

# Exterior Mot



## Nothing impacts a home's appearance more than its cladding

By Alicia Kelso

We've all heard it before: location, location, location. It's the most important factor when shopping for a home.

But once you've got an area picked out, what next? Besides cost, the other deal-breaker for home builders and buyers is the home's appearance.

A home's exterior can be the difference between a love-at-first-sight or drive-by-without-stopping decision. Some buyers have their hearts set on timeless red brick, while others dream of a rustic log cabin or charming stucco dwelling.

Nothing impacts the home's overall appearance more dramatically than its cladding, and there is no limit to the materials used in home construction.

### Stucco

Many people choose stucco because they like its distinct look. The mixture of cement, sand and lime smoothed over adobe brick or frame construction has a Spanish or Mediterranean influence. It is one of the most common traditional materials; its popularity is based on affordability and durability.

If properly maintained, stucco's tough finish stands up to the harshest weather elements and is also fire and water resistant.

According to Tom Brown, a project manager at Bob Webb Group, stucco is the company's most requested material

in Central Ohio's custom built, high-end homes.

"It's very big here. There are a lot of stucco contractors," he says. "Stucco may seem to be an unusual material for Central Ohio but it's very popular. It's fairly maintenance-free and fairly inexpensive."

Sarah Schnulo, design gallery manager at Romanelli & Hughes, agrees stucco is common among new builds, but adds it is usually seen with other materials, such as cultured stone or brick.

"Very rarely will you see all stucco without any other material for detail. It's just not a style consistent with Central Ohio, but it stands up nicely for our climate and is incorporated into many homes," Schnulo says.

Perhaps the only downside to stucco is its susceptibility to cracking.

"You're putting a large sheet of a cement-based product on a vertical-plane house that is going to shift and settle, so it can get cracks. If it needs repairing, it can be challenging to patch it up color-wise," Schnulo says.

### Brick

Brick's reputation is built on durability, even in the harshest Ohio weather. With proper maintenance, brick can last a century or longer.

Because it is man-made, brick is available in different colors – pastel yellows, pinks, wine red and dark grays. It also

comes with various coursing and bonding options and dimensions, and can be arranged diversely, creating many texture options for homebuyers.

"One of the things that modern technology and shipping has gotten us is people can pick brick that looks very different. You won't see that in a historic neighborhood, where all of the bricks came from the same local plants," Schnulo says.

With the customized opportunities brick presents comes a higher price tag. Cost may deter some from building entirely with brick, but it may exceed your expectations. According to the Brick Industry Association, a brick exterior adds 6 percent to the resale value of a home. Plus, brick won't rot, burn or fade, and it provides excellent thermal insulation and energy efficiency.

"Brick is very popular in certain communities. People like the way it looks, especially all throughout a neighborhood, and it's easy to maintain," Brown says.

### Stone

Of masonry options, however, stone might trump brick in natural and timeless beauty, as it is quarried and not man-made. However, it is the most expensive material used in Central Ohio.

"It is unusual here to see a home made entirely of real stone because of the cost. But it is used a lot more now as an accent," Brown says.

Stone is frequently integrated through-

# ives



out a home's interior on fireplaces, wine cellars or front entryways, for example.

Cultured stone – a veneer, cement-based product that is molded to give it similar texture as real stone – is much more common here, and provides the same benefits, such as looks and durability, without the weight and cost.

“Cultured stone is probably what you see on 95 percent of homes in Central Ohio. They come in a wide range of looks and colors and it has the look, but not the price,” Schnulo says.

## Fiber Cement

Fiber cement, also known by brand name HardiPlank, is made from cement mixed with ground sand, cellulose fiber, and other additives. According to Brown, cement-like siding is gaining in popularity because of its affordability and lack of maintenance.

Depending on how the panels are textured, fiber cement can resemble stucco or wood patterns, but with more durability. It is also fire and decay resistant. Although more expensive than vinyl siding, fiber cement siding is less expensive than wood, stone and brick.

The material does typically require a paint job. However, it absorbs paint enduringly, and if coated properly, it will never peel or chip. Cement fiber siding also stands up to water damage. The only disadvantage, perhaps, is its weight: it is about 1½ times heavier than wood.

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## Wood

Wood siding in new builds has waned in recent years because vinyl and other synthetics are more durable and require less maintenance. Similar to fiber cement is the trademark brand SmartSide, which is commonly used in Romanelli & Hughes homes.

"Very rarely do we see real wood siding anymore. Wood will expand and contract with the freeze/thaw weather elements and every time it expands, it's going to stretch the paint a little. You will need to re-paint the wood every two to three years because of the cracking and peeling. But the newer materials, such as HardiPlank or SmartSide are less susceptible to the freeze/thaw contraction/expansion and last much longer with lower maintenance," Schnulo says.

Real wood trim remains trendy, however, especially cedar trim around windows or doors.

## Vinyl siding

Vinyl siding is the most popular exterior in the country: it is low maintenance, durable and relatively inexpensive. Vinyl siding comes in a rainbow of colors and many manufacturers are now using extra-long panels to reduce the appearance of seams.

There are downsides to winning the popularity contest, though. Some commu-

nities require homes be built with natural materials, so vinyl siding doesn't make the cut. Natural materials have a higher resale value than synthetics. Also, vinyl's color is not permanent and fading will most likely occur.

Still, vinyl pops up occasionally in higher-end neighborhoods to fill in the back or side exterior.

"Vinyl is very durable and doesn't have the maintenance other materials might have. But it is a lower price point material and therefore might not be a material used in some communities," Schnulo says.

## Combinations

Most homes feature some type of exterior combination, whether it is cultured stone and stucco with brick accent or a brick front façade with siding on the back and wood trim.

"Combinations are increasingly common because it may help lower the overall cost. It also creates interest and texture and shadow, and it adds depth," Schnulo says.

It's important to check your location first, to make sure the community allows your desired materials and that those materials are consistent with the look and feel of the other homes. Also, keep in mind the potential re-sale cost. You don't want to blow your budget on an all-brick home if

the rest of the neighborhood has brick facades with three sides of a cheaper material; it will drive your price up.

"You want to have a similar look to other homes in your neighborhood, to create that sense of community and to add appeal," Schnulo says. "You'll know exactly what you want when you see it." ❖

Alicia Kelso is editor of *Luxury Living*.



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