

COLUMN FOR MAY 7, 2005.

HEADLINE; HIGH-TECH SLATE ROOFING

*Q; We are considering a new roof for our older home. We like the look of slate but have heard these are very heavy and expensive. Is there another kind of roofing that looks like something like slate that would suit an older home?*

A: Our reader is correct; a slate covering is very expensive and extremely heavy. A heritage slate roof was actually real stone that was split to make the slate shingle. I have heard estimates of 1200 lbs or more per square for a real slate roof. A conventional asphalt shingle comes in around 300 lbs a square. In roof terms a square is approximately a 100 sq ft. The pitch of the roof and the strength of the roof framework becomes a critical issue. There are however some options. A number of the Conventional Roof Shingle manufacturers have produced fibreglass and Asphalt shingles that emulate the look of slate. The makers use a laminated felt that is thicker than conventional shingles. They then cut them and shade the colours to appear like stone. These shingles are often rated at 35 years or more and are priced accordingly.

A number of composition materials designed to have the slate look have hit the market within the past 5-10 years and they are slowly making inroads. They advertise the fact that they have the “new slate look”. In actual fact, Fibre Cement shingles were one of the first “synthetic slate shingles”. They were introduced in North America just before WW1. Unfortunately the majority were made with asbestos and this practise was halted some years ago. In the early 80’s the use of cement blended with fibreglass or cellulose was introduced. While this method has some success in warmer climates, it has its limitations in our cold weather.

In the late 90’s the use of composition materials like polyethylene and polymer resins, which have been used in automobile production for nearly 30 years, entered the home roofing market. These plastics already have a proven track record when exposed to the outdoors. To create this “slate look” they are manufactured by injecting the plastic under high pressure into a series of moulds. Some of these shingles use recycled plastic, this makes them very environmentally friendly. These shingles are very light compared to actual slate or concrete shingles. Some manufacturers claim that their composition plastic “slate look” shingles weight only fractionally more than conventional asphalt shingles.

Another method is to blend plastics with pulverized stone or clay. They sometimes use cellulose and fibreglass in this blend as reinforcement for the shingle. One manufacturer I researched used recycled tires as a small part of their blend. Heating the blend and then compressing the material into moulds to imitate the shape and texture of slate is the most common method of manufacturing these blended shingles. I know of one maker that creates a wood shingle effect with their composite plastic material. Just a side note, there is a company in Alberta that uses recycled tires to manufacturer a very distinctive roof shingle.

If you decide to look into these modern roof coverings you should do some extensive research. Like a lot of new products, there are some very good ones and some questionable methods. The first consideration is the weight of the roof covering, some of the blended plastic shingles can weight nearly double what standard asphalt shingles weigh. Look for a reputable installer. A lot of these shingles have only been around for 5-10 years and we do not have a real handle of their longevity as yet. Ask the installer how many he has done and get references. Take the time to go look at as many installations as you can and talk to the homeowner. I did some amount of research on these relatively new products and now have a list of companies in this business. As I did for our reader, if any anyone else would like this list, just send an e-mail to [cam.allen@sympatico.ca](mailto:cam.allen@sympatico.ca). When I started to ask the difficult questions I was impressed by the in-depth technical information that I got from some manufacturers. A couple actually sent me samples. I think this type of plastic “slate look” roof covering has a future and may be worth investigating if you intend to stay in your home for some years. These new plastic shingles are not cheap, but the projected life spans on these products may be worth the money and they are

considerably less expensive than real stone.

Now the answer to last week's question. What is an astragal? The answer was B) a heritage ornamental moulding. Now this week's question. What is a berm? Is it A) a type of decorative concrete wall. B) an engineering term for level C) a type of perimeter fencing. D) an earth embankment used for visual or sound barrier. The answer in next week's column.

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