

Preserving the Details and Value of Your Stanley D. Anderson Home.

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I am regularly asked questions about remodeling Stanley D. Anderson homes and buildings.

Below are specific responses to questions frequently asked by new homeowners seeking to remodel their SDA homes while at the same time preserving the scale, intimacy and detail work that are hallmarks of the firm's work.

The SDA firm is known for its high attention to detail in designing buildings. Stanley, Jim Ticknor and Bill Bergmann were all committed to high quality construction and great design. So it is important to support that commitment to quality in remodeling, upgrading and adding to your SDA residence or building.

I Want to Add an Addition to My House:

Living standards and lifestyles change, and the uses of houses change over time. Having said that, the SDA houses are very tightly designed. The scale and detail of SDA houses are precise. Remodeling them and adding additions can be very difficult.

Should I add to the house?

New owners need to consider carefully their choice of architect as there are few architects that seem to be able to successfully add to SDA houses. Stanley and Jim Ticknor were educated in the French Beaux Arts style. Bill Bergmann was educated in the American Beaux Arts style. Architects educated after World War II did not receive this training and unfortunately their lack of Beaux Arts training shows in remodeling SDA houses. The additions are out of scale or are in conflict with the original house. Dormers, soffits, cornices, lintels, brick string courses are all details that need to be addressed. Windows are another area of major concern (see comments below.)

Clients Apologize for their Additions:

These statements may sound harsh, but I've had a number of owners apologize to me for the additions they've put on their SDA houses. I've had owners apologize for additions that prior owners put on their houses.

SDA remodeled many homes in Lake Forest. I have been told—many times, that the SDA addition to other homes is “the best room in the house.”

So it is very disappointing to have homeowners apologize for having spent their own money on their own house. One owner spent over \$500,000 adding a major addition to her house. She now tells me she hates driving in her driveway. Think about adding that stadium kitchen or extra room to a finely scaled house before spending the money.

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Do It Yourself:

Another point: designing your own addition is an even more dangerous prospect. An owner wife profusely apologized to me after her husband & engineer added a sun room to the house. She said it's "his" room and the rest of us don't go in "there."

Call or email--I can give you a (short) list of good architects.

Should I Replace the Windows in the House to Conserve Energy?

Do **NOT** replace the windows in your house. The paradigm has shifted back to rebuilding windows—especially windows built before WWII.

Have the windows rebuilt.

The windows of a house are like the eyes on a pretty or handsome face. If you alter or damage the windows it creates the same effect as a face lift or bad glasses on a comely face—the face is still there-- just not as pretty.

SDA windows can be rebuilt:

You can achieve the same level of window efficiency—at a comparable cost, by rebuilding the windows while at the same time preserving the beautifully sculpted mullions and sash.

There is enough wood in the mullions and sash to add new double pane glass within the structure of the old window. I've had several architects look at the drawings for SDA windows, and they all confirm there is ample 'shoulder' width to rout the existing frames and add double pane glass.

SDA windows can be custom sizes:

In houses built before 1960 or so, SDA windows were all custom designed. The windows are unique in size as well as structure. They were built in a wood mill--not in a factory. Modern windows are built to standard sizes, ie, 28, 30, 32, 34 inches wide, etc. Many times the original SDA windows are designed to fit the building, so a window might be 31 or 32-1/2 inches rather than a standard size. Fitting a standard window into a non-standard opening never works. Think of a bad face lift on a handsome face.

Old SDA windows are better quality"

The quality of the old windows far outpaces new windows. The wood used was the finest 'cabinetry and sash' lumber available at the time. The Douglas fir and white pine from the 1930s and 1940s is simply higher quality wood that is grown on wood farms today

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Furthermore the assembly methods were better when the windows were hand made in wood mills in Lake Forest and Highland Park. The craftsmen making the windows took great pride in their work. The mortise and tenon method of reinforcing a window is better than today's windows that rely on the strength of the glue rather than fitting the wood pieces together.

Preservation and National Register applications:

Finally from a true preservation standpoint, replacing the windows jeopardizes the building's status as a National Historic Register applicant. This in turn may prevent the owner from applying/receiving preservation tax benefits/incentives.

Contact:

I can recommend architects that are experienced in window restoration; or, contact Gail Wallace at Restoration Works, 200 E. North Street, Bradley IL 60915 www.restorationworksinc.com 815 937 0556. Gail is nationally acclaimed and has one of the best window remanufacturing facilities in the country.

I want to lighten my SDA library. Can I pickle the wood to lighten it?

(Pickling is an wood finishing technique that covers the wood with a white glaze that is then wiped off to reveal the grain through a white film.) (Note; pickling wood goes in & out of style.)

Stanley (and Ticknor and Bergmann) designed many wood paneled libraries—they were designed as ‘cozy rooms’ and were meant to be dark and relaxing. They are built from the finest oak, walnut, maple and knotty pine. In a few cases the libraries are paneled in butternut. They are typically stained a lush medium to dark medium brown.

Now Rare Woods:

Almost all of the paneling woods used by the firm are unavailable today. The wood is very fine grained, old-growth cabinetry wood. The wood today is grown on a lumber farms in a way that promotes maximum growth in the shortest time. This produces open, rough grained wood that is blotchy and coarse looking.

Butternut and walnut are the rarest of the woods; these woods are now practically priceless due to their scarcity.

Knotty Spruce:

Stanley also used knotty spruce--a not very expensive wood at the time, which is also no longer available. Knotty spruce produces a better pine paneling effect because the knots tend to be very firmly anchored in the wood (the knots don't come loose and no ugly cracks) and the knots are no bigger than the tip of your thumb. The small knots give a lovely wood paneled stipple effect. (Southern pine, on the

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other hand has knots 2 to 3 inches in diameter, which come loose, and which does not yield the same ambiance--it looks chunky and rough.)

