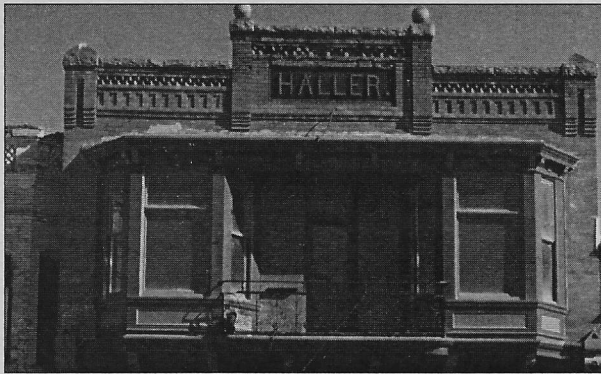


**Butte Citizens for
Preservation and
Revitalization**

Historic Windows: Repair vs. Replacement



**BUTTE CPR
P.O. Box 164
Butte, Montana 59703
www.buttecpr.org
(406) 490-3216**

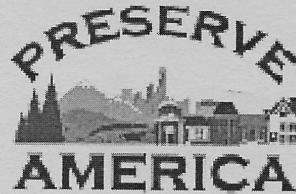


Credit


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Window Repairs Do's and Don'ts

#4: DON'T:



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Since vinyl windows became available in the mid-1980s, property owners have seen them as an inexpensive and maintenance-free way of replacing their tired, old wood windows. Eliminate all drafts, save on your heating bill, make your house look like new - why would anyone say "no?"

The first thing to remember is that a vinyl window salesperson is selling vinyl windows. They are not in the repair business. He or she is not going to tell you that your windows can be repaired -he or she is selling vinyl windows. The sales pitch is not going to include any of the drawbacks to vinyl windows, only the pluses.

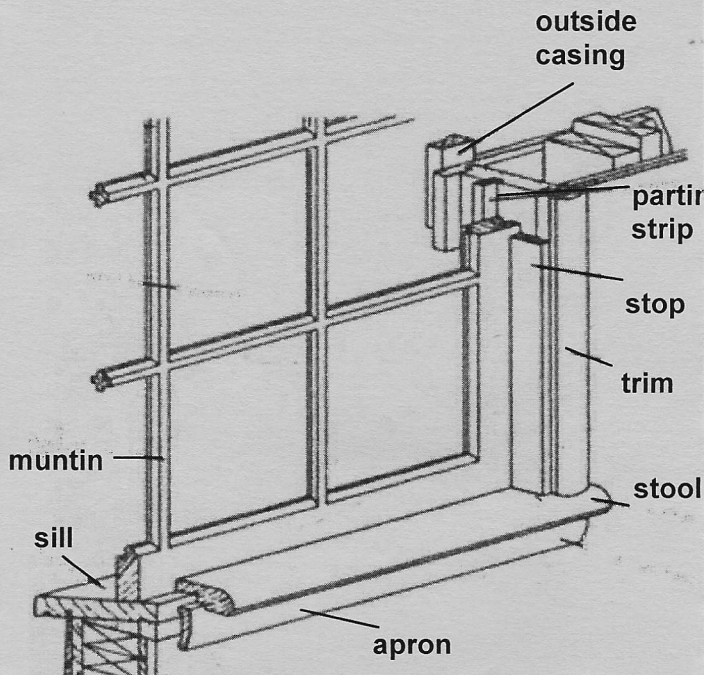
Second, there is no such thing as a maintenance-free house. Here are some reasons why not to replace your wood windows with vinyl:

Vinyl windows are not going to solve your energy problems. There have been many studies on the energy efficiency of wood and vinyl windows. Based on an exhaustive 1996 study in Vermont, a "tight" wood window (meaning it doesn't rattle and is weather-stripped) with a storm window will be as energy efficient as a vinyl thermo-pane window.

Windows account for about 20% of a home's heat loss. Insulating your attic and walls is a far better use of your money. Multiple layers of glass (i.e., thermo-pane windows) are a small part of the heat loss equation. Only a small percentage of a single-pane window's heat loss is through the glass itself. Air infiltration around a window accounts for the remainder, so tighten up those windows and plug the gaps.

If you have wood windows in Butte, chances are they've been there 50, 100, or even 125 years. Why mess with success? If you do install vinyl windows, you'll often get a life-time guarantee. We guarantee that they'll last less than 25 years and

the company that made them will no longer be around. All windows expand and contract with temperature changes; however, vinyl expands more than twice as much as wood and seven times more than glass. Their seals will eventually fail, the desiccant will evaporate, and the windows will fog. The window may last for life, but its practical life will be much shorter.



The energy savings realized by replacing single-pane windows with vinyl windows seldom justifies the replacement cost. Have NorthWestern Energy do an energy audit on your house and see how many pennies you can save a month by replacing all your windows. It can easily take decades to recover replacement costs and with an average life of 25 years or less, vinyl windows hardly make good economic sense.

In a historic neighborhood, if there are seven houses on a block with original wood windows and the eighth house has vinyl windows, the value of the house with vinyl windows is going to suffer. People pay for integrity in historic districts. Original wood windows are important architectural features in any historic building.

They show craftsmanship and detail that cannot be achieved in vinyl.

Wood windows are sustainable. Your wood windows have already been created. The energy to produce them has already been expended. They are made of materials natural to the environment and are renewable. Vinyl windows are created through a toxic petroleum manufacturing process, are unrepairable, and are harmful to the environment when they are inevitably thrown away.

The manufacture of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) is one of the most toxic production processes there is. Dioxin is formed when PVC is manufactured and when it is burned. Dioxin is a carcinogen and among the most toxic chemicals known. Fire-fighting has become a serious problem at vinyl-encased homes. Fortunately, the windows are not toxic while they are being used, but they are toxic to produce and toxic to dispose of.

Additional Information

For online readers, the best source for repairing historic wood windows is National Park Service Brief #9 available at www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief09.htm

And for those who like books, The Old House Journal Compendium has a terrific section on historic window repair. As the title says, it's a compendium of sage advice and instruction from years of Old House Journal articles. The window section fully covers terminology, maintenance, restoration, and energy efficiency.