

Steep roofing alternatives look better to homeowners all the time

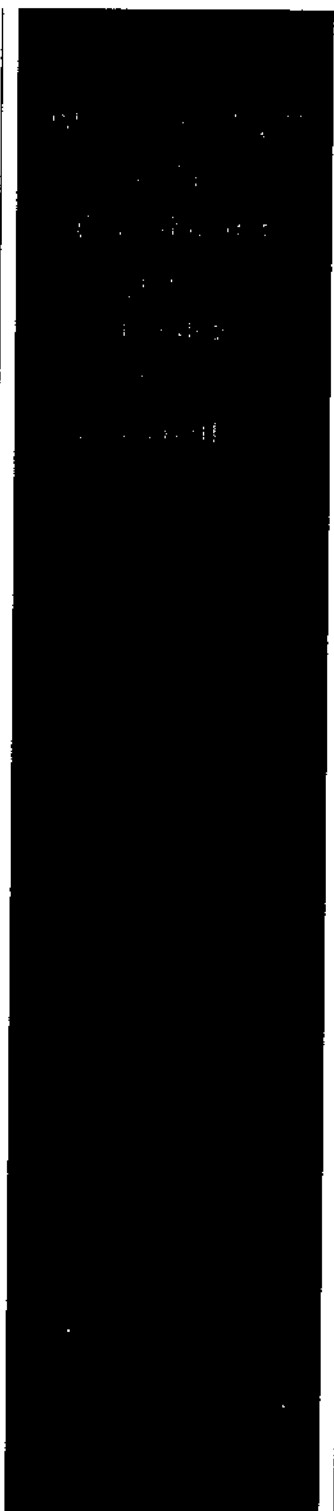
The non-asphalt shingle business is looking up. For many architects, designers and homeowners the steep roofs over their heads are no longer just simple, practical necessities, but design elements that can complement or enhance their homes' appearance. For these consumers the standard three-tab asphalt shingle may not be the best choice. Although asphalt shingles remain the largest product group in shingle roofing, a number of people have turned to slate, wood or tile for more distinctive textures and colors.

Although the costs of these products may have been prohibitive in the past, shifting prices and a concern for durability are making them more attractive to the cost-conscious homeowner. While the increasing cost of oil has driven up the price of asphalt products over the last few years, the prices of some non-asphalt materials have come down. When the longer life-spans of some of these roofing alternatives are figured into the equation, the cost per year for a non-asphalt shingle roof starts to fit well within many a homeowner's budget.

The products currently being marketed in non-asphalt residential roofing fall primarily into the following five categories: slate, tile (concrete and clay), metal shingles, wood (shingles and shakes) and simulated wood products.

Slate—all natural roofing

Clark Hicks, president of Evergreen Slate, Inc., Granville, N.Y., says that his high-grade Vermont roofing slate products "possess a quality that makes them suitable for reroofing all types of buildings. Slate is a product of nature, obtainable in neutral or colorful, permanent or weathering tones, which quickly assume the characteristics of the surrounding environment." The naturally colored Evergreen products are available in greens, greys, purples, blacks and reds.



Evergreen quarries the slate material from natural deposits. The company then hand-splits the slate to specified thicknesses and hand-trims the tiles to size. Thicknesses available include 1/4-inch, 3/8-inch, 1/2-inch and 3/4-inch. Each tile is machine-punched for two nail holes.

Hicks describes his product as being "a dense, hard stone, non-disintegrating and permanent, which is fire-proof, storm-proof and cannot warp or curl." One of slate's big advantages as a roofing material, according to Hicks, is its durability. "You need roof only once in a century with Vermont slate, as opposed to maybe five times with asphalt, cedar shakes or imitation slate."

Hicks says that if the roofing contractor's crews do not already have the necessary slate application skills or tools, they can easily acquire them. The workers may already be familiar with some slate roofing tasks. "The installations of valleys, hips and flashings are comparable with other roofing," Hicks says. To work on slate roofs Hicks recommends that the contractor "should have the proper slate cutter, hammer and ripper."

Demand for Evergreen's slate, which is marketed nationwide, "has increased tremendously over the last 10 years, with its natural characteristics continually specified by architects," Hicks says. He anticipates a 20 percent yearly sales increase over the next five years.

