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Cover Story/Side Story

Throw on Some Color

An option to matching brick in renovations, or additions to older existing structures, is to match modern brick with color staining. Lynda Evans, owner of StoneArt, Church Hill, Tenn., a company that specializes in replica brick for such projects, actually suggests to her customers staining as a cost-effective alternative. "It might sound odd but I tell my customers that, if they can find a brick that is the right size and texture, but the wrong color, they should consider staining by a company such as Nawkaw, of Atlanta. Their motto is 'Changing the color of masonry' and they can do some amazing things to match up bricks that don't match."

She continues, "They would have someone build the wall out of brick that don't match in color but do match in texture and size, and then they will come to the job site and make the mortar and the brick match in the wall. It's a staining process, but from what I've seen it's quite permanent."

How it Works

Commercial additions often create a matching problem. Materials used by the same manufacturers at a later date do not always match previously manufactured products. The most common residential use for brick staining is to correct fading due to water damage or the owners desire to change the color of their home or fireplace.



Whether you are doing brick matching or staining to improve the look of an addition to an older building, an important consideration is "zeroing the existing material." In other words, making the old and the new as close to the same as possible now so they will age the same over time.

Cleaning

So cleaning the existing surfaces makes sense before ordering replacement bricks or stain. Ron Bayer, owner of Unique Industries, the manufacturer of the Kem-o-Kleen spray unit, explains how to get started with that part of the job. "Test everything on a very small scale before you do anything on a large scale with restoration cleaning," he says. "That's the way to select the correct chemical to use. Try a few and see what works best and takes off the dirt, but do it where it won't be easily seen if something goes wrong."

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Sounds logical. Bayer acknowledges that many mason contractors aren't familiar with doing expansion or additions to existing buildings, especially those designated as historical structures. He notes, "There you're going to have to do some cleaning on the old building and you would want to be sure you're cleaning with a method that will not 'burn the brick.' When you put acid, the typical cleaning material, on brick it changes the brick's color. It's basically acid burn. And although the new brick will change color as well as the replacement, the amount of change will be different depending upon the brick making materials. You need to clean the building first, and then pick the color of the new brick to match the cleaned brick."

Choosing the right chemicals isn't always easy, either. As Bayer says, "Most of the chemical companies don't like you to use pressure washers for several reasons. First, you use a lot less chemical. Second, if the operators are careless or untrained, they can do some damage with a standard pressure washer and usually the chemicals get blamed for it. Doing it wrong can damage the building — you can see the marks of the water, scarring the brick. If they use too much pressure, they could literally write their initials in the building. When they scar the brick, it can't be fixed."

Kem-O-Kleen washers use a patented pressurized acid and chemical induction system with no chemical injector or pump to be destroyed by the cleaning acids or other chemicals. The flexibility of the system allows it to be used for restoration cleaning, new masonry cleaning, applying waterproofing and sealing materials, cleaning concrete surfaces, and "just general all-around cleaning jobs," Bayer claims.

Staining and Aging

A company with 22 years experience in brick matching, BrickImaging claims it has a revolutionary method of re-coloring and sealing brick, block, mortar, stucco and concrete. Bob Homolka, BrickImaging's founder and president, says, "Our process penetrates deep into the subsurface for a permanent change to new or existing surfaces. We also can completely remove graffiti and restore the original color with a perfect block or brick match. BrickImaging provides permanent solutions for new construction or special restoration projects."

He adds, "We can resurface dark brick light or light brick dark, blending all brick, block, mortar, stucco and concrete. We create a clean, new look before or after installation. Because we have literally completed hundreds of jobs without one dissatisfied customer, we confidently provide a lifetime guarantee," says Homolka."

As masonry ages, it becomes subdued and it changes in color. When restoration work is made to aged surfaces, the new brickwork often will not match the existing surface. Color Match Masonry (CMM), Baltimore, Md., claims it can create this "aged look" to provide uniformity. Their process can also be used to solve mortar problems, they say. If the mortar in brickwork does not match, CMM can treat the mortar to eliminate the situation.

So there are ways to pick a brick and make it work with existing structures when you can't get a true replica or enough of the original batch. Just remember to treat the wall to get it clean so the stained bricks and original ones will age equally for the next 100 years.

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