

Exterior, Interior Wall Materials

EXTERIOR *

MANY people are surprised to learn that walls ordinarily represent a minor portion (usually 5 to 10 percent) of the cost of a house. Most of us think that the exterior walls of a house are more costly, if not more important.

In buying or building a house, probably the single most important element is its walls. For one thing, walls tell us what kind of house we are looking at—a brick house, a wood house, a stone house, etc. Also, they tell us something about the owner. They indicate his taste, ideas of quality, and intentions toward permanent residence.

Let's look, then, at the types of exterior walls most commonly built in today's market and the pros and cons of each. No one wall is right for all possible circumstances. Walls differ in quality, ease of installation, cost, permanence and recyclability.

Brick and stone require virtually no maintenance, will not corrode or dent or rot, are fireproof, termite-proof, and—when properly installed—last longer than other building materials. They carry a quality image unmatched by other materials. Finally, brick and stone are just about totally recyclable. In an energy-conscious society, this feature will become more and more important.

Disadvantages of brick and stone primarily center on initial cost and the skilled workmanship (bricklayer—stonemason) needed.

Concrete block shares many advantages of brick and stone. One plus

that it has over brick and stone is lower initial cost. Disadvantages include a relatively limited selection for residential use, an unfinished look which may not be esthetically pleasing in all applications, and possible need for painting.

Wood walls include cedar, plywood, redwood, lap siding, shingles and shakes. Advantages are that wood is a natural material and an excellent insulator. Additionally, it is easy to work with and is erected by a carpenter.

Wood siding is available in most parts of the country and its in-place cost is generally lower than that of masonry. Disadvantages lie primarily in the need for painting or staining every few years, higher fire insurance rates, and susceptibility to termites and weather.

Advantages of hardboard siding lie in its generally reasonable cost and availability. It is relatively easy to work with and, like wood siding, is often installed by a carpenter.

Disadvantages closely follow those of wood siding. They include the need for paint, and susceptibility to termites and weather.

Hardboard siding may require more maintenance through the years than most other materials. Some homeowners feel this is offset by the modest initial cost.

Aluminum siding is often less expensive than wood sidings, and aluminum is fire resistant, rot-proof, termite-proof and has a number of textures and colors readily available to builders. It is often sold and erected in packages which include aluminum gutters, downspouts and soffits.

Disadvantages include the possibility of fading, denting, and the need for grounding in case of an electrical storm. Also, some people feel that aluminum lacks the quality image of masonry or wood siding.

Advantages of vinyl siding are somewhat similar to aluminum. However, vinyl siding won't fade or rust and tends to resist dents.

Disadvantages are the possibility of cracking in low temperatures, and difficulty of installation. Also, the fire re-

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sistance of vinyl siding is less than that of aluminum or masonry.

Nevertheless, this is a relatively new material which is constantly being improved. At a distance, it is a dead ringer for aluminum siding.

Builders and buyers have a choice of a number of other finished sidings including steel, asphalt, and asbestocement. They are not nearly as widely used as masonry, wood and the major finished sidings. Their advantages primarily lie in the area of durability, while disadvantages include selection and esthetics.

Stucco is a cement-lime material that may be applied over masonry (concrete block) or over a metal lathe. Advantages are that the material is readily available, since it is generally prepared on site, and has a unique appearance.

Stucco can have a rugged Mediterranean textured look or appear to be smooth as glass. And it can be prepared in a wide range of colors.

Disadvantages of stucco are sensitivity to climatic changes, tendency to crack, and need for skilled craftsmen.

All materials mentioned herein can be painted. Several materials—brick, wood, aluminum, stucco, vinyl and stone—may be left unpainted, depending on their finish.

Advantages of choosing a material that requires painting solely lies in color. Disadvantages are the need to repaint or restain every few years. A table in *Exterior Painting*, G-155, a booklet published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, shows what type of paint to use on wall materials.

At the outset, it was said that the walls of a house not only tell a visitor something about the house, but also something about its owner. By careful selection and consideration of initial cost, ease of installation, permanence and recyclability, the homeowner will have the opportunity to choose the right wall for his budget today and for his investment tomorrow.

FOR FURTHER READING:

U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Exterior Painting*, G 155, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Interior**

COLOR, TEXTURE, and design play an important role in selection of interior wall coverings. Some wall coverings can be both decorative and functional. They may serve as backgrounds for furniture and furnishings or to provide beauty and decorative effects. They may also provide color where needed and help to add light or contrast to a room.

Some coverings may serve as noise barriers, or help to further insulate rooms. Some may have fire or flame-resistant qualities.

Gypsum board or sheet rock, paint, regular or vinyl wallpapers, paneling, tiles of ceramic or mirror, laminates or plastic wallboard, plaster, glass, and bricks are among the many choices of materials that can be used on walls. Other materials such as plygrill, carpet, fabrics, and cork may also be used as wall coverings.

Walls are of two types from a construction standpoint—wet wall and dry wall. They are also classified into rigid materials and flexible materials.

Dry wall construction includes gypsum board or sheet rock, paneling and wood finishes, wallpapers, fabrics, and plastic type coverings. Wet wall construction includes plaster, masonry and brick.

Rigid materials include sheet rock, paneling, ceramic tiles, glass tiles, and laminated plastic sheeting. Flexible materials include wallpapers, plastic materials, cork, linoleum, fabrics, and leather.

Paint is used as a finish over walls. One gallon will cover 450 to 500 square feet. Some paints require one coat and some may require two coats. Quality paint will range from \$7 to \$12 per gallon. A wide range of colors are avail-

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