

## Keeping the Trim. . . South Beach for Your Home

Typically when one thinks about keeping trim, images of the gym, Michelob Ultra commercials, and a bottle of Cortislim come to mind. However, in the world of preservation, keeping trim refers to the moldings at your baseboards, around your windows and doors, and sometimes in the form of crown.

Trim is one of the trickier aspects of historic preservation and/or renovation. “Tricky? What could be so tricky about some wood found at the base of my wall?” you ask. Well, trim is tricky on many levels. First, the type of trim used in your home may vary from room to room and certainly varies depending on the year in which your home was built and in which neighborhood you live.

For example, the homes in Canton were built to house the workers at the American Can Company. They weren’t the flashier homes and were typically owned and inhabited by the blue-collar factory workers. Therefore, it would be extremely rare to find crown molding in a home in Canton. Of course, there are exceptions. There are several larger homes that can be found throughout the Canton District and an argument could be made that these were the homes of management or someone with more means and thus might have had crown moldings. So you can see that even homes within the same district can have different molding treatments, making the determination of the appropriateness of trim tricky.

To give another illustration of how houses in the same district might have different moldings, we will look at Federal Hill. Most of you are familiar with the homes that sit at or in the immediate vicinity around Federal Hill Park (for those of you who are not, you need to take an afternoon one day this Spring and take a trip to the park). The homes that are around the park are a great deal bigger than the rest of the rowhomes found in the rest of the Federal Hill National Register District. They have more intricate windows, more decorative window and door trim, and more mosaic cornices. These homes often contained crown molding, thus making it an appropriate trim in those homes. However, I live in one of the row homes not on the park and crown molding is not appropriate in my home as I live on one of the smaller “alley” streets where most of the homes were inhabited by dock workers.

This is in contrast to homes found in districts like Stoneleigh, Guilford, Roland Park, and Homeland. These neighborhoods are replete with homes containing original and intricate crown moldings. Here again we find ourselves in a situation where it can become tricky. We have had several clients who have gone absolutely bonkers (a historical term for overboard) with crown molding installing it in the bathroom, upstairs hallways, and even in closets. “Well, Tristan, you said that crown molding was found in this house, so shouldn’t this be alright?” In one word, NO! It was found in these homes, however, it was usually found in the parlor/great room and in rooms where entertaining was done. So you can see, that even in homes where there is crown molding, it may only be appropriate in certain rooms, thus adding another tricky facet to the subject of trim.

While I have spent the last several paragraphs discussing the appropriateness of crown molding, I could go on for another several pages discussing each type of trim in and on your home and still not cover it all. You can imagine that with all of the facets surrounding the appropriateness of crown molding what must be involved in dealing with the moldings contained in all homes have (i.e., baseboards, window casings, door casings). One thing is for certain, there are proper moldings and improper moldings for each and every house and while a bit of investigation must be done to figure out which is appropriate for your house, it can be accomplished.

First start with your own home. Look around your home and see what seems to be original. If you find original trim, your first responsibility is to do everything to save it. Contractors and builders alike will all tell you that the molding needs to be replaced likely saying this, "Oh, I can buy something that looks just like that at Home Depot." Let me assure you of two things 1. It CAN be saved. There are several techniques to save it and it comes out looking nicer and is often cheaper than replacing it; and 2. You CANNOT get it at Home Depot. It is true that there are companies that specialize in historic moldings, but the Home Depot is not one of them. (As an aside, for those of you who own homes that have a great deal of molding still existing, but are having a tough time finding matching molding to fix some "trouble" areas, there are companies like Walbrooke that will use a piece of your molding to create a 'bit' to mill new matching molding).

Second, if you don't have original molding in your home, but wish to restore your home, go to a neighbor's house that is similar in style to your own. See if they have any original molding. If they do, take a picture of it and mimic that.

Okay, I can't close without discussing outdoor window and door molding. As a preservationist I firmly believe that it is the responsibility of a historic homeowner to help preserve the historic nature and appearance of our neighborhoods. Last month we discussed wood windows and their importance to this effort, however, the trim is equally important. Most homes with wood windows had bull-nosed molding surrounding them, some were arched, some boxed, but regardless it was usually some type of wood bull-nose. As vinyl windows are never acceptable, wrapping old moldings and sills in vinyl is just as offensive.

As mentioned above with interior moldings, if your exterior molding is failing and needs to be replaced, there are companies that will mill moldings for you. The better solution, however, is to contact a custom window company such as WF Mold (Tom Davey 410.574.9250). It is no more expensive and such companies will create the entire window, casing and molding to fit your existing opening. This not only creates a more historically aesthetic appearance, but is more energy efficient, and will reduce the amount of collateral damage done to the surrounding interior and exterior of your home.

If you are contemplating a rehabilitation or renovation of your home and are considering applying for the Maryland Historic Tax Credit which will give you 20% of your rehab expenditures back to you in the form of a Refundable Tax Credit, getting the type, style,

and appropriate use of molding in your house is a must. As always, anyone and everyone can use the tips above to guide them making the correct determination. However, if you find yourself in need of help, or would just prefer to take the guess work out of it, please feel free to contact me at 410.837.5800.