FROM drab TO FAB

Craft techniques to turn unwanted items into stylish décor

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MEYER AND RENE PHOTOGRAPHY
My gratitude in life is due to my Creator who inspired me daily through His creation.

I am ever grateful to my Husband Alan, my greatest supporter, who never gets bored at my ideas. My adorable kids who recognised everything I made. Colia, you are my proudest fan, Calvyn my practical fan and Ame my precious soundboard.

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INTRODUCTION

There’s a cliché that says the only constant in our world is change. It may be a cliché, but it’s also true. Technology, the environment, society’s structures, even relationships – all are changing at a rate that is often far less comfortable than many of us would like. And it’s for that very reason that so many people are fighting to slow things down, to preserve the good, to ‘save the planet’, to create beauty and not to be conned into a throw-away mentality.

In the interests of ‘going green’ and sustainable living, we are constantly asked to reduce, reuse and recycle, but I suggest that while you’re on your way to becoming a fully fledged ‘RE’ warrior, don’t limit yourself. What about repurpose, restore, return, revitalise, revise, revisit, reinvent and, most importantly, rethink?

If you ask most people what ‘junk’ is, they’ll say it’s anything old, worn and drab, of little value, or something that should be thrown away. I, on the other hand, see junk as a springboard for ideas, a starting point for something grand and fresh for the garden or home. Items of junk can become new creations overnight. Over the years I have started to look and think differently about items lying around my house or garden – pieces that ordinarily would have been discarded because they were way past their best. With a rescue and craft process, all junk can be given a second chance and welcomed back.

I grew up on a farm in the Free State province. Everything was homemade from jam to ball gowns. The skills I learned from creating something from nothing have proved to be invaluable. There are no limits to the imagination. I love homemade items, but I dislike things that merely look homemade.

The concept of ‘grand’ can differ. I noticed while running craft lessons that each individual’s final object looked different to the person’s next to them. The difference was in the love and effort they put into their work, thus ‘grand’ took on a different meaning with each person. My ‘grand’ is merely an idea to inspire you to discover your own ‘grand’.

Perhaps you’re wondering how shabby can be grand and fabulous. In my opinion, shabby chic is stylish rather than fashionable, and therefore your style reflects a quality as opposed to a ‘newness’. And quality is always fabulous.

In this book I aim to give you ideas for ‘reuse’ (to use an item again after it has been used), ‘recycle’ (the breaking down of used items into raw materials that are then used to make new items), as well as ‘up-cycle’ (to take a plain, ugly or cheap item and turn it into something of beauty and value). In this manner, the amount of waste entering landfill sites may be reduced and resources and materials conserved. Moreover, I hope the ideas will show you how a dash of creativity can transform unwanted products into desirable items. From Drab to Fab also provides you with the necessary techniques to achieve this, because one person’s junk is another person’s treasure.

It gives me great pleasure to create things that people want in their homes, or to give a friend a handmade gift. My objects are not necessities, but rather things that elevate your life. I hope this book will inspire you to create something from nothing, taking something menial and transforming it into something beautiful and decorative. It does not require a lot of skill, money or resources. You just need to start somewhere, and when you are done, to stand back and proudly proclaim that you did it yourself! Every object in this book represents a recycled or reused item that has been modified by a craft technique to create an objet d’art for the home.

The techniques themselves are very simple and achievable for any crafter. I learnt them from my mother, my mother-in-law and friends, or discovered something by chance. Someone once said that ‘the best learning process of any kind of craft is just to look at the work of others’.

So invent outside the ordinary, have fun and enjoy the results!
Think left and think right, think low and think high. Oh! The things you can think up if you only try.

Dr Seuss
GLOSSARY OF CRAFTS

AGEING
A process that precipitates maturing to create an instant shabby look. It only works on metal objects and is achieved by painting such objects with a rust activator or by burning them over an open fire. (See page 10.)

CANDLEMAKING
This craft has come a long way since it was first developed by the ancient Egyptians, who we are told, used the core of reeds as wicks in pots of melted animal fat. Although no longer man’s major source of light, candles remain important in marking celebrations, romance and luxury in our homes, and are also significant in various religions. (See page 11.)

CRACKLE GLAZING
A paint effect used to create the appearance of varnish that has cracked with age. Suitable for use on any surface, including wood, stone, porcelain, glass or metal, it gives any object a spectacular make-over for an old-fashioned or shabby-chic look. (See page 12.)

DECOPAGE
Also known as pasting, decoupage with cut paper dates back to twelfth century China, but the craft has even more ancient roots from Siberia. It was not until the seventeenth century that it became known as decoupage as a result of its enormous popularity in France and Italy. Decoupage is a way of decorating almost any surface with pieces of cut paper, glue and varnish. The raw decorative materials of decoupage are all around us: magazines, cards, wrapping paper, napkins and illustrated catalogues – all waiting to be transformed into something beautiful. The real magic of this technique is in the way in which the object is finished; a variety of varnishes can make it a very grand object indeed. Interesting effects can be created on a dull surface for an antique ‘cracked’ look (see page 12) once the decoupage is complete. Alternatively, for a bright, mirrored surface, apply gilding before the decoupage (see page 14 for gilding technique). (See page 13 for decoupage.)

