

Siding Choices

Builders and consumers today have a wide range of siding materials to choose from, including various types of natural wood; masonry materials like brick veneer and stucco, and a growing field of man-made products including vinyl, EIFS, hardboard, and engineered wood. To find out what sidings *JLC* readers are using and how they feel about what's available, we mailed 1,000 surveys to a random assortment of subscribers and evaluated the results. Here's some of what we learned.

What Lies Beneath: Views on Sheathing Wrap

Although nearly three-fourths of the readers who responded to the survey expressed a preference for proprietary housewraps such as Tyvek and Typar, traditional 15- and 30-pound felt paper also put in a strong showing (see chart, right). Reader comments suggested that for some, the time-tested nature of felt outweighed the ease of application offered by housewrap.

"We are frequently tempted into the housewrap speed camp, yet anchored by the long-term success of good old simple 30-pound felt," noted one builder who uses both materials. Remodelers seemed particularly partial to felt. "In 30 years of remodeling/repair work, I've found that old sheathing boards that were covered with felt are in good condition as long as the felt was installed right," another reader observed. "I am reconsidering the idea of the air barrier now," said a third. "Perhaps I'll go back to 30# felt."

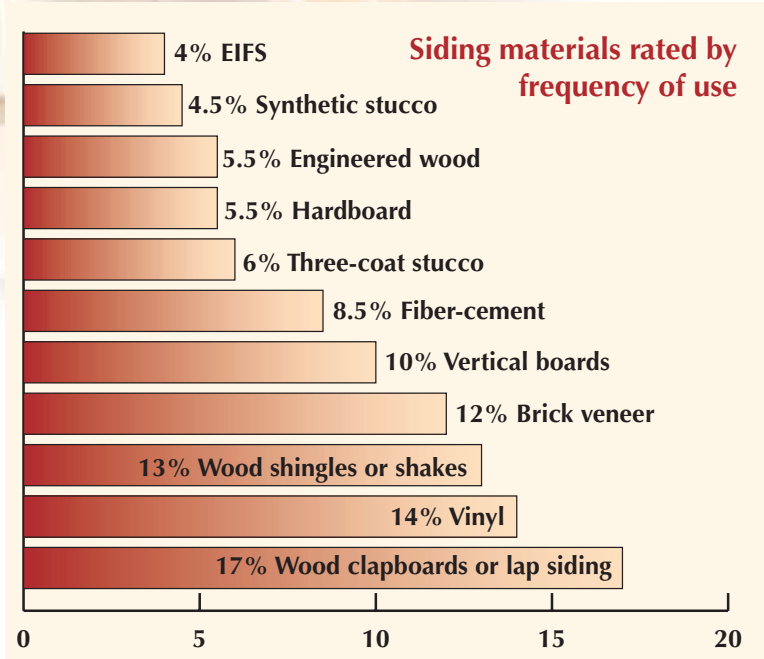
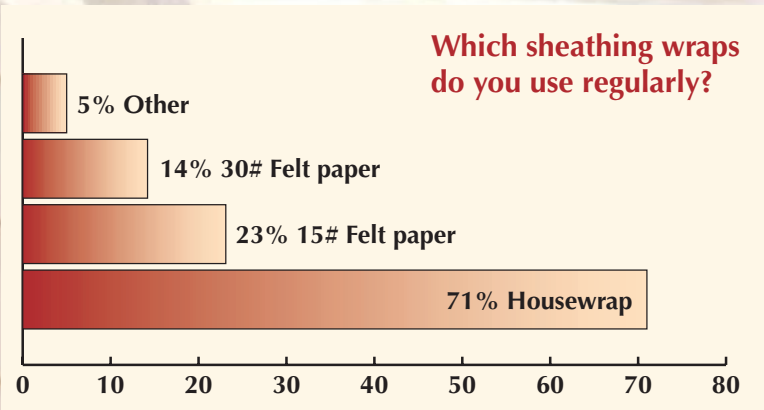
Frequently Used Sidings

We also asked readers to consider an array of common siding materials and rate the frequency with which they used each. A breakdown of the result, based on responses from readers who indicated using materials either "regularly" or "occasionally," appears in the chart at right.

The top four materials — wood clapboards, vinyl, wood shingles and shakes, and brick veneer — accounted for well over half of all responses, while hardboard, engineered wood, synthetic stucco and EIFS ranked at the

bottom with a collective total of less than 20%.

Those figures undoubtedly reflect the difficulty any new product has gaining a foothold in the marketplace. But reader comments suggest that many are openly skeptical of some newer siding materials. "Engineered wood is too scary after the L-P Inner Seal disaster," a California



builder commented. Another builder noted that his insurance underwriter does not allow the use of EIFS.

The sole exception to that trend was fiber-cement, which finished in the middle of the field — between stucco and vertical boards — despite its relatively recent arrival on the scene. “Fiber-cement seems to be the best man-made product on the market today,” noted a reader from Washington State.

Exterior Wood Finish Preferences and Problems

Most users of wood siding and trim seemed aware of the importance of proper installation and prep work in achieving a long-lasting finish. More than 60% of those responding reported that they “always” back-prime painted wood siding and trim, while about a quarter of the total back-prime some of the time. Only 10% admitted to skipping back-priming altogether (see the bar graph at top right).

