

Highlands Style Blends with Nature

By Brian O'Shea

The general consensus when designing and improving buildings in the Highlands area is to maintain a natural look. Kenny Roweton, manager of the paint department at Ace Hardware on Main Street, said that people tend to choose colors that mimic nature for the exterior of their home or business. "Most folks try to stay with the natural greens and tans," he said. "Stains seem to be more popular because they are not as shiny and seem to blend with the rural landscape. They kind of have a softer look to them."

Roweton's observation is well known to builder Bill Nellis, owner of Nellis Communities Inc., who is currently building condominiums adjacent to Harris Lake. "I just wanted the buildings to disappear in their surroundings," he said. "I'll finish the exterior in a way where they'll be the least noticeable."

Some materials he uses are wood indigenous to the area as well as pressurized cedar shingles, which have a higher resistance to moisture. Using wood for the exterior requires more maintenance than vinyl siding but he said it is worth the extra effort to maintain the natural appearance.

"All I have to do is clean vinyl siding, using wood requires more maintenance meaning I have to re-stain it every five-to-seven years as well as be very careful with pest control," he said. "This is the look everybody wants, they don't want vinyl siding." Nellis added that the site of his condominiums is the former Edwards family estate from which the Old Edwards Inn is named after. He felt the historical aspect of the area was an added bonus for anyone who chooses to live there.

Rick Siegel, chairman of the town Appearance Commission, agrees that the town's history should be incorporated in its architecture. "Village character reflects the look of the mountains where we live," he said. "Every one building on Main Street does not look the same but they're all consistent with what this area is historically. It all seems to fit together."

The Appearance Commission makes recommendations to other commissions when it comes to matters of approving special use permits. Factors taken into consideration when making these recommendations include examining certain aspects of design, landscaping, lighting and color to see if it would be a good fit for the surrounding area. "The purpose (of the commission) is to maintain a level of appearance in the town that is consistent with the ambience and beauty of the town," said Siegel.

Joe Luke, manager of Ace Hardware said that spring is a great time to do some minor maintenance on the exterior of your home to maintain its beauty and increase its longevity. "Anytime in spring or the beginning of summer, after a wet and fairly warm winter, your deck can get a lot of mold and mildew," he said. "Get it cleaned off quickly to prevent the mold from growing before the heat and humidity make it grow faster and cause rot. This will extend the life of the structure."

Roweton's advice for cleaning mold and mildew is to wash the surface in a mixture of one cup of bleach, one scoop of laundry detergent and one gallon of water. The bleach will kill the bacteria that cause mold and mildew and the detergent will remove the stain. He added that this is also an important step before one paints the exterior walls of their home.

"The cleaning and getting rid of the mold and mildew is probably the biggest challenge for homeowners up here because it's so warm and moist," he said. "Those conditions are ideal for mildew growth which will grow under the paint surface causing it to fail prematurely." After the solution is applied to the surface he recommends letting it sit for ten-to-15 minutes before rinsing it off. That will give it ample time to kill the bacteria. Then make sure the surface is completely dry before any paint is applied.