

Green and Growing

The roofing industry is looking to give itself a new color.

Recently, a prospective customer of American Custom Contractors, in Rockville, Md., wanted to know if the company would recycle the shingles torn from her roof rather than send them to the landfill. Co-owner Demetri Giakoumatis says that before the homeowner would sign the contract, she insisted on seeing a recycling company receipt as evidence that American Custom Contractors responsibly disposes of waste.

CONSUMER AWARENESS

The number of customers aware of recycling and other earth-friendly options such as reflective shingles isn't large, but it is growing. Herbert Frank, president of Reliable Roofing and Gutters, in West Palm Beach, Fla., says that just a small percentage of current customers — less than 5% — ask about the green aspects of their roofing. "It is really just getting started," he says.

Consumers who insist on such products may be relatively few, but manufacturers are betting their research dollars that that's just for the moment. Roofing product manufacturers introduced a whole spectrum of energy-saving and recyclable items at the International Roofing Expo, in Las Vegas last February, where every other booth, it seemed, eagerly touted eco-value. For the moment, most of these products are targeted to the commercial roofer, but many residential roofers, such as Joseph David Roofing, in Linden, N.J., do commercial roofing as well.

Recently, for example, a homeowner with a low-slope roof "stated definitely that she wanted nothing asphalt-related," says partner Mark David. "So we're going in there with a TPO system."

Frank says he uses "greener" products, such as white tiles that reflect back heat, "any time we can."

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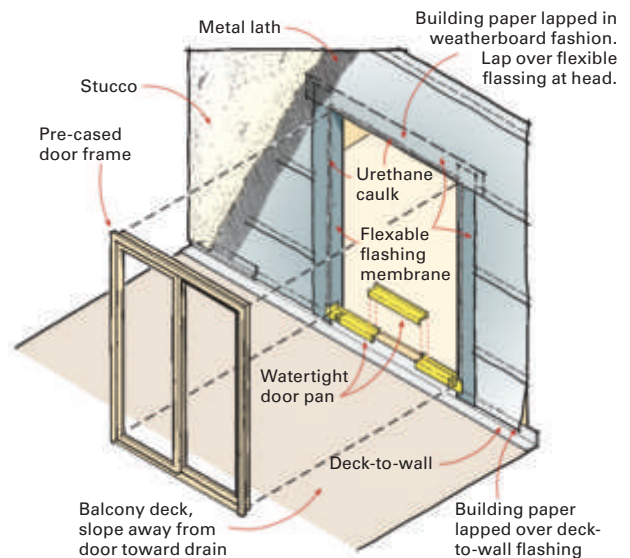
Wall-to-Window (or Door)

Opening up a wall when adding a deck to a home is no small undertaking. Here are some things to consider.

I can't tell you how many jobs I've done where the scope and complexity increased enormously after hearing the homeowner utter this seemingly harmless phrase: "You know, we were thinking ..." A new deck can be a gateway project for customers: Once they see how awesome it is, their creative juices start flowing and you start talking about add-ons. Typical items, such as planters, pergolas, and landscape features, are usually the bailiwick of deck-building carpenters, who can create them with ease.

On the other hand, turning a wall into a window or a door is a different story. Such projects are remodeling carpentry and require a working knowledge of everything in a wall section from siding to drywall to trim, as well as some familiarity with what's required for working inside a home. The complexity of the task raises the stakes for deck-builders who offer this service.

Flashing Details for a Balcony Door



Illustrations: center, Matt Wood; left, THE JOURNAL OF LIGHT CONSTRUCTION; photo: iStockphoto.com/Michael Pettigrew



Quick Fix

Taking time to set client expectations is vital if you anticipate problems on that siding job.

Wood rot, termites, leaning frames, bowed walls, and weather can all cause problems on a siding job. However, most are at least as easy to avoid as they are to solve, contractors say.

"The best thing you can do is to set the customer's expectations up front," says Bill Kidd, president of Missouri Siding and Window, in Sibley, Mo. "Everybody expects you to do everything. It is as important to tell [homeowners] what you *won't* do as it is to say what you will do. If you do that properly, then you usually don't have problems," he adds.

Shawn Talbot, owner of Forever Siding & Windows, in Belmont, N.H., agrees. "As long as you do a good job sales-wise in the beginning, and people feel that you are treating them right, the jobs tend to move pretty smoothly."

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Hidden damage may be the biggest snare for contractors. Talbot warns homeowners that he may encounter rot or other problems when the old siding comes off, and that there may be an additional charge. In general, however, he says that homeowners don't object because they want him to find and deal with such problems.

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Mechanically Inclined

For window installers, the real challenge is handling what's not in the manual. That includes homeowners.

How long does it take to train a rookie to install replacement windows? Doug Cook, president of Feldco, in Chicago, suggests four to six weeks, followed by three months with an experienced installer. California contractor and window replacement instructor Bill Robinson believes a novice "with reasonable manual dexterity, who can follow or read instructions" should be ready to go in six to 12 months. Dan McDowell, owner of All-Weather Seal, in Burton, Mich., estimates it takes three years. "There are so many applications," he notes, and mastering trim and window types — especially for a company installing a variety of windows — isn't simple.

