



# Black Dog Salvage in Roanoke VA: Turning Trash into Treasure

Written by Katherine Rodeghier

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**Black Dog Salvage warehouse becomes an interior design showroom and a leading attraction in Roanoke, VA in the heart of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains.**

“Seriously,” I grumbled when I pulled into the parking lot of Black Dog Salvage—Tripadvisor’s highly recommended attraction in Roanoke, Virginia. Strewn around and behind the building lay a jumble of odd pieces of...okay, I’ll say it...junk.

But first impressions can be wrong. Mine sure was.

Once inside [Black Dog Salvage](#), I discovered a wonderland of reclaimed, repurposed, restored furniture and home goods, and a showcase of art and antiques. Next door to the warehouse, a circa 1911 house doubles as an inn for overnight guests and a showroom for the creations coming from Black Dog’s fabrication shop.

So how did a gritty salvage warehouse evolve into a high-end interior design showroom, spawn a reality TV show that aired for eight years, and become a big draw for visitors to this city nestled in Appalachia's Blue Ridge Mountains?

## **Two Navy Veterans Turn to Salvage**

It started with a garage. Mike Whiteside wanted to build one so he sought the advice of fellow ex-Navy guy Robert Kulp. In the process, the two began commiserating over the planned demolition of a Roanoke house built in 1892 and full of architectural details.

“Let’s go after that place and save it,” Kulp remembers saying. It took three weeks to pull the house apart and store the salvage in a small warehouse Whiteside had rented. With Whiteside’s black dog Molly at his side, the two U.S. Navy veterans turned over an old vinyl sign and wrote “Salvage.” Moments later a customer pulled up.

That was 1999. Business snowballed from there.



Owners Robert Kulp (left) and Mike Whiteside talk with visitors in the main warehouse of Black Dog Salvage in Roanoke, Va. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

One salvaged building led to another and in 2003, Black Dog Salvage moved into a 44,000-square-foot warehouse near Roanoke's [Historic Grandin Village neighborhood](#) to store what some might call junk. They considered everything architectural treasures. Kulp and Whiteside acquired a second warehouse in 2015 to receive new items and is open by appointment.



