



## How to Evaluate the Exterior of Your Home

I wrote this report for homeowners who are tired of the anxiety they experience every time they invite a home improvement contractor into their home. By reading this report you will better understand how to view your home in a whole new way by learning what the best painting and remodeling contractors know.

Let's face it; the less you understand about caring for your home, the more vulnerable you are to rip-off artists.

Over the years in the painting and remodeling business, I have heard some scary statements from supposed painting "pros". Here's just a sampling:

- "I like using cheap paint, because then I get to return sooner to do it again."
- "As long as the customer doesn't complain, I don't care what the painters do."
- My all-time favorite was a painter who told me that I "take my work too seriously" and that I "shouldn't worry so much."

Yes, I am guilty! I do take all this stuff seriously... My clients appreciate what I do for them, and they remind me of that fact every time they have me do more work for them or refer others to me.

What follows will arm you with information and processes which will help you in at least two important ways:

1. You will learn about construction materials in modern homes and how they are affected by various factors including old mother nature herself.
2. You will be better able to make maintenance and contractor hiring decisions.

### ***Your Home as a System***

View the outside of your home as a system. Design, materials, age, weather, maintenance history, trees/shrubbery, and insects are all factors which contribute to the deterioration of the paint/stain coatings on your home. A better understanding of how these factors affect your home will facilitate better choices for maintenance goals.

1. **Design:** Design includes the style of house, roof, eaves, overhangs, exposures, and material combinations. Styles that incorporate various features may be more vulnerable to problems than simpler designs.

**View your home as a system.**

**Perform a thorough assessment of the exterior.**

**Use this information to choose the right contractor for you.**

2. **Materials:** There are a variety of materials with differing characteristics that must be viewed separately and as part of a system. They would include siding, trim, windows and doors, and other accessories.

3. **Age:** The time period in which your home was built can offer information regarding the quality of materials and methods used in its construction, and provide clues to evaluating problem areas.

4. **Weather:** Climatic conditions play a crucial role in the deterioration of paint and wood surfaces. Consider the effects of sun, precipitation, and temperature. Associated factors would include the growth of funguses, insects, and other contaminants.

5. **Adjacent objects:** Trees, bushes, other structures and the like will exert influences on the exterior surfaces of your home. Problems with insects and animals are often related to nearby trees.

6. **Past maintenance:** The quality of past painting and repairs can have a significant impact on current problem areas. Information about previous maintenance can also be useful when considering your goals and expectations for future exterior projects.

Begin to think about your home with these factors in mind. As you read on, I will cover important considerations of each, helping you to draw conclusions about basic issues particular to your home.

### ***Construction Materials***

The type and quality of materials used on the outside of your home are important factors in your homes ability to resist the detrimental effects of mother nature and pollutants. Brick, being a very durable material, will outlast us all. On the other hand, pressed board siding can literally rot off of your house in just a few years after installation. Even true woods such as redwood can give problems if not properly maintained. Sub-standard installation practices often lead to premature problems with some siding materials and trim.

The age of the house will also reveal specific issues. Homes built in the last few decades are constructed using “new growth” wood materials. Investigation into this trend has revealed that modern methods of tree production lead to less dense wood which is more susceptible to rot and other diseases.

In an effort to keep prices down, lumber manufacturers mill windowsills, trim boards, doorframes, and moldings through a process called "finger-jointing." The board is literally assembled from portions of any number of trees from the same species. Many



### **The System:**

- **Design**
- **Materials**
- **Age**
- **Weather**
- **Adjacent objects**
- **Past Maintenance**

builders during the last 20 years have used this type of material wherever possible. Serious consequences have resulted. Why?

Finger-jointed trim material is held together with water-based glue. Every joint represents a potential problem. Moisture can penetrate the joint leading to a failure of the glue and separation of the wood. Exterior trim pre-primed with water-based products further contributes to this problem. Using solid wood or PVC materials for repairs can eliminate these problems and be more attractive to boot!

Pressed-wood products are manufactured by mixing wood fibers with resins. Siding, garage doors and paneling are common examples produced and installed throughout the 70's and 80's. These materials may look good when installed. However, inadequate preparation prior to installation (not primed/sealed) often leads to moisture damage and costly replacements.

Vinyl siding alone is as easy as it gets. However, when a home combines vinyl siding and wood trim, moisture problems may become an issue where the two meet. People whose homes have this combination often have a false sense of security. The space between the siding and trim is vulnerable to water penetration and damage.

Aluminum siding does well for many years, yet the factory paint does oxidize. However, it can be painted to bring back its good looks. The transformation from old dull siding to new and shiny is amazing!

