

# Aluminum and vinyl siding

You've decided on siding for your home, and want the convenience of a low maintenance material coupled with a choice of textures, styles and colours.

If that's narrowed your options down to vinyl or aluminum, here's a look at the characteristics of the two materials.

Aluminum has been a building material staple for years, and once covered an estimated 10 per cent of North American homes. That figure dropped considerably today, with much of what would once have been covered in aluminum now clad in the newer vinyl siding.

Today you can buy vinyl and aluminum siding in a variety of widths, designs, textures and colours. Horizontal or vertical, the choice is yours. Vinyl siding, particularly, can match just about all architectural styles. Historic homes have been clad completely in vinyl right down to fine decorative vinyl mouldings, and have managed to keep their period look intact.

Both aluminum and vinyl are applied in much the same way, and both are available with insulated backing, or designed to take drop-in panels of insulation. Because aluminum is a poor insulator, it's often put up over rigid insulation. Patterns on vinyl may be shallower than on aluminum, but the two finishes do look similar.

Vinyl is more flexible than aluminum, and therefore easier to work with, but both take lots of cutting and fitting for a first-class job. If vinyl's out on an improperly prepared wall, unevenness may show through more than with aluminum, and incorrect fitting (vinyl expands and contracts with exposure to temperature extremes) can make it snap under a sharp blow. It can buckle, which can also happen to aluminum in the heat of the summer sun.

While vinyl won't take bumps and knocks well in extremely cold weather, it does have a high resistance to dents. Because colour runs through the whole panel, chipping is not a

problem, but some colours may be prone to fading more than others.

The colour of aluminum siding comes from enamel that's baked on at a factory. This finish can chip and peel if the siding is dented, which can happen far more easily with metal than with plastic if a stray baseball or even a heavy hailstorm comes aluminum's way. Scratches too can be a problem, but like vinyl, aluminum siding panels can be removed and replaced without too much trouble.

There's less wind noise transmitted with vinyl than with aluminum, but aluminum is fireproof.

Cleaning vinyl can be accomplished with soap and water. It maintains that "new" look for years. More work is necessary to spruce up aluminum, which can fall victim to fading and, in some climates, chalking. This is what happens when paint sheds pigment and leaves behind a fine powder. In excessive cases the siding the paint is supposed to protect can be left exposed.

If aluminum siding sits above bricks, chalking can leave streaks. A strong solution of hot water and dish detergent mixed with elbow grease should get rid of them.

If you're having a tough time deciding between aluminum and vinyl siding, keep your eyes open when you're out and about in the neighbourhood. If a particular house finish catches your eye, it's worth talking with the homeowners to find out particulars like what material was used, was it professionally installed or a do-it-yourself job, and how happy are they with the results.

And talk to professional siding suppliers and installers to learn as much as possible about the products you're considering buying.

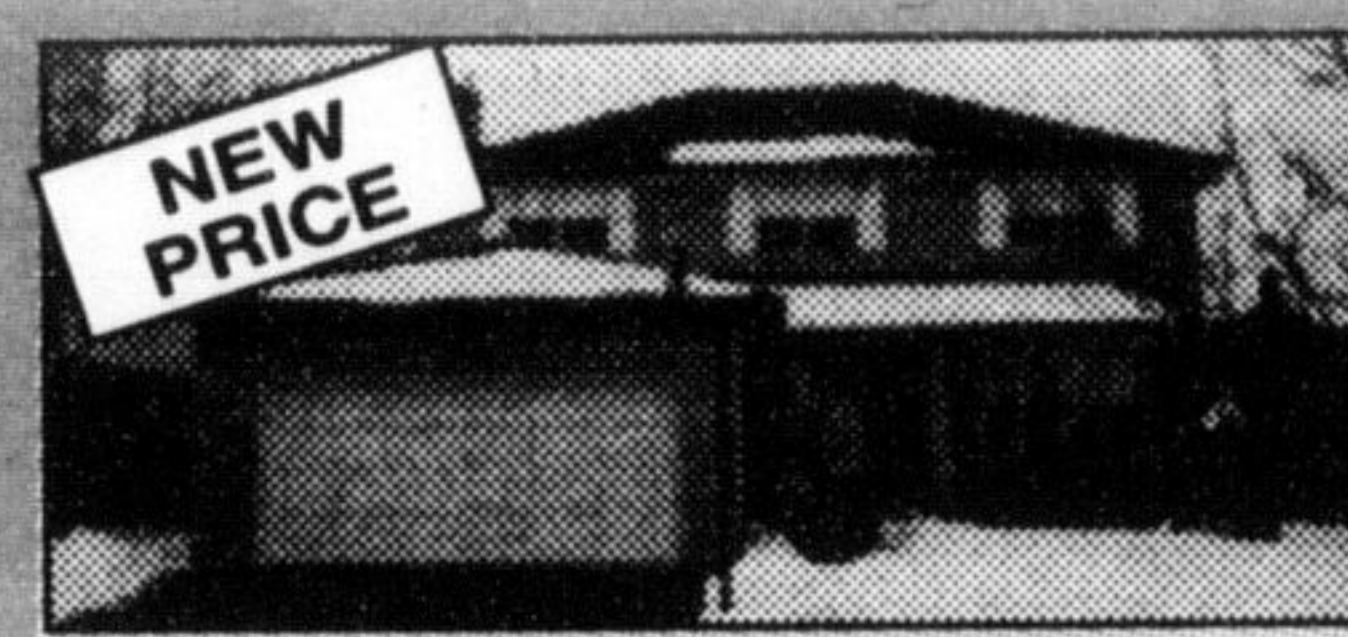
*This article is provided by local realtors and the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) for the benefit of consumers in the real estate market.*

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