

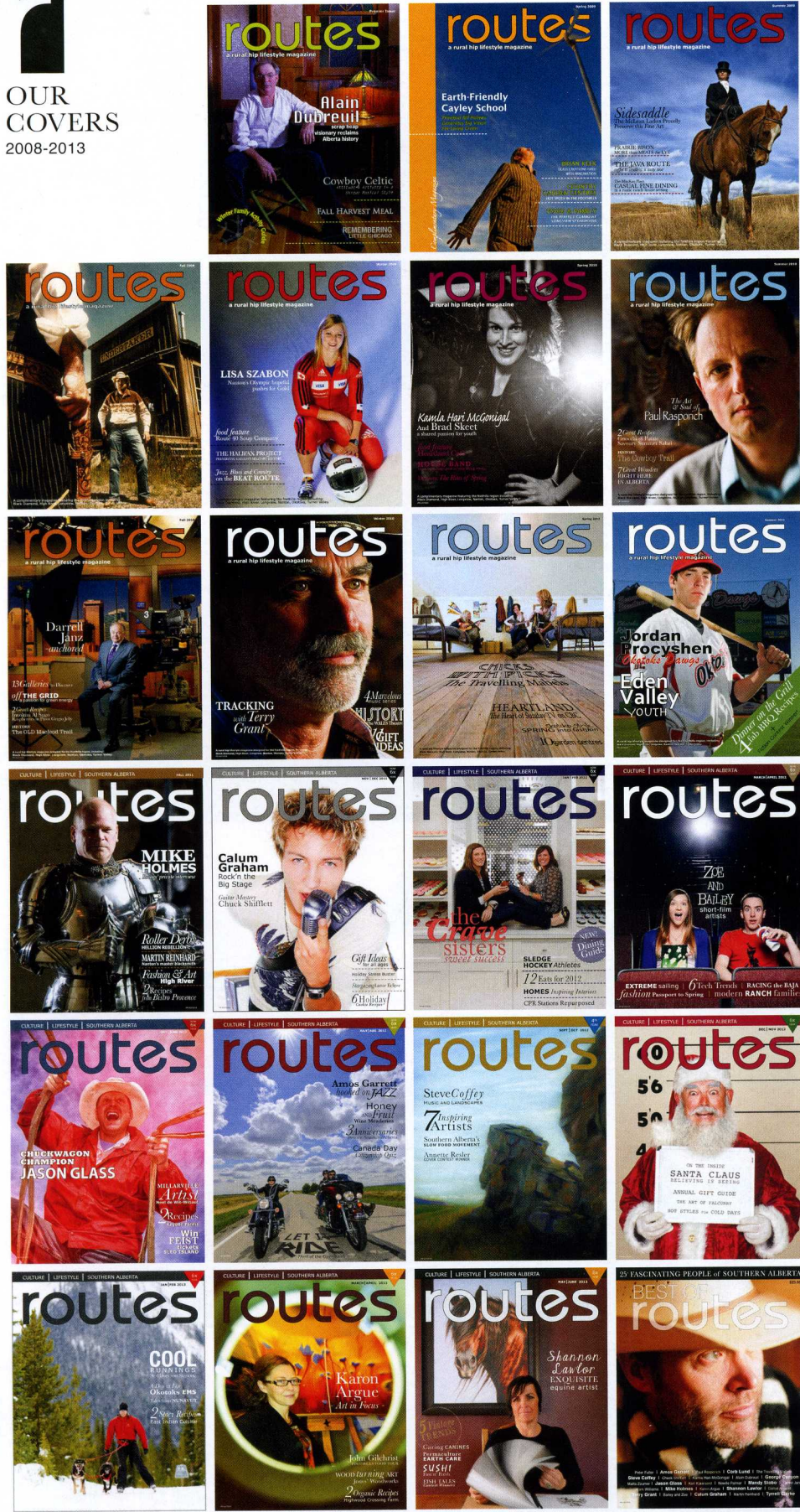
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Alain Dubreuil

Reclamation Artist

“I always salvaged. Even as a kid I was collecting copper and cleaning wire. I guess one of my first money [making] ventures was when my dad put a new bathtub in the house and I asked to have the old claw foot one.”

