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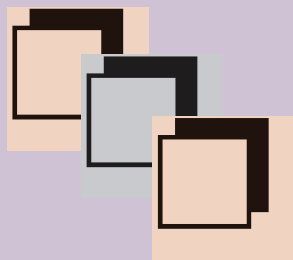
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Comment

They do say 'what goes around comes around' but sometimes it is different the second time.

When I joined this industry, as a journalist, in 1983 it was all about glass and replacement windows were aluminium. Mill finish for the most part. ("Don't worry Mrs Jones, they will soon weather to a nice grey colour.") It was said in those days that all you needed to get into the replacement window business was a Workmate, a saw and a hammer.

PVC, white of course and 'maintenance free', changed all of that and the replacement business exploded. (I am sure you have watched Damon Beasley's hilarious series White Gold. Beasley once worked on Glass & Glazing Products in case you were wondering.)

But that's history. We have all grown up now and the business is a lot tamer, more sophisticated perhaps.

And aluminium is back!

Not that it ever went away but it was always for commercial projects. It supports all of the glass that gleams over our cities on our great modern buildings; it wins awards for architects and now it is back in the domestic sphere. The trend for folding sliding doors, with the desire to have slim frames and greater areas of glass, helped. But chicken or egg, in the millennium PVC fabricators have been getting into aluminium, in a lot of cases going back to their roots. But the new aluminium windows are different. They are powder coated and come in a variety of colours.

It has been fascinating to watch. But never let it be said that the PVC window makers are not up for a challenge and the one thing I have always admired about the entrepreneurial spirit of the replacement window industry is its ability to turn a challenge into an opportunity.

So if Mrs Jones likes the look of aluminium windows, well here is a PVC profile that looks just like aluminium. Timber? We can do that too, the joints on our windows look just like the real thing – and remember PVC is really low maintenance as well. (Did we say 'no maintenance'? I think you must have misheard.)

'Heritage' is another area where the industry has been fighting the planners (and English Heritage) for a over a decade. New techniques such as Timberweld (page 26) help complete the illusion. And an important illusion it is but the industry seems finally to have got across the point that maintaining the look of an historic building is more important than worrying about the material the windows are made from.

So what goes around comes around. Aluminium is again a strong contender in the domestic market but with a whole range of different products. And its reprise has caused PVC manufacturers to look to their laurels and consumers now have a whole new range of options here too.

Not like the days of 'white gold' but very exciting in its own way.

John Roper

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