

Donna Lewczuk's

~Home Owner's Newsletter~

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Today's Article: A Window on the World

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Opening up a dark room with a new window is an appealing idea, promising more light, better ventilation and broader views to the outside. In most cases, the process isn't complicated, but there are aesthetic and practical considerations to keep in mind before you put a hole in your wall.

Windows do more than admit light and air. They also have a lot to do with what a house looks like from the outside. While adding a window usually doesn't make a big difference at the back of a house, it can alter the symmetry of a facade, sometimes dramatically. Introducing a new element to the front of a carefully balanced design can have unpleasant visual consequences.

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#### MATCHING THE EXISTING WINDOWS

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Matching a new window to the style of the existing windows can help, but if that's not possible, make the most of the opportunity. If the window is visible from the street, you're going to alter the appearance of the house. If you can't do something that blends in, be bold and make the new window count.

Inside, a new window is likely to change the balance of a room by altering light patterns as well as available wall space. Large pieces of furniture or paintings may no longer fit in a room where a new window interrupts a long wall. Added light, too, can be an issue.

A new window in a west-facing wall may produce more afternoon heat than you're used to, or create

a glare that makes it tough to watch the evening news on television. Finally, windows are all about views. It's worth weighing carefully what will be on display once a new window is in place. Not only will more of your neighbourhood be visible, but you will be too.

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## LET THE WORK BEGIN

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A simple window installation takes a day or less, with few disruptions. However, installing a large window in a load-bearing wall - or a wall where wiring or plumbing will be disturbed - can be another story.

Some clues as to what lies inside the wall can be found in the basement or crawl space: electrical, cable and plumbing lines should be visible near the top of the foundation where they exit the wall. Beware of surprises, though, particularly in older houses.

No matter where a new window is placed, it will require some alterations to the framing that lies inside the wall. The extent of those alterations depends on the size of the window and whether the wall is load-bearing.

In a nonbearing wall, an average-sized window - something about 3 feet wide - won't need a structural header to carry the weight of floor joists or rafters above. The header may be nothing more than a length of framing lumber laid in flat.

Although new studs will be needed to define the sides of the new opening, a skilled contractor may be able to make virtually all of the structural adjustments from outside and punch through the wall neatly just before installing the new window.

The job grows more complicated for a large window - a wide bay window for instance, or several windows ganged together into one large unit - installed in a load-bearing wall. Here the contractor will have to add a structural header at the top of the window and will probably have to shore up joists from inside the house while the new opening is framed. Larger sections of wall may even have to come off to provide access, and that means more repair once the window is in.

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## ESTIMATING THE COST OF THE PROJECT

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It won't be hard to find matching windows if your house isn't too old. Windows are available in a variety of architectural styles, materials and finishes, from vinyl-clad contemporary designs to all-wood units that look at home in a colonial reproduction. Stock windows start at less than \$200.

It will take more doing to find a suitable mate for those double-hung 12-over-9 windows in your 18th century cape. A number of window manufacturers offer custom sizes, but for an unusual design, you may have to go to a millwork shop. And although a good shop should be able to duplicate almost any design, a custom window will add considerably to the cost of your project.

Matching unusual molding profiles to round off the installation will cost even more, especially if custom knives for milling machines must be produced first.

Although costs will vary considerably, a one-day job to install a relatively small window (with no unexpected complications) could cost as little as \$600 or \$700. A large window - with extensive re-framing, wall repairs and elaborate detailing could easily run as much as \$5000.

Have a great day!

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