Age twelve at the time, Dubreuil bargained with the local scrap yard owner to buy the tub. “I made a deal with a strong kid from school in which we built a horse-like harness and one of us pulled the 200 pound tub upside down while the other pushed it on the snow for well over eight city blocks and then we split the money.”

A scrapper he is, in every sense of the word, so much so that he was the subject of National Film Board of Canada’s: *Alain Dubreuil, Alchemist*. Set in his previous Vancouver location, the award-winning 2002 film described this eccentric, if not brilliant man, as a demolition artist with a treasure trove scrap yard, saving the disused and discarded from the wrecking ball.

Today Dubreuil spends his days reclaiming and brokering salvaged materials from the many buildings and structures he demolishes. He is living a lifestyle reflective of his over-the-top passions for reusing that, which would otherwise be landfill. In an ultimate downtown Vancouver experience, recovered shipyard materials are made new again and displayed in ‘highbrow’ restaurants and retail buildings in Vancouver’s famous, rejuvenated Yaletown. He has also turned abandoned warehouses into gallery lofts of exquisite living.

Dubreuil has salvaged over 300 houses in his thirty years on the West Coast, “... taking bricks, wood flooring, mouldings, pillars, mantels, stained glass windows, doors and hardware, even the trees were a good reselling item, rhododendrons, Japanese maple, azaleas and more.”

In 2002, while looking for a change, Dubreuil ventured into the reclaimed timber business, settled in southern Alberta and established Chinook Salvage Ltd. The company offers up a wide range of architectural and building items such as flooring, doors and windows, which he gingerly removes from historic buildings. His Fort Macleod shop yard sprawls amid the grounds of what remains of a World War II flight-training centre. There, he demolished two acre-sized airplane hangars one – piece of reclaimed lumber at a time.

It was only natural that Dubreuil would hunt for another unique space to create his Alberta home. Atop three side-by-side, century old buildings in downtown Fort Macleod, he discovered an abandoned wreck untouched since 1963.

After extensive restoration work in 2001, Dubreuil now enjoys over 7000 sq. ft. of loft-style living. The home features his eclectic collections of art, vintage lighting, old fireplace mantels, movie posters, radios, cloth and furniture fit for a king; including a grand

bed from the estate of the Earl of Egmont and a castle-size, hand-crafted, timber table and chairs.

His endless dedication to salvage spills out in the overflowing layers and layers of his passionate collections, to which he jokingly adds, “Do you think because it looks like this that I am not organized? I actually know exactly where everything is!”

Dubreuil also dedicates his talents and knowledge of structure and salvaging to historic groups by assisting in moving and preserving many key historic buildings province wide. Dubreuil’s expertise played a substantial role in the reclamation of High River’s historic post office (now Carlson’s on Macleod).

He is far from sitting still long enough to enjoy his efforts and vast private collections, as he currently spends every spare moment he can get tackling a century-old building in Medicine Hat. This living-large visionary from the past sees his long history of reclaiming and a passion for collecting as his contribution to Mother Earth, but sadly he predicts, “New construction methods of today will allow no one in the future to be able to salvage anything.”

By Michelle Greysen
Premier Issue, Fall 2008

FOLLOW UP

Although a lot has changed for Alain Dubreuil since 2008, one thing still remains the same: his passion for salvaging.

Since his interview with *Routes*, Dubreuil was sought out by the History Channel’s *Canadian Pickers* and he agreed to be filmed for its first ever episode (2011).

