

Backfill

Slate Is Final

by Jon Vara


Slate has a well-deserved reputation as a handsome and long-lived roofing material. But as Sheffield, Mass., slater John Kuhn can attest, it also makes pretty good siding. Kuhn sided his own house with a combination of unfading green and purple Vermont slate, laid 6 inches to the weather. That's substantially less than the 7- to 9-inch exposure typical of roofing applications, but Kuhn found that the wider coursing seemed too crude when seen from close up. Like



The unfading green and purple Vermont slate siding on master slater John Kuhn's modern post-and-beam house should last as long as the structure itself. The ornamental "Christmas tree" figure on the chimney chase at center is a duplicate of one Kuhn found on an old barn.

roof slates, each sidewall slate is secured with two ring-shank copper nails; an architect confirmed that the 7-pound-per-square-foot load represented by the slate wouldn't present any structural problems.

While Kuhn started in business as a slate roofer, he actually does more copper work than slate these days ("If you're going to work with slate, you more or less have to be a copper worker, too," he says). The 16-ounce copper corner trim on his house is bent to the profile of a 1-inch corner board and soldered to the matching copper water table. A standing-seam copper roof caps everything off.

All told, Kuhn says, the project took about a year, with the work moving ahead as time was available between other jobs. But Kuhn is well pleased with the finished product — and happy to think that he'll never have to scrape, paint, repoint brick joints, or try to match replacement sections of faded vinyl siding. 



A purple slate trim band wraps around the house at window-sill height. Copper trim strips beneath the mahogany windows cover the exposed nail heads.



The 16-ounce copper corner trim and water table were formed on a bending brake and soldered on site. A right-angle bend at the upper edge of the water table acts as a "starter course" to hold the bottom of the first course of slate clear of the sheathing. Each slate is fastened to the $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch plywood sheathing with two $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch copper nails.