How are all these surfaces joined together to form the "seamless" exterior envelope of your home? Nails and caulk! Unfortunately, mother nature constantly battles them and eventually wins out; especially where caulk is concerned. The seams come undone, water enters, fungus grows, wood fibers breakdown and paint fails.

### ***The Effects of Mother Nature***

The design of your home's exterior and the location of adjacent objects will have a bearing on the surfaces that collect moisture and how long that moisture remains. The longer water remains on particular surfaces, the more vulnerable they are to moisture penetration. Trees, shrubs, and structures often cast shadows that lengthen the dry time on particular surfaces. I call this the 'Wet/Dry



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**Ultra violet rays from the sun break down paint and adversely affect wood fibers.**

**Holes in the eaves are evidence of squirrel entry points...**

Cycle'. If the water can't escape or evaporate quickly, wood rot, paint failure, carpenter ant infestation, and other problems can occur more quickly. Furthermore, pollutants in the air and precipitation can be a source of problems leading to paint deterioration.

Moisture is drawn into wood like a sponge. The change in relative humidity causes expansion and contraction. This movement increases stress on all wood surfaces, but is most significant at the joints (lap joints, butt joints, finger joints, etc.). Paint failure right down to bare wood surfaces can also result. This fact is reason enough to always insist on appropriate and high quality materials when repairing and having your house painted.

Moisture is also present inside your home and seeks to escape to the outside through walls, windows, and doors. If the level of moisture is significant, it can have an effect on painted surfaces, actually causing the paint to "pop" off the side of your house. Latex paint, as opposed to oil paint, allows moisture to pass through it more readily, and thereby reduces moisture-related paint failure.

Ultraviolet rays from the sun break down paint and adversely affect wood fibers. Certain areas of your home get more sun than others, resulting in an accelerated breakdown of the paint finish. Those sides of the house need extra attention during the preparation phase of painting to help combat the deterioration.

Proximity of trees and shrubs to the structure can either contribute to or hide problems in their vicinity. Physical contact with the house can cause paint to be scratched off or other problems and to hide from your view these and other potential problems.

Look closely at features of your home such as porches or decks. Flashing (flat metallic strips) between these structures and your home can cause moisture problems both outside and inside your home. Holes in the eaves are evidence of squirrel entry points, and should be confirmed by a (surprise) inspection of the attic. Always ensure that these animals are humanely captured and taken several miles from your home before having any repairs made.

### ***Home maintenance is a fact of life***

The only defense we have against nature's onslaught is home maintenance. Although the quality of materials and workmanship that go into our homes are important factors, we should bear in mind that some aspects of deteriorating surfaces are inevitable.

A cost/benefit analysis will help in deciding what should be repaired vs. replaced. Often times it is less costly to replace



**Pressed Board type siding can literally rot off your house in just a few years after installation.**

**Newer houses are constructed with siding and trim that I have often seen rotting within just a few years after construction.**

**The fact that we continue to do home maintenance on some regular interval is proof that we can't stop time or mother nature.**

damaged materials than to repair them. Various options for dealing with damaged areas should be considered during the planning phase of the job.

A good knowledge of what went into the construction of your home will aid you in planning for future maintenance and repairs. Past records and a thorough assessment of current conditions can aid you in deciding what results, in terms of overall look and length of service makes the most sense for your particular needs, taste, and budget.

The knowledge gained from your ability to competently assess your homes exterior will also enable you to deal confidently with contractors that you may consider for performing these jobs. You will be able to better assess their knowledge, skill, and integrity, and thus better guarantee the success of the project.

***The following 2 steps will help you choose the right contractor and get the job you want:***

1. You and other interested party should perform the best inspection possible and write down your findings. Decide on your goals in terms of your homes appearance and expectations for length of service. Do these things before calling any painting contractor.

2. Walk around house with the painting contractor while they perform inspection and evaluation. Listen closely to what they say and don't say. Ask questions to evaluate their knowledge, skills, and the service they provide. Consider their professionalism and desire to meet your needs and expectations. Decide if the investment being asked for makes sense. And, finally, trust your gut. Pick a person you feel you can work with and have a positive relationship throughout the project.

I hope that this article will be useful to you and if there is anything more I can do to assist you, don't hesitate to call me.

Best to You,

John Rabner



**Often times it is less costly to replace damaged materials than to repair them.**

**Past records and a good assessment of current conditions can aid you in deciding what results, in terms of overall look and length of service makes the most sense for your particular needs, taste, and budget.**