



# Reuse, renew, recycle a house

*By recycling a pre-loved house you could save 40 to 60 trees. Removal houses save time, money and the environment by reducing demolition costs, avoiding the waste of new construction resources and conserving the embodied energy of the building.*

## Residual energy

There is a huge amount of residual energy in a house that can be wasted. Purchasing a removal house is a perfect way of reusing this material; better recycled than bulldozed. The virtually irreplaceable timber and the energy embodied in windows, roof and construction materials result in environmental savings. Sadly, there are no certificates available for this sort of energy efficiency.

BY PHILLIP RICHARDS

## House yards

There are firms in most states that advertise house removals; they mean that they move the house not the furniture, either from one place to another, to their yard for holding until a place is ready for it, or to their yards for on-selling.

You've been to a second-hand car yard? Well, consider visiting a second-hand house yard. Buying a recycled house can be a way of getting a house onto your block relatively quickly and at significantly less expense.

In the house yard there are lines of sad looking old houses stuck precariously on spindly temporary stumps. But look again. Once that building was a family home and with a little attention could become one again, once it is picked up off its stumps and relocated.



Characteristically, the Queensland house was made of wood with a corrugated metal roof and built off the ground for termite control, the creation of under-floor space and temperature modification. Consequently, the comparatively light construction makes the Queenslander an excellent candidate for relocation. Brisbanites have been known to take the whole house with them when they move suburbs. Wooden houses such as the classic Queenslander are sought after but it is possible to relocate a brick veneer. In Victoria and southern NSW, the bricks are taken off, the house moved and the owner builder attaches new cladding.

An older house on a valuable inner-city block may need to make space for higher density residences. The original houses may be sold off to a removal specialist, saving the cost of demolition and site clearing. When selling a block to a developer you can quite often arrange to remove the present house and relocate it. The developer may even pay you more for the block as his costs are reduced.

## Our experience

With a ready-made family a ready-made house seemed a good idea to us, so we went to the used house yard. It was a bit like picking a car; how many years on the clock, kicking the tyres a bit and generally checking for wear and tear.

It is strange walking along streets and alleys of houses all resting precariously on piles of bricks or skinny jacks. You have to be fairly imaginative to see a comfortable house hidden behind all the tat but it is there.

*Treasures await discovery in an older house, such as this beautiful floor buried under old linoleum and restored to life by polishing.*

And there it was – a small Queenslander, originally from Brisbane, that had a new roof and wiring of a fairly recent vintage. The three bedroom cottage had been taken from its block to make way for units and moved 250 kilometres north to Maryborough – we had it moved another 60 kilometres north.

The house was nasty inside with poor linoleum, smelly carpets and badly attached 1980s random groove plywood panelling on the walls. Removing these, we found beautiful vertical tongue and groove boards on the walls and, on the floor, wide pine boards that were later sanded and polished up to a soft golden colour. Above the internal doors, the original fretwork that allows air to circulate was still intact.

The price included the move and the re-stumping to council approval. We chose to have it high-set so that there was room to build in later if needed, to have a view and catch any breezes. The

underneath gave us parking, a shady working place and a storage area. New owners since have created more living space by building this space in.

We did have to put in tie rods; these are threaded rods that go all the way up from the bottom plate to the top plate and sort of bolt the house together so that it doesn't go flying off in a storm. This was a long undertaking. We should have taken the cladding off and done it quickly, but I insisted that we drill up from the bottom plate and down from the top; it was a long, frustrating and extremely fiddly job to get the rods threaded through the nogginns – sounds simple, it isn't.

When we first moved into the house it looked like a great insect stuck up on spindly legs and we had to get into it via a ladder – no stairs and they took a while to be completed, too. Gradually, as vegetation grew, the devastation left by the bulldozers recovered and it 'grew' into the landscape.





PHOTO: DAVID WRIGHT HOUSE REMOVERS



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## Buying 'as is'

Another option is to purchase the house 'as is' on the original block and arrange for its removal and re-setting. Ed Dillon and Emma Chilman of Nambour did just that. Ed had looked at project homes that he could build doing much of the work himself. But he liked the idea of re-using an old house, so searched for that perfect fit. He says that only two things matter: the house and the quality of the removalist. He was lucky with both.

They are very happy with the find, believing that they will save about \$100,000 on the cost of the cheapest project home. Ed points out that the house was built 60 to 70 years ago and contains magnificent hardwood that would be impossible or extremely expensive to replace today. Taking up the shagpile carpet they exposed a hardwood floor that polished up beautifully. Ed estimates the present day value of the timber in his house is about \$300,000.

The couple, doing the work when they can, have added steps (front and back), painted throughout, grouted tiles and replaced taps in the bathroom. They didn't like the placement of the original carport and so built that into a wide deck (18m<sup>2</sup>) and added a new carport to the other side near the back door.

There are advantages with a moved house: it is often better built by craftspeople; in some, the ceilings are high; the internal walls are usually wood panelled vertical boards; the external cladding is thick weatherboard; and the frame is solid, tough hardwood not thin, bent pine. Emma pointed out that their house was so well constructed that nothing moved, bent, twisted or split

*Houses can be moved intact (above left) or in two halves (above right).*

during the journey – it was set down as intact and solid as when it was built.

