

Building Circular by Design: The Kitchen Reuse Opportunity Could Unlock Billions in Economic Value

By Sonya Betker

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Millions of American kitchens are remodeled each year, driving one of the largest streams of material turnover in residential construction. The result is a quiet waste crisis: roughly 600 million tons of construction and demolition debris enter the U.S. waste stream annually—more than double that of municipal solid waste—and kitchens account for a disproportionate share of it. Cabinets, countertops, and fixtures built to last decades often end up in landfills within 15 years.

A More Profitable Model is Emerging

Field audits show that two-thirds of removed kitchen components remain structurally sound, while circular-economy practices demonstrate that reuse is not only sustainable but also profitable and in demand. Recovered materials could unlock US\$7 billion in annual economic value, avoid 13 million tons of CO₂-equivalent emissions, and save homeowners thousands of dollars per project.

Industry leaders are taking notice. Digital marketplaces can already match reclaimed inventory to new layouts in real time, and AI-assisted design platforms can reduce both project costs and complexity. Large appliance brands now offer trade-in credits and refurbished lines, providing both a proven model and an untapped opportunity for coordinated reuse programs with countertop and cabinet manufacturers. Meanwhile, policy pilots in cities such as Portland, Oregon, and Palo Alto, California, demonstrate that deconstruction mandates can reduce landfill tonnage without slowing work.

The findings presented here trace how economic, technological, and cultural shifts are converging to make material reuse a cornerstone of modern remodeling. While barriers remain, the path forward is clear.

Integrating Sustainability into Industrial Practice

Architects and designers are beginning to integrate reuse into practice, a trend reflected in guidance from industry associations such as the National Kitchen + Bath Association (NKBA), the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association (KCMA), and the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). Implementing this practice will require collaborative action among manufacturers, contractors, policymakers, and consumers. Such action can transform kitchen remodeling into a flagship success story for the circular economy—one that lowers costs, creates skilled jobs, preserves forests, and redefines waste as a resource of lasting value.

INTRODUCTION: FORCES DRIVING KITCHEN REUSE NOW

The building sector consumes nearly half of the world’s extracted raw materials—and residential kitchens epitomize that appetite. Solid maple cabinets engineered for a 40-year service life are routinely replaced after 15 years^[i] as layouts and aesthetics change. In the United States, construction and demolition debris now exceeds 600 million tons annually—more than twice the volume of municipal solid waste^[ii]—and kitchen remodels contribute a disproportionate share of this waste. An estimated 3 million tons of cabinetry alone enter landfills each year, even though much of it is readily salvageable for reuse through refinishing, refacing, or resale.

This “rip-and-replace” cycle exacts mounting costs. Landfill capacity is tightening, with tipping fees exceeding US\$95 per ton in many metropolitan areas, making disposal a growing margin risk.^[iii] The waste also compounds embodied carbon emissions and resource depletion at a time when both consumers and regulators are demanding lower environmental footprints.

Generational differences suggest that the market for reused fixtures and reclaimed kitchen and bath materials is likely to strengthen as younger homeowners gain purchasing power. Gen Z and Millennials are more likely than older consumers to choose secondhand products when suitable options are available, with 54 percent of Gen Z and 44 percent of Millennials^[iv] reporting that they choose secondhand most of the time. Millennials are also emerging as a major remodeling-spend segment, leading all generations in total home project spending in 2025 and ranking as the consumer group most interested in sustainable kitchen and bath design.

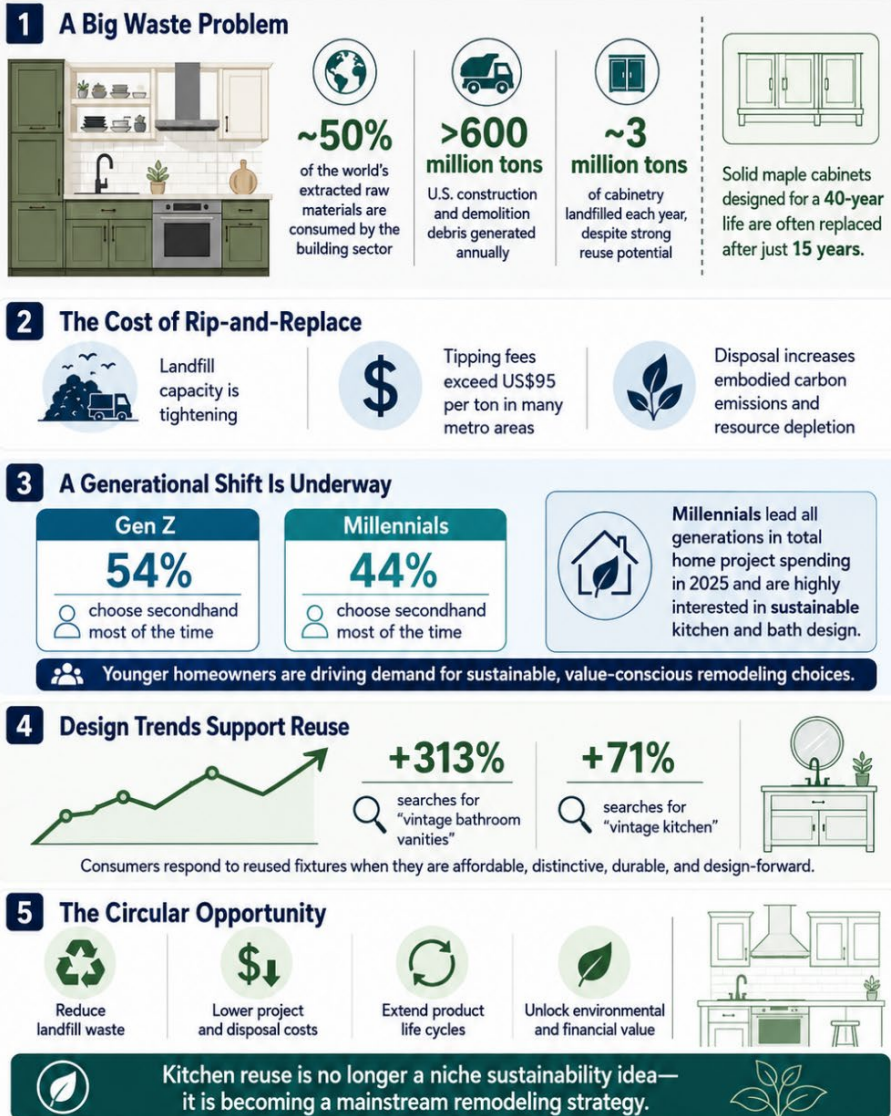
Figure 1 synthesizes these forces, illustrating how the magnitude of waste, the removal of durable materials well before the end of their useful lives, and generational changes in consumer behavior are jointly reshaping the kitchen-remodeling landscape. Rather than functioning as a niche sustainability option, kitchen reuse is increasingly positioned as a practical, cost-effective, and design-forward response to systemic inefficiencies in the residential construction sector.

