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Fit & Trim

Expert advice for designing rooms with traditional trim.

BY JENNIFER SPERRY
PHOTOS BY ERIC ROTH

Trim is the cornerstone of a historic or new-old interior. It anchors a home in its appropriate era while showcasing the time period's craftsmanship. However, incorporating convincing new-old millwork into an interior designed for modern living is no small feat. Many factors, from crown moldings to baseboard profiles to window casings and chair-rail heights, can make or break the effort.

While architects often take the lead in determining an interior's millwork package, homeowners can also rely on the knowledge and experience of builders and, even more specifically, millwork companies to oversee the finer details. It is important for a project's design team to collaborate in ensuring a cohesive look from floor to

ceiling as well as a logical progression of formality throughout the house.

CLUES FROM THE PAST

The best-case scenario when determining appropriate trim for a traditional interior is when existing details set a precedent. Even if only a few bits remain—the paneled base of a window casing, a fireplace surround—these historic clues can act as stepping stones for a home's entire trim package.

“When millwork already exists, we collaborate with the project's architects to harvest details out of the existing patterns,” explains Stephen Payne of Boston-based Payne Bouchier Fine Builders. “Once the patterns are established, we then collaborate as a design team to decide how best to use them.”



Olson Lewis + Architects and Payne Bouchier Builders create interior spaces with beautiful, classical detailing.

Known for its work in historic Boston neighborhoods like Beacon Hill, Back Bay, and the South End, Payne Bouchier Fine Builders is no stranger to trim. “In these neighborhoods, the architectural style is typically Greek Revival or Beaux-Arts. We’ve put our hands on a lot of original 19th-century millwork and seen what it looks like, how thick it is, how many layers there are, and what types of wood were used,” says Payne.

During a project, the building company produces custom moldings either onsite or in its woodshop, which features a full line of custom knife profiles and milling machinery. The shop can also source any species of wood, including reclaimed products. “Back of house” wood types used in and

around Boston include first-growth Carolina pine and red gum, for example, while native hardwoods such as walnut, chestnut, mahogany, white oak, and sycamore were reserved for more elaborate “front of house” designs.

In special cases, when chestnut, for example, is hard to source due to blight, Payne Bouchier’s carpenters improvise with American white ash. “Even though ash is a much heavier, denser wood, when it’s stained to a chestnut color and used in collaboration with walnut, the effect can be quite historically convincing,” says Payne.

Overall, choosing a builder who is conversant with a particular region’s architectural styles goes a long way towards trim success, adds Payne. “We’ve worked with some talented

architects and interior designers who understand the nuance of detailing very well, and we bring yet another level of hands-on expertise to the mix.”

SOURCING SIMPLIFIED

Anyone who’s seen a molding profile catalog knows that choosing trim from scratch can be a daunting process. That is why Kuiken Brothers Company Inc., a building material supply company with eight residential and millwork showrooms across New Jersey and New York, launched its Classical Moulding Collection in 2010.

The collection includes 70 historically inspired molding profiles categorized into six distinct architectural styles: Early American, Georgian, Greek Revival, Federal, Traditional Revival, and Colo-

nial Revival. Besides crown, casing, base, chair-rail, and panel moldings, there are also CAD files available for each profile so that the details can be quickly incorporated into architectural plans.

Crafted from Appalachian poplar, a locally sourced wood, the millwork defies “off the shelf” bias with thick stock and exacting standards.

“For the past 60-plus years, molding companies have been publishing these huge catalogs of two-dimensional line drawings, and the selection has been confusing,” says Ryan Mulkeen, director of marketing. “We have brought millwork back to basics by creating a historically true yet simple selection experience, which is helping to promote classical and traditional architectural styles to a larger audience.”

The organization of classical moldings by architectural type, both online and in catalog form, helps alleviate the challenge of coordinating styles from

Right: The rich details found in the stair railing and entryway create depth and beauty in the design.

that first chosen piece. “If homeowners, architects, or designers find a casing profile that they like, they can go to our website and find the matching crown, base, panel and chair-rail profiles that would have been installed during that time period,” says Mulkeen.

In addition, six full room packages “help our customers start to visualize how the packages come together. And while some of the profiles may be too large or small for their specific project,” he continues, “we offer 5½”, 4½”, and 3½” proportionately sized casing profiles and all of our base moldings have a matching base cap.”

Kuiken Brothers applied a great deal of architectural research—as well as milling and installation expertise—to each individual collection.



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DRAFTING BOARD

Right: Payne Bouchier created the paneled walls for this seacoast home. The interiors are by C & J Katz Studio of Boston.

“For example, the molding profiles in the Federal collection feature cavetto shapes and simple beads, which help the molding read lighter and more refined in a room,” says Mulkeen. “Conversely, the profiles in the Georgian collection have bold shapes and proud projections and are symbolic of a pre-Revolutionary style primarily installed in the homes of wealthy merchants and well-to-do landowners.”

With profiles culled from actual historic homes, the classical collection is indeed 100-percent made in the USA and reflective of the country’s decorative roots. In fact, the Kuiken Brothers catalog is like a walk through American architectural history, one trim piece at a time. **NOH**

For Resources, see page 72.



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