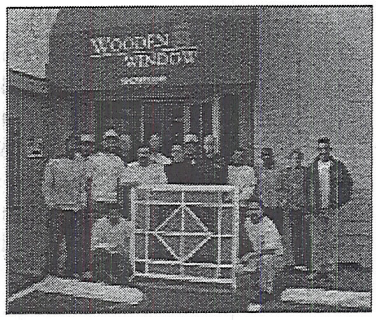
CalMAX Connection: Fall 2004

The Wooden Window: Handcrafting Windows That Are Works of Art

Contributed by Joel Gardner, Wooden Window staff

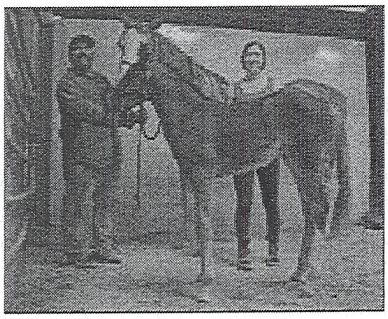


Wooden Windows owner Bill Essert was concerned about the environment and about greening up and cleaning up every stage of the company's production process. He saw piles of clean sawdust leaving the shop heading directly for the dump, and he decided to do something about it. Through word-of-mouth, Essert found the CalMAX website, http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX//, where he advertised the sawdust free for pickup.

So where is all that sawdust going?

John Volkman is a firefighter who, with his wife, Sheryl, keeps 16 Tennessee Walker horses at their ranch in Pleasanton. Volkman's Valley Horse Farm, http://www.volkmansvalleyhorsefarm.com/, is a serious operation, and all those horses need a lot of bedding for their stalls. "We do a lot of recycling out here," said Volkman. Every two weeks, he collects sawdust from the Wooden Window shop. Until recently, the sawdust went to the dump.

"We found Wooden Window through CalMAX," Sheryl said on a recent visit. Sabra Ambrose, a CIWMB staff member, pointed the Volkmans to the CalMAX website, where they found Essert's ad for sawdust.



"The first time I came into the barn after we began using the sawdust for bedding, I was just swept away by the freshness. It smelled like a forest!" Sheryl said. After use in the stalls—the material is very absorbent—the Volkmans mix it with compost and the material has a third life in their garden and the gardens of friends and neighbors.

Wooden Window specializes in wood window and door restoration and replacement. Since 1980, the Bay Area company has been serving the owners of older homes—often historic buildings designed by Julia Morgan or Bernard Maybeck—by nursing old windows back to health, repairing broken sashes (the movable parts of windows), and restoring rotten sills.

The craftsmen in the large and well-equipped workshop also build new windows to custom specifications using hand-selected, vertical-grain Douglas fir, stain-grade redwood, cedar, mahogany, or other species to match originals elsewhere in the home.

Franz Fischer, shop foreman, is an artist at reproducing Victorian color schemes in sashes with multiple-divided lights (which are many small panes,

either rectangular or diamond shaped). One of Wooden Window's most satisfying experiences is seeing one of these sashes reproduced and installed in place of an old, ugly aluminum sash.

These aluminum sashes are a relic of a time when many owners believed them to be "modern" and "economical." In truth, they have a much shorter lifetime than a properly built or restored wooden window. Aluminum sashes are not as energy-efficient or as good at blocking sound as wooden windows.

Wooden Window is now sourcing recycled old growth redwood from Michael Deakin in Sonoma County. Deakin founded Heritage Salvage Company six months ago to recycle high quality (and now essentially unobtainable) redwood from abandoned chicken barns dotting the Sonoma County landscape. Deakin and his company were recently profiled in the San Francisco Chronicle, where he stated he would like to find a way to preserve the barns.

Wooden Window's recent green-up and clean-up effort is the purchase of an innovative window sash steamer-box, built to remove and contain lead-based paint from the old windows the company services.

"We are aiming for the highest standards, when it comes to both care for the environment and employee health and safety," Bill Essert notes. "Our customers are willing to pay a little more, knowing that on top of the high caliber of work we do, we are leaving them with a clear conscience."

Window Care Tips to help you save your windows and energy, from the Wooden Window.

Wood is an adaptable material, and with proper care your wooden windows will last a lifetime. The following maintenance tips will help keep your windows in good working order:

Do:

- Perform an annual exterior inspection of your home's windows, particularly those facing south and west.
- Remove and replace loose or cracked putty (glazing compound); prime and repaint these sections in a light color where possible.
- Locate drafts by using a candle flame on a windy day. Add weather stripping to drafty areas. This is the single most important energy conservation measure you can take.
- Wipe condensation that forms on the bottom rail of the sash during the winter months.
- Rub the jamb channels of double-hung windows with a cake of paraffin wax to keep them sliding freely. This should be done annually or as required.
- Seal any portions of jambs that are unpainted with sealer or linseed oil.
- Ensure that the bottom faces (the parts that close against the window sills) of all sashes are sealed with both primer and exterior finish paint.
- Check that exterior paint on window frames "kisses the glass" by a good 1/16" (the width of a pencil lead)

Don't...

- Ever paint the moving parts of a window or those parts touched by a moving part.
- Touch fresh glazing compound (putty), it is soft and will remain so for several months.

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