continued

Figure 1 Forces Driving Kitchen Reuse Now.

Kitchen Reuse: The Next Frontier of Mainstream Remodeling

Why salvage, refurbishment, and resale are gaining momentum in kitchen and bath projects



Key figures summarized from the provided text; generational and search-trend data reflect cited source notes (1)–(3).

At the same time, Houzz search data show rapid increases in interest in vintage and repurposed design, including a 313 percent increase^[4] in searches for “vintage bathroom vanities” and a 71 percent increase in searches for “vintage kitchen.” Together, these findings indicate that reused fixtures are most likely to gain traction when positioned not only as environmentally preferable, but also as affordable, distinctive, durable, and design-forward.

Together, these economic and cultural forces position kitchen reuse not as a niche sustainability choice but as the next frontier of mainstream remodeling. A circular approach that prioritizes building better—by incorporating the largely untapped advantages of salvage, refurbishment, and resale—can dramatically reduce landfill contributions, lower costs, and extend product life cycles while unlocking measurable environmental and financial value.

NATIONAL WASTE LANDSCAPE

Construction and renovation remain among the largest generators of waste worldwide, and progress toward circularity has been uneven. In the United States, EPA’s 2018 C&D debris estimates show that approximately 600 million tons of C&D debris were generated; just over 455 million tons were directed to next use, and just under 145 million tons were sent to landfills. This equates to an approximate national diversion rate of 76 percent and a landfill/disposal rate of 24 percent, indicating that while substantial material recovery is already occurring—largely through aggregate and other next-use pathways—significant disposal and higher-value reuse opportunities remain.

Kitchen remodeling plays a significant role in this stream. Each year, an estimated 15 million tons of material are removed from U.S. kitchens—including cabinets, countertops, appliances, and fixtures—most of it long before the end of its usable life. Cabinetry alone accounts for nearly half of this debris by weight,^[vii] representing one of the industry’s clearest opportunities for material salvage and resale.

The kitchen and bath remodeling market, valued at approximately US\$173 billion in 2024 according to industry reporting, underscores both the scale of the problem and the potential for change. Yet despite growing consumer interest in sustainable living spaces, misconceptions persist. Many homeowners still assume that reclaimed materials are lower quality or harder to source, and contractors often lack standardized pathways for deconstruction, transport, and resale. These barriers, rather than a lack of interest, continue to limit the adoption of deconstruction practices.

Regional data show how quickly outcomes can shift when structure replaces stigma. Portland, Oregon, where a deconstruction mandate has been in effect since 2016, now diverts nearly 30 percent of kitchen construction waste from landfills—compared with less than eight percent in many Sunbelt metros.^[viii] In cities with similar deconstruction and reuse policies, Habitat for Humanity ReStore outlets have reported compound annual growth rates above 20 percent in sales and material throughput, driven by steady inflows of reclaimed cabinetry and fixtures.

Early policy moves and market momentum point to a transition; the real test is on-site, with how material is handled from tear-out to transport. That’s where the bottlenecks—and the fixes—begin.

THE SCOPE OF JOB-SITE WASTE

Job-site audits conducted by the Building Materials Reuse Association (BMRA) across five U.S. cities found that the average kitchen demolition generates approximately 4,200 pounds of debris, of which more than half—about 2,350 pounds—can be reused. Yet informal surveys from ReStore affiliates across multiple states indicate that up to 75 percent of removed cabinets and fixtures never enter donation or salvage channels, even though they are serviceable. The primary reasons contractors cite are compressed schedules and logistical friction, not material conditions.

