WISCONSIN BADGERBUILDER

THE IDEA GUIDE

MASSONY
FOR THE
Millennium

BY LORI VEIT
Homeowners will find a variety of options to suit their tastes and budgets.

Building in curb appeal has never been easier for homebuilders and remodelers, thanks to innovative products that satisfy consumers' longings for traditional good looks and quality without the maintenance expense or time needed for some of the "real" Mccoys.

Phil Simon, president of Michael F. Simon Builders, a design/build firm in Waunakee, says with every new home or remodeling customer the first thing he does is determine budget requirements and lifestyle. Once those things are understood, he says, material considerations fall into place rather quickly.

Many homebuilders opt for the rustic ambiance of stone, and today's manufactured stone facades are one of the hottest products in home architecture.

Concrete split block is a form of manufactured stone that is a thin, lightweight (as compared to real stone) product that looks like ledge stone or fieldstone. It is a combination of aggregate and cement and had a resurgence in popularity in the early 1980s. So why would a consumer choose concrete split block over natural stone? According to Charlie Misslin, a sales representative with County Materials Corp. (formerly County Concrete Corp. and Wisconsin Brick & Block Corp.) in Marathon, a supplier of manufactured stone and brick, concrete brick and decorative block, there are several reasons: "It's a lot cheaper to have concrete split block delivered, and it's easier to lay than natural stone because it's a little bit more uniform. You can't just grab any natural stone and fit them. Sometimes you have to use little ledges."

In addition to fit, building can progress at a faster rate using manufactured stone for other reasons. "In general, concrete split block weighs about 30 percent to 40 percent less than real stone. Real stone is so heavy you can only set so many per day or the mortar will start squishing out on you," says Misslin. "The block is lightweight enough to go on interior walls [although some additional support is required], too ... its square-foot weight is very low."

Another improvement made in recent years has been to stucco, reborn in what's popularly known as EIFS (exterior insulation finish systems). The main advantage of EIFS is its ability to provide thermal protection, due to a sheet of board insulation installed
"Limited budgets can incorporate just a touch of brick for timeless charm."

Before applying the finish, Simon advises builders not to forego installing the drainage board component of the system, which shepherds water away from the interior walls. "Drainage board must be installed correctly—it can't be omitted," he states, citing leaks and water damage that can result in the interior in five to 10 years. "People sometimes try to save money ... thinking it's a shortcut."

Innovation has also touched the brick and split block industries. Misslin says concrete split block is getting more popular as veneer for homes today and that he's seen more than one Parade of Home residence in central Wisconsin that finished the entire front with it. It's manufactured for a more rugged surface to be more decorative, an effect achieved by tumbling the stones together. "They're still a block shape and can come with more rugged edges. Old World is a tumbled County Stone product that looks like refined stone but is concrete masonry units. The product comes in a 4-inch thickness with fulls, halves, quarters and three-quarter lengths. In addition, the product is available in half-high. There are also four basic colors: white, off-white, beige and light gray.

"Concrete Form Masonry Units (CFMUs) are more energy-efficient than concrete masonry units (CMUs). It's a produced decorative con-
crete block base,” explains Misslin. “We split it, score it, color it and texture it for architectural appearance. It has a very high R-value and high thermal storage.” The assembly configuration allows for massive thermal storage using air space and thermal board insulation. Internal webs of a traditional concrete block are replaced with plastic insert connectors and a foam insert. Insert connectors act as form ties connecting two masonry face shells. The system is installed with mortar-like standard masonry, then filled solid with ready-mix concrete.

“They’re in demand even though they’re a little more expensive because of the payback,” says Misslin. “The extra initial costs are recaptured over time in air-conditioning costs and fuel costs. The building owner pays more up front, but recoups over the life of the product.”

Misslin says CFMU costs about one-third more than CMU. “It also costs a little more to install only because it’s new, and you have to grout it and put some concrete in there,” he adds. “It’s a lighter unit than the older one, and when the bricklayers put it up, there’s a learning curve [for] how to lay the lighter unit and fit the insulation board. It’s not a big thing, but sometimes it needs to be adjusted. Over time this may change, once masons and tradesmen get used to it.”

Of course traditional clay brick is always a beautiful option for home exteriors and landscapes, and remains indicative of life’s finer things. Simon estimates that brick costs three times what wood costs, and while people of means can afford all-brick homes, limited budgets can incorporate just a touch of brick for timeless charm. “Curb appeal is definitely up there,” he comments. “It’s something you want to come home to and be proud of. You can even use brick as accent, combined with stucco or less expensive product.”

Duke Kelly is president of Janesville Brick & Tile and sits on the steering committee of the Brick Marketing Council. He says brick is as popular as ever. He does admit it is more expensive. But, he says, with brick’s high insulation value, longevity, carefree maintenance and look of quality and tradition, sales have increased almost 33 percent over the last couple of years. “It is probably the finest insulating product on the market,” says Kelly. According to Kelly, the R-value of brick with 4-inch face brick, 1-inch air space, 1-inch Styrofoam and 4-inch stud is 19.1.

Even just an accent of real brick on a home or property adds curb appeal, and brick makers have evolved with the times by offering

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Ahrens says that Best Block has seen a large demand for these products over the past 12 years. He adds that today's modular retaining walls and walkways are made to look very much like traditional stone. Homeowners use these where they have grade changes to level yards. Likewise, if a yard is too flat or uninteresting, they can be used to create raised planting beds, parapet walls, pillars and arches to add interest and create visual relief.

Ahrens estimates the cost of the modular systems to be between $5 and $10 per square foot for residential purposes, (including shipping, but not installation). The benefit is that they are mortarless and easy to install.

“They’re designed to go together quickly, using fiberglass pins that lock together and give the proper alignment.

“We did the retaining walls at Miller Park,” he adds. “They are supporting the walkway ramps and look like decorative concrete block walls.”

Lori Veit is president of Veit Communications, located in Madison.