. **(Figure 11)**

Another precaution that people can take to protect their property is to install exterior motion-detector-lighting that deters thieves during night hours. These lights are designed to go on automatically when something in the area moves. Therefore if anyone approaches the property the light immediately illuminates the local vicinity and scares

⁵⁶ www.libertynet.org/historic/iron.html

⁵⁷ Police and the FBI have held several “open houses” to display recovered items, but victimized property owners have no way of proving the items came from their homes. The gates from Saint Peter’s Church were the only items recovered from Kass that could be traced back to their owners making restitution impossible. (Joseph A. Slobodzian. “Ex-labor Agent Gets 18 Months in Prison.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 March 2001.)

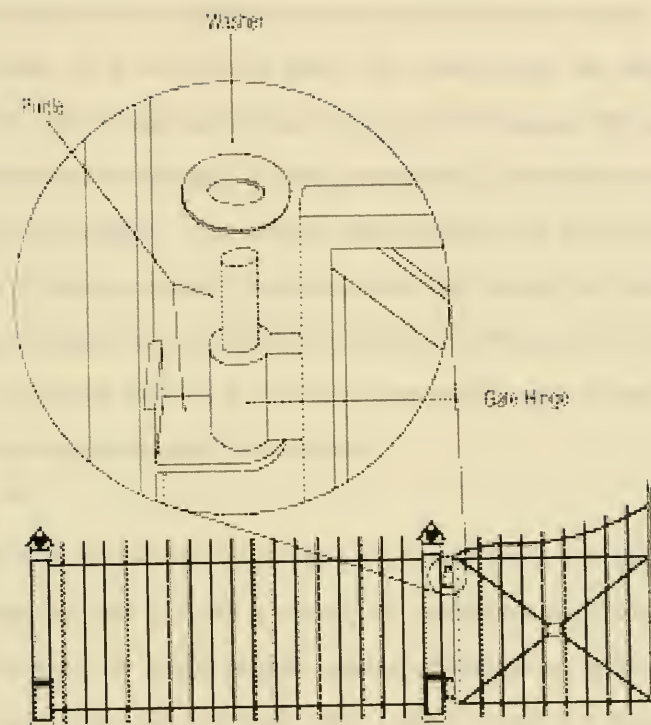


Figure 11. Diagram from the Philadelphia Preservation Alliance showing how to secure an iron gate against theft.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ www.libertynet.org/historic/iron.html

away prospecting thieves. This sort of lighting is a proven means of property protection. Besides protecting property, another way to stem the trade of stolen building artifacts is to promote change in the way people do business within the salvage industry. There are various theories as to how salvage dealers can avoid buying and selling stolen merchandise. The first and most obvious advice given by the police, FBI, and salvage retailers interviewed for this paper, is to trust your instincts. Do business with reputable individuals and companies. Get to know industry dealers and the ones with good reputations will become apparent. Do not shop with a “don’t ask don’t tell attitude.” Ask middlemen and dealers where particular items come from. If there is ever a doubt as to the legality of the item, don’t buy it. This will also pressure the seller to make sure he is well informed about the origin of his merchandise.

On a larger scale, communities need to be aware of theft within their neighborhoods. Tom Ferrick has done good job at alerting the Philadelphia community but local awareness remains low. Ferrick suggests neighborhoods should band together, be aware of their built environment, and report every incident of theft that occurs in their community. Homeowners need to report everything that gets stolen to police and insurance companies so this crime can be properly studied, tracked, prosecuted, and prevented by the authorities.⁵⁹ Also, local initiatives like the reward program sponsored

⁵⁹ The Chubb Group Insurance Company, a major residential property insurer in the Philadelphia area, was contacted for this paper. According to Kathleen Crolazak in the archive department they have few claims for stolen pieces or architectural property and they do not track the few that come in so there are no statistics available from them.

by the community civic groups in West Philadelphia are excellent ways to experiment with different preventive measures.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Certainly there is a place for the commercial recycling of building materials and architectural details but with it come ethical issues that need to be addressed. While the new trend to use old building parts is a way of preserving unique and beautiful artifacts from buildings that no longer have viable uses, the huge demand for salvaged building parts has spurred the illegal acquisition of architectural antiques. This obliges the dealer and consumer to be conscientious of how he or she buys recycled architectural items.

The only way to truly eradicate the trade of stolen architectural artifacts is to require documented provenience of every salvaged item for sale.⁶⁰ At the moment this appears to be an impossible task, compounded by the fact that the architectural salvage industry deals with items that have a long history often involving numerous owners. A starting

⁶⁰ Provenience is the original source or origin of something.

point could be instituting a law that would require salvage dealers to label all existing inventory and to tag anything new entering the market with its provenience. For this, demolition companies would be required to issue certification or place a “brand” on every object removed from their buildings through sale of salvage rights. This might curtail middlemen who use demolition as an easy and untraceable excuse for selling stolen items. And for conscientious property owners some sort of microchip could be devised and attached to vulnerable architectural features that would enable tracking of an item if stolen. Perhaps this would be a way to infiltrate the maze of thieves, middlemen, and dealers involved in the illicit industry.

This thesis is a simple start that delves into a few aspects of the architectural salvage industry. One of several ideas for further research is to investigate whether buildings are demolished because the sum of their parts is worth more than the building as a whole. The practice of architectural salvage has been around since man began making shelters, but the recent commercial surge in architectural salvage is a phenomenon unique to the present culture. Today the salvage industry is born of choice rather than necessity. This use of building parts as non-functional home décor has become a fad that has jumpstarted an entire industry and unfortunately triggered a black market to sustain it. However, on the whole, the incorporation of old artifacts into new space is a positive trend that celebrates architecture built in the past and, despite its downside, this new industry should be heartening for Historic Preservationists and non-Preservationists alike.

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