To expand on this, many kitchen cabinets are screwed and often glued in place. It's the glue that causes the damage and makes it nearly impossible to remove the cabinetry without damaging it. Perhaps worth noting so that cabinetmakers and builders are aware that simply not gluing could make a huge difference.

A core barrier is structural: the absence of a coordinated job-site-to-market pathway. In many regions, crews and homeowners must self-manage deconstruction, transport, storage, and resale among fragmented players, making disposal the default option. Where pathways exist, or can be brokered, salvage rates rise significantly.

Financial dynamics further illustrate the opportunity. Careful removal typically adds only about US\$300 in labor yet enables roughly US\$2,800 in resale value through established reuse channels supported by complementary infrastructure—from digital platforms such as ReCapturit^[viii] to regional warehouse networks like The Reuse People of Oakland, which receive deconstructed materials and resell quality cabinets, fixtures, and appliances to the public at discounted prices.

The workforce dimension reinforces these gains. Milwaukee's deconstruction policy illustrates how salvage can be linked to local economic development goals: city materials describe deconstruction as a strategy to maximize the salvage of building materials and reduce landfill disposal. In contrast, HUD's deconstruction feasibility research found that Milwaukee had the most public-sector deconstruction initiatives among the four cities studied and that it used community service worker programs in deconstruction-related projects. Local reuse programs, including Milwaukee Habitat ReStore's deconstruction services, further demonstrate how trained crews can move cabinets, appliances, fixtures, doors, and other reusable materials into resale channels rather than the waste stream.^[ix]

The practical takeaway is consistent: when time, logistics, and roles are organized, salvage happens. The challenge is building that coordination at scale—the bridge to how circular models operate in practice.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY OPPORTUNITY

The circular economy represents a pivotal opportunity for the kitchen remodeling industry to transition from an increasingly unsustainable model toward one that extends material lifespans through reuse, refurbishment, and resale. By designing projects with selective deconstruction and material recovery in mind, manufacturers and contractors can retain both value and resources that would otherwise be lost to disposal.

With the U.S. kitchen and bath remodeling market projected to surpass US\$200 billion, circular practices represent not only an environmental advance but a strategic business opportunity. Reusing cabinetry, countertops, major appliances, and plumbing fixtures reduces reliance on virgin wood, metal, and stone—materials whose extraction and production carry heavy energy and carbon costs—while also generating tangible economic returns. Reselling high-quality salvaged components creates new revenue streams, lowers project costs for homeowners, and reduces outlays for hauling and landfill tipping fees.

Industry expertise illustrates how circular models operate in practice. Jim Gurulé, President of Bay West Sales and Innovation, is a kitchen renovation domain expert whose holistic perspective comes from more than two decades of experience across nearly every facet of the kitchen cabinet industry—from manufacturing, installation, and logistics to business development and construction. Ten years ago, Gurulé recognized the environmental impact of the millions of cabinets he sold, as construction and demolition debris became an increasingly pressing economic, social, and environmental concern. In response, he began focusing on how to transition the kitchen renovation industry into the circular economy.

“The key to any large-scale adoption,” Gurulé says, “is the introduction of sustainable renovation options in the pre-construction planning and design phase.” Gurulé notes that there are three levels to any kitchen renovation project: minor (resurfacing existing components), medium (resurfacing and replacing), and major (“rip-and-replace”). “Once consumers understand the feasibility as well as the financial and environmental impact of the options, adoption will increase significantly.”