GILDING
Gilding is the application of gold, silver or bronze leaf to objects in order to add lustre and beauty to them. (Leaves are usually available to purchase in the form of tissue books.) The technique creates an appearance of dipped gold, silver or bronze, and the craft can be traced back as far as 3000 BC. Gilt architectural embellishment is evident throughout Europe and America. Some of the finest examples are found in the eighteenth century palaces of Louis XIV. His power and wealth were displayed through the very expensive and time-consuming process of traditional gilding. The projects in this book use a more modest and affordable process! (See page 14.)

GLOSS VARNISHING
This is the application of Pratliglo from Kraftex (see Supplier List on page 176) or multiple layers of sealant. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for preparation, mixing, pouring, curing time, problems and tips.

KNITTING
The process of looping and entwining yarn (or other thread) with handheld, eyeless needles to make garments or other items is known as knitting.

PAINTING
Some of the projects in this book require basic paint techniques. This is the art or process of applying paint, colour, varnish or other products to a surface.
PAPIER-MÂCHÉ
Papier-mâché, also called papering, is the art of building a model with torn or shredded paper, bound together with glue (usually water-based). The technique is quickly mastered and offers endless possibilities. (See page 15.)

SANDING
To polish or scrape with a sander or sandpaper.

SEWING
Basic needle and sewing machine work.

WIREWORK
The use of interwoven wire materials (mesh).

WOODWORK
The craft of making new objects out of wood.
BASIC TECHNIQUES

AGEING

YOU WILL NEED:

- kettlebraai or outside fireplace
- charcoal
- firelighters
- matches
- metal objects
- oven gloves
- barbecue equipment
- rust activator

1. Make a fire with the charcoal, firelighters and matches. Place the metal objects directly over the flames or coals, one by one (objects lose their shape if they lie on top of each other) (A). Leave until all paint coatings have burned away. (Note: galvanised paint takes longer than others.)

2. Wearing oven gloves, use tongs to remove the objects from the fire. Take care not to drop them or place them on top of one another as they will easily distort while hot (B).

3. When all the objects are cold, wash them thoroughly under running water to remove any traces of ash (C).

4. Dry the objects with an old cloth; they are now ready for decorating.

5. Follow the manufacturer’s instruction when using rust activator.
CANDLEMAKING – making new ones from old

YOU WILL NEED:

- sufficient quantity of old candle wax from broken or short candles (mixing too many colours or scents may result in an unpleasant appearance or odour)
- safe heat source (ideally an electric hotplate as an open flame is very dangerous near wax)
- old pot for melting wax
- thermometer
- moulds/containers (tins, glass or ceramic pots)
- pre-waxed wicks
- thin wooden stick/kebab stick/pencil
- small sieve

1. Break the wax into smaller pieces, then heat them in an old pot until melted (A). Remove old wicks and any debris with a small sieve. Return the pot to the heat source. Place a thermometer in the pot and measure the heat of the wax; it must not exceed 80 °C.

2. Pour a drop of the liquid wax into the centre of your mould or container, then press a pre-waxed wick onto the soft wax drop. Wait for it to cool and solidify. Place the stick over the opening of the tin and twist the end of the wick around the stick to keep it in an upright position (B).

3. If the wax in your pot begins to solidify, reheat it to liquid state. Pour the liquid wax slowly into the mould, layer by layer. Wait for each layer to dry before you pour another one (C).

4. Repeat this process until you have a smooth surface.

5. The new candle is ready for decorating.
CRACKLE GLAZING

YOU WILL NEED:

- paint brushes
- Heritage Art antique crackle base coat (see Supplier List on page 176)
- Heritage Art antique crackle top coat (see Supplier List on page 176)
- artist’s oil paint
- small soft cloth
- turpentine
- water-based varnish or Kraftex Pratliglo (see Supplier List on page 176)

1. Ensure that the surface of the object to be crackled is dry and clean.
2. Use a paintbrush to apply an even, thin layer of base coat to the object’s surface. It should be dry after about 30 minutes.
3. Paint the top coat over the base coat. This layer must be thick and smooth. Make sure you cover the entire surface.
4. Leave to dry overnight. Cracks will appear on the surface (A).
5. Rub a small amount of artist’s oil paint into the cracks, using a soft cloth (B). (Use a darker colour oil paint than the background of the object. This will give it a natural aged effect.)
6. Once the cracks have been coloured, gently rub the excess paint from the surface with a damp turpentine cloth (C).
7. Leave to dry for at least 24 hours before you apply any varnish (D).
8. Apply four layers of water-based varnish or one layer of Kraftex Pratliglo.
DECOUPAGE