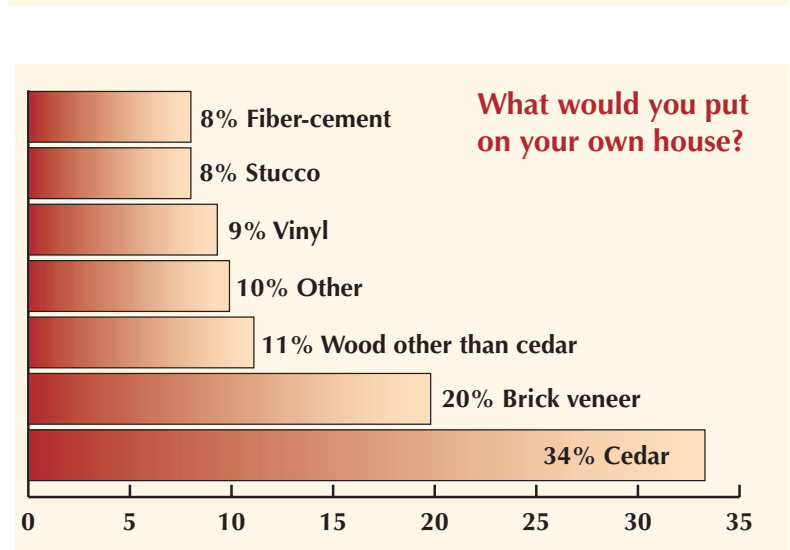
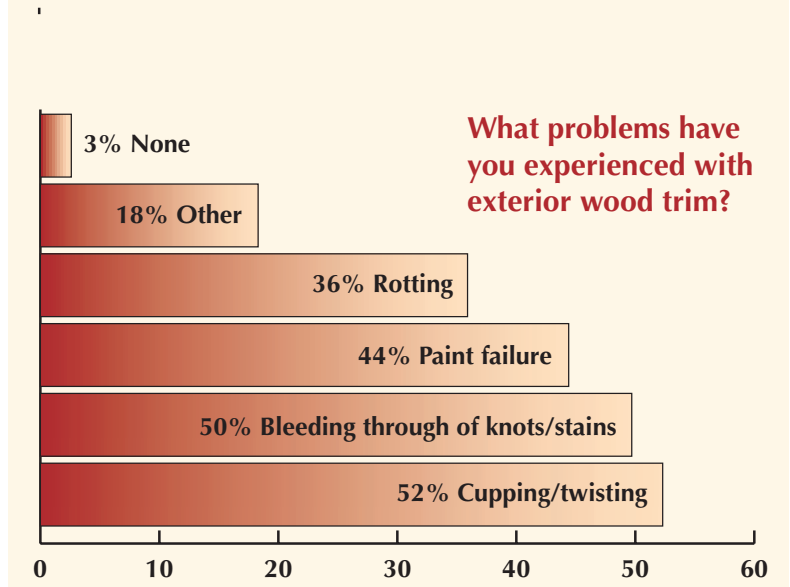
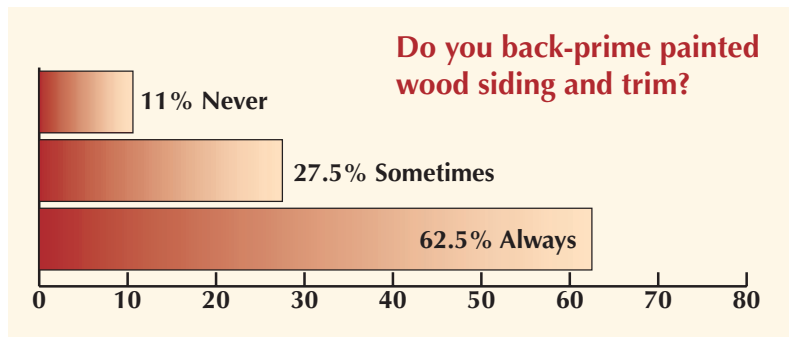
Even so, most users of wood siding also experienced problems with the material. About half reported cupping and twisting or bleeding through of knots or stains. A smaller but still substantial percentage of those responding reported paint failure and rotting. Despite such problems, 55.7% of the survey respondents reported that they were “satisfied” with the quality of available paints or stains. Another 38.9% described themselves as “somewhat satisfied,” with only 6% logging in as “dissatisfied.”

On My Own House...

Most of the siding builders put up reflects the customer’s choice, not their own. That being the case, we thought it might be revealing to ask readers what siding they’d choose for their own home if cost were not an issue. The results are shown in the chart at right.

About 45% of those who responded express a preference for one of four low-maintenance options: brick veneer, vinyl, fiber-cement, or stucco. One reader — who seemed slightly offended by the cost qualifier — commented, “Cost was not an issue and I used an excellent vinyl siding.” A Wisconsin builder who also chose vinyl observed, “Sometimes you only get a few nice days in the summer, and who wants to be messing around painting, staining, etc.” A proponent of brick said, “With a proper foundation and correct installation, brick is a lifetime finish.”

Builder skepticism toward newer man-made materials — again with the exception of fiber-cement — was especially pronounced: Not one respondent chose hardboard or engineered wood. One California builder who selected #1 red cedar shingles as his top choice noted that his house was currently sided with hardboard lap siding. “It holds paint well,” he reported, “but buckles visibly between the studs in wet weather. Also, the butt joints and nail heads are



unsightly. But heck, it was cheap!”

But despite the obvious benefits of low-maintenance materials, 44% of the survey respondents opted for lap siding, shingles, vertical redwood boards, or some other variety of natural wood. “Wood gives a building a quality look that people notice and admire,” one wood advocate noted. Another builder’s response suggested that for some, the feel of wood may be as important as its appearance. “I like the look of wood,” he wrote. “I like working with wood whenever possible.”

