



## Product Monitor: Siding

Accentuate the Positive: Pairing inexpensive siding with accents and unique materials can boost curb appeal.

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When customers want siding on the cheap, it's difficult to persuade them that paying more can bring worthwhile results. There's an alternative, however. Some manufacturers and dealers are seeing builders pair basic siding choices, such as lower-end vinyl and fiber cement, with exterior accents to create a higher-end look.

Two of the most popular picks are polymer shakes and shingles and manufactured stone and brick veneers. These products can help set a home apart. At the same time, they offer lower maintenance costs than their counterparts.

"We're seeing the use of various profiles together," says Dana Schindler, director of marketing and product development for the siding group at Associated Materials Inc. "For example, a house [may use] a clapboard profile that has board and batten and shakes or stone or another type of material."

While the two categories have seen some sales setbacks due to the faltering economy, they have more promising prospects than other siding materials.

The siding market in general plunged 25% in 2008 from 2007, according to Principia Partners' Residential Siding & Exterior Trim 2008 report, falling from 91.4 million squares to 69.2 million (1 square equals 100 square feet). But polymer shakes and shingles only dropped half as much, going from 900,000 squares to 800,000 squares.

Manufactured stone declined at the same rate as the general siding market from 2007 to 2008, but it saw a boom in growth from 2005 to 2007 that signals its popularity. It nearly doubled in size, the report says.

"This increase shows the rate of adoption and how that penetration into the siding market grew over a short period of time," says Lou Rossi, a managing partner for Principia, a consultancy focused on the building products industry.

Drew Brandt, director of marketing for CertainTeed's new product development, says the company has offered polymer shakes and shingles for 15 to 20 years, but has never seen them as popular as in the past couple years. "Up until even December, our higher-end products were faring better than our lower end," he says.

Tim Teeter, who runs the installed siding division for Big C Lumber near South Bend, Ind., sees homeowners using these higher-end products to accent exteriors.

"In our market, the main product is still vinyl," he says. "But you see some upgrades in accents, like the cedar shake or the vinyl shake."

A number of companies offer imitation shakes and shingles. Associated Materials offers the products to dealers through its Alside brand. CertainTeed's newest profile, single 9-inch Staggered Rough-Split Shakes, is part of the Northwoods Vinyl Shakes line. The new Classic Perfection Shingle from The Foundry, part of The Tapco Group, imitates weathered cedar. Ply Gem offers a new Cedar Dimensions line from Cellwood, which has the look of hand-tooled rough sawn cedar.

Manufactured stone and brick makers have also seen a boost in interest. Jim Ziminski, president of Exterior Portfolio by Crane, says his company's manufactured stone division has grown "significantly" since being introduced in 2007. Its newest offering, BellaStone Bordeaux, features red, gray, and brown hues.

"As there is less construction, there is more of a need to differentiate the product than there used to be," he says.

Earl Hunt, siding buyer for Lezzer Lumber, which has locations across Pennsylvania, is familiar with Nailite's line of polypropylene shake, brick, and stone. He says they've sold well, mainly as accents.

"From the curbside, the products are so realistic that it looks like wood or stone," he says. "But, you are at half the price, and installation is a lot easier than with masonry products."

Exteria Building Products recently purchased Nailite. Chuck Jerasa, CEO of Exteria, says his company was interested in Nailite because of the siding company's growing popularity. "They have enjoyed growth around the U.S.," he says.

Another recent merger also shows the increasing interest in stone alternatives. Ply Gem acquired United Stone Veneer in November 2008. United Stone Veneer offers manufactured stone and brick veneers.

"It's the largest growth category that we have in the siding space," says Jerry Blais, Ply Gem vice president of marketing.

Jim Hagyard is a siding buyer for Your Building Centers, which has 15 locations throughout central Pennsylvania. He says sales of Nichiha's fiber cement imitation brick siding have been "starting to grow".

"Contractors can hang it themselves instead of having a stone mason come in and do the wall," he says. "It's not the real thing, but it doesn't look bad."

A variety of other manufacturers offer dealers alternatives to brick and stone. Eldorado Stone's new Cut Coarse Stone profile is now available in the Western United States. Eldorado does, however, recommend that a mason apply the manufactured stone to get the best look. Owens Corning expanded its Cultured Stone product line in 2008 with the Del Mare Ledgestone, Ancient Villa Ledgestone, and Aged Tumbled textures. Centurion Stone has added new accessories and patterns to its stone veneer. And, The Tapco Group offers its new manufactured Dutchcraft Foundation Stone through StoneCraft Industries.

While getting customers to try something exponentially more expensive may not be in the cards during these times, showing them how to create new looks with accents and unique products may help their projects stand out from others on the block.

"You don't need a whole-house application to create a stunning difference," says Jonathan Wierengo, director of marketing for The Tapco Group. "The stone feature may be as simple as designing a small wall along the walk to your front door, or a stone door surround that distinguishes your entryway. Smaller applications like these are enough to create timeless style and an inviting atmosphere."

*—Victoria Markovitz*