

Get the facts on exterior treatments

(AP) — Your home's exterior presents an image to the world. Before deciding what's best for your new home, Home Plan Ideas magazine presents some basics on exterior finishes to help you make an informed decision.

Once a standard for ranches, colonials and other house styles, wood-plank siding is now seen primarily on custom homes because of high initial cost and the amount of maintenance required. Today's top grades of cedar or redwood are usually stained for a natural wood look, but these woods are also the best for holding paint if that's the type finish you want.

Wood-plank siding may be installed in horizontal, vertical or diagonal patterns. Bevel (or clapboard) siding and drop siding are the most popular horizontal patterns. Bevel siding consists of a series of long boards attached to the side of the house from the bottom up, with each new board overlapping the preceding one. Boards should be nailed to the studs through the wall sheathing using corrosion-resistant nails.

Drop siding differs in that the boards lie flat with their upper and lower edges fitted in a tongue-and-groove pattern. Vertical and diagonal patterns

are usually some variation of board-and-batten construction. A narrow strip of wood (batten) is used to cover the joints between plywood or board panels.

The cost of wood-plank siding, which is sold in random lengths, covers a broad spectrum. Advocates of aluminum and vinyl siding are quick to point out the cost of repainting. If you spend an average of \$2,000 repainting every three years, you will have spent more than \$20,000 on repainting during the life of a 30-year mortgage. This is a primary reason why most wood-plank homes today are stained to preserve natural hues or left to weather over time to a gray tone.

Plywood popularity

Other popular wood-siding options include plywood panels and hardboard siding. Plywood panels are thin sheets of wood bonded together with a waterproof adhesive. Typically, these are four-foot-wide sheets with a surface veneer pattern separated by vertical grooves. These wood veneers may be redwood, cedar, fir or pine; they can be bought unfinished, pre-stained or pre-painted.

In recent years, plywood panels formed to look like lap siding have grown in popularity because

they're cheaper and quicker to put up. The range of finishes and thicknesses available makes plywood paneling one of the more popular siding options today. It is also graded by the American Plywood Association; this assures more control over what you're buying.

Hardboard siding is sold in sheets or in planks to be installed as lap siding. It's a resin-bonded ground wood material that is impact-resistant but doesn't offer the variety of tones or shading provided by plywood or lumber. Impact resistance and price are its chief selling points, but hardboard siding isn't graded by an industry group. Its appearance can simulate clapboard, shingles, shakes or other finishes.

Metal siding, either aluminum or steel, is sold in the form of extruded strips with flanges so that adjacent strips can be locked together.

Aluminum siding is popular because it is lightweight, fire resistant and immune to attack by termites. It also comes with long-term guarantees of up to 35 years. Drawbacks include easy denting and noise caused by wind, rain or hail. Because it conducts electricity easily, all metal siding must be grounded. Metal siding may be installed over old surfaces, but uneven walls need furring strips.

Steel siding weighs about twice as much as aluminum, costs a bit more and comes in shorter lengths. These sidings reduce maintenance but aren't truly maintenance free.

They should be washed yearly, and after many years they need touch-up paint or even an entire new coat. Some new varieties feature fluorocarbon surface coatings that help to repel dirt and prevent color fading.

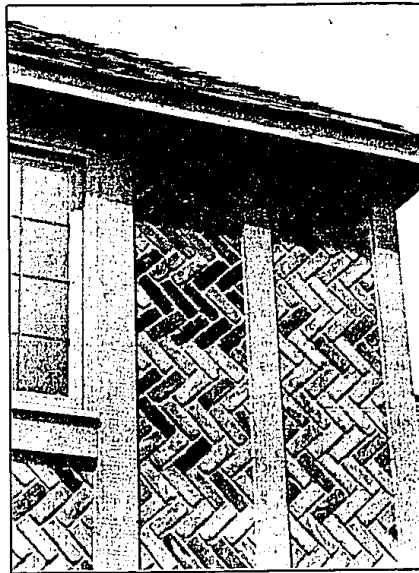
Vinyl siding doesn't dent or conduct electricity the way metal siding does. Available in a variety of colors and embossed textures, vinyl siding is extremely easy to wash and is less likely to lose its gloss than painted metal. The color also runs throughout the thickness of the product, so scratches aren't so noticeable. Because it expands and contracts with temperatures more than other materials, correct installation of vinyl siding is important to avoid buckling or ripping. It's best to install it in hot weather.

Think resale

Brick and stonework are expensive but can increase the resale value of your home. They're popular because they look solid, require little maintenance and are fire resistant.

But brick and stone are seldom used today as structural walls because of the expense. They require extra-thick foundation walls, and craftspeople able to install them are becoming harder to find.

Stucco is a mixture of cement, sand and water that is applied in three coats over a layer of expanded metal lath. The lath is designed to prevent cracking when the house frame expands or contracts.



The look of brick: Except in the high end of the housing market, brick and stone are seldom used as structural walls because of the expense. They require extra-thick foundation walls, and craftspeople able to install them are becoming harder to find.

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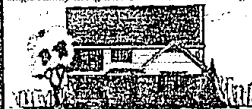


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