



In a pasture in Waller County, houses rescued from destruction in Houston are being stored until they can find a new owner.

## PRESERVATION *Piece by Piece*

**HISTORIC HOUSTON, INC.** has been quietly going about the business of saving as many historic houses as it can, and salvaging materials from the ones it can't.

The small preservation non-profit has as its primary goal moving endangered houses into the hands of individual property owners or builders who are committed to restoration and reuse. The endangered houses are donated to the organization, which then locates a new owner, coordinates all moving and permitting, and is finally reimbursed by the buyer. If a house cannot be saved, then Historic Houston's secondary goal takes over: to salvage materials from doomed houses. Demolition is done by volunteers (there are currently 88 active ones) and the salvaged materials are sold from a temporary location at 1702 Houston Avenue two Saturdays a month.

The success of Historic Houston's primary goal has been spectacular. Since 2002, 63 houses have come to the organization; in January alone, 23 houses were donated to Historic Houston. Fifteen houses are now in the hands of new owners, while others are mothballed in a pasture in Waller County awaiting "adoption." Community development corporations such as Avenue CDC have helped put houses in the hands of new owners. When that happens, everyone wins: the developer who gets a tax deduction when he gives the house away, and the home owners who get an affordable house.

Most of the donated houses, however, cannot be placed. As a result, they have to be salvaged. According to Historic Houston founder and director Lynn Edmunson, the salvage operation "kind of developed," when she couldn't find takers for a house or didn't have enough



Historic Houston salvages everything, including the bathroom sink.

time to move one to a new location.

When Historic Houston salvages a house it takes everything, unlike architectural specialty businesses that tend to cherry-pick. As a result, the Historic Houston warehouse is jammed with doors, windows, shutters, cabinets, columns, balustrades, trim, flooring, siding, structural lumber — you name it.

Developers are happy to have Historic Houston salvage their unwanted houses because it reduces their cost of clearing a site. Homeowners and contractors are equally happy to obtain low-cost, quality materials for their residential projects, lowering the costs of restoration. The salvage operation has generated enough income to provide the organization with power tools, a generator, and a much-needed pickup truck. What is the next big need? A permanent home for the salvage warehouse.

What most amazes Historic Houston members is that there are so many houses donated to the organization that they can't keep up with the inventory. The next most amazing thing is that there is a huge demand for what they have to offer. Historic Houston has indeed discovered an important niche in the Houston housing market. — Barry Moore

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