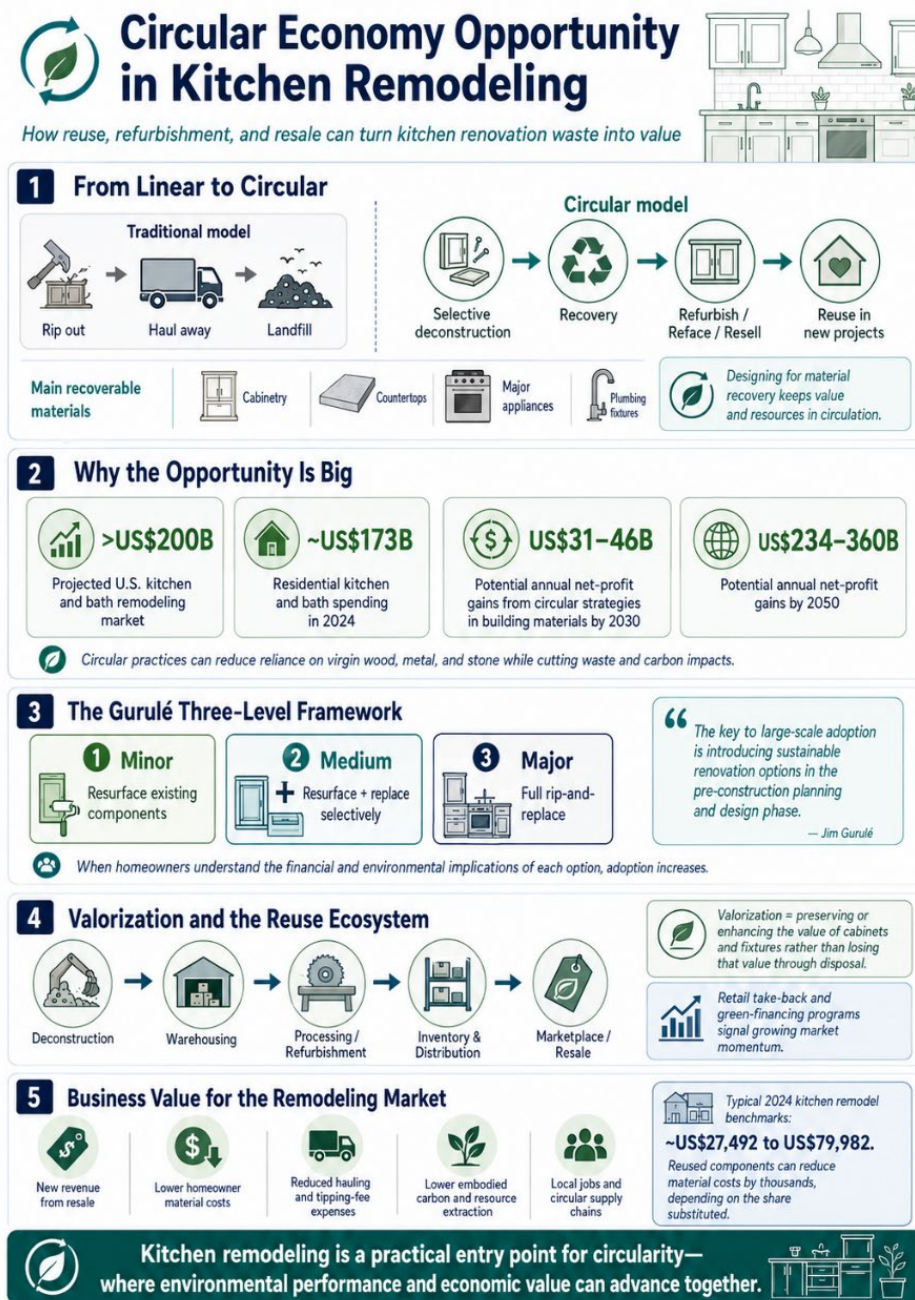
Figure 2 locates kitchen remodeling within a circular economy framework, illustrating how value can be retained across the renovation lifecycle rather than lost to disposal. Instead of a linear “tear-out and landfill” pathway, circular models intervene at multiple decision points—design, removal, refurbishment, redistribution, and resale—allowing cabinetry, countertops, appliances, and fixtures to circulate through secondary and tertiary use cycles. Each loop preserves embedded material, labor, and carbon value while generating new economic activity across manufacturers, contractors, reuse retailers, and consumers.

As shown in **Figure 2**, the circular approach reframes kitchens not as single-use assemblies but as modular material systems whose components can be selectively retained, upgraded, or transferred to new users. Pre-construction planning enables feasibility assessment of reuse; careful deconstruction preserves resale value; refurbishment and remanufacturing restore

function and aesthetics; and digital marketplaces and salvage hubs reconnect recovered materials with demand. These feedback loops contrast sharply with conventional demolition pathways, where materials exit the economy after a single use phase.

continued

Figure 2 Circular Economy Pathways in Kitchen Remodeling.



This three-level framework aligns with the concept of valorization—the process of preserving or enhancing a product's price or value, most commonly through government or organizational support. In this context, valorization means recognizing that existing cabinets and fixtures retain value and structuring renovation decisions and programs to preserve that value rather than lose it.

In this context, kitchen remodeling offers a practical entry point for circularity because cabinets, vanities, and fixtures are routinely removed while retaining their value.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL DRIVERS

Emerging technologies and shifting consumer attitudes are accelerating interest in kitchen remodeling reuse. AI-driven design software, 3D scanning, and augmented reality (AR) visualization tools could enable more precise measurements, faster planning, and easier integration of salvaged materials into new layouts. Handheld LiDAR scanners paired with AI layout engines could map salvage inventory onto new floor plans in near real time, streamlining design cycles. AR previews could also help increase client acceptance of reclaimed materials by allowing homeowners to see salvaged elements in context before committing to them.

Back-end logistics have advanced in parallel. Route-optimization software reduces salvage pickup costs by nearly 30 percent.^[xi] At the same time, product passports with verifiable provenance provide the documentation lenders, insurers, and inspectors require, addressing a long-standing trust barrier in the resale of reclaimed material. These systems lower friction across the reuse supply chain and make circular remodeling operationally feasible.

Consumer behavior is moving in the same direction. Surveys indicate that sustainability is now a mainstream purchasing factor among younger consumers: 75 percent of Gen Z and 71 percent of Millennials report that sustainability is more important than brand name when making purchase decisions.^[xii] In the U.S., that translates to roughly 74.2 million Millennials, or 21.8 percent of the population, and 70.8 million Gen Z consumers, or 20.8 percent of the population, based on 2024 Census-derived generational estimates. Homeowner behavior aligns with this shift: 45 percent of surveyed homeowners chose eco-friendly construction materials for their most recent renovation, while 70 percent said they planned to do so for their next project. Remodelers who integrate reuse strategies are therefore meeting an increasingly common market preference, not a niche one.