MANAGE THIS

Company owners don't always agree on how much time it takes to master window replacement installation, but most would concur that that's only half the process. Managing client expectations is the other half. "The actual installing doesn't take that long," says Don Darragh, vice president of Energy Swing Windows, in Pittsburgh. "Learning how to treat the customer takes a while."

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BASES COVERED

A pre-bid or design checklist can help you organize your presentation, and is useful for managing your process and your customer's expectations when going "wall-out." Be aware of two things:

Utilities. You can nearly guarantee that electrical will have to be re-routed. Check for plumbing supply lines, waste stacks and vents; HVAC vents and returns may need relocation.

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Anything that “saves the homeowner on some of their utility bills but that can also be promoted as a green product is a positive.”

GREENER FUTURE

Bill Good, executive vice president of the National Roofing Contractors Association, points out that roofing products today insulate better than their predecessors and/or reflect sunlight to reduce energy costs, and that more products are either made from recyclable materials or are designed to be recycled. But, he says, new products coming onto the market promise far greater environmental benefits, particularly those products that integrate photovoltaic technology into glass or roof coverings, especially shingles.

Last year, Allen Brothers, a residential and commercial roofing company in Rochester Hills, Mich., formed a subsidiary to market a kit consisting of 60 solar shingles and other parts that, once installed, can generate 1,860 watts of domestic electricity. The solar roof kit was voted best new product at the Las Vegas show. “If you are making a shingle that is a solar collector all by itself, then the game changes completely,” Good says. —*Jay Holtzman is a freelance writer based in Jamestown, R.I.*

Wall-to-Window, continued

and returns may need relocation.

Subs. You’ll need to get a subcontractor’s bid, and you’ll have to weave the sub into your schedule.

HOW TO DO IT

Here are some suggestions for managing this complicated job:

- Lay out the ledger and finished deck height to correspond with the door threshold; the control point for layout is the interior floor.
- Siding cuts must be exactly laid out — no matter what kind of siding it is. There must also be a provision for head-flashing.
- Framing alterations should be part of your permit drawings, including header size and king/jack studs. Then figure out how you will install the header (usually from the inside). Note: Framing a temporary interior wall helps keep the house from sinking as you remove load-bearing studs.
- Expect to remove/replace/refinish/paint the drywall.
- New interior casing must be installed; it must intersect seamlessly with existing base molding, and be caulked and painted.
- Use dropcloths and/or items such as carpet samples to protect existing floor finishes.

Opening a wall is no small undertaking. If it plays to your strengths, great. If not, subbing the job to a remodeling contractor may be the better part of profitability. —*Mark Clement is a freelance writer and former contractor in Ambler, Pa.*

Quick Fix, continued

For Joseph Iuvara, president of Iuvara Siding & Windows, in Haddon Heights, N.J., getting installation started right is the key. “The most important part of siding installation is preparation,” he says. That means adjusting for a wall that is out of square and making the wall flat so he can install the siding properly, he says.

JOINING TOP PANEL TO TRIM

One perennial problem with vinyl siding is how to fasten the top panel when trimming to fit removes the nailing hem, explains Steve LaPietra, president of Monmouth Vinyl, in Howell, N.J. Some contractors put caulk in the butt and “hope for the best,” but as the siding expands and contracts, the bond tends to break. Others simply nail the top course, ultimately causing bubbles. “The industry hasn’t really provided us an answer,” he says.

LaPietra’s simple, effective solution is an aluminum fastener called PermaTab, made by Securing Devices, in Conroe, Texas, www.securingdevices.com. The piece crimps onto the last cut panel of siding and then locks onto the finish trim. “This seems to cure the problem,” LaPietra says. “It’s been 100% fail-proof for us.” —*J.H.*

Mechanically Inclined, continued

What many owners find is that the mechanically inclined are not necessarily the most socially amenable. “Customer service doesn’t come naturally to folks who are tradesmen,” notes Mike Kelly, owner of Kelly Window & Door, in Cary, N.C. The company’s installers leave behind a survey card with the firm’s warranty package, .

Installers at All-Weather Seal let homeowners know up front that they’ll be asked to fill out a report card at the end of the job. Installers are required to “get the check and the report card,” McDowell says.

HOW’S THAT WORKING FOR YOU?

Robinson, a veteran of many window installs, says two things to homeowners that make a difference. Before he begins working, “I ask them: ‘What is your biggest concern?’” That one question allows the installer to avoid inadvertently annoying the client. Similarly, Robinson says that when he’s finished, he asks customers “What could I have done to make it better?” It might take them a moment to think of something, and it might take the installer a few minutes to address it, but, once all that’s done, “you’re golden.” —*J.C.*



Photo: George Brown