

Wood, metal, glass all have place in modern house



STEVEN SIVAK

Metals are a relatively underutilized finish material but they have some amazing qualities in terms of strength and coloration. There is stainless steel and aluminum which are cool and whose finish can range from satin to high polish.

There is brass and there is also bronze which has more copper in it thereby producing a redder coloration than brass. The natural oxidation of brass and bronze is a rather beautiful change which the material undergoes through time. A few years ago the rage was to use chemicals to synthetically produce this green oxidation. Make sure that if you want

this natural oxidation to occur you do not purchase objects that have a clear lacquer finish over the brass. If it is shiny it has this protective coating and will not oxidize. It can be removed with lacquer thinner, 0000 steel wool, and elbow grease.

Rusty steel

Steel has also made its way into the arena especially after it has been allowed to oxidize and produce its characteristic rusty finish. Steel like brass can be chrome-plated which is becoming more and more rare due to EPA restrictions in the chrome process.

Although aluminum can be painted like steel it can also be finished which becomes part of the aluminum itself and is therefore quite durable—similar to Caphalon cookware.

As a culture, wood is perhaps our favorite material and one of the oldest of the North, it is our most important building material. The 2x4 and the type of construction we use, i.e. "the platform frame," is a derivative of post and beam construction which used larger wood members which were intricately joined—a process that required true skill, wooden pegs and large numbers of neighbors to erect. Lots of small toothpicks have taken the place of more massive

members.

It is the wood which is used as a finish material which is truly one of the greatest materials we have. Go to a good lumberyard and one can find the following hardwoods: Red and White Oak, Cherry, Mahogany, Maple, Birch and Poplar and maybe Walnut.

Go to a good hardwood seller like Armstrong Millwork and the number increases to about twenty-five varieties including Wenge, Purpleheart, Bubinga, Ash and Beech.

Think veneer

Get the opportunity to deal with a veneer house and there are close to 200 different species that are available in veneer form. Some of these are drop dead gorgeous, all the way from clear white Holly to pitch black Ebony, and the patterning of the grain structure is quite varied. Some of these must be seen to be appreciated.

When dealing with these veneer houses one gets to choose the tree which has the coloration or grain structure which one prefers and one chooses which side of the tree one prefers. The cabinet maker then purchases those veneer leaves and glues them up to the appropriate base and builds the furniture with them. It is an moderately expensive process but allows one to get the product that one wants.

Wood as both trim and as furniture produces a strong sense of warmth and deep comfort.

Imagine a beautiful library without wood paneling; I do not think it is possible. Wood will wear and if its hardwood will develop its own patina where the finish has been removed.

One nice aspect about the material is that it can always be refinished, as opposed to the plastic debris that fills so much of the stores today. As mentioned last week, I am a big fan of Maple butcher block for kitchen counters. It has such depth and warmth; it also happens to be fairly hard and can, if one likes "patina," be used to cut

Go to your local meat department and see what it looks like with hard daily use. Run a knife through a Corian countertop and I am not sure you will like the patina that is created.

Glass is varied

Glass is one material that rarely changes but did you know that there are thirty or so varieties of glass that can be easily used in decorative situations. Such as cabinet doors or interior glazing panels. With a little bit of perseverance they can be combined with safety panels and used in places that requires tempered glazing.

There is bubble glass, ham-

pered glass, fluted glass, gridded glass, sandblasted glass (which can have an infinite variety of patterns applied to the surface) and tinted glasses. This is an area that requires some investigation on behalf of your designer/architect. Just tell them that you are interested.

Actually, that is what using real materials is all about—the natural variations and colors of the materials found in nature. They are not perfect because they are not photos of wood (which is what Formica that looks like wood is) but wood itself.

It is funny how so much of what is sold is actually plastic disguised to be something else. This is because plastic has no real identity of its own; it must imitate something else.

Plastic windows, plastic carpeting, plastic countertops. Take your time with your design and investigate some real building materials. You will be glad you did.

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Popular Mechanics answers your questions

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Q: I had a company out to install a bathtub and they could not successfully locate the studs. They recommend some other methods of installing a grab bar instead of attaching it to studs. What method do you recommend?

A: The only method that I recommend for securing a grab bar is to fasten it to the studs. A person can exert considerable force on a grab bar, and if the bar is not adequately fastened, it will pull right out of the wall, rather than being loosened. Many people mistake the wash cloth rail on a ceramic soap dish as a grab bar. It is not designed for this. In our opinion, the only grab bar suitable for a bathtub is one made of stainless steel and secured to the studs. There are instruments that can be used to

locate studs. If the company that you called cannot locate the studs, perhaps you should call in another company.

Q: My daughter has a 10-year-old garage door opener that needs repair, but the repairman says the manufacturer told him replacement parts are no longer available. Can you help?

A: Even if the parts were available, the repairman might not want to install them, because the door does not meet current safety standards. The garage door opener does not comply with recent guidelines established by Underwriters Laboratory (UL Standard 295). This is important because between 1992 and 1995, 48 children between the ages of 2 and 14 died from being trapped under garage doors operated by automatic openers. Federal law mandated that as

of Jan. 1, 1993, all new residential garage doors must comply with UL 235. This requires that garage door opener assemblies include a photoelectric sensor or other device that will reverse the door if it comes in contact with someone or something as it is closing. It also requires apparatus to automatically disable the opener should the sensor malfunction.

There are no federal restrictions on repairing older residential garage door openers, but several states require these older devices be brought into compliance with UL 235 at the time repairs are made to them.