BARRIERS AND EMERGING PATHWAYS

While momentum for building-material reuse is accelerating, several factors still limit scale: fragmented job-site-to-market pathways, limited deconstruction training, inconsistent local code interpretation, lack of standardized quality and traceability systems, uneven access to reuse infrastructure, and difficulty financing circular business models. Progress, however, is visible where these barriers are being made operational: digital inventory and resource-exchange platforms are improving coordination; deconstruction training and the new U.S.

Department of Labor–approved Deconstruction Technician apprenticeship are building workforce pathways; used-materials and alternative-materials provisions in ICC-derived codes, together with local salvage-assessment requirements, provide clearer compliance pathways; and SBA-backed loan programs can finance eligible reuse, recycling, and circular-infrastructure businesses through ordinary small-business capital channels.

“The missing link is an agnostic kitchen renovation industry platform that brings these pieces and stakeholders together, creating a frictionless experience for all parties,” says Gurulé, also an inventor of cabinet installation tools with five patents. His latest patent-pending tool, KitchenPlan.ai, is consumer-facing and uses computer vision scanning to capture project details, along with algorithms and a relational database to create a digital twin and a unique KIN# (similar to a VIN# for a car). AI agents enable circular collaboration between the homeowner and trade professionals to produce reports—for stakeholders, for construction and debris, and for appraisals of donated values—with the ultimate goal of advancing the circular economy in the kitchen renovation industry and convenience for buyers.

All of this progress suggests a transition phase rather than a hard structural ceiling.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The financial benefits of reuse in kitchen remodeling extend well beyond waste reduction. At the project level, deconstruction and salvage can reduce costs through avoided disposal, reduced purchase of new materials, on-site reuse, and donation or resale of recovered components. EPA identifies avoided purchase and disposal costs, reduced transportation costs, and tax benefits from donations to qualified charities as potential financial advantages of C&D material recovery. At the same time, MPCA guidance notes that deconstruction projects may benefit from tax deductions, reduced or avoided landfill tipping fees, and revenue from the sale of reclaimed materials. Reuse-market pricing further supports the cost-savings case: Habitat ReStore outlets commonly sell donated building materials below retail, and full used kitchen cabinet sets may be available at substantially lower prices than new stock or semi-custom cabinetry. For contractors and reuse partners, the opportunity lies in creating fee-based services around salvage planning, careful removal, documentation, inventory management, transport, appraisal support, and resale coordination.

These returns scale quickly. At the national level, cabinet resale and avoided landfill tipping fees total nearly US\$7 billion annually—a figure comparable to profits across the entire U.S. flooring sector. Reused components typically cost 30–70 percent less than new ones, depending on quality and availability, translating into substantial savings for a market of this size.

New financial and tax mechanisms are beginning to reinforce the economics of reuse. However, the incentives are still more developed around resilient construction, energy efficiency, and documented charitable donation than around reclaimed materials specifically. Insurers in some states provide premium discounts or rate reductions for homes certified under resilience standards such as the [Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety](#) (IBHS) FORTIFIED, while

green lending products increasingly finance eligible energy-efficiency and sustainable home upgrades. For kitchen reuse, the strongest homeowner-level financial incentive remains the documented donation of salvaged cabinets, appliances, fixtures, and other building materials to qualified charitable organizations, which may qualify as noncash charitable contributions when IRS substantiation, valuation, and appraisal requirements are met.

At the homeowner level, donations of salvaged kitchens and appliances to qualified charities may qualify for federal tax deductions based on their appraised value, further reducing net project costs.

These developments demonstrate that reuse is moving beyond a marginal sustainability practice to become a financially optimized approach—one that enhances contractors' profitability, delivers savings and convenience for homeowners, and strengthens resilience across the broader remodeling economy.