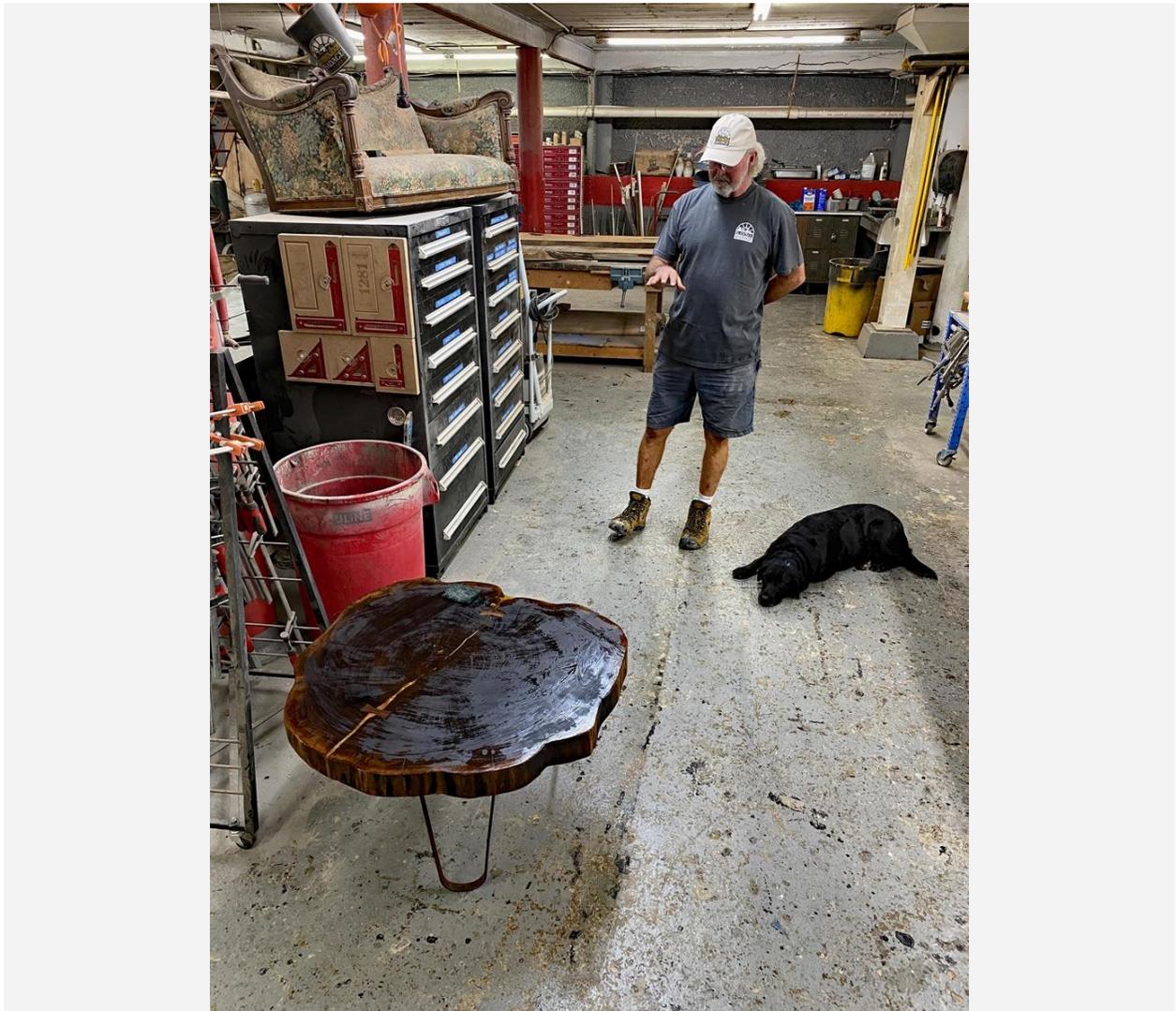
Black Dog Salvage moved into its main warehouse in 2003 where it evolved into a design center and showcase for antiques, art, and home goods. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

“A salvage is just one step from hoarding,” jokes Kulp, whose attention to detail coupled with Whiteside’s creative problem-solving skills form the backbone of their partnership in one of the premier architectural salvage operations in the nation. And what of the dogs? Frequently one or two pet black dogs roam the premises, serving as a kind of mascot for the business. The current pair, Stella and Molly May, were adopted from the [Roanoke Valley SPCA](#) and [Save A Lab Rescue](#).

## **Black Dog Salvage Helps Spare Landfills**

Stella followed me on a tour of the fabrication shop where customers' dreams are turned into reality using reclaimed materials. It might be a piece of custom furniture, a kitchen island, or a wrought iron fence.

Between breaks to play fetch with the friendly canine, Whiteside showed me a wood coffee table he's refinishing and a beat-up sofa with ornate wood scrollwork along its frame that's in dire need of some love.



With one of the operation's black dogs resting nearby, Mike Whiteside explains work in progress on a wooden coffee table in the fabrication shop. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

While tinkering in the lamp room, Whiteside lamented the loss of any still-usable object. “We live in a disposable society. When something breaks you throw it away and buy another at Target,” he says.

Black Dog Salvage takes a more sustainable approach, saving pieces that still have value from landfills, be they furniture, reclaimed wood, or old house parts such as doors, windows, clawfoot bathtubs, and fireplace mantels.

Black Dog’s inventory changes daily as new salvage comes in and completed items go out. Clients range from blue-collar contractors to high-end interior designers looking to restore a historic building or add character to a new or existing structure.

