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Replacing Windows In Historic Homes Worth The Extra Effort

By Ed Sanchez

Window restoration and repair fills an interesting niche for homes built between 1910 and the 1960s. While many people rush to spend a lot of money to get new windows, keeping and repairing restoring your existing windows usually leaves you with longer lasting, easier to repair and better looking windows.

Here's why: Wood double hung windows (up and down) can last for 40 to 50 years before they need to be fixed because they don't have plastic parts that can crack or break. The same goes for steel casement (crank-out) windows that can last a century, with about one repair during all

that time, because there are few breakable parts.

On the other hand, new vinyl windows have small, not so visible, plastic injection molded parts used to assemble the window and let it tilt in. These small parts, just like the plastic parts in the interior of your car, start breaking when they are between 10 and 20 years old.

When you look at what's involved with repairing your window, your existing wood or steel windows are an easier bet. Wood windows can all have their parts made easily out of wood. Steel windows just need tune-ups after about 50 years. When you buy new vinyl windows though, they need tiny plastic parts. This

can make things interesting, if the company that sold you the window is no longer in business or doesn't carry your outdated part five to 20 years after you bought the window.

When it comes to looks, window styles change all the time. In the 1960s, louver windows were hot and in the 1970s aluminum was the top choice — both of those are now outdated. Chances are, your vinyl windows will look outdated in about 10 years too.

However, if you renovate your existing wood windows, they can have a charm that doesn't go out of style. Also, if your existing windows are double hung wood, or steel casement (crank-out), they can be

painted different colors on the inside and outside to match the interior and exterior colors of your home. You cannot paint vinyl windows. If your wood windows are prepped and painted right, you won't have to re-putty your window for decades.

Ironically, the really old windows (1910-1930) are particularly worth restoring because they have a counterweight balancing system that works like a scale. This means that when it's balanced right, even if the window weights 50 pounds, it can be opened and shut with one hand!

The only repairs on these windows are in changing the rope, which needs to be done every 30 to 50 years.

Even more interesting, windows until about 1946, had their windowsills and jams (sides) made out of old redwood — sometimes from 500-1,000-year-old redwood trees. The older a redwood tree is, even when it's being used as wood in a window, the more it can repel termites and mold. Lots of the older sashes (the movable parts of an up-down type window) were made of Douglas fir, which was dipped into a borate solution so that it could repel bugs and mold. None of that is available in wood windows made today.

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