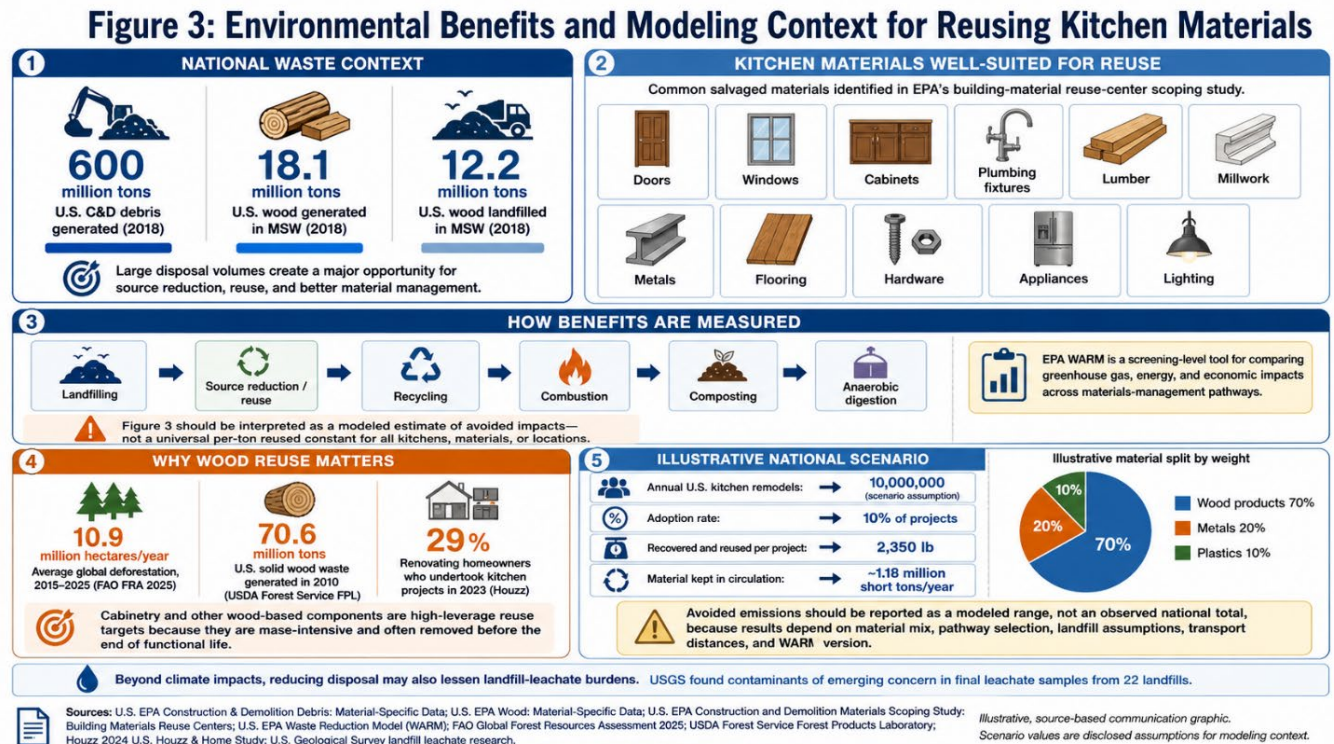
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Reusing kitchen components can deliver measurable environmental benefits by avoiding disposal and reducing demand for virgin material extraction and new material production. At the national scale, the EPA estimates that approximately 600 million tons of construction and demolition debris were generated in the United States in 2018 — more than twice the amount of municipal solid waste generated that year — illustrating the magnitude of the impact achievable through source reduction, salvage, reuse, and improved material management.^[xii]

The EPA estimates that 18.1 million tons of wood waste were generated in the U.S. in 2018, while 12.2 million tons were landfilled.^[xiii] Reuse infrastructure is already designed around many of the same materials removed during kitchen remodeling; EPA's building-material reuse-center scoping study identifies commonly salvaged and reusable categories of building materials.^[xiv] For project-level quantification, EPA's Waste Reduction Model (WARM) provides a transparent screening-level method for comparing greenhouse gas (GHG), energy, and economic impacts across materials management pathways, including source reduction, recycling, and landfilling.^[xv] Cabinetry and other wood-based components remain high-leverage targets for reuse because they are mass-intensive, commonly removed during remodeling, and often discarded before the end of functional life.

Kitchen remodeling is a practical focus for reuse because kitchens remain among the most frequently renovated interior spaces. Houzz's 2024 Study found that kitchens led interior renovation activity in 2023, with 29 percent of homeowners who renovated undertaking kitchen projects. This paper frames national impacts as an illustrative scenario using disclosed assumptions and EPA WARM's publicly documented source-reduction modeling approach. Under the scenario shown below, if 10 percent of an assumed 10 million annual U.S. kitchen remodels recovered and reused 2,350 lb. of material per project, approximately 1.18 million short tons of material would remain in circulation each year.

To avoid overstating precision, the scenario in **Figure 3** allocates recovered mass by material category in weight terms. It compares landfilling with reuse/source-reduction or recycling pathways consistent with WARM’s material-management framework. The resulting avoided-emissions estimate should be reported as a modeled range, not an observed national total, because results depend on the material mix, pathway selection, landfill assumptions, transportation distances, and WARM version used. These impacts demonstrate that reuse is one of the most direct and scalable levers for reducing the remodeling industry’s environmental footprint—transforming waste into a measurable climate solution.



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INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT AND INCENTIVES

Growing alignment among industry leaders and certification bodies reinforces the momentum behind kitchen-material reuse. The National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) highlights sustainability as a top design priority, citing durable, low-VOC materials and waste-reducing construction practices as defining trends. While “reuse” is not always explicitly named, these standards closely align with circular-economy principles.

Similarly, the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program recognizes the environmental and economic value of salvaged materials and offers credits to projects that integrate reclaimed cabinetry, fixtures, and finishes. Public- and private-sector buyers are also standardizing on Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs)—third-party-verified reports of product impacts, akin to a “nutrition label” for environmental performance—which make reclaimed and remanufactured options easier to spec alongside new materials. A recently awarded multi-year U.S. EPA grant to Build Reuse, aimed at helping the reclaimed building materials industry develop EPDs for salvaged and reused products, signals growing federal support for accounting. Such endorsements, reinforced by federal, state, and local policy efforts and informed by domain expertise from policy makers, sustainability advisors, and reuse innovators, validate reuse as both a professional best practice and a recognized sustainability metric across the remodeling sector.

Gurulé has observed a notable change in professional and client behavior. “In the past two years, I’ve seen a marked shift in kitchen designers’, renovation contractors’, and homeowners’ attitudes,” he says. “More clients are asking about ways to integrate pre-owned kitchen materials into their projects—not only for sustainability reasons but also for the federal tax credits.” Gurulé’s experience reflects the growing convergence between economic motivation and environmental awareness across the remodeling industry.