## **TV Stars**

Kulp tells me Whiteside’s fishing buddy—“and drinking buddy,” Whiteside quickly interjects—urged the pair to turn their salvage enterprise into a reality TV show.

“[Salvage Dawgs](#)” first aired on the DIY Network in 2012 for what was originally to be five episodes. Eleven seasons and 143 episodes later, the run finally came to an end. The series still can be viewed on Discovery +, [Amazon](#), iTunes, and YouTube TV. A podcast is in the works and is expected to launch in January 2022.



One man’s junk is another man’s—or woman’s—treasure. Salvaged bathroom parts are stored in the yard of

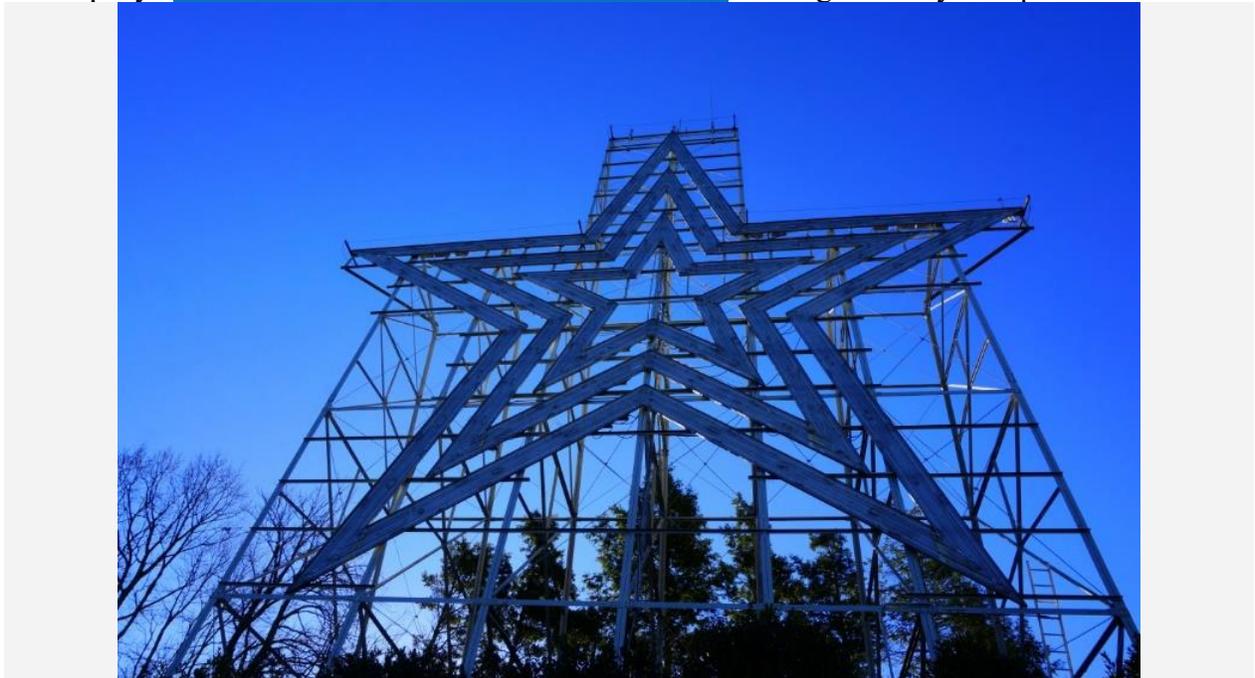
Black Dog Salvage’s main warehouse. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

Kulp is quick to say he and Whiteside are not celebrity actors in the unscripted, family-friendly docuseries. “We’re just normal people with normal problems.” He credits the success of “Salvage Dawgs” with their ability to “identify with America as just regular old folks.”

The show put Black Dog Salvage—and Roanoke—on the map. “It allowed the business to grow exponentially,” he says. They went from six to 22 salvage jobs a year and from eight to 20 employees—30 employees at their peak.

