

Aika Mengi

Vertical Space

I was inspired after the architecture lecture to think of better ways of using the spaces we have. Houses have become bigger, and we fill more of the spaces with more things. However people have found ingenious ways to increase the amount of space available to them in smaller houses. Here is an example of using stairs as storage units.



Living at Lincoln Manor was the inspiration for creating the mug rack. Our cupboards were full of mugs and cups. But because mugs are not stackable they take up a lot of space. So I decided to create a mug rack so that next years Wendell Berries could use the rack to keep their mugs. Therefore there is one spot for each member of the house. But it also encourages a more creative way of using the spaces and resources that we have.

I began with a trip to Menards where I found some off cuts of cedar and pine. I chose to use the offcuts of wood for several reasons, one was that I did not need lots of wood, and I felt it would be appropriate to take only as much as I needed. Secondly I like the idea of using others peoples waste to create something that is useful. I believe that more people have to look at “trash” as a resource rather than something that is simply thrown away. I chose cedar and pine because I really enjoy the smell and grain of cedar, and I thought that the pine would compliment the cedar

¹Housemagz. Retrieved May 23, 2011. <http://www.housemagz.com/amazing-interior-design-small-home-studio-apartment-using-a-smart-idea.html>

well. The added bonus of using offcuts is that they are really cheap, all the wood I bought that day cost me less than two dollars.

Once I got back to campus I watched a video on youtube on how to make a chopping board, because the base of the mug rack would be similar to a chopping board.² I then went down to the wood-shop at St. Olaf and ripped the pieces of pine into 1/2 by 1 inch, 15 inch long pieces. I then glued the pieces together in the same method I learned from the youtube video. I left the base to cure overnight, once the glue was dried, it was time to smooth out the bumps and irregularities using the shapers and sander.

I then went about cutting the cedar to the shape I wanted the center stand to be. I used the tools in the woodshop to make an abstracted shape. My initial plan was to then shape the handles out of cedar and then fix them to the center. After shaping the center piece I decided that I should get some dowels. So a trip to Meandrous was in order to buy two oak dowels. I picked the oak because it is a beautiful wood that I thought looked different enough that it would add to the piece. Without it looking out of place. I returned to the basement of Wendell Berry this time to cut them down the dowels to six nice pieces. I cut them with my Jigsaw that I bought to make skim boards.

I then systematically drilled holes in the center piece, adding a dowel to compliment the location of the previous dowel. I did drill a hole that did not feel or look right, so I covered it with a mixture of sawdust and gorilla glue. The rest of the dowels were fixed in place with gorilla glue and left to mature overnight.

I then drilled five holes into the base and five holes in the stand to connect the two pieces. I then added glue to the wooden fluted dowels and glued them together, waited for the glue to cure overnight and then sanded and stained it to protect it against water. In case there is any water on it.

Would I have done things differently? Yes, I have learned from this experience, and will use what I learned on future projects. I have learned that it is much easier to avoid a mess or a mistake than clean it up later. This lesson can translate into many aspects of my life. But the experience also made me aware of the power of reusing resources that have already been used in a beautiful and resourceful way. It reminds me of the Maasai tribe who reused the rubber of old tires to make durable shoes, or the women who reuse plastic bags to make jewelry or beautiful bags. Too often we only see the tree as a resource, but only a few people are able to appreciate the endless resources we have all around us that many people call junk or trash.

The project has made me appreciate the idea of living with a smaller footprint, which includes living in a smaller house or apartment. And instead of seeing the small space as a problem, it can

² Wood Whisperer [Video], January 3 2007. Retrieved May 5, 2011. From <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YcF1Ne2GII>

be seen as a challenge of creating a comfortable environment that optimizes the space that you need and can use. I really enjoy working with wood, and could see this as something that will inspire me to use the used resources around me in more creative ways.



Vertical Space, a mug rack. Aika Mengi. Photo by Laura Carpenter.

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