

Creative Living



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condo queries
Robert M. Welsner

Q: My husband and I live in a condominium in Plymouth Township and we have been there since 1983. About two years ago we noticed a leak in our basement. As our basement is finished, pinpointing the origin of the leak was difficult. The site manager of the condominium decided that the main source of the leak was from the main supportive I-beam. This was repaired by digging down and covering the suspect area with tar.

Shortly thereafter, we discovered that we had one more leak. The worst was around a large basement window that sat in a well. We were told that to have the leak repaired we would have to hire someone to remove the exterior finished wall from around the window including the window frame and suspended ceiling which we did. Ultimately we found that the leaking window frame became a leaking frame, two additional leaks in the basement wall and an additional leak around the I-beam.

After a total of four trips by the people hired by the association, the leaks have been stopped. This has taken approximately three months during which time our deposit was a total loss, depriving us of the space we basically desperately need over the holidays. We had out of pocket expenses and painting to be done plus the carpeting now needs to be replaced. Can we hold the association financially responsible for the inside damage caused by the basic structural defect?

A: This is an age-old question which not only is perplexing for co-owners but condominium boards as well. Many condominium boards, unfortunately, make arbitrary and capricious decisions about their repair responsibility without consulting with competent legal counsel. Others make reasoned decisions but decide that they will not follow the condominium documents and rely on either their own so-called "handed-down policies" or what they think they can get away with.

In your case, the responsibility for the association for incidental damage to your unit depends in part upon what the condominium documents say as to the scope of responsibility of the association.

Most condominium documents require that the association be responsible for the incidental damage to a unit which would include, at the least, the items which came with the unit originally when it was purchased from the developer. Others are more expansive in terms of their scope of liability. That is not to say that a court would not take the position that the association, under a negligence theory, is responsible for all of the resultant damage attributable to your unit if it was careless and/or negligent in maintaining the condominium premises.

You are well advised, therefore, to seek the advice of competent legal counsel to review your condominium documents and provide you with a written opinion.

Robert M. Welsner is a Birmingham attorney specializing in condominiums, real estate and corporate law. You are invited to submit topics which you would like to see discussed in this column, including questions about condominiums, by writing Robert M. Welsner, 30200 Telegraph Road, Suite 407, Birmingham 48010.



organizing
Dorothy Lehmkuhl

Q: Every year I fantasize about how I'll improve my yard. When I see all the beautiful tulips, I vow I'll plant hundreds of my own. When tomatoes ripen, I wish I had planted my own. I can't afford a landscaper and somehow the beauty I imagine never materializes. Any suggestions?

A: As with any project, bountiful gardens don't just happen — they require careful planning, and right now is the perfect time.

The first step in your Grand Plan is to gather information. Obtain books and catalogs from the library or book stores. Drive around and spot particularly attractive plantings and find out what they are. Visit several nurseries, talk to their nurserymen and ask for their catalogs and pre-drawn designs. Call the county Extension Service for information.

Set up a Gardening file to hold your data. Make a list of the names of all plants you may want. Write down whether they will grow in sun or shade, when they produce flowers, color or fruit, how big they will eventually get, and the best planting time. (Planting times are much more versatile than they used to be.) Consider a color scheme and continuing maintenance.

Coat your outside shakes as soon as weather permits

AP — One of the misconceptions about the care of wooden shakes on the outside of a house is that they could be allowed to "season" for as long as a year before a coating is applied.

Wrong, say the experts. It takes only a month before the outer surface of the wood develops a loose layer of dead cells. Coating will not adhere to a loose surface.

One of these experts, John Oberle, technical director of Benjamin Moore & Co., advises homeowners to coat the shakes as soon as weather permits.

"If the season has been generally dry," he says, "and you have had two or three days of good weather, the chances are your shakes are dry enough for coating."

SHAKES CAN BE FINISHED in a number of ways with stains, paints, clear coatings or not at all. Left to weather naturally in harsh environments, the resulting layer of loose cells turns cedar an attractive gray.

This outer layer stains in place and offers some protection to underlying layers. Left untreated, however, shakes can sometimes weather unevenly, creating a non-uniform appearance. They can also develop unsightly stains.

To preserve the beauty of cedar's natural color, shakes can be treated with clear coatings that penetrate the wood and require very little upkeep. Not only do they permit cedar to hold its original color and appearance, but many offer the added advantages of repelling water and protecting against wood rot.

Stains, often applied to shakes to achieve a more Colonial look, range from semitransparent to solid. Semitransparent stains allow both texture and grain to show through.

