

VINYL WINDOWS IN CANADA

Article written by Phil Lewin, Vinyl Window Designs, Woodbridge, ON

Background

Vinyl windows were first developed in the European market. The typical style in Europe is known as a "Tilt and Turn" as a description of its operating characteristics. These heavy framed windows did not achieve popularity in North America where vertical and horizontal sliding windows traditionally dominated the market.

In the early 1980s, windows with assembled (screwed together) frames and sashes were introduced into the Ontario market by companies such as Guardline Industries, while heavier duty styles such as Tilt and Turn as well as casement were introduced in the prairie provinces by companies such as Duraco Windows.

Vinyl quickly became a dominant product in the emerging window replacement market where existing frames were left intact and new windows were inserted into them. Soon welded frames and sashes using more expensive technologies became the norm in the manufacturing process.

In the mid 80s vinyl windows received a further boost when Ontario Hydro created a \$5 per square foot rebate program for homeowners when they bought more energy efficient windows. The industry made further gains into additional markets as the cost of raw aluminum rose and the supply of wood resulted in increased competitiveness of vinyl products. By the beginning of the new century, vinyl had gone from becoming "a plastic window" to being the dominant product in the marketplace for both renovation and lower end new construction.

Over the next fifteen years, more manufacturers entered the field. Improvements were made in the product. Production rates increased dramatically, resulting in lower cost. By the late nineteen-seventies, vinyl siding was beginning to take a significant market share away from its arch rival aluminum. By 1983 a square of vinyl siding had become less costly than a square of aluminum. Today vinyl siding is by far the siding of choice for Canadian homes.

Products

All styles are now made from vinyl. Where at first only white, ivory or sandalwood windows were available, vinyl quickly evolved to having multiple colours capped on the exterior. In the last decade, painting technologies have allowed for a variety of exterior colours while metallic based films have been successfully used to offer both exterior colours as well as interior wood grain surfaces.

With the advent of so many approaches to colour, virtually any colour can be matched to meet the needs of homeowners.

Canada has continued, since the inception of vinyl windows, to be a leader in developing and applying new technologies. Horizontal sliding windows that tilt in for cleaning are a Canadian invention.

More recently, vinyl has begun to branch out again into shutters, roofing systems for solariums as well as solariums and sunrooms.

Quality

Products made from vinyl are available at both the bottom and top of the market. New home construction products tend to be lower end to meet the cost requirements of tract builders who are building homes for first time buyers. The harsher prairie climate has dictated the use of better quality products in these environments. The desires of homeowners who are renovating their homes for reasonably priced, but energy efficient products, continues to drive the renovation market in Ontario as well as British Columbia.

The bottom line is that you can find the price point you want or the quality level you need in vinyl.

Distribution

Canadian Consumers are blessed with a large number of local manufacturers spread across the country. This is partially due to the success of Canadian extrusion firms in making it relatively easy for fabricators to acquire equipment and window systems. As a result, competition has pushed the price for simple commodity products quite low and at the same time has stimulated some manufacturers to develop unique products that meet specialized market niches. An excellent example is the Parallax Hardware and Tilt 'n Hide Screens.

Many manufacturers sell directly to dealers and contractors in their most local markets but sell through building product distributors in other markets. In recent years the entry of the "big box" style of merchandising has resulted in these companies taking as much as 30% of a continually growing market volume. While the "big

boxes" can offer excellent pricing on specific lines of products, dealers continue to offer a wider variety of options and pride themselves on having greater expertise in meeting their customer's requirements.

Installation: In the mid 1980s it became clear to Ontario Hydro after their successful program to promote energy efficient windows that the ultimate weakness was that even a great window is mediocre if the installation is faulty. To date, only the Window Wise program offered across the country by The Siding and Window Dealers Association of Canada (S.A.W.D.A.C.) creates any requirement for the techniques used in installation.

Most windows come with basic, generic installation instructions and many manufacturers are able to offer advice by telephone to homeowners who purchase their products.

Warranty

Vinyl is a proven material and most warranties from vinyl window companies are quite encompassing in regard to the durability of the vinyl components of the window. Over the years warranties on the sealed unit have also become extended beyond the traditional five years offered in the 1980s by most of the industry. Warranties on the hardware components can vary from one year to life time depending on design and the individual manufacturer.