



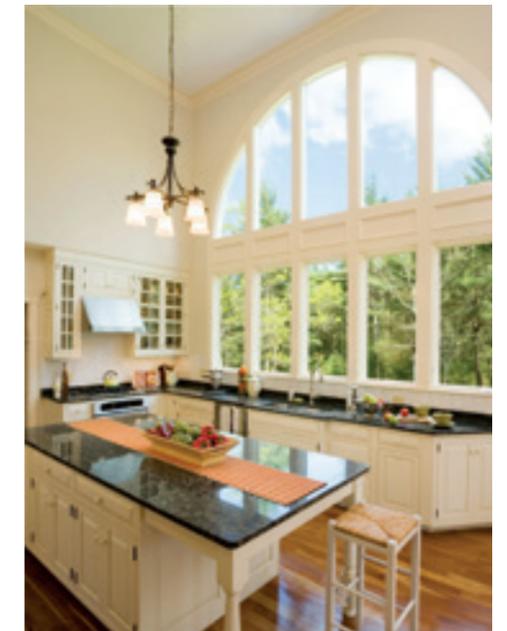
COOL, QUIET COMFORT

By **ASHLEY FESTA**

Another scorching Texas summer is on its way, but don't turn on the AC just yet. Deciding between suffering during the heat of the day or lowering the thermostat only to pay the price for it later aren't a homeowner's only choices. Instead, consider scrapping old windows and installing customized replacements made with insulating glass units. With these new windows, beauty and efficiency come as a package deal.

Insulating glass units are made with two pieces of glass within the frame of the window. A low-emissivity (or low-e) coating and an inner gas create the magic, says Aaron Heth, CEO at ASAP Windows & Siding. The low-e coating is an invisible silver metal on the inside panes of glass that reflects heat back outside, keeping the interior of the house cooler and the energy bill lower.

"In the old days and even today, most homes just have one



piece of glass and heat flows into the house," Heth says. "A low-e coating doesn't allow heat to transfer to the inside of the house."

While the low-e coating handles the heat, the gas between the panes of glass combats the cold.

"It's cold enough in Texas to make us uncomfortable," says Heth. "People here in Texas think it doesn't get cold, but when it's 48 degrees outside, it makes the home cold and the heater has to come on."

Double-paned windows with a gas filling prevent much of that cold from seeping into the home, maintaining a more consistent indoor temperature without wasting energy. And the amount of savings might shock you.

"People often think they need more insulation in the walls and attic, but that saves only about 15 percent on their energy bill," explains Heth. "Seventy-five percent is lost through windows and doors because we have so many of them and because windows are such a big part of the wall when you consider a sliding glass door or French door."

Replacing all the windows and doors in a home may be pricy, but could save a homeowner up to 40 percent on the energy bill. Depending on the type of windows chosen, the replacements could pay for themselves within eight years.

Taking into account not only energy savings, but also added value to the price of the home, the investment offers a big payoff — into the thousands of dollars, according to Heth. Just replacing the windows creates an immediate 71 percent return on investment. For example, a homeowner who spends \$10,000 on replacement windows can expect an increase of \$7,100 on the sale price of the home.

On top of that, the windows also protect the homeowner's personal belongings by blocking out 98 percent of harmful UV rays which could bleach rugs or furniture.

"If you have a really expensive Italian leather sofa sitting next to a window that doesn't have the protective coating, you could ruin that couch," Heth says.

And as if the windows needed another selling point, they're also safer than regular single-paned windows. The locking mechanism is located inside the window for the tilt-in feature of easy cleaning, a placement that also makes it much harder for burglars to break in.

"The glass in the windows is an eighth-inch thick. It's heat treated so it's super strong. You can't take a glass cutter and cut it," Heth says. "You'd have to take a hammer to it, and that's way too loud for most thieves."

The thick glass also creates a sound barrier, which is immediately noticeable to Heth's customers. From highway traffic and nearby railroad tracks to neighbors' dogs and lawn mowers — annoying outdoor noise practically vanishes.

Beyond efficiency and safety, the frames themselves boost home value as well. Wood window frames that require zero maintenance? Yes, you can have it all. Specially treated wood doesn't need painting and comes with a 20-year or a lifetime guarantee.

A simple change of windows — adding a big picture window, for example — can make a dramatic update to the home, creating a more modern or more traditional look depending on the homeowner's style.

"I've been in the home improvement business for quite a while, and I've never seen a home improvement that changes the look of a house as much as the windows," Heth says. "Windows are the only home improvement that I know of that can upgrade and beautify the home on both the interior and exterior." ♦

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