OPAQUE STAINS OBSCURE a bit more of the texture, but obliterate the grain and do not build up a thick, five-year paint coat. Because they penetrate the wood rather than adhere to its surface, stains are also less likely to peel.

Paint is the coating of choice for a smoother, more contemporary look. Untreated cedar requires a base coat of primer before painting because the wood contains soluble materials which may bleed through to the surface. To avoid stains showing through the paint, Oberle says, use one or more coats of a bleed-resistant primer

must be used. Both oil and water-based systems are available for this purpose.

Once the proper primer has been applied, painting is easy. As common sense would dictate, just paint vertically with — not against — the grain. For those who prefer them, special applicator pads are available for painting shakes.

Over the years, untreated shakes eventually wear out and need replacing. Paint provides the most protection against replacing, followed by opaque stains. Semitransparent and clear coatings require more frequent reapplications.

Before a new coating can be applied over the old, the surface of shakes must be free of loose or peeling paint, mildew and the chalky residue that often results from natural degradation of the initial coating.

IF THE WOOD IS BADLY WEATHERED, Oberle advises, it's often wise to use another coat of primer before applying the top coat. Mildew is easily removed with a solution of one-part laundry bleach to four-parts water. Commercial mildew removers are also available.

Because each added coat of semitransparent stain reduces the visibility of the grain, it can be hard to anticipate how the finished job will look. Test the stain first on a small, obscure area of the house.

If you don't like the result, you can step up to an opaque stain or paint. When clear-coated shakes begin to look silvery, it's time for recoating. A new clear coat penetrates the wood and gives the house a rich, fresher look.

When structural changes are made to the exterior of a house, new shakes must be matched to the original color. The task is often tricky.

"If you're trying to match shakes of different ages, the best you can do is minimize the difference," Oberle says. "New shakes and old shakes have different textures." He recommends enlisting the help of a paint dealer.

According to the National Paint and Coatings Association, shakes may be finished with highly satisfactory results "if a top quality material, made by a reputable manufacturer and distributed by a reputable dealer, is applied in accordance with label directions."

"The most important single factor in obtaining a satisfactory finish job is to follow the manufacturer's instructions."

New style home windows helps let the sunshine in

More years ago than most would like to remember, "let the sun shine in" was the anthem of a generation.

Today, that generation — and every other group you can name — is taking that little motto to heart as latest trends in windows, skylights, greenhouses and other ways to "let the sun shine in."

Builders throughout the metropolitan Detroit area are meeting the demand with a variety of innovative and attractive products and design techniques.

"Decorative windows in all shapes, from simple circle to triangles, trapezoids and even more elaborate geometric constructions are showing up in homes everywhere," said James Bonadeo, president of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

"Combined with beveled glass, stained glass, leading, carved wooden mullions and others decorative design features, these windows bring not only light but an air of distinction and charm to any home," he said.

Especially popular with many homes buyers are half-round windows above standard windows or patio doors. And decorative transoms and sideights grace many a home's entrance, while walls of windows bring sunlight and enticing views indoors.

"Despite their obvious aesthetic value, today's new windows can be practical as well," said Bonadeo. "Many feature coated glass, reflective materials, double glazing and other modern techniques to enhance energy efficiency."

With the emphasis on light, sight lines and views of the outside, what's a home owner or builder to do in metropolitan communities where the homes are within sight lines of each other? The answer: glass block.

INCREASINGLY POPULAR in residential applications, glass block is perfect for bringing light into the home while screening a less than perfect view for a measure of privacy. It also is popular inside the home — especially in bathrooms — where it again provides light and privacy.

Last call for 'memories'

What do you think of when thoughts of Meadow Brook Music Festival come to mind? We'd like to know — and share those nostalgic memories with other readers.

Once again, the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers will publish a special section detailing highlights — both past and present — of the outdoor musical event that has been held on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester for the past 25 years. It will appear in all editions

on Thursday, June 1.

A part of the section that proved popular last year was a column on Meadow Brook Memories gleaned from letters from readers who have attended the concerts through the years. We want to repeat it again; this year. Letters chosen for publication will receive two free tickets to a Meadow Brook concert. Send your letters to Meadow Brook Memories, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.



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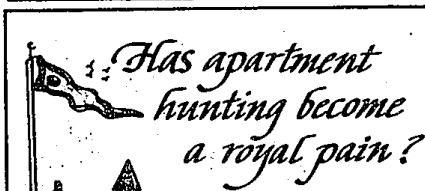
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