



## WINDOWS: DO THE MATH AND SAVE SOME REAL MONEY

by Pieter Roos, Executive Director, Newport Restoration Foundation

I want to sell you some windows. Unlike many big companies that are also trying to sell you windows, the ones I want you to buy into are your own. I can't tell you that my product will cost you nothing – repairs cost money – but I will promise that it will be less than my competition.

This thought started when I recently saw a commercial suggesting that replacement windows would save loads of cash on heating. It's a nice concept but the logic is shaky. The math is so flawed that it defies reason and the fact that anyone swallows their marketing is downright amazing.

Before we go further, a word from your preservationist: the old windows in your house are one of its primary character-defining features. If you get rid of them, your house will lose much of its authenticity. End of argument. Let's get on with the savings part, which is why you tuned in to begin with.

I will admit, windows *are* a cause of heat loss in a house. *Any window, whether it is two months old or two hundred years old causes heat loss.* Even the best and newest windows are going to cost you money – if you don't like it, live in a house without windows.

Do the math on a window project. Even the best (and most expensive) replacement windows will only save you about \$50 per month. Even then they only will do that in the coldest five months of the year and will save that much only if your current windows are truly dreadful. This is a savings of about \$250 per year.

Now consider the real cost of the replacement windows, the 500 pound gorilla in the room that the window company forgot to tell you about: The average two story house has about twenty-four windows. Decent quality replacement windows are between \$500-1,000 installed which is a total of \$12,000-24,000 to do the whole job...and you're going to save \$250 a year???

Unless my calculator is broken, that's about 48 years before you pay off the project and start to see a "savings". Even if you are alive then, statistics say you probably will have sold the house long since, so you are really passing the "savings" on to future owners and I think that is not why you undertook the project. This also assumes that your new windows will be of a quality equal to the originals, which may not be the case.

Now some good news. The fact is that you can save money on your heating bill. Any of the following could save you *more* than \$50 a month:

1. Lower your thermostat to 68 degrees (cost: free)
2. Buy a programmable thermostat (cost: \$60)
3. Tune your furnace (cost: \$150)
4. Buy a high efficiency burner for your furnace (cost: under \$1,000)
5. Buy a whole new furnace (cost: \$7,000)

Most people would laugh if I suggested that they buy a new \$7,000 furnace in order to save \$50 a month on their heating bill, yet most of us nod our heads wisely about the far higher cost of replacement windows. The funny thing about my list is that nothing on it has anything to do with windows. Those ads won't tell you that one of the *least* cost efficient ways to save on heating is to throw gobs of money at your windows.

So why do we have this strange concept that replacement is better? Pretty simple – there are a lot of companies out there with very big marketing budgets that, like me, want to sell you some windows. Theirs cost more. It's much cheaper to repair or tune the ones you've got.

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