

Don't Bungle a Bungalow

Part III: Windows

An original wood sash window rebuilt and well maintained can be opened or closed with ease.

BY MICHAEL LOGAN ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY HILLARY BLACK AND LESLIE CHEW



Keeping your home's original windows in good condition is easy once you know what to do. The home will retain more value while the window design's beauty and efficiency are nearly impossible—and quite costly—to replace.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL LOGAN

above

Top row: Glue, utility knife, hammer, stiff blade chisel, wide putty knife, two hand saws (rarely needed), fish file knife (rope cutter), sash rope.

Middle row: tape, 3-in-1 oil, crowbar, finish nails (8d, 5d, 3d).

Bottom: Optional Sawzall with metal cutting blade to cut nails.

THE MOST COMMON—AND QUITE COSTLY—error made by bungalow or vintage homeowners is needlessly replacing original wood windows with whatever the latest building industry fad has to offer.

There have been many variations of aluminum windows, and now there are vinyl windows. What will be the next window fad? Whatever it is, I can assure you that providing windows that will last a lifetime is not in the best interest of the industry; they want to keep you coming back.

So many times I have seen bungalows in the process of having all of the original windows replaced, but never have I seen a window that was beyond restoration. The vast majority of

old windows that get replaced have very little, if anything, wrong with them. Too many bungalows and vintage homes in general are being stripped of their key identities and given inferior replacements for huge sums of money.

In this series of restoration articles I explain why it makes financial sense to keep your bungalow's originality intact. Never is this more true than in retaining the original windows. Like so many other aficionados of the vintage bungalow, if I was in the market to purchase and one came along with all the right features except all the windows were vinyl it would be a deal breaker. It would just be too costly and time consuming to undo.

Shattering Window Myths

Let's dispel some of the myths about these modern, miracle dual-pane vinyl windows some of which were said about aluminum windows 30 years ago.

1. They will last forever.

FALSE. The seals go out within 20 years and necessitate complete replacement the same time the latest fad emerges. Ask a window salesperson what to do if a ball goes through your new dual-pane window to see how fast the subject gets changed. The old growth lumber of the originals cannot be duplicated today. They are solid, firm and resistant to decay, unlike today's farm wood. They can be made to go for another 95 years for less than the cost of replacing.

2. They operate smoother than old windows.

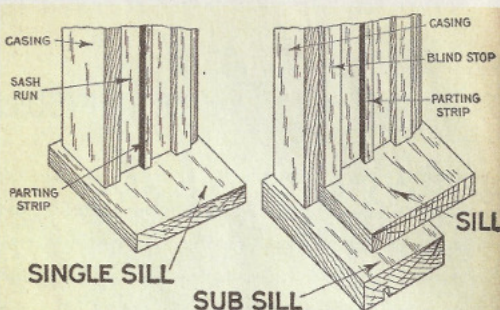
FALSE. An original wood sash window rebuilt and well maintained can be opened or closed with just one finger. I dare anyone to try that with a vinyl sash dual window.

3. They will save you tons of money in utility bills.

FALSE. Take the combined square footage of your windows and divide it by the total square footage of all your interior walls, floors and ceilings. This is the small percentage area that you are left with to improve on. In a warm/moderate climate like California the difference would be hardly noticeable on your utility bills. In more extreme climates it would take more than your lifetime to pay for the vinyl windows in energy savings. The addition of storm windows will equalize the savings.

4. They look so nice with their permanent white color.

FALSE. White is historically inaccurate, and you need the freedom to choose any color in the future.



Figs. 3.201 and 3.202.—The two general styles of window frame. Fig. 3.201, single sill frame; fig. 3.202, frame with sub-sill and blind stop.

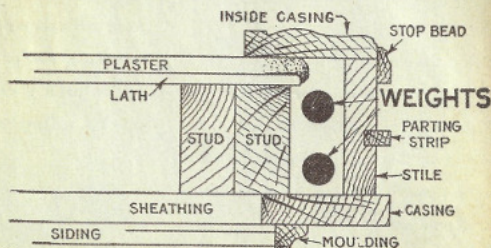
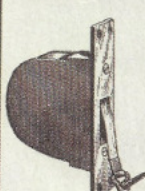


FIG. 3.203.—Detail of single sill frame setting showing construction.

Caldwell Sash Balance



Does away with weights and cords and VASTLY more durable.

Makes sashes work perfectly.

Permits greater window space in new work, as box frames are not necessary.

May be applied to old windows without altering sashes or frames.

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Designed to Last

The two most common types of windows found in vintage homes are casement and/or sash. Casement windows are as basic as it can get with only two simple moving parts: hinges. If they have trouble operating it is almost always solved at the hinges. Either the hinge screws are loose or the hinges need

shims. Examine the entire opening. If the gap is not even on all sides it is likely a hinge problem. A one- or two-layer thin cardboard shim properly placed will usually solve the problem. Shims are a science; research and try different combinations. Plane off the edges of a window as a last resort if the casement has become out of square. Once you remove the wood it is gone forever. It is possible that too much paint buildup is present at the edges of the window or casement, in which case it is recommended to chemically strip.

The Craftsman-era bungalow sash window with its ropes and pulleys is the ultimate in design efficiency. So-called improvements over the years, such as spring-loaded cable sash balances, are just more examples of industry changes that did not benefit the consumer but rather the industry. Sash and casement windows share the same kind of maintenance issues in regards to window putty (glaze), and that subject could be a story of its own. After you research it, use Dap 33, the pros' choice for window glaze.