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Knotty Pine

IT'S NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE

Think of knotty pine. What comes to mind? Old cabins and lodges? Your grandparents' basement? Maybe you're thinking paint, as in, "Let's update that old knotty pine paneling by priming and painting it."

Whatever your thoughts and from wherever they come, knotty pine—wood from a pine tree that is cut so that the knots form a decorative pattern—evokes nostalgic musings. Several Midwest designers and woodworkers report that today, knotty pine takes on several looks, whether reclaimed, updated, natural, or awash with a new finish.

For woodworker Andrew Brown, knotty pine offers dozens of opportunities. He and his wife, Mary, of Lakeside, Michigan (they are transplants from Detroit and Chicago, respectively), use knotty pine in several projects. For their home addition, Brown used antique reclaimed knotty pine from Virginia-based Mountain Lumber Co. The couple, who own Hearthwoods Cottage Design on Red Arrow Highway in Lakeside, sell furniture and floors made from reclaimed knotty pine. Recently, Brown fabricated a wide-plank knotty pine floor that features 9-, 11-, 13- and 15-inch-wide planks. "It's really cool," he says of the character-rich flooring.

Interior designer Sally Matak of MATAKdesign in Birmingham, Mich., concurs with Brown. "Knotty pine floors, especially wide-plank flooring, can be stunning," Matak says. Originally from Canada, Matak has designed interiors for everything from vacation homes to offices to main residences. "If you want to update knotty pine cabinets," Matak says, "you can

do some prep work and paint them, and also change out the hardware." Or, you can get a more reclaimed look. "For a raw look," Matak suggests, "strip off the layers of the varnish/polyurethane topcoat, which typically yellows over the years."

That technique is exactly what interior designer David Weston, co-owner of Think Design Studio in Grand Rapids, Mich., recommends. "Generally, people like to refurbish their knotty pine by stripping it down and putting a lighter glaze on it or a wash of color so you can see the grain of wood coming through," says Weston, who's committed to eco-friendly treatments. "You want to preserve the knotty pine character, especially for cottages, but make it lighter and brighter, as cabins are more sophisticated these days. It used to be that walking into a cottage was like going into a cave."

Weston designs interiors for both residences and offices, many of which are in Saugatuck and Douglas. "Reclaimed knotty pine is great," he says, "because it's been refinished and doesn't look like that orangey, old knotty pine of the past."

A nostalgic look at knotty pine can be seen at Sea Glass Cottage, a lovely, 5-year-old shop in South Haven, Mich. Located in a 1930s space that originally



was a gas station, the shop showcases a variety of home décor vignettes. Its "bedroom" boasts three knotty pine walls.

"Knotty pine creates a warm and cozy atmosphere," says shop co-owner Deborah Gershbein, who lives in both Chicago and South Haven. Many of the shop's wares echo the colors of the sea and sea glass, Gershbein explains. Bedroom quilts, furniture, lamps, throws, rugs and other goods complement knotty pine paneling. For Gershbein, knotty pine is reminiscent of childhood memories. "We had it when I was a girl," she recalls. A few years ago, when she built her current South Haven cottage, she noted there were not many home décor shops in the area. "So I opened one. The knotty pine was already a part of the building," she recalls of the naturally stained pine. "It was a main attraction for me."

Interior designer Janet Harrington got just the look she wanted when she went the knotty pine route for the new Lighthouse Restaurant in Cedar Lake, Indiana. Working with Merrillville, Indiana's WPM Construction, Harrington says the builders and design team opted for a knotty pine interior to evoke an old, nautical theme.

"Part of the restaurant is supposed to look like the inside of a boathouse," Harrington explains. Knotty pine paneling and ceiling beams were just the ticket. "It warms up the whole atmosphere."

—MEGAN SWOYER

