

HISTORIC WINDOWS RESTORATION



Historic window restoration and care are essential to preserve the architectural integrity and historical value of older buildings. Windows play a significant role in the overall aesthetics and functionality of historic structures, so proper maintenance is crucial. Here are some important considerations and steps for restoring and caring for historic windows:

Assessing the Condition:

- Carefully examine each window to identify any signs of damage, decay, or missing components. Be aware of abatement issues when it comes to lead or asbestos in historic windows.
- Evaluate the type and extent of deterioration, including rot, peeling paint, broken glass, or loose joints.

Repair vs. Replacement:

- Whenever possible, prioritize repair and restoration over window replacement to maintain historical authenticity.
- Evaluate the overall condition and determine if repairs are feasible. Some severely damaged windows may require partial or complete replacement.

Cleaning and Maintenance:

- Regularly clean the windows using a mild detergent or specialized window cleaner. Avoid abrasive materials that may scratch the glass or frame.
- Clean the tracks, sashes, and hardware, ensuring they are free of dirt, debris, and corrosion.
- Lubricate hinges, pulleys, and other moving parts with a non-reactive lubricant to ensure smooth operation.
- Open the windows periodically to ensure all of the mechanical systems are operational.

Paint Stripping and Repainting:

- If the windows have multiple layers of paint, consider removing the old paint to reveal the original wood surface.
- Use careful methods like chemical paint strippers, taking necessary precautions to avoid damaging the wood. The use of heat guns is not recommended anymore.
- Apply a suitable primer and high-quality paint to protect the wood from moisture and UV damage.

Repairing and Sealing:

- Repair or replace damaged wood components, such as sills, sashes, or muntins, using matching materials and techniques.
- Reinforce joints with appropriate adhesives, epoxy resins, or wood fillers.
- Seal any gaps or cracks with an appropriate sealant to prevent air and water infiltration.

Glass Replacement:

- If the original glass is damaged or missing, consider replicating the historic glass or using salvaged glass from the same time period.
- Consult local preservation guidelines and regulations regarding glass replacement to ensure compliance.



Energy Efficiency Considerations:

According to statistics by the Window Preservation Alliance, the estimated first year energy savings between a restored wooden window with a good storm window vs. a replacement window was only \$0.60. "The decision to renovate or replace a window should

NOT be based solely on energy considerations, as the difference in estimated first year savings between the upgrade options are small. Broken glass, failed glazing, no weather stripping – these small and repairable items are what really affect energy efficiency in windows."

In addition, "If the total energy expenditure to manufacture replacement windows is considered, then the breakeven period stretches to 40-60 years. Sadly, the life expectancy for replacement windows is often much shorter than that breakeven point and repairs, even

replacing broken glass, is limited by continued availability of parts from the manufacturer, whereas historic windows can last for generations with proper maintenance."

Professional Assistance:

According to statistics by the Window Preservation Alliance, complex or extensive restoration work should

be performed by professionals experienced in this field. Engage specialists who understand the unique requirements of historic window restoration.



Remember that each historic window and building is unique, so it's important to tailor the restoration approach to the specific circumstances and follow local preservation guidelines. Preservation experts, Main Street programs, and professional conservators can provide valuable advice and assistance throughout the process.

Window restoration and care should always be the first consideration rather than replacement. On occasion, a window may be in such poor condition that there is no other option but replacement, even after considering the steps laid out in this document. High quality windows that match the design and dimensions of the original windows are the only option if replacement is necessary. New windows replicate the look and feel of the historic windows and should complement the building's architectural features.

For more information on windows in historic buildings, please refer to Preservation Brief 9 on repairing historic wooden windows, Preservation Brief 13 on steel windows, the Window Preservation Alliance, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Research & Policy Lab.

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