CASE STUDIES

Across the United States, nonprofit and private reuse initiatives are demonstrating how kitchen-material reuse performs in real-world markets. Habitat for Humanity of the Charlotte Region operates six ReStores where donated home furnishings, appliances, and other household goods are resold to support affordable housing; its FY2024 audited financial statements reported approximately US\$7.38 million in ReStore donated goods and US\$9.03 million in ReStore retail and coffee shop operations, although the statements do not break out cabinet-set sales separately. In the private reuse sector, Second Use Building Materials in Seattle and Tacoma provides salvage and reuse services for residential and commercial projects, sells reclaimed doors, windows, cabinets, lighting, plumbing fixtures, appliances, furniture, and related materials, and reports diverting more than 10,000 items from landfill on behalf of Habitat for Humanity in the prior year. A more directly quantified deconstruction example comes from Milwaukee Habitat ReStore, whose deconstruction team salvaged more than US\$670,000 in materials in 2018 and specifically identified kitchen cabinets, appliances, light fixtures, plumbing fixtures, and doors among the items it salvaged for resale.^[xvi]

Contractors, reuse partners, and municipalities are realizing similar results when deconstruction is organized before demolition begins. Milwaukee Habitat ReStore’s Deconstruction Services crew salvages reusable materials from residential and commercial buildings, including kitchen cabinets, appliances, light fixtures, plumbing fixtures, doors, and related components, moving them into resale channels rather than local landfills. In 2018, Milwaukee Habitat reported that its deconstruction team salvaged more than US\$670,000 worth of materials for resale through its ReStore shops, demonstrating how careful removal can convert discarded building

components into community and financial value. Municipal policy can reinforce the same market pathway: Palo Alto's Deconstruction Ordinance, effective July 1, 2020,^[xvii] requires covered residential and commercial removal projects to conduct salvage surveys, deconstruct structures, and source-separate materials for reuse and recycling. This shows how local policy can convert reuse from an optional good intention into a structured project requirement. Gurulé calls this shift "a margin frontier," underscoring reuse as both an operational and financial strategy.

Adoption is also accelerating in the upscale remodeling market, where design firms are integrating reclaimed wood and cabinetry into bespoke, eco-conscious interiors that appeal to clients seeking sustainability without compromise. This expansion across both ends of the market signals that reuse has matured from pilot programs to profitable practice.

Whether through nonprofit salvage networks, municipal policy, or high-design applications, the momentum behind reuse indicates a scalable, durable model for kitchen remodeling.

CALL TO ACTION: SCALING A CIRCULAR KITCHEN ECONOMY FROM NICHE TO NORM

Despite growing adoption, key barriers—fragmented logistics, uneven policy support, and limited reuse infrastructure—continue to limit scale. Yet the tools, incentives, and market will now exist to overcome them. What's required is synchronized effort across every link in the value chain.

A truly circular kitchen remodeling market will not emerge through isolated pilots; it needs coordinated action. Contractors, manufacturers, salvage nonprofits, policymakers, and—above all—consumers each provide levers that, when pulled together, convert reuse from niche to norm. The common objective is straightforward: keep materials in circulation, minimize virgin extraction, and capture the economic and environmental value locked in existing cabinets and fixtures.

Manufacturers: Closing the Loop

Cabinet manufacturers are uniquely positioned to stitch reuse into mainstream supply chains. Manufacturers can educate the market by publishing third-party-verified EPDs for new and remanufactured cabinet lines, and by pairing reclaimed listings with EPD-aligned impact documentation so designers can spec reuse with the same confidence as new. Robust buy-back or take-back programs give homeowners credit for returning serviceable units, while modular product lines designed for easy disassembly extend service life and simplify future refurbishment. Industry-wide investment in remanufacturing—where salvaged doors are refinished, upgraded, and resold at roughly 60 percent of new-unit cost—can transform today's waste stream into tomorrow's revenue line while shrinking demand for virgin timber.

Salvage Nonprofits and Reuse Retailers: Scaling Access

Groups such as Habitat for Humanity ReStores, Second Use, The Reuse People, and Rebuilding Exchange already divert thousands of tons of high-grade cabinetry each year. The next step is

efficiency. AI-based condition grading, barcode-driven inventory, and provenance records can cut processing times and build buyer trust. Coupled with targeted outreach that demystifies reclaimed products for homeowners and contractors, these upgrades broaden both supply and demand.

Consumers: Shaping the Market with Every Purchase

Homeowners exercise decisive influence simply by asking remodelers for reclaimed options, browsing digital resale platforms, and rewarding brands that publish circular performance metrics. As Gen Z and Millennials continue to dominate renovation spending, their preference for low-carbon, character-rich materials will move from a specialty request to a default expectation.

The Path Forward: Coordinated Innovation

To convert momentum into mass adoption, the industry should:

- Build regional salvage hubs to receive, store, and redistribute reusable kitchens at scale.
- Standardize digital tools—AI design platforms, marketplace APIs, and material passports—so reclaimed components slot seamlessly into project workflows.
- Launch clear, consumer-facing education that dispels quality myths and highlights cost savings.
- Advance supportive policy: deconstruction mandates, landfill-fee differentials, tax credits, and third-party reuse certifications.

When these threads synchronize, reuse delivers a triple dividend: lower project costs, new profit centers, and a sharply reduced environmental footprint. Circular remodeling is therefore more than a sustainability imperative—it is a blueprint for a resilient, margin-rich kitchen industry ready for the demands of the next decade.