### **Boosting Tourism**

“It was great for the business; it was [great for Roanoke](#),” says Kulp. Black Dog estimates it has received as many as 150,000 annual visitors from across the U.S. and a few from abroad. Some purposely routed their itinerary through Roanoke just to stop by. [Tripadvisor lists Black Dog Salvage](#) among the city’s top attractions.



Look up to see the Roanoke Star on Mill Mountain from almost anywhere in town. Photo by Susan Lanier-

Graham

Visitors come to the main warehouse not only to see Black Dog creations but also to browse the building’s Marketplace showcasing the works of more than 100 regional

artists and vendors. The space serves as a small-business incubator making it possible for some to open their own shops.

Black Dog transformed its warehouse mezzanine into the Loft Gallery displaying regional art, pottery, sculpture, and [Ttxtur furniture](#) sustainably made in Roanoke. It also sells [Winndom mattresses](#) handcrafted in Virginia and—for do-it-yourselfers—shiplap paneling reclaimed from Appalachian barn wood and its own brand of [Black Dog Salvage furniture paint](#) designed for a variety of surfaces. Behind the main warehouse, Black Dog created an outdoor venue it calls The Dog Bowl. They repurposed a salvaged semi-trailer as a stage.



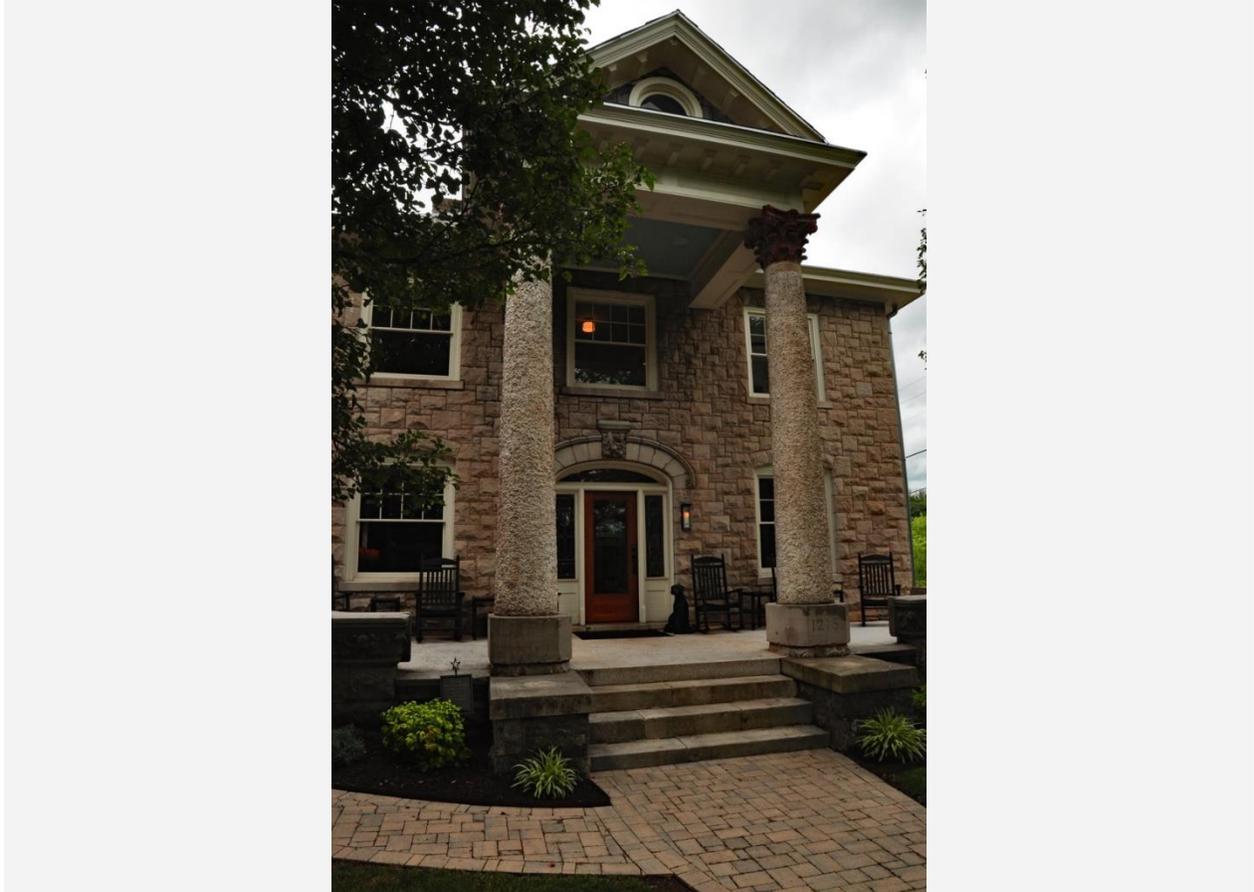
The stage of The Dog Bowl started life as a semi-trailer. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

