

“Unsidings” Your Older Home

In the 1960’s, 1970’s, and 1980’s it was not uncommon for homeowners to cover their original wood siding with either vinyl or aluminum siding. These ‘newer’ materials promised easier maintenance and relief from ongoing painting and maintenance. But they also covered up details that were important to the character of the original house, stripping the house of its character. It leaves a clean but *uninspiring* appearance!



“Unsidings” a house is an intense task. You *will* have repairs. But brining back an old house to its original charm and beauty will be worth the effort. Here are some **6 Rules of Thumb** that you should know:

1. **Expect some damage.** You don’t know what the condition of the wood underneath is. Anticipate dirt, nails, chipped, and even rotted wood. But typically, most of the original siding is intact and can be kept.
2. **Pick the right time of year.** **Spring:** Investigate and remove the old siding in early spring. **Summer:** Restore throughout the summer leaving plenty of time for repairs. **Fall:** Prime and paint when wood is thoroughly dry.
3. **Know what’s underneath.** Pry back a corner of the siding in a less prominent area to see what’s there.

You may find:

Asphalt (1930s),

Asbestos (1950s),

Wood Shingles,

Aluminum (1960s) and...

Original Wood Siding intact!



If you’re not sure you want to fully commit to the ‘unsiding’, take off siding from the top down. It won’t ruin the siding and you’ll be able to put the test piece back without too much difficulty. If you are confident in proceeding with the restoration, just use a pry bar and start stripping off at any corner.

4. **Let the house speak for itself.**



Once unsided, missing trim elements and shadows of removed details will be obvious in cut marks and silhouettes. Use those as the basis for replacing those elements. Resist the urge to add trim or details that would be “nice,” but were never there to begin with. New trim should always complement the architectural style of your house.

5. **New siding should match the old.** If boards need to be replaced, profiles of the original siding will need to be matched to the existing. There are lumber yards and mills that may have certain profiles available. If the profiles are not available, a specialized router bit can be fabricated that can later be used on other projects. This job is best left to a contractor who has experience working with old houses, with using five-quarter, full-dimension lumber, and with restoration millwork.



Rounded ogee shape underneath wood shingles

6. **Before You Paint:** Fill in nail holes with caulk or putty. Sand and feather edges of repaired and scraped sections. Wash and gently rinse off any dirt and grime. Old wooden siding may be either too dry or too wet from being covered by layers of other material for many years, so give the wood ample time to return to a normal level of moisture before painting.

Further questions? Call or email the Columbus Landmarks Home Preservation Program: 614-221-4508. Email: skeeney@columbuslandmarks.org

Resources:

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/8-aluminum-vinyl-siding.htm>

https://www.ohiohistory.org/OHC/media/OHC-Media/Documents/ExteriorPaint_FastFact.pdf

<https://www.oldhouseonline.com/gardens-and-exterior/horizontal-siding-guide>