Ryser believes that new roofing conditions favor the increased growth of not only clay tile but also all non-asphalt roofing.

Concrete offers wide selection

Gory Associated Industries, Inc., Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., markets concrete roofing tiles in four basic shapes: Spanish S for nail-on or mortar application, a Bermuda-style flat tile and a mission-style barrel tile for mortar applications, and another flat tile for nail-on applications. A selection of four different surface treatments and 100 different colors, including white top and grey, is available for each style.

W. E. Ortloff, Gory president, says, "The wide variety of color and surface treatment combinations make it able to meet any desired architectural effect and fulfill all code requirements."

Concrete tiles are made through a high-pressure extrusion process that results in a dense, strong tile. "It's fireproof and will not burn, which gives it a big advantage over wood and similar products," says Ortloff.

Ortloff's company provides a brief training program on installation technique. Designers and contractors used to working with asphalt shingles will notice some differences, primarily in the underlayment system and the proper way of marking off the roof prior to laying the tile, he says.

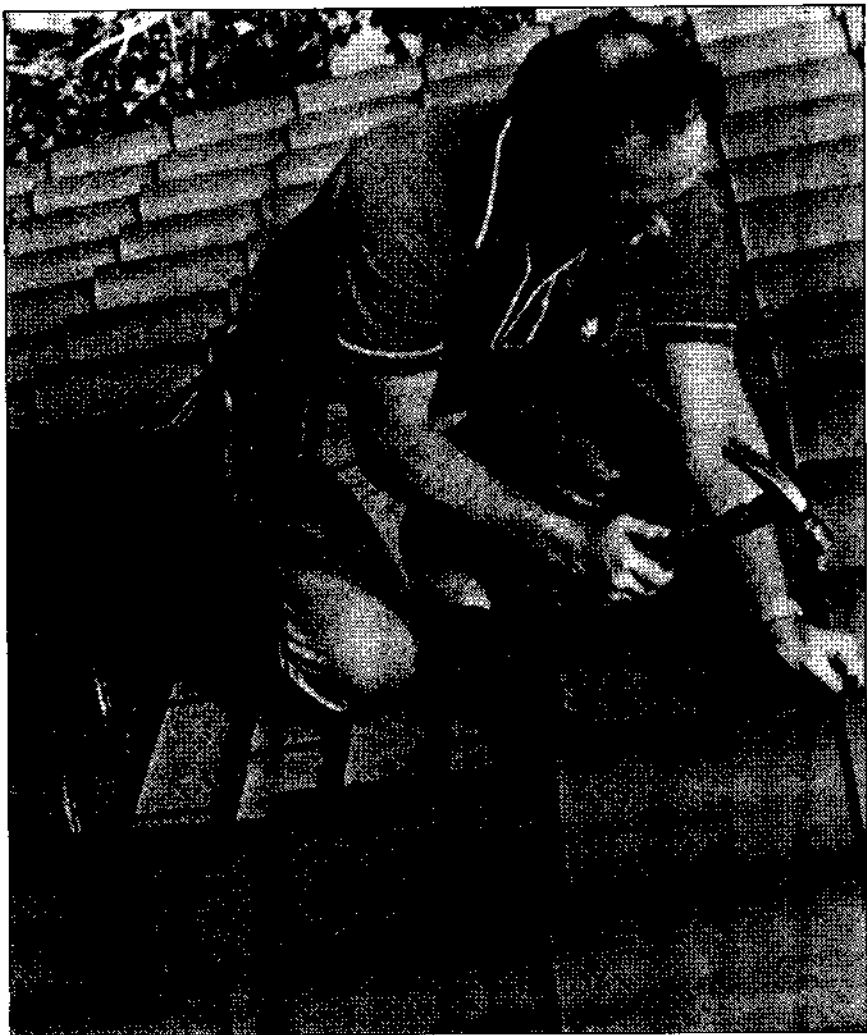
Concrete tile's current market area is Florida, though Gory also ships to Texas and the Southeastern states. "We have definite plans to expand from our current marketing areas, principally into the Sun Belt and along the coastal areas," Ortloff says. "We anticipate our production doubling within the next five years."

