

Windows & Doors Make Remodeling Jobs Sing

Seek treatments that are characteristic of original designs.

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Windows, doors and skylights are among the primary elements of remodeling and renovation work. The modulation of space between rooms inside a building and the degree of connection to the outdoors affect us in very basic and powerful ways. A carefully controlled beam of sunlight entering a solid building or room can inspire. Views to the landscape expand the feeling of a small interior space.

When renovating existing houses, look for door and window options characteristic of the era and region in which the house was designed. Understanding these characteristics allows the designer to "read" the building and discover its underlying order, as well as to manipulate the design to achieve new effects. Those who remodel existing structures are often drawn to the challenge of discovering details that may have been part of the original structure but have long since been buried by insensitive remodeling.

When discussing this with clients, I often paraphrase a quote by architect Louis Kahn and talk about how the building "wants to be" or about an opening that "wants to be right there." When remodeling any structure, the result will be better if the underlying architectural conditions are well understood. The goal should be always to weave the old and new elements of a building into a well-integrated whole. This holds true for historically accurate rehabilitation and for progressive or adaptive renovation.

Clients usually discuss the windows and doors in their home very early, often during the first design meeting. Turn-of-the-century homes benefit from the generous sized windows, but clients often complain about drafts or energy loss. The interiors of those homes are often divided into discreet rooms separated by



Simple, custom wood windows step down with the counters in this Oakland kitchen remodel and emphasize the landscape and hilltop setting. The perception of the interior space is enlarged by "borrowing" the large view outside.

French doors were used throughout this residential kitchen remodel in Alameda, Calif., to connect the house to the landscape.



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Wood windows and doors are timeless.



In the master bathroom of the San Francisco addition, skylights and casement windows lead the eye toward a private view into treetops beyond bathtub.

many doors. Clients with ranch houses from the fifties and sixties are usually unhappy about their old rattling aluminum windows and will have things to say about the open plans of the main living areas in the house. Some want more sense of enclosure, others want less.

Of course, they all have strong ideas about the front door or their "public door." Desire for light, connection to the landscape, privacy, security issues and energy consumption all interact to steer design decisions about the openings into and within the house. Invariably the major building blocks of a successful residential remodel include doors and windows and most often they will be wood.

The timeless quality of wood

Wood windows and doors have an enduring, timeless stature. They have been around for centuries and regardless of how modern the design of new windows or doors, they benefit from this historic association. Clients may feel more at ease with very modern architectural solutions to projects because they are comfortable with the wood from which the elements were made.

Additionally, the depth of grain radiating from a hardwood door or the hefty section of a painted wood window communicate substance and solidity regardless of style. They also suggest a tactile warmth. Most people like to touch wood and are comfortable in spaces that expose it. The penetration of light into the grain gives wood a visual depth unattainable in most other materials used for doors and windows. The most foreboding front door can be warm and inviting if it is made from the appropriate wood. When well-made wooden doors and windows become a new part of an old home, clients feel they are getting enduring value.

Employ windows and doors to open space. Rarely is a remodeler asked to close down or darken an interior by removing windows. If privacy or security concerns preclude cutting windows into a wall, cut a skylight through the roof. Occasionally, you can "borrow" light and air from a skylight through an interior glass door or window and open an otherwise depressing interior hallway or room.

Extending an invitation

Natural light deep in an interior space becomes an invitation to move into and through the space. A window placed at the end of a hall or room can be a reward that beckons people to enter the house. By aligning interior doors with exterior doors or windows, an axis can be created which reinforces an architectural characteristic of the building or a natural quality of the site.

Appreciation of the underlying order of the environment can be reinforced through this kind of careful planning and arrangement. People are generally happier and healthier when they feel a connection to the landscape, sunlight and fresh air.



This is equally true for residential and commercial situations. To avoid opening a house too much and losing its sense of shelter, experiment with the size and proportion of openings and muntins and mullions.

A window always contrasts with the solid wall through which it is cut. A door breaches the wall in which it hangs. Discussions with homeowners can help them understand that these inherent contrasts are a benefit—a design tool to be used. A big view does not always warrant a big picture window. Sometimes a panorama is enhanced by restricting the viewer's access to it. A small window to a large view accentuates the solidity of the wall and the vastness of the landscape

beyond the wall. Each is strengthened by contrast. Later, the view can be revealed more dramatically in another room or from an outdoor space.

Likewise, a big door does not necessarily mean less security. If a small bungalow sports huge wooden front doors, it may feel like the inside of a small fortress. Sometimes, small residential rooms can be made to seem larger than they are by installing oversized windows or doors. They suggest a larger space, by association, and it works.

When remodeling a home or building from scratch, the goal should be to find or establish that underlying order which will make the project feel substantial and



Inspired by a sundial, this dining room turret in the Oakland house has compass points scribed into the floor and windows arranged radially to focus light and shadow around the room as the sun moves. The beveled, leaded glass was fabricated for the wood window sash above to give prismatic effects to the sunlight.

Custom light cuts were used to unify the design of the Alameda kitchen and to relate to existing design patterns elsewhere in the house.

inspiring for a long time. This usually involves creating a logical and artistic variety of experiences throughout the building and refining details for consistency. A good house must accommodate a wide range of activities both public and private.

To help create the ordered setting for this variety of experiences, rely heavily on the appropriate and classic use of windows and doors. Too much detail can be as detrimental as too little. Too many shapes and configurations get distracting and too few are boring. Wood windows and doors provide a large range of options to designers these days so the challenge we all face is one of clever balance and restraint. □