

Preservation Points
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS)
By Randy Horton

Windows: Restoring or Replacing
Last in a Series

The three preceding articles of “Preservation Points” have detailed the criteria to review when considering replacing original windows. In concluding this series, this article will review each of these criteria.

Original windows are a major architectural detail of the home or commercial building . Victorian, Bungalow and Craftsman architecture have unique qualities which exemplify the style and should be retained. The windows’ size, style (double hung, casement or fixed) and location are an integral part of the architectural characteristics defining the period and style of the structure. The proportion of sashes, stiles, muntins (grids), and exterior moldings are all essential in the architectural integrity of the building.

Preservation Point: The City of Alameda requires a permit when replacing windows

Energy efficiency is the primary factor in the decision to replace original windows. Before deciding to replace original windows one should consider restoring the original window. Caulking around exterior and interior moldings, replacing cracked panes of glass, re-putty of glass panes, weather stripping and strengthening frame corners can extend the life of the window. Insulating of attics and crawl spaces should also be considered before deciding to replace original windows. Adding a removable interior weather stripped sheet of plastic or storm sash can help in the energy efficiency of original windows and help to prevent condensation during winter months.

Preservation Point: The condition of your original window may effect the energy efficiency

Double glazed windows are the window replacement of choice. Depending on the quality of the replacement window, the return on your investment may not be seen for at least 16 years. Argon gas sealed between the two panes of glass may escape if the seal is broken reducing the efficiency of the window. When the seal is broken dust can enter the void causing the window to haze. When this occurs, the only solution is to replace the entire window. Depending on the warranty of the window, one may not be able to recoup the savings projected before the window needs to be replaced. Most studies on the energy efficiency of double glazed windows are performed in severe climate zones and newer homes which are “wrapped” with insulating material.

Preservation Point: Vinyl and aluminum windows can be out of character with older buildings

Cost of replacement windows is also a deciding factor. “Off-the-shelf” window replacement, as advertised at home centers, is very enticing. The options are usually vinyl with snap in grids. However, the sizes offered may not be compatible to the existing window and may require modification to the existing opening. This will add to the installation cost and overall cost of the replacement window. Modifying the opening size will affect the appearance and sacrifice the architectural integrity of the building. Vinyl windows can not be painted, come in limited color choices and over time may become brittle and crack. Restoring your original window or replacing with a custom single glazed wood window can be cheaper and cost effective.

When repair of the original window is not feasible, the new window should match the original as closely as possible to ensure that the historic appearance of the structure is not jeopardized. Previous articles on “Windows: Restoring or Replacing” can be found on the AAPS website @ www.alameda-preservation.org.

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society is dedicated to the preservation of Alameda’s historic structures and neighborhoods. For further information on AAPS, phone 986-9232 or write P.O. Box 1677, Alameda, CA. 94501.