It holds a market there on the third Sunday of the month with live entertainment, food trucks, and vendors offering vintage and handmade items. From June through October, concerts fill the Dog Bowl one Saturday night a month. Proceeds from the gate benefit local nonprofit organizations.

### **The Stone House**

When Black Dog Salvage moved into its main warehouse, it acquired a dilapidated 1911 house next door that had been vacant for many years. It had no heat and

certainly no air conditioning. Windows were broken and the roof was in sad shape. Kulp and Whiteside used it for some inside shots for “Salvage Dawgs” and decided to refurbish it.

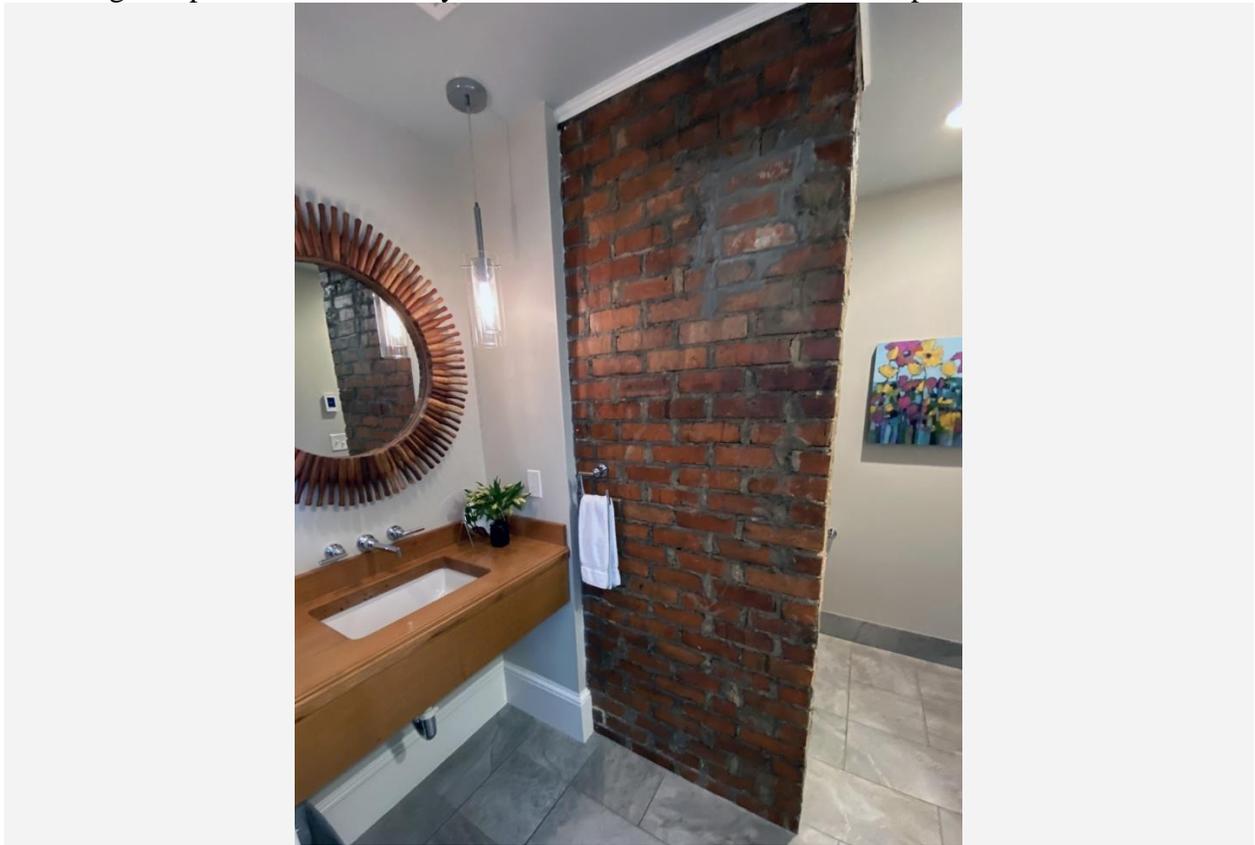


The Stone House, built in 1911 by a local stonemason. It's now an event space and inn for overnight guests. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

An Italian immigrant stonemason, Michael Grosso, and his son Joseph built the house as the family's residence. Kulp and Whiteside learned from several sources that Grosso wanted to live in a tony part of town, but his ethnicity and immigrant status restricted him from owning property there. Instead, he built just across the bridge, as close as possible to the neighborhood that denied him.

Grosso worked on several stone structures in Roanoke. During the renovation of The Stone House, Kulp and Whiteside discovered materials and designs from Grosso's other projects. A gargoyle dug up in the backyard matches one from a post office demolished in the 1930s.

With a goal of keeping key architectural details but adding modern amenities and conveniences, Black Dog set about gutting the house and refurbishing with reclaimed materials. It kept much of the oak flooring, the staircase, and two non-working fireplaces. A chimney in a bathroom became a brick partition.



Black Dog Salvage repurposed the brick chimney in the Stone House as a dividing wall in a bathroom.

Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

