

## **FIX IT UP!**

*Bruce Turner*

### Clear as Glass

One of the easiest and least expensive ways to upgrade your home – and make money in the process – is by replacing your windows. For every dollar you invest in new windows, you increase the value of your home by \$1.50 or more (according to the annual Remodeling Cost vs. Value Report) because you're enhancing the beauty, energy efficiency and leak resistance of your house, and home buyers just love that.

And that 150% return calculates that you hire somebody to do the work. If you do it yourself, you increase that return dramatically – and it's not all that difficult if you have basic skills. You don't necessarily have to replace the entire window structure – you can just change out the sash, or the frame in which the panes of glass are set, and insert it into the existing framework. If you're reasonably good with tools and have a helper, you can probably retrofit a window in an afternoon.

To start with, decide what kind of window you want – a fixed or picture window, a horizontal slider or a double-hung window that opens vertically, usually from the bottom up. You have a choice of wood, aluminum, vinyl or fiberglass (the newest alternative), with vinyl being the overwhelming favorite here on the Coastside because of its low cost, thermal efficiency and durable resistance to our salty air. If you don't like the look of vinyl on the inside of your home, consider wood-clad windows – beautiful wood on the inside, tough vinyl or aluminum on the outside.

For window glass, I strongly recommend Low-E, which is a double-pane window with a sealed gas chamber in the middle (usually argon) and a microscopic metallic coating. Low-E glass blocks unwanted UV rays and radiant heat. Some people in high-exposure areas tint or glaze their windows for extra protection, but it's rarely necessary here.

Your first step is to carefully measure the window opening and order the window you want from a supplier. If you've never done this work before, recruit a helper – you'll need someone on the opposite side of the window to help you position the new window and keep it from falling. And if it's not a ground-level window or over a deck, you'll need scaffolding.

When you're ready, put on your gloves and goggles and pull everything out except the window frame that's attached to the house. Then install the new window according to the instructions provided. Most new windows come with the screw holes already drilled but without the screws themselves, so expect to be using your own.

Once the window is installed, seal it with high-quality polyurethane caulk, let it dry 24 hours, then do any drywall touch-up necessary before priming and painting.

When you're changing out a bedroom window, there's one other factor to be aware of – fire egress standards. In every bedroom, by law, there must be at least one window that will allow someone inside to climb out and a fully outfitted firefighter to climb in, for obvious reasons.

The standards are pretty simple. The bottom of the window, the sill, can be no higher than 44 inches above the floor. When the window is open, that opening must be at least 20 inches wide, at least 24 inches high and at least 5.7 square feet total (a 20" by 24" opening yields only 3.3 square feet, so do your math).

Got questions? Drop me a note.

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