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Fabulous faux: Stone veneer gives new look and luster to older homes

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Lori Cox is moving from a run-of-the mill brick ranch house in Northbrook to a European villa without leaving home.

She's able to do this just by putting stone veneer along the bottom half of the house to complement the Spanish-style metal tile roof she recently had installed.

Stone veneer, a building material that replicates real stone, is gaining popularity among homeowners going for a new look. Made of concrete poured into molds, stone veneer comes in different shapes, sizes and colors, just like real stone. However, unlike real stone, veneers are less expensive. It's also being used on many newly constructed homes.

Cox liked her ranch house when she bought it 16 years ago. But, it's time to update and create a different ambiance. Stone veneer is being placed on the front and back of the home, and the sides are being covered with stucco to enhance the gray, brown and golden faux stone.

"It was a very nice brick ranch, built in 1969. There was no real character to it. It was a very plain-looking property," she said. "We wanted to give it a villa feel. We're going for that Old World type of look."

That look, and a warm, upscale feel, is what's attracting homeowners to stone veneers.

Face lift

Cox is a real estate agent and speaker for the Illinois Association of Realtors and the National Association of Realtors on how to succeed in a tough real estate market. She knows aesthetics are important, that curb appeal is more important than ever.

The stone look is "a show-stopper, curb appeal-wise," she said. "It makes a house very inviting."

But, she's not selling her home.

Deb Peterson of Libertyville also wanted a new look for her 35-year-old brick and cedar sided house, but didn't want to spend a lot on real stone.

"It was old and needed to be replaced," she said.

She thought about replacing the brick and repainting the siding, but decided the exterior needed to be updated. After seeing some homes with stone veneer, she thought it looked good and would likewise look nice on the front, garage and outdoor fireplace of her house.

The project, done in the spring, was completed in about 10 days and cost about \$20,000.

"It was very well done," she said. "It looks real. It looks more expensive than it really is."

Since having stone veneer put on the house, the reviews have been positive.

"People who live in the neighborhood stop by and say they like it," she said.

A natural look

The nod from neighbors was something Cox was a little worried about before she began transforming her ranch house.

"I didn't want it to look factory-made," she said. "But, you can't tell. There is a lot of texture to it."

Stone veneers have been around since the early 1960s.

North Star Stone, located in Libertyville, has been around and applying stone veneers only since 2004.

But, proprietor Alan Andrews has had enough business to say stone veneers are a very popular product on the North Shore and in Lake County. It's become more popular since the product has improved and more colors offered.

The product is as long-lasting as any siding, Andrews said, adding the stone veneer industry provides a standard 40-year warranty. Very little, if any, maintenance is required. It might need to be power washed once, he said.

And, stone veneer, he added, can be applied right onto unpainted brick with mortar. But other materials on houses have to be removed before stone veneer can be applied. Andrews said each piece has to be placed by hand.

"It has stood the test of time," he said. "You really can't tell it's not real stone. It's a very popular and well accepted product."



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