



Wood adds beauty and warmth to our traditional, transitional and contemporary homes

Many manmade surfaces found in the home, including flooring made from ceramic and vinyl, are made to look like real wood. Laminates on countertops and furniture also imitate wood. In addition, exterior house elements, including shutters and decks, often have an appearance that reminds us of the warmth and beauty of natural wood.

And it's no wonder. Wood is still our most coveted building material. It is sustainable, easy to work with and each project is one of a kind because each tree is unique. Knotholes, burls, cracks and variations in colors and grain occur even in the same species. And who would have thought wood marked by spalting (a condition caused by fungi) could be so fascinating that woodworkers and artists love it for making bowls, picture frames and mirrors?

The wood we use in our homes is both visible and behind the scenes. But don't make the mistake of thinking that decorative wood is outdated and has no place in contemporary styling. Like tree limbs and trunks in nature, wood and how we use it in our homes is adaptable.

Merritt Woodwork is an international company with corporate headquarters in Mentor, Ohio, and other locations in California, Florida, New Jersey, Utah, Wisconsin and Germany. The company, founded in 1967 by an artisan woodworker, has expanded to serve international high end customers and their architectural, design and production needs. One division of Merritt offers classical decoration - custom, hand-carved wooden architectural details.

Mark Mantione, Merritt's vice president of sales and marketing, points to wood's organic quality and each piece's unique characteristics as reasons for the material's timeless place in our homes. According to Mantione, "flat panels and tight tolerance with inlaid metals" reflect contemporary wood designs, while "traditional interiors have much heavier moldings."

Mantione also said "solid woods with textures, opposed to veneers," and "flat and quarter-cut walnut, followed closely by European white oak," are among the popular types of wood being used in upscale homes.

But maybe your taste (and budget) runs in another direction. You also might be into retro and the perfect kitchen cabinetry or "den in the basement" for you might be knotty pine. So many people have good memories of the wood in homes belonging to people they loved that there are even blog sites dedicated to reminiscing about the knotty pine rooms.

Retro is fun. But if you are thinking more contemporary, here are a few ways wood is being used in today's homes:

Reclaimed wood is the biggie. And no wonder. Reclaimed or recycled lumber gives you instant history, authenticity and a home like no other. Old wood is well-seasoned and stable. But as with everything else, be aware of suppliers who want to sell you old wood that is chemically treated and inappropriate for in-home use.

Some do-it-yourselfers have access to old barns, warehouses and outbuildings that they want to use as a source of reclaimed wood. But there are really good reasons to buy reclaimed wood from established businesses that specialize in this type of wood. Old wood needs to be thoroughly cleaned. (Think pigeon and raccoon poop plus insects.) It also has to be stripped of its obvious and hidden nails unless you use a heavy duty saw designed for that job. And even that can be dangerous. A beam used as a mantel or a barn door used as a tabletop is one thing and doable for a do-it-yourselfer. But for an entire floor where many planks are needed, it's often best to call in the experts.

Statement walls are hardly new. Homeowners have long covered just one wall in a room with a special material to prevent an overwhelming look. But now it seems we really want people to notice those walls and will splurge on an expensive material. A high quality paneling or wood planks can take the place of wallpaper, stucco, brick or stone on a statement wall. Just remember, it's not as easy to change as paint.

Wood on the ceiling is popular in some circles, but again, it might be more prudent to add the newer, wider yet streamlined molding instead of covering the entire ceiling. You get more wood into the room without overkill.

Driftwood is mysterious and beautiful without doing anything to it. But we humans can't seem to leave things alone. And that's ok, as end tables, picture frames, lamp bases and planters have all been fashioned out of this gracefully aging wood. We do get a little nervous, however, when someone makes candelabra out of chunk of driftwood. (Can you say fire?) And if you are lucky enough to find a suitable piece of driftwood for your project yourself, so much the better.

Incorporate wood into your home in products and ways that you might not normally visualize. Stone Forest's Wood Slab Pedestal is a combination of heartwood and sapwood with variations in light and dark grain. It is constructed with mortise and tenon joinery and stands 32 inches high. You add the vessel sink. Someone said the pedestal looks like a strip of bacon standing on end. Maybe. But that's not all bad. It just makes us think of breakfast.