Clay tiles' colors unlimited

The clay tile produced by Ludowici-Celadon, New Lexington, Ohio, may be made in virtually any color desired, according to Ed Ryser, the company's vice president and general manager. "Twenty percent of our sales are for restoration or remodeling work where we have to match existing or old colors," he claims. The company's products also come in four basic shapes: an S tile, a shingle tile, an interlocking tile and a barrel tile.

Ludowici-Celadon's tile is prepared from rock clay. After the material is extruded or pressed into the desired shape it is kiln-dried, and then kiln-fired to 2,100F before being packaged for shipment.

Ryser says the application of his product should not present any special difficulties to an experienced roofer. "The main difference is understanding how to line up the roof and how it fits together; this information is provided in the manufacturer's instructions," he says. "And different cutting tools are involved—mainly a masonry saw."



Metal steep roofing is available in a variety of shapes. This aluminum zinc coated style from Metal Sales Manufacturing Corp. simulates clay tile.

Ludowici-Celadon sells nationally, with some export sales. But the largest sales concentration per capita is Florida. "Florida tends to use hard roofing material rather than asphalt or shakes," Ryser says. "It goes with the architecture, and there's no degradation from the sun, termites or similar factors."

Ryser anticipates his company will continue to maintain its present growth rate of 6 percent per year, and says this is in line with national clay tile growth. Ryser believes that marketing conditions favor the increased growth of not only clay tile, but also all non-asphalt roofing. "All the indications are that asphalt prices are climbing dramatically in terms of what other roofing materials are costing," he says. "As the price of asphalt gets closer to clay tile and other materials, non-asphalt products will gain an increasing share of the market. Soon it's not going to be very practical to put on an asphalt roof that will last for only 15 years." When it comes time for homeowners to replace their asphalt roofs they will be looking for more permanent products, according to Ryser.

Not-so-heavy metal

Metal shingles are another durable alternative to asphalt roofing. Metal Sales Manufacturing Corp., Louisville, Ky., offers a 20-year warranty on its Stile metal shingles. The product also meets the most stringent fire codes and has excellent resistance to wind uplift, according to Product Manager Terry Lacer. Another advantage, Lacer adds, is Stile's light weight. "Compared to clay tile, metal is much better," he says. "In a retrofit-type system, metal is about one-tenth the weight of clay tile."

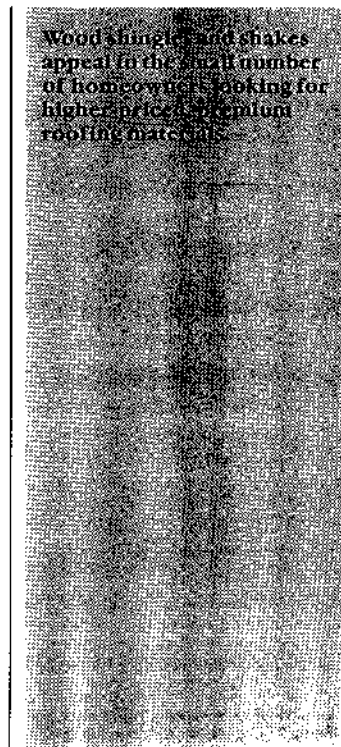
Stile shingles are made from 26-gauge stock. Each 1-meter-wide shingle can vary in length from 1 to 16 feet. Metal Sales markets the product in one profile. Colors available include Spanish clay, Tudor brown, ocean blue, slate grey and Riviera sand.