Q: The mortar joints on the brick walls of my house are dried and crumbling. How can I repair this?

A: The repair procedure for mortar joints on brick is known as "tuck pointing." Start by chip-

ping out all the loose mortar from the joints with a cold chisel and hammer to a depth of at least 1 inch.

Clean away dust and chips with a water jet and wire brush. In areas where falling water is causing mortar leaks, remove the bricks and clean mortar from remaining bricks in the surrounding area.

Mix mortar from 1 part portland cement, one-half part hydrated lime, 4 1/2 parts sand and enough water so that the mixture can be compacted into a ball.

Let it stand for one hour, then add enough water to make a stiff but workable paste.

Dampen joints with clean water. Use a jointing tool to force the mortar into joints.

As you compress the mortar and strike off the joints with the jointing tool, work in one direction only to avoid forming air pockets.

Don't let frozen pipes ruin your day

(NAPS)—Turning down the heat while you're away from home this winter may sound like a good way to save some money, but it can lead to thousands of dollars worth of damage to your home.

If your water pipes freeze and burst, a one-eighth inch (3-millimeter) crack in a frozen pipe can spew up to 250 gallons of water a day, destroying floors, furniture, appliances and keepsakes.

That's why State Farm Fire and Casualty Company, the nation's largest insurer of homes, suggests setting the thermostat no lower than 55 degrees Fahrenheit (12 degrees Celsius) when you're away. It's also a good idea to ask a friend or neighbor

to check your house daily to ensure it's warm enough to prevent freezing and to see if everything else is OK.

A preventable disaster

There are several other things you can do to make sure you don't return home to find flood-like damage inside your home.

• Insulate pipes in your home's crawl space and attic. These exposed pipes are most susceptible to freezing. The more insulation you use, the better protected your pipes will be. An insulating pipe-sleeve, heat tape or thermostatically controlled heat cables can be used to wrap pipes. Be sure to use products approved by an independent testing organization, such as Underwriters Laboratories Inc., and use the cables only for the use intended.

Seal leaks that allow cold air inside. Look for leaks around dryer vents and pipes. Use caulk or insulation to keep the cold out and the heat in.

• Disconnect garden hoses and, if practical, use an indoor valve to shut off and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets. This reduces the chance of freezing in the short span of pipe just inside the house.

• If you're going to be away for an extended time, it might make sense to shut off and drain the water system. You must be aware, however, that if you have a fire protection sprinkler system in your house, it will be deactivated when you shut off the water.

• If the forecast calls for temperatures to fall below freezing, turn your faucets on so that a trickle of hot and cold water runs overnight.

This is especially important for faucets on outside walls. Also, be sure to open cabinet doors to allow heat to get to uninsulated pipes under sinks near exterior walls.

Free brochure

For a free brochure about preventing frozen pipes, see a State Farm agent or write: State Farm Insurance, Public Affairs Department (FP), One State Farm Plaza, Bloomington, IL 61710.

Insulating leads to money in your pocket

Insulation is the key to saving money and making your house a more comfortable place during the summer and winter months.

The two advantages of insulation are that it saves money on fuel bills and adds comfort to your house. The reason is because heat always moves toward colder areas. This means that every winter, the warmer air in your house wants to greet the cold air outside and in the summer the heat wants to enter your house and merge with air-conditioned air (if you have air conditioning).

Insulation should be installed during the construction of your house, but if your house is under-insulated, more can be added.

Before you insulate, make sure there are no air leaks or cracks in the floors, walls and ceilings. If there are any leaks or cracks, repair them before starting your insulating project. The places you will want to ensure have the correct amount of insulation are

the attic, outside walls and floors that are over unheated space. If you plan to heat the attic, insulate the roof.

Always leave an air space between the insulation and the shingles or other roofing material. When insulating the outside walls of your house, don't forget to include the walls next to an unheated garage or storage room.

Before you determine the type of insulation you want to use, familiarize yourself with insulation terminology.

Some common terms and their definitions are:

■ Rtu—This is a measuring unit of heat. It is the quantity of heat needed to raise the temperature of one pound of water one degree Fahrenheit.

■ Batt—A length of flexible

insulation, usually not more than 48 inches long.

■ Blanket—A length of flexible insulation, usually a roll up to 60 feet long.

■ Coefficient of heat transmission—Sometimes called the "U" factor, it is a measure of the rate heat flows in Btus per hour, per square foot, per degree difference between the temperature difference inside and outside. The lower the "U" factor, the less the heat lost during the winter and the less the heat gained during the summer.

■ Heat Gain—The temperature increase within the house caused by heat entering the house through the roof, walls, doors and windows.

■ Heat Loss—The amount of heat that passes through the

roof, walls, doors and windows from the house to the outside.

■ "K" Factor—Known as thermal conductivity, this is a measure of the heat flow through one inch of material. It is measured in Btus per hour, per square foot of material one inch thick, per degree difference from one side of the material to the other.

■ Radiation—Known as thermal conductance, it is the rate of heat flow through a material. Indicated by the letter "C," it is also measured in Btus.

■ Thermal Insulation—Insulating material, whether it is fill, flexible batts or blankets, reflective material or rigid boards.

■ Vapor Barrier—Material used to keep moisture on the warm side of the insulation from passing through to the cold side. The vapor barrier used is always placed on the side facing the inside of the house.

Information provided by the Do-It-Yourself Encyclopedia.