## Bringing up to code

Many older houses, once moved, will have to have updates to modern codes. Typically the owner builder may have to re-roof or at least put in approved roofing screws (most are sold now with new roofs), tie downs (rafters to top plate) and tie rods top plate to bottom plate. Because most of these houses are stumped, steps will be needed. The stairs don't come with the building because each set is specific to the site so new stairs are necessary. Another piece of advice from removalists is to allow the house to settle for a few weeks before trimming the doors and windows.

Ed noted that an upgraded meter box will be required for connection and that cost has to be factored in. It is also a good idea to check that there is a laundry. When a house is lifted everything from the bearers up goes; anything below is left. Often in Queensland the laundry was under the house and so there is no laundry in the new house – provision has to be made to come up to code.

Because the studs are mortised into the bearers, there was no need for tie rods. Instead they only had to use strapping tie downs from stud to bearer – the bearer was so hard that normal nailing was impossible and they had to use a coil gun. There was a surprise under the house: the soil test failed to notice huge lumps

of wood below the surface – sleepers from an old tramway. Nothing would budge them and the stumping couldn't go ahead. Eventually an excavator used a screw-plug to split the sleepers so that the concrete for the steel stumps could be poured. This held the job up.

## Costs

Rod and Donna White purchased a small two-bedroom house in North Brisbane for \$250 on the internet and had it lifted up, stored in a house yard for six months and then moved to their small block on the Sunshine Coast. It is in pristine condition with good roof, guttering and polished timber floors. Rod and Donna have added carpets to the bedrooms, a new stove and are changing the shower recess. Otherwise it is good to go once connected to the services.

Costs vary greatly, of course. The cheapest wooden three bedroom house with one bathroom in a removalist's yard seen recently was \$35,000. This is the cost to have it put onto your land, properly stumped. You need to connect utilities and jump through any council hoops. A good company should explain the options. Houses can cost over \$100,000.

If you sell to a removal company it is unlikely that you will be paid much – perhaps only a few thousand dollars. The seller gains by not having demolition expenses.

And you can find a bargain such as the \$250 house on the internet (I saw one for about \$6). There are firms in each state that will lift it and move it for you – at a price.



## Other considerations

Often recycled houses are cut right down the middle – top to bottom – and then rejoined once moved. Vere Brown's house in Yandina, moved many years ago, was cut in half; top to bottom, front to back. Vere showed me where the join is but I would never have seen it myself. A requirement of Ed's was that the house could have just one move. It would not be cut in two and that it could be picked up and put down in its final position as one lift. Our house, too, was lifted as one whole.

It pays to speak to the council before you make any deals. Sometimes a large bond demanded makes cash available for completing the job scarce, although councils will dole back part as certain milestones are reached. Ed and Emma say that the bond is the biggest problem, being 'dead money.'

Removal houses are a viable alternative to building from scratch and there is the satisfaction that comes from recycling. ♦

## House removal companies

### ◆ QUEENSLAND

- **David Wright Properties**  
07 3888 2234, [davidwright.com.au](http://davidwright.com.au)
- **Drake Homes**  
07 3801 1992, [drakehomes.com.au](http://drakehomes.com.au)
- **Redhouse House Removals**  
07 3807 2115, [redhousehouse.com.au](http://redhousehouse.com.au)
- **Dalby Removal Homes**  
07 4669 6162, [dalbyremovalhomes.com.au](http://dalbyremovalhomes.com.au)
- **Mackay and Sons House Removals**  
07 3888 9399, [houseremovals.com.au](http://houseremovals.com.au)
- **Queensland House Removers**  
07 5499 2160, [queenslandhouseremovers.com.au](http://queenslandhouseremovers.com.au)
- **Queensland Colonial Houses**  
07 3886 6567, [qldcolonialhouses.com.au](http://qldcolonialhouses.com.au)

### ◆ VICTORIA

- **Kilmore House Removers**  
0427 077 414, [khr.com.au](http://khr.com.au)
- **Golden Age Homes**  
1300 135 120, [gah.com.au](http://gah.com.au)

### ◆ NEW SOUTH WALES

- **Graham House Removals**  
02 6686 5757, [grahamremovalhomes.com.au](http://grahamremovalhomes.com.au)
- **Sunraysia House Relocators**  
0427 274 838

### ◆ WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- **Countrywide House Transporters & Erectors**  
08 9454 3634, [countrywidehte.com.au](http://countrywidehte.com.au)
- **Coxall House Relocations**  
0488 994 282
- **Nylund House Transporters**  
08 9410 2047, [nylund.com.au](http://nylund.com.au)



## Links & resources

### ◆ BLOGS

#### • Stumped

Sean's blog (2010) about a removal house project in northern NSW.

[deliveredandstumped.blogspot.com](http://deliveredandstumped.blogspot.com)

#### • Eight Acres

Renovating a relocated Queenslander in SE Qld.

[eight-acres.blogspot.com.au](http://eight-acres.blogspot.com.au)