

CURB APPEAL and THE "WOW" FACTOR

EXTERIOR HOME RENOVATIONS

The exterior of your home is the first and lasting impression one makes as they make their approach. Who wouldn't want others to comment on how lovely your home is, regardless of size or style? Let's discuss many of the exterior elements of a home - keeping in mind we usually want them as maintenance free as possible yet generate great curb appeal.

Doors: The entry door is usually designed to make a statement - in addition to ward off the cold and invaders. Made of wood, fiberglass or steel - each is available in a variety of styles. Some have beautiful decorative glass that sparkles like diamonds. Solid wood doors are expensive and require a high level of maintenance. Solid core wood veneer doors are less costly. Fiberglass is durable and flexible for any climate. Doors of fiberglass can be stained to look like wood or painted but will not rot or warp, are low maintenance and energy efficient. Steel doors are long lasting, although not as energy efficient. You also need to consider whether you're adding a storm door - trapped heat from the glass can damage an entry door. Finally, don't forget the jewelry - the door handles. New finishes are guaranteed and are worth the extra cost.

Siding: Climate plays an important part on the type of siding you use on your home. Vinyl siding is very popular and is good in all climates. It comes in many colors and patterns; minor scratches are not easily detected because the color is solid throughout. It's very easy to maintain with a yearly washing. Friendly Reminder - Keep the grill away from the vinyl as it can melt. You don't want to be serving cooked vinyl with your meal. Aluminum siding is maintenance free although it can dent and may fade over time. It is inexpensive but not used as much as the vinyl. Wood siding is usually made of cedar, redwood and cypress. It is more expensive than vinyl but some think the beauty of wood is worth the added cost. It is subject to moisture if not cared for. In this climate, a coat of paint can make a more lasting product. Fiber cement siding is durable and easy to install. It is fire resistant, moisture and insect resistant and will not rot. It must be painted but the paint will last longer on this than on wood. Years ago, we would have laughed if you'd said we'd be using cement for siding - now it is more and more common.

Roofing: most used are fiberglass asphalt shingles. They are saturated with asphalt and coated with minerals on one side to resist weathering. They are flexible and strong and generally have a 20-30 year guarantee. Dimensional shingles are thicker and have a more appealing architectural appearance. Their lifespan is generally 40 years. Cedar shakes, tile, metal and slate are used less frequently. All roofs require adequate ventilation and flashings. You can go over an existing roof if it is not in bad condition. Gutters and downspouts should be correctly hung (and cleaned out frequently) to prevent water from backing up under the shingles. When water does backup, it generally runs to the inside of the home and shows up at window or door openings. Sometimes just an ill placed gutter nail can cause interior damage. Many blame window caulk on the failure, when the problem is all the way up at the roof level.

Windows: The latest national building codes are more strict regarding energy efficiency and window manufacturers have had to make many product changes (much of the reason window costs have risen). Leaky and inefficient windows, skylights and doors account for more than 25% of your energy bill. Windows 20 years old generally should be replaced. Thanks to low-emissivity coatings, the average double-pane window is now twice as resistant to cold or heat as it was in 1980. Cheap vinyl windows frequently last less than 10 years. Windows should maintain or improve the home's architecture. Many styles are available to the homeowner to achieve that although recognizing what your home should have is not always evident to the homeowner or window installer. If you're searching for the absolute cheapest window price, you're probably not taking into consideration the architecture or efficiency. A very wide airspace between the 2 panes of glass adds energy efficiency (it also reduces outside noise); low e coatings reflect the heat (keeping it inside in the winter and outside in the summer) and block ultraviolet rays; argon, krypton or xenon gas achieve better R ratings; exterior coatings keep your windows clean; shades in between the glass add efficiency (away from little hands, pets and dirt); folding handles accommodate blinds. Tempered glass will now be a requirement for not only tall pieces of glass but windows near a bathtub. There are new requirements regarding the size of openings for easy escape but also how far windows open so young children cannot fall out. New home builders must abide by these rules more so than someone just replacing their windows. Building inspectors, homebuilders and remodelers are trying hard to follow the rules but much controversy exists. Clad windows are wood throughout covered with aluminum or vinyl on the outside for maintenance free exteriors. They are more expensive but offer the most efficiency. They are stained or painted on the interior for added beauty. Vinyl windows are affordable and offer low maintenance (although the vinyl can become brittle and discolor over time). The interiors are white vinyl as well. Some homeowners think this detracts from the inside appearance, others could care less. Composite is the newest player in town, made of sawdust and polymers. They are strong and generally priced in the middle and possibly the window of the future - although most don't have a proven track record yet. Generally new product technology undergoes frequent changes to get it just right. Once you select the window right for you, if its' not installed correctly, all the money you spent could go right out the window.

For more charm, add a decorative roof over your front door for a welcoming entrance and added interest. A full porch certainly makes an inviting statement. Shutters, decorative trim and decking materials are all available now in sturdy, maintenance free products. Flowers and landscaping contribute to the "wow" factor - and now you have time for this since your home is more maintenance free than ever before. Remodel sensibly, your home is usually life's biggest investment.

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