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CRAFTSMAN RESTORES CHARACTER OF VICTORIAN HOUSE

By Margaret St. George, Special to The Globe

Richard and Lee Kaplan went house hunting in 1980 and hit pay dirt with the house of their dreams at a price they could afford.

Well, it was almost there dream house, a 90 year old Queen Anne Victorian in the Auburndale section of Newton that had the misfortune of having been "modernized" with yellow aluminum siding.

Why destroy a Victorian house with by adding aluminum siding, asked Richard so last summer he decided to remove the metal strips that he felt detracted from the houses character.

He took on the project despite warnings about possible pitfalls.

Ken Soderholm the carpenter/painter who remove the siding says that often aluminum siding is put on to hide a damaged exterior.

"Most houses have siding because they're in such bad shape he said people give up and try to put siding and forget it."



Richard and Leah Kaplan's Victorian home in Newton sports new clapboards.

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Moisture a Problem

Metal siding may also allow moisture to become trapped, according to Melvin H Chalfen, who owns a home inspection company in Newton and teaches home inspection at the Cambridge Center For Adult Education. If siding prevents moisture from escaping, the moisture will be absorbed by the underlying wood, making it unlikely the paint will adhere well to the clapboards. In some cases, the wood will eventually decay. A moist atmosphere behind the siding may also be the ideal breeding ground for insects such as termites, carpenter ants and wasps, which can be dangerous because they are often go undetected when hidden by siding.

In Kaplan's case, at least, such fears were unfounded. A half inch sheet of fiberboard that lay beneath Kaplan's siding – and was partially a water stain – “probably absorbed the moisture” according to Chalfen and saved the clapboards if a homeowner were to remove a small section of siding and discovered a backing of some kind, it might indicate the wooden clapboards or shingles underneath have been spared the damage of moisture absorption.

Gary Allan, a salesman for Bonnie – Glenn, a siding company in Brockton, said it would be unusual to find any kind of backing behind the siding especially if it was installed before the late 1970s when consumers energy consciousness was raised. If the siding dates to about 1978/80 a 3/8” piece of polystyrene insulation might have been installed behind but the homeowner opted to have insulation blown into the walls, chances are no backing was used according to Allen.

Strips of Aluminum

Horizontal strips, wider than the average clapboard, of yellow aluminum covered Kaplan's entire house, save for the turret

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where vertical sheets were used. The siding was probably installed late in the 1950s, a time when aluminum siding became popular among homeowners who relish the idea of discarding their paintbrushes.

Using a pry bar and hammer, it took Soderholm only about a week to remove the aluminum, he had to be careful not to crack the clapboards when pulling out the nails and then had to fill the nail holes because the underlying wood clapboards were in good condition, all he then had to do was a basic paint job – scraping, priming and applying a finish coat.

It costs Kaplan \$500 to have the siding removed but he recovered half his money by selling the sheets of aluminum to a scrap dealer.

According to Soderholm, the Kaplan's were just plain lucky with original clapboards were in good condition; apparently the owners a quarter of a century ago opted for siding because it was the fashionable thing to do, not to hide any blemishes.

After the siding was off and before the paint job was completed, insulation was blown into the walls through the holes in the clapboards.

Wood Tested

A moisture meter, a plastic tube with four needles in the end, which are inserted in the wood, was used to determine the amount of moisture in the underlying wood after the aluminum siding had been removed. The apparatus is connected by a cord to electrical circuit with a dial that registers the amount of moisture Chalfen recommends such testing be done by a professional, AP company representative, for example, rather than the homeowner because the interpretation of the reading changes with the tem-

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perature in the species of wood being treated besides the meter costs about \$300.

Kaplan's wooden clapboards registered 11%, which Chalfen said was about average for a house on a dry day in summer when would his first cut it contains about 20% moisture and amount the drops to about 15% by the time the lumber is shipped stored and marketed.

Chalfen says homeowner should not despair if they want to remove siding from their homes, all homes can probably be saved he says if the work is done during a dry time of year.

According to Chalfen, preserving the exterior of a house is only one reason to remove – or never installed – aluminum siding he said the paint on aluminum, as on any surface, fade so it isn't necessarily as maintenance-free as some think in contrast to claims made earlier by manufacturers and installers of such siding, it has no insulation value by itself.

Gus Lameiras, another salesman for Bonnie – Glenn, said the worry about paint fading has dissipated with the advent of final siding, which is usually guaranteed against fading.

He has never been asked to remove siding from a house and has, in fact, covered several Victorian homes with vinyl siding.

The Kaplan's, both lawyers, spent the 1970s renting one Victorian house after another in New Orleans with the move into smaller apartment in Boston came the living without the high ceilings the construction and the character of a Victorian home.

“That's why we wanted a Victorian” says Richard Kaplan, sitting at his dining room table in a house that his is looking more and

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more the way he wants.

Lee Kaplan admits to being hesitant about tearing off the aluminum siding when her husband undertook the project she is pleased with the results however and says that some of their neighbors suggest circulating a petition thanking them for restoring the Victorian character to the house.