Changing the Color:

Therefore, you must take great care in altering the color of the stain. A light washing with stain lightening/washing chemicals is about all the wood will tolerate. This will only change the color shade by 2 or 3 degrees and will not yield the dramatic change some owners are seeking.

Pickling Damages Your Paneling:

I've seen several instances where newer homeowners have pickled/glazed the wood with disastrous consequences. The old stain underneath the glaze bleeds through changing the color of the paneling to a weird pinkish/brown color. Further the stain does not bleed through uniformly so there are great color variations--blotches with pinker spots and then darker brown spots. Don't do this. The homeowners who glazed their oak paneled living room probably have devalued their house by doing this.

I Want to Refinish my Wood Floors.

The wood floors in most SDA houses are the finest grade white oak. The North American forests stop producing fine-grained old growth white oak for flooring by the mid-1960s. Most oak flooring produced today is red oak, swamp oak and other types of oaks. Before the white oak was consumed, these other woods were considered inferior and were not used as flooring. The best flooring comes in very long strips--often 10-12 foot-long strips.—not the 2 to 3 foot strips of today's floors. It is uniform in grain and color. There are no 'check' boards (boards with two types of grain in one board.) There are few or no mis-colored boards, (i.e., a very dark board in the midst of light boards.) The SDA floors are quite valuable and need to be treated as such.

Floors don't require regrinding:

SDA floors were originally laid flat and then ground smooth. They are laid on an extra layer of base and a layer of roofing felt to give them extra support. Typically the floors in SDA houses only need to be well cleaned. If they do require sanding, they should be sanded with the finest grits. I've not yet seen a SDA floor that required regrinding or other substantial maintenance work. A thorough chemical cleaning and re-waxing/polyurethane application suffices. My advice is do not grind

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the floors. Also be very circumspect when adding new flooring to a SDA house--the quality of the wood is not the same.

My SDA House Doesn't Have a Marble Entry Floor:

Most of the SDA houses do NOT have marble hallway floors. The firm had strong beliefs of remaining within an architectural period when designing houses. Thus the French Norman and Tudor houses tend to have slate, flagstone or tile floors. The Country Georgian houses tend to have wood or tile floors emulating Colonial era homes. Houses that were designed for owners who part of the 'Horse Set;' those who rode regularly and might be entering their own homes in riding boots tended to have hexagonal tile floors. Many houses have terrazzo floors as this was quite popular in Lake Forest starting in the 1930s.

Adding a marble floor is fraught with pitfalls & usually doesn't add to the house's charm or value.

Adding a marble floor to a SDA is usually difficult and expensive. The base, shoe and plinth blocks all need to be removed before setting the marble floor. If the marble changes the level of the floor, then the proportioning of the trim is affected. Since all of the trim is custom designed it can be very expensive to have a mill make new trim. Replacing the trim with stock materials removes the detail work and devalues the house. Having the marble tiles cut & shaped to follow the edge of the trim, especially the plinth blocks invariably looks cheap and unbecoming of a SDA house.

Tuckpointing My House:

The SDA firm took exceptional pride in its masonry work. The instructions and drawings for the front facade of Lake Forest High School literally define how each stone and brick is to be handled, shaped and laid-up in the face of the building. The requirements for setting Williamsburg Bond brick are voluminous and were strictly enforced by the firm. Often mortars were tinted and were regularly filled with marble dust to give the mortar a sparkle. Joints were raked in a variety of styles, including: struck joints, weathered joints, rough raked and smooth raked joints. The type of masonry joint affects the refraction of light and thus how the face of the elevation reflects light throughout the course of the day and throughout the seasons.

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Modern Tuck Pointing:

Modern tuck pointing companies typically have never learned the finer points of masonry—ask them about light refraction. Their goal is to get the job done and move on to the next one. They will fill joints flush with the brick ruining the look of the masonry work. They do not understand the artistic nature of raking joints and seem completely unaware of how to send mortar samples off for composition and color analysis. You need to consult a competent supervising architect before hiring a tuck pointing company who can instruct the workmen and can inspect the work.

Remodeling the Kitchen:

Bill Bergmann said that a house needed a new kitchen about every 10 to 15 years. He said in that period of time there were enough changes in kitchen technology that an upgrade fulfill today's needs. However, SDA built many very special butler's pantries off the kitchens. These small rooms are full of cupboards, drawers and counter space. There is a tendency among modern kitchen remodelers to tear out the pantries to free up more space for the stadium kitchen. This is a mistake and please avoid demolishing the butler's pantry. I have seen several instances where charming and useful pantries were torn out. This is an area where homeowners realize only after the fact that they've lost more than they've gained in remodeling their kitchens. You will never be able to replace the beautiful maple & birch counters and cabinetry.

Remodeling the Bathroom:

New homeowners say “I want to remodel the bathrooms. The tub alcove has an elliptical arch over the tub--should I take it out?” Also it has the original fixtures--sink, toilet & tub. In the early SDA houses, Stanley designed an elliptical arch over the tub. This is a signature design by SDA. We've not seen any other architect in the Lake Forest area use this style. It is one of the designs that marks your home as a SDA house. Please don't tear out the arch.

The old fixtures are typically still in good working order. Several of the older plumbing companies in town stock parts for these. In some of the homes the fixtures are different colors--black, peach, pale green. These are very rare and are part of the SDA oeuvre. Learn to love them.

Contact Palmer (nee Strenger) and/or Killian.

Please call or email with questions. I can show you many alternatives that stay in the SDA style. Often new homeowners are unaware of the rich history and attention

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to detail in the original design of their homes. Anderson homes are meant to be lived in--to be used, enjoyed and loved. Enjoy your house.

Paul Bergmann

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