GREEN TECH THE SERIES COLUMN FOR NOVEMBER 18, 2015
HEADLINE: THE SIDING BATTLE: CEMENT VS WOOD

When it comes to the exterior of your home there are four factors that should be considered, durability, maintenance, fire resistance and curb appeal. Last week we looked at vinyl siding, how it has changed and to this day remains the most popular home siding by a wide margin. However, if you are building or planning a new home or considering a complete siding upgrade to add insulation on the exterior of your home, there are other options to consider.

This week, we are going to look at the two largest competitors to vinyl, engineered wood siding and fiber cement siding. For years, siding was brick or wood, often bevelled or ship-lap and painted. After the war, aluminium and vinyl took over the siding market, leaving the “all brick” home a selling feature with some builders. This remained the case right up until the early 90’s when costs put this siding into the custom home realm. Wood siding has remained, with a small regional popularity; mostly cedar, with pine often used as “board & batten” and stained with one of the more recent UV stable formulas. Some custom homes blend two or more siding effects. For the Spa, we have used cedar shingles to arrive at the warm effect this type of siding radiates. The catch with all natural wood siding is that it requires refinishing after a number of years or it can be allowed to age naturally. It will turn a light grey shade, which should be accounted for when blending with other siding effects.

There was a start in alternative sidings in the early 90’s. The first one was a hardboard siding, but it was plagued with swelling, rot and delamination. The formula of sawdust and glue did not allow for high moisture conditions and extreme changes in temperatures. This left a sour taste with some builders and homeowners. The look of vinyl, the four inch panels were common; too common for some homeowners and wider siding, different textures and a greater range of colors came into demand. Composite board siding was improved and started to gain in popularity. The largest advantage to these sidings was that, even though they faded rapidly, they took paint very well and this made the siding look near new; a great selling feature.

In the early 90’s, an Australian company called James Hardie introduced what we now know as “cement board siding.” They took the siding market by storm, to the point where some neighbourhoods in the US set a covenant that this was the only siding permitted. “Hardie Board,” as it is known in the trades, became

synonymous with the more traditional looks in siding. It could be ordered paint ready or prefinished. The latter makes up 99% of the sales. It fit all of the criteria, including the coveted ASTM rating for fire protection. The name Hardie Board became so popular that it became “the name”, not unlike snowmobile and Ski-Doo did in the 70-80’s. They did not hold the entire cement board siding sales, however. CertainTeed, one of the largest in North America for siding products sold their cement line, too, but their percentage of sales is small compared to Hardie Board. All through the 90’s and into the 2000’s, Hardie Board dominated, However, delamination issues started to show up in some extreme climate areas like the deep south and here in Canada. Installation of this product must adhere to strict methods. Simply put, it has to have a 2” gap to maintain warranty. This has caused a number of consumer complaints when installed incorrectly. Hardie got the drift about the climate issues and, just a few years ago, introduced the “HardieZone” system where the siding you order for a project in Ontario is made with attention to the extremes of our climate. They upped their game with respect to warranty, offering a 30-year transferable warranty, helping to dissuade the consumer from worrying about the problems they had experienced in the past.

The companies who made the early wood composition siding realized that their game plan had to change if they intended to give vinyl or Hardie Board any real competition. One area where the composition or engineered wood siding had an advantage is in its environmental benefits. It’s no secret that producing cement is not as environmentally beneficial, even though they blend things like fly ash into the formula. The new architectural sidings are still made with wood waste, OSB being the most common. All of the flakes are coated with zinc borate before being pressed into panels using MDI resins and marine waxes. This produces a moisture resistant siding that only needs to be installed with a 1” gap. Cost is also a factor and engineered wood siding is less expensive to not only buy, but simpler to install and the sections are longer, up to 16 feet. The finish is consistent and the accessories are also considerably cheaper than Hardie Board. One other plus, engineered wood can be made to look like, not only wood siding, but stone, stucco and cedar siding.

The largest player in this segment of the siding business is Louisiana Pacific (LP) and this was the company that took the largest hit over the early formulas, resulting in a huge class action lawsuit that they settled. LP decided that the market was still there, only this time they better get it right and they did. With

over 7 billion feet of “LP Smartside”installed to date and production closing in on their 18th year, they have yet to have a warranty claim on the product.

Both companies make a top notch product and it comes down to your own preference. Mine favours the architectural wood siding. The reason being the use of recycled and natural materials in its manufacture.

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