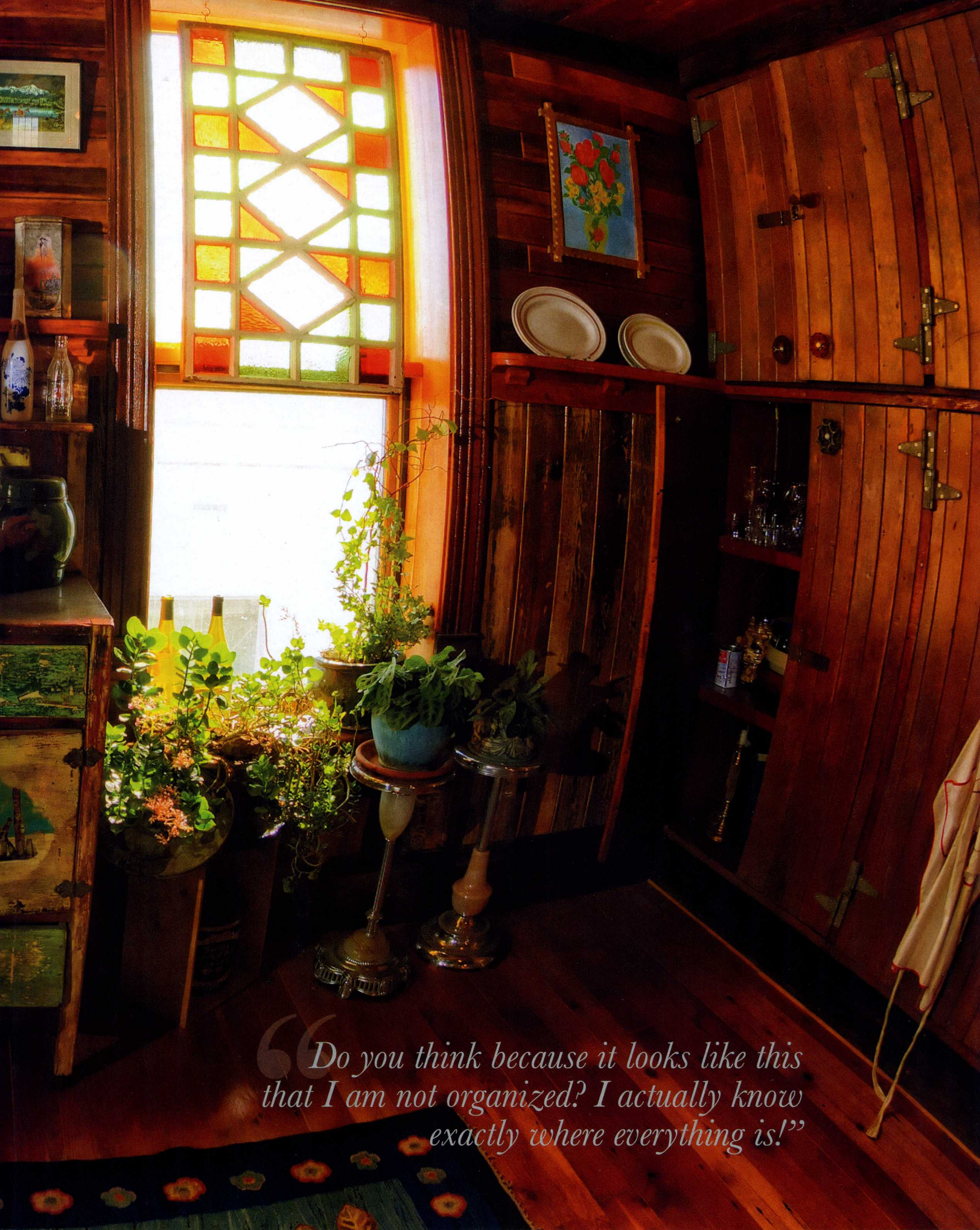
Although this was a significant accomplishment for Dubreuil, he said he had a bad experience on the show.

Apparently, he told the ‘pickers’ they could look at everything he had except for some transistor radios that were of sentimental value. Despite this warning, he said they basically forced him to sell the radios for a price much less than they were worth.

However, after the show, Dubreuil ended up taking a trip to High River to buy 500 new radios. “It’s a good thing I did too,” he said. “I probably saved them all from being ruined in the flood!”

Aside from being on *Canadian Pickers*, Dubreuil has been preoccupied with some intriguing investments in Fort Macleod. He purchased an old church that he now uses for storage, and a bus depot with a four-bus garage that he plans to convert to a coffee shop and auction house in the near future. ■





“Do you think because it looks like this that I am not organized? I actually know exactly where everything is!”