



Trashmagination Podcast #34 – Dollhouse Furniture from Recycled Materials

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

Today we'll talk about dollhouse furniture made from recycled materials. Even if you are not interested in dollhouse furniture, here's why I think this episode is still relevant to you. There are many items that we purchase that we could make ourselves, and **the act of making them could give those items much more value**. Let's think of an item you use every day – a shopping bag, a cookie, a scarf or a bathroom mat. If you make that item from recycled materials, you get four benefits:

- You learn how to make something, and perhaps reduce your stress during the making.
- You remove the guilt of throwing that item in the trash.
- Often handmade items are made with more care and are less likely to break.
- Handmade gifts show a lot of love!

When it comes to dollhouse furniture, I would think it means more to a child when you made the items or even better, you made the items with the child. There are so many tutorials that show how to do it step-by-step on Youtube or courses in Udemy or Skillshare. If you don't have wood working or sewing machines, you can look for local community centers or sewing centers where you can take a class or rent a machine.

So I started thinking about dollhouses at the Renwick Gallery in Washington DC. There is a current exhibit of dollhouses was made by an artist in the 1940s named Frances Glessner Lee [<https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/nutshells>]. She was the first female police captain in the United States. She crafted these dollhouses to be teaching tools for homicide investigators. They are mini-crime scenes. In the exhibit, you read the witness statements and then evaluate the evidence in the dollhouse.

In the exhibit, of course my mind wandered to the world of creative reuse. I tried to figure out what Frances used to make her furniture and accessories. She knit her tiny linens with pins which was hard on her eye sight.

When I started to research on dollhouse furniture from recycled materials, I quickly went down a rabbit hole. I learned there are so many ways that people make dollhouse furniture. Most do not use recycled materials, but looking at their work can be inspiring for someone who wants to use recycled materials. Those include:

- People who print their designs on a 3-D printer.
- Architecture enthusiasts - some buy kits similar to the models for cars or airplanes. I recommend the blogs Call of the Small by Christine Ferrara [<https://www.call-small.com/>] and Modern Mini Houses by Megan Horbecker [<http://modernminihouses.blogspot.com/>].
- People who search for items in dollar stores and transform them – for example, someone took apart a plastic baby rattle to make two doll-sized bowls.
- People who specialize in sculpting dollhouse furniture and accessories from bake-able modelling clay.
- People who use printables and scrapbook paper.

Some of these artists build models because they specialize in miniatures in photos or videos. This is a trend on social media. They are sometimes called "miniaturists." There are also apps for your phone that make regular life photos look

like photos of miniature modes (such as Awesome Miniature). There is a whole genre of cooking shows where everything is done in miniature, sometimes cooking on stoves heated by candles (Examples: Miniature Space and Miniature Cucina).

While all those dollhouse makers are fascinating, I wanted to find people who use recycled materials. Here are my three favorite Youtube channels who do that.

The first is **Simple Kids Crafts** [<https://www.youtube.com/user/simplekidscrafts>]. Her creations are particularly ingenious. For example, she shows how to make a washing machine where you actually pour in water and wash your dolls clothes! It's made from a rectangular-shaped shampoo bottle. She has another video where she shows how she makes many kitchen appliances from plastic caps, including a blender, coffee maker, rice cooker and griddle.

Another Youtube channel which focuses on dollhouse crafts is **My Froggy Stuff** with 1.6 million subscribers [<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9Q0dAjbhv0FbwvoHRSmjxA>]. It's a mother-and-daughter team. Their dollhouses are mostly for Barbie-sized dolls. Most of their designs involve cardboard, paint and scrapbook paper. But some designs do involve creative reuse of plastic items. I was most impressed by the toilet they made from a dental floss container and the white lid of a Coffee Mate container.

The Youtube channel **The Square to Spare** [<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCs2kJlccdyWWH4Lvlafqg>] teaches how to make realistic-looking musical instruments from popsicle sticks including an acoustic guitar and a violin. She also designed paving stones for her house from egg cartons and a typewriter where the keys are made from toothpicks.

Now here are some of my favorite dollhouse items and what they used to make them:

Artist Name	Link	What They Made
Joanne's Minis	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpG9R81Cos57Lp33KYofy8A	colorful bottles out of the tiny cylindrical bulbs from a broken Christmas light string
Vince House	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUK3WQjOtYE	Couches and arm chairs from large plastic coffee or ice cream containers
Va-Voom Vintage	http://www.vavoomvintage.net/2015/12/how-to-make-miniature-dollhouse-vintage.html	Pyrex dishes from the blister packs of medication
Miss Cutiepie	http://misscutiepieinspiration.blogspot.se/2012/04/dockhus-renovering-lagg-ett-tragolv-av.html	Hardwood flooring from popsicle sticks
Shades of Tangerine	http://shadesoftangerine.blogspot.com/2013/02/recycled-mini-food-diy.html#!/2013/02/recycled-mini-food-diy.html	Miniature boxed food items from junk mail
Dolls Houses and Minis	https://dollshousesandminis.blogspot.com.es/2012/06/how-to-make-plates-for-your-dolls-house.html?m=1	Fancy plates by cutting out images from magazines and modge podging them on to foam or plastic caps

My Homemade Doll Furniture Experiments

When I was a kid, my sister and I were obsessed with Strawberry Shortcake dolls. My grandmother taught us how to knit, and we made sleeping bags for our dolls. My grandmother also gave us two tiny doll beds made from a Sunlight dish soap bottle with a crocheted trim [<http://trashmagination.com/crocheted-doll-bed-from-liquid-soap-container/>]. I found a pattern for how to make this which I will feature in the show notes.

<http://scribbit.blogspot.com/2009/03/how-to-make-dolls-bassinette-from.html>

My own children were more interested in dinosaurs. They loved to play a game outside where they would give all the dinosaurs a “spa day” which involved rubbing lotions on the dinosaurs and then giving them a bath. Making a bath tub for your dolls is an easy first project – it really works with any large plastic container. I will link to instructions on making a doll bath tub from a lotion bottle on a blog called Pequeñeces. [<http://pequeneces-maragverdugo.blogspot.com/2011/11/al-agua-patos.html#.WkFdglWnHio>]

If you have made dollhouse furniture or accessories from recycled materials, please let me know at trashmagination@gmail.com. Maybe you have something your parents or grandparents made for you like my crocheted doll bed. You can see image at the Pinterest board I made at <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/dollhouses-from-recycled-materials/>.

Also, this is my first episode recorded with a new microphone I got for Christmas from my mother-in-law – thank you Marilyn! I hope you enjoy a new level of sound quality! I will continue to record in my sound studio i.e. my closet.

And if you want to see the dollhouses I mentioned at the Renwick Gallery – the exhibit is there until January 28. If you miss it, you can see the dollhouses at the Baltimore Medical Examiner’s office. I will link to a podcast about the exhibit done by Sidedoor, a Smithsonian podcast [<https://www.si.edu/sidedoor/ep-10-murder-her-hobby>].

Be sure to tell a friend about this podcast for a more inspired 2018! And until next time – may you see trash as a source of dollhouse furniture and accessories in your life.