



by Neale Whitaker

# The cycle of life

Updating a piece of preloved furniture injects a little history into your home's interior and brings a valuable second life

Once upon a time, it was pistols at dawn. Now it's garden chairs. I was recently eyeing up a rather handsome pair of secondhand chairs outside a vintage furniture store. Their sturdy metal frames had a pleasing mid-century feel. As I went inside to buy them, two women who'd been observing me moved in for the kill. By the time I came out of the store (having just paid for the chairs) they were loading them in their Tarago for a swift getaway. How rude.

**"If a piece no longer brings joy, no need to discard it – you can transform it"**

I share this tale of lust and greed to illustrate the current phenomenon that is upcycling. Not to be confused with recycling, upcycling of preloved furniture is more closely related to an extreme makeover. Not that it's anything new. I'm old enough to remember the original *Changing Rooms* TV show. As with Network 10's recent reboot, upcycling was always a key component of the show's format. I also remember a popular British show called *Home Front* where terrible things were done to perfectly good furniture in the name of renovation.

Lisa Rickert is a New Orleans-based design expert and upcycler who has just launched her Jolie Home brand in Australia ([joliehome.com](http://joliehome.com)), comprising paints and decorative finishes. Rickert was inspired to create a business from her passion while rebuilding her own home after 2005's Hurricane Katrina. "I'm trying to educate the marketplace," she explains, "that if a piece no longer brings you joy, you don't need to discard it – you can transform it. People are catching on to this trend, which I see as becoming a lasting movement in consumer behaviour."

At Mrs. Red's Shed & Co. Emporium, a vintage homewares store in Berry on the NSW South Coast, owner Elissa Sinclair agrees. "The move towards upcycling has increased exponentially," she says. "These items have their own story, they whisper a history that can be heard if one listens carefully." Sinclair says her customers are choosing to use chalk paint and wax "to create something wonderful in a few hours". Whether you choose to upcycle furniture you already own or buy vintage pieces to transform, the impulse is the same. Quite apart from economic and environmental advantages, upcycling tugs at the heart, claims Sinclair. "There's an undeniable emotional connection when you see an item that evokes a happy childhood memory." Not to mention when you see a bargain garden chair. ★ Neale Whitaker is co-host of *Foxtel's Love It Or List It Australia on Lifestyle*, and a judge on *Nine Network's The Block*.



**SECOND CHANCE** (from top) A preloved chair has had its life extended with a new cover and waxed wooden arms; this cabinet was reinvented courtesy of a coat of black paint; vintage homewares bring their own history to a house.

## ★ NEALE'S OBJECTS OF DESIRE



GRAHAM & BROWN wallpaper, \$160 (per roll), [grahambrown.com](http://grahambrown.com)



JOLIE furniture wax, \$26.50, [joliehome.com](http://joliehome.com)



RUST-OLEUM chalk paint, \$42.20 (887ml), [bunnings.com.au](http://bunnings.com.au)



TEMPLE & WEBSTER armchair, \$549, [templeandwebster.com.au](http://templeandwebster.com.au)

PHOTOGRAPHY: NETWORK 10; JOLIE HOME: MRS RED'S SHED & CO. EMPORIUM; STYLING: ANNALIESE ZIEME