An eye-catching chandelier over the dining room table is made from telegraph parts and glass blown by Whiteside's daughter.

### **Inn and Idea Generator for Black Dog Salvage**

The Stone House now serves as a 2,400-square-foot extension of Black Dog Salvage's interior design showroom. The beautifully furnished three-bedroom home opened in 2018 as an event space and can be [booked for overnight stays through VRBO](#).



Beautiful rooms in the Stone House show off the creative works of Black Dog Salvage. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

From two back porches, one on each of the two floors, guests can look out on the backyard at Black Dog Salvage strewn with what some might call junk—while others see dreams in the making. Be sure to check out Wander for more great ideas on [what to see and do when you visit Roanoke](#) or [other parts of Virginia](#).





### **Written by Katherine Rodeghier**

During her extensive career as a travel journalist, Kathy has researched destinations in nearly 100 countries and has taken cruises across the globe. Her travel experiences span all seven continents, including close encounters with penguins and leopard seals in Antarctica, lions in Tanzania and tortoises in the Galapagos Islands. She has waded into a cranberry marsh in Wisconsin, danced the two-step in the Texas Hill Country and hiked into Havasupai Canyon in Arizona. Her travel journalism career began in suburban Chicago writing and editing an award-winning newspaper travel section for the Daily Herald. She continues to write about travel as freelancer for the Daily Herald as well as for other newspapers, including the Chicago Tribune, St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Dallas Morning News. Her work also can be found in Global Traveler magazine, Cruise Travel magazine and auto club publications and on websites FoodieTravelUSA.com and GoNOMAD.com among others. She's a member of the Society of American Travel Writers, is on the board of Midwest Travel Journalists Association.

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