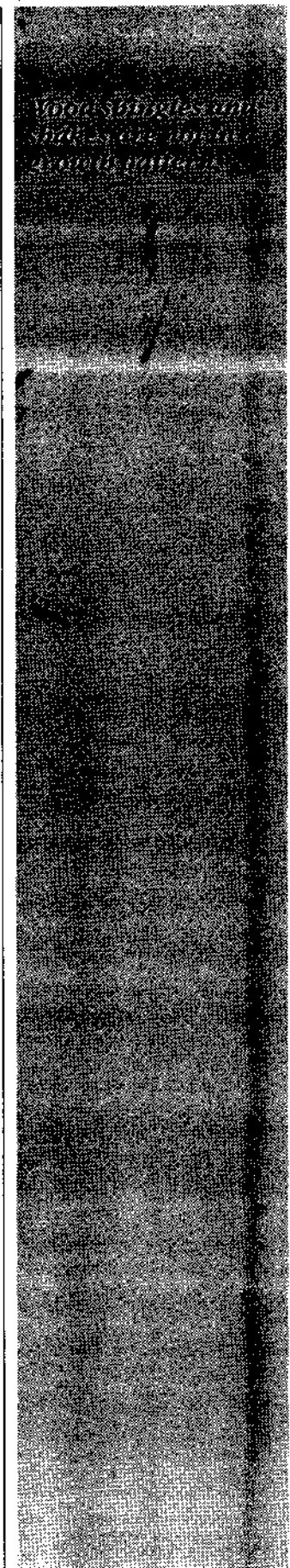


Metal shingles are fairly simple to put down, according to Lacer. "The only problems a standard roofer might have would result from his inexperience in working with metal," he says. Because it is necessary to cut profiles for the hips and valleys of a Stile roof, someone accustomed to working with metal should be part of the roofing crew. "A standard roofer could put it up like metal flashing, using a screw gun and metal shear," Lacer says.

Metal Sales markets Stile shingles throughout the country. It has had its best luck in the Sun Belt and coastal areas, however, primarily because the product complements the regions' Spanish-style architecture.

Wood shingles and shakes appeal to the small number of homeowners looking for higher priced, premium roofing materials.





The Stile product was developed in Sweden, where metal roofing commands an 80 percent share of the market. "Metal roofing is just starting to be accepted in the United States," Lacer says. "It now represents only about 1 percent of the market, but with more exposure more people will be asking for it. My guess is that its market share will double this year and continue to rapidly grow."

Wood finds its niche

Wood shingles and shakes are not in a growth pattern. The limited availability of Western red cedar, consumer concerns about the fire safety and durability of the products, and the high cost of wood compared to other forms of roofing have put a damper on wood roofing sales. Yet Marshall Ritchie, market manager for the Red Cedar Shingle & Handsplit Shake Bureau in Bellevue, Wash. explains, "Cedar roofing has its niche in the marketplace. It's usually more expensive; for a custom-type home; frequently architect-designed."

The two basic wood roofing products are shingles and shakes. Shingles are sawn on both sides, resulting in a smooth, uniform and tailored appearance. Shakes have sawn backs and natural split faces for a more rustic-looking, irregular exposed surface.

Ritchie says shingle and shake application is routine enough for the average roofer, though care should be taken that the roof is designed with minimum pitch and that fasteners used in humid climates are corrosion-resistant.

Red cedar roofing is currently marketed throughout the United States, but sales are concentrated on the West Coast. Though no market expansion is predicted for the immediate future, new technology may spur sales. Ritchie says that the industry is currently researching ways to incorporate fire-retardant and wood preservative chemicals into the products. This may eventually lead to the pressure-treating of other species, a technique that "would make available tremendously greater volumes of natural resources and would render the industry capable of much greater volume," according to Ritchie.

Simulated wood ready for growth

One non-asphalt roofing category that does not have to look to the future for rapid growth is simulated wood. Rick Madonia, director of marketing for the Masonite Corp., Chicago, says, "If we're able to meet our goals from a pricing and cost standpoint, we think that within just a few years there could be a demand that could give us at least 10 percent of the marketplace."

The Masonite roofing now on the market is called Woodruf Traditional, a 7/16-inch-thick hardboard made from wood shavings. Masonite turns the raw wood shavings into a cellulosic-type fiber and, after adding resins and bonding agents, sends it through the presses to produce a roofing shingle with a 25-year warranty.

This product is designed to simulate cedar shingles, although its larger size makes it easier to install, Madonia claims. Each foot-wide Woodruf module is 4 feet long and has a 9-inch exposure. One module covers the same area as 10 to 15 wood shingles or shakes, Madonia explained, reducing the amount of work necessary to cover an entire roof.

In summing up the changing steep roofing market for his own, as well as other alternative roofing products, Madonia says, "There's a growing desire by designers and homeowners to see the roof as an architectural design element. To do this you have to be able to look at something other than just plain asphalt."