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## When Restaurants Remodel – A Lesson from Red Lobster

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**Have you ever considered the environmental impact of a restaurant? What about when a restaurant decides to remodel?**

I've always held a special place in my heart for the **Darden** family of restaurants (Olive Garden and Red Lobster especially). For years while I was growing up my mom worked at Olive Garden as a bartender. One of my first jobs in college was with Olive Garden. I remember the smell of the restaurant after coming home from a shift to this day. My mom always had those little Ande's Candies mints stuffed in her apron and on her night stand. **I'm sure if I looked hard enough I'd still find some in her house today – many, many,**

**many years after she left the company.** My job was short lived as I quickly realized the restaurant life was not in my future.

I remember as a child going out to dinner with my family and **Red Lobster was always one of our favorites.** We always thought of it as a special treat. I would always press my nose up against the lobster tanks wondering if they had ever snapped off anyone's fingers with those huge claws of theirs. **Even today, I enjoy taking my kids to the local Red Lobster for some of their cheddar biscuits.**

I was lucky enough to be invited to see the results of the recent remodel of our local store in **Tampa/Clearwater.** It's one of the first set of restaurants that the company is remodeling in their chain. Over the next three years they will be remodeling about 700 stores in the US and Canada to resemble the small Maine town of Bar Harbor.

**Have you ever wondered how environmentally friendly a restaurant remodel can be? What happens to all of those fixtures and features in the current restaurant that are still usable? Do they trash them, resell them, or something else?** I was excited to learn more in one of my emails with my correspondent with Red Lobster. Here is a short expert from one of our emails:

*Knowing you're passionate about eco friendly practices, I wanted to let you know that as part of the remodel process, Red Lobster donated the old art work and other décor, dining tables and chairs, booth seating and host/hostess stands from the remodeled restaurants to Habitat for Humanity International. These furnishings will be sold at local Habitat for Humanity ReStore resale outlets in the Tampa Bay-area.*

*Red Lobster also utilized recycled building materials throughout the remodel process; supplies such as sheetrock, doors and windows are made from recycled content. In addition the restaurant incorporated more windows more frequently into the building's exterior to reduce the need for artificial light.*

Until recently we've never had a personal experience with **Habitat for Humanity** but we've always respected the organization and the work they do for our communities. My husband was honored to be selected to accompany a team to China recently with his employer and help contribute to a series of houses being built outside of Shanghai. While I know there are many people in our own communities that could use the assistance I am so proud of my husband for dedicating his time and money to help others in a part of the country that has far less that we could ever imagine. **I know it was a life changing experience for him and those who served on their team.**

I didn't realize that Habitat had retail stores all around the country that offered deep discounts of items used to build houses (toilets, cabinets, paint, etc) as well as decorations (like those from Red Lobster stores) used to make those houses someone's home. You can learn more about the **Habitat ReStore** resale outlets and find a store near you by visiting:

<http://www.habitat.org/restores/default.aspx?tgs=Ni8yNS8yMDEwOjI3OjMwIFBN>.



About a month ago we packed up the family and went to go enjoy the new look along with some new menu items. After a recent trip to Maine I was eager to try their **New England Lobster Rolls and Lobster Bisque**. Of



course we had to start with their famous cheddar biscuits too and I couldn't pass up an opportunity to try their new sangria.

I thought it was funny that **my kids both pressed their nose up against the lobster tank** just like I use to do as a child. We all enjoyed a nice evening that reminded me of going out to dinner with my parents. The kids always enjoy going out to eat because that's the only time I let them drink sodas – but I know it's more than the sodas they really enjoy. We all devoured our food and I was able to get a few good pictures of my food and drink while they looked as beautiful as they tasted.

After knowing that their previous decorations and furniture may be sitting in someone's new home it made me feel a little better about a company that I've always loved. I may just have to make a trip to a Habitat ReStore one day just to see what interesting finds they have. Too bad these adorable Adirondack chairs are new to the remodel – **they would look adorable out by our pool.**



**What restaurants make you think back to being a child? Did you and your family have a special place where you would always go for birthdays and other special events?**

*Disclosure: I was provided with a gift certificate for Red Lobster and decided I would share my experience with you along with information on how they considered the environmental impacts of their remodel. All opinions expressed in this post are my own and were not influenced by Red Lobster.*