CONCLUSION: FROM VISION TO STANDARD PRACTICE

The evidence presented here makes one point unmistakable: kitchen-material reuse is no longer a boutique sustainability gesture, but a financially rational, policy-aligned, and technologically enabled path toward standard practice. National data show the scale of the opportunity. EPA estimates that approximately 600 million short tons of construction and demolition debris were generated in the United States in 2018, with just over 455 million tons directed for reuse and just under 145 million tons sent to landfills. Wood-based materials are also a significant disposal stream: EPA estimated that 18.1 million tons of wood entered municipal solid waste in 2018, including 12.2 million tons landfilled. Although these national datasets do not isolate kitchen cabinetry, they establish the size of the material system that kitchen reuse can interrupt. Because kitchen cabinets can have service lives of up to 50 years,

many removed components may retain functional value even when they no longer meet a homeowner's design, layout, or aesthetic goals. In this light, status quo demolition is less a habit than a liability.

Adoption barriers—fragmented marketplaces, limited deconstruction training, conservative code interpretation, inconsistent standards, and appraisal uncertainty—remain real, but they are steadily shrinking. Research on circular construction continues to identify fragmented supply chains, unclear regulations, inconsistent quality standards, and higher perceived upfront costs as persistent barriers to building-material reuse. At the same time, digital inventory platforms, material passports, and resource-exchange systems are making recovered materials easier to identify, document, value, and move through secondary markets. Material passports can support due diligence by storing information on material composition, certifications, warranties, and reuse potential. At the same time, connected inventory platforms such as Rheaply demonstrate how furniture, fixtures, equipment, and building materials can remain in circulation rather than enter the waste stream.

Kitchen-industry expert Jim Gurulé notes that many cabinets removed during remodels are not functionally obsolete, but displaced by changing layouts, aesthetics, or homeowner preferences. From his perspective, reuse succeeds when it becomes operationally predictable for contractors and financially rational for owners. Gurulé emphasizes that deconstruction, resale coordination, and reuse logistics are increasingly becoming service lines rather than burdens, particularly as digital tools improve inventory visibility, material tracking, and customer confidence. In that sense, the market is beginning to shift from viewing salvage as a disposal alternative toward recognizing it as a recoverable asset stream and, potentially, a new “margin frontier” for the remodeling industry.

What remains is coordinated execution. Manufacturers must close the loop by designing for disassembly, standardizing replacement parts, and expanding take-back or remanufacturing pathways. Contractors should institutionalize deconstruction training and adopt digital tools that make reuse as predictable as ordering new stock. Policymakers can accelerate adoption by implementing deconstruction requirements, aligning landfill surcharges with diversion goals, supporting reuse infrastructure, and requiring better material documentation. Owners and developers can request EPDs, EPD-aligned disclosures, material passports, or equivalent documentation for both new and reused products, ensuring reuse is evaluated with the same discipline as virgin materials. And, most critically, homeowners and designers can normalize reuse simply by asking for it—especially as younger consumers continue to signal strong preferences for sustainable products and services. First Insight and Wharton found that 75 percent of Gen Z and 71 percent of Millennials consider sustainability more important than brand name in purchasing decisions, while Deloitte reported that roughly two-thirds of Gen Zs and Millennials are willing to pay more for environmentally sustainable products or services.

If these stakeholders act in concert, kitchens can become a flagship success story for the circular economy: lowering project costs, creating skilled jobs, freeing landfill capacity, preserving material value, and reducing demand for virgin resources without compromising

aesthetics or timeline. The future is no longer speculative; the tools, policies, market demand, and reuse infrastructure are already taking shape. The only real risk is inertia—and as the data show, that may be the most costly option of all.

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Betker is a TRUE (Total Resource Use and Efficiency) Zero Waste Advisor and a SEA (Sustainability Excellence Associate) credentialed by Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI), and a Circular Economy instructor credentialed by the Circular Economy Institute. She serves on the boards of SWANA Minnesota (Solid Waste Association of North America – Minnesota Chapter), Reuse Minnesota, the National Stewardship Action Foundation, and the Minnesota Biochar Initiative, where she focuses on reframing waste as a resource and advancing circular solutions for people, planet, and profit.

RESOURCES:

- ⁱ [BMRA, 2024.](#)
- ⁱⁱ [US EPA, 2018](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ EREF, 2024
- ^{iv} [Prnewswire,2025](#)
- ^v [US Houzz, 2025](#)
- ^{vi} [BMRA, 2024.](#)
- ^{vii} City of Portland, 2025
- ^{viii} [ReCapturit.](#)
- ^{ix} Milwaukee [Deconstruction Ordinance](#), 2019
- ^x [Routeware](#), 2025
- ^{xi} [The State of Consumer Spending, 2021](#)
- ^{xii} [US EPA](#),2018
- ^{xiii} [US EPA](#),2018
- ^{xiii} [US EPA](#) WARM Model, 2025
- ^{xiv} [US EPA](#),2018
- ^{xv} [US EPA](#) WARM Model, 2025
- ^{xvi} [Habitat For Humanity, 2023-2024](#)
- ^{xvii} [City of Palo Alto, CA, 2020](#)