YOU WILL NEED:
- objects to decoupage
- matt emulsion paint (if necessary)
- pictures to cut out
- water-based sealant (PVA glue or modge podge)
- small sharp scissors or craft knife
- cutting mat
- paintbrushes or sponge brushes
- damp sponge (optional)
- water-based varnish or Kraftex Pratliglo (see Supplier List on page 176)

1. Make sure that the surface of the object to be decoupage is clean, smooth and dry. Seal any porous surfaces with matt emulsion paint.
2. Before you cut out an image, coat it with sealant, then leave to dry (A).
3. Cut around the edge of the image with scissors (B). For intricate patterns you may prefer to use a craft knife and cutting mat.
4. Decide how you want to arrange the images on the object. Pictures can be in any design and can overlap each other.
5. When you are satisfied with your layout, paint some sealant onto the reverse side of your first image. Place it in position, press down gently and rub over it with your fingers or a damp sponge to smooth away any air bubbles and excess glue. Repeat this process with each image (C). When you have glued all your images onto the surface of the object, paint two coats of sealant over the surface for protection. Allow the first one to dry before you apply the second coat.
6. The beauty of decoupage is that if you do not like your layout you can re-do it before applying the final layer of varnish. To do this, just soak off the water-based sealant and image by submerging the object in water. Ensure that the object’s surface is properly dry before you start again.
7. When you are ready, apply the final layer of varnish. This protects the object and your decorative work from heat and water (D).
GILDING

YOU WILL NEED:
- object to gild
- sponge brushes
- universal undercoat (if necessary)
- top coat paint (if necessary)
- vinegar (if necessary)
- sheets of gold, silver or bronze leaf
- water-based size (glue for gilding)
- cotton gloves
- scissors
- good quality artist paintbrushes
- small piece of velvet fabric
- water-based varnish

1. Prepare the item you want to gild. If you do the gilding on raw wood, it is advisable to fill in the grain and sand the surface to make sure it is perfectly smooth, otherwise any defects will show. Use a sponge brush to paint the wood with a universal undercoat and top coat paint. Choose a dark paint colour (brown, black or red) for gold or bronze leaf, and a light-coloured paint (white or yellow) for silver leaf. If you gild directly onto glass, clean the surface with a little vinegar added to lukewarm water; it needs to be grease and dust free.

2. Make sure the item is completely dry. Using a sponge brush, apply a thin coat of size evenly with strokes across the entire surface to be gilded.

3. Allow the size to dry completely (refer to the manufacturer’s instructions on the container). It is important not to touch the size as it will mark. The best way to check the state of the size is to use the hair on the back of your hand: if you feel a slight pull, the size is ready.

4. Before working with metal leaf, ensure that your work area is draft free. It is important to wear cotton gloves when handling the leaf. Pick up a sheet of leaf along the tissue border (between the metal leaves there are tissue leaves), then position the foil against the size surface (A) and pass your fingers very gently and slowly over the back of the tissue (B). Metal leaf is extremely fragile. Repeat the process until the size area is completely covered. Cut smaller pieces of leaf for smaller areas and to fill any gaps.

5. Small creases will appear. Don’t worry; brush the creases away with a paintbrush (C).

6. To achieve a bright surface, dab your foil-covered object lightly with a small piece of velvet fabric (D).

7. Seal the gilt with varnish to prevent it from tarnishing.
PAPIER-MÂCHÉ

You will need:

- plastic sheet or oil cloth
- apron
- paper (newspaper, white wallpaper, or unused magazines or books)
- moulds
- petroleum jelly or clingfilm
- water-based glue
- paintbrushes
- scissors or craft knife
- blunt knife

1. Protect your working surface with plastic or an oil cloth (easy to clean). Wear an apron to protect your clothes.

2. Tear the paper (don’t cut it) for a better seam: 5 x 5 cm-wide strips for larger objects and 2 x 2 cm-wide strips for smaller objects (A). (This is just a guide; you can use different measurements.)

3. Almost any object can be used as a mould for papier-mâché (round objects are easier to cover). Coat the surface of your mould with a layer of petroleum jelly to create a barrier (B), or use clingfilm. This will prevent the papier-mâché from sticking to the mould and allow it to be removed easily when dry.

4. Paint glue onto both sides of the paper strips with a paintbrush or simply dip the paper in the glue. Remove any excess glue with your fingers.

5. Position the strips individually on the greased mould from one side of the mould to the other, until the entire mould is covered (C). It is important to remove any air bubbles and excess glue. Do this by gently pressing the glue paper against the surface of your object, always moving from the middle outwards. Repeat the process six to eight times.

6. Leave to dry (this will take six to eight hours). Tap the object to check whether it is properly dry; it should sound hollow.

7. Trim away the raw edges around the mould, using a pair of scissors or a craft knife (D).

8. Use a blunt knife to pry the paper gently away from the mould.

9. The mould is now ready to decorate.