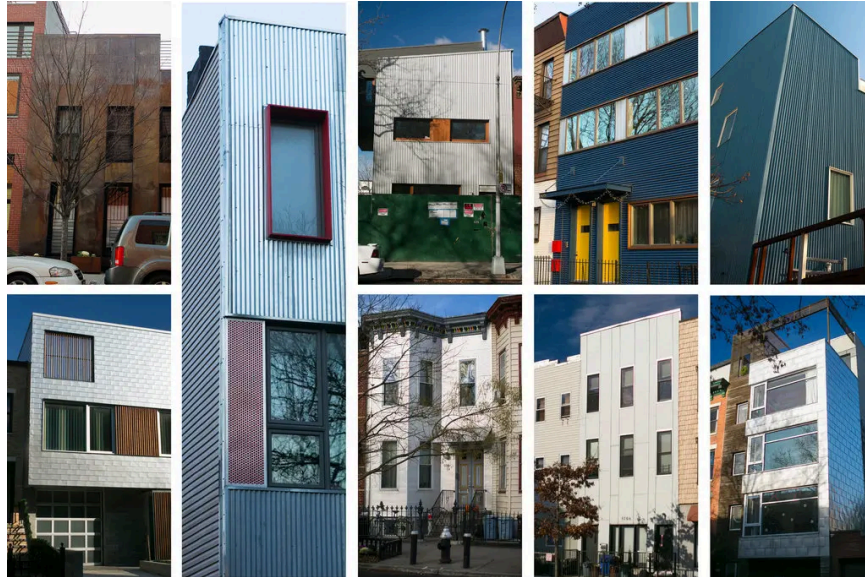


The New York Times

Brooklyn Houses Clad in Metal



Metal exteriors in Brooklyn may be found on, top row, from left, a condo on Bond Street on the Gowanus-Boerum Hill border; 16th Street, Park Slope; two houses on Sixth Avenue in Park Slope; and Park Avenue in Clinton Hill. Bottom row: Seventh Street and Seventh Avenue in Park Slope; Eighth Avenue near Windsor Terrace; and Wyckoff Street in Boerum Hill. Dave Sanders for The New York Times

By Kaya Laterman

Jan. 8, 2016

The day a tire popped off a car, flew off the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and hit his house with a loud bang, [Vardon Owen Marshall](#) was in disbelief.

But he was not too worried about the dent on the facade of his house on Park Avenue in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, right across from the busy elevated roadway.

The indentation was quite noticeable, about four feet above the sidewalk. But instead of stressing out about finding money and a reliable contractor for the repair, Mr. Marshall, a cabinet maker, was able to fix his home in a snap because the exterior was made with corrugated metal.

“I had some extra panels I didn’t use during the build-out, so I was able to simply replace one panel and I was done,” said Mr. Marshall, who with his partner, Erin Wilson, a textile artist, built the house they share in 2011. “Even though I knew metal is a very durable material, it is pretty surprising how well it has held up.”

Though the prevailing image of prime Brooklyn real estate is a beautifully restored brownstone on a tree-lined block, the borough has plenty of other housing stock, much of which could use some serious upgrading. And in areas where no zoning or preservation laws prevail that would pose a hurdle, some Brooklyn homeowners are opting to build or renovate their homes with a metal exterior, thanks to its relatively low cost, durability and sleek, modern feel.

“When you talk about corrugated metal, it’s hard for some people to look beyond the image of a rusty shed,” said Jeff Etelamaki, the principal of [Etelamaki Architecture](#) in Brooklyn, who as part of a renovation gave a multifamily house in the South Slope area a new corrugated galvanized sheet metal front, replacing a dated stone facade. “But it has a great texture and gives the building a very contemporary look.” He estimated the cost of the materials, uninstalled, was about \$3,000.

Metal siding long has been used around the city to build industrial and commercial complexes, but it is an uncommon choice these days for residential exteriors. In 2014, about 11,000 new single-family houses completed in the United States, or a little less than 2 percent, used materials other than those considered to be primary exterior siding choices, which include brick, wood, stucco, vinyl and fiber cement, according to the United States census.

Katie Janness, an expert on building materials and a principal at [Ducker Worldwide](#), a consulting firm in Troy, Mich., estimated that metal siding, mostly aluminum, totaled 6 percent to 7 percent of the overall residential cladding market in North America, and was likely to total about 7.5 to 8 billion square feet in 2015.

Although aluminum siding is available that resembles wooden clapboards, the recently built or renovated homes with metal facades of Kings County, N.Y., tend to have a funky, artistic sensibility. The idea is not to mimic traditional construction, but to be proudly metallic.



Sarah Jefferys and Stewart Osborne, with their children, from left, Oscar, Elliot and Callum, in front of their home on Wyckoff Street in Boerum Hill. Dave Sanders for The New York Times

Metal siding caught on when it was first introduced to the residential market in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but its popularity nose-dived once vinyl siding was introduced in the 1950s, Ms. Janness said. Unlike vinyl, which can retain its look and durability for decades, aluminum, though waterproof, is easy to dent or scratch. As for steel, it can rust.

But today, homeowners in the market for a green siding product — siding is often recycled steel or aluminum — might do well to consider metal, Ms. Janness noted. Pricing, she said, is all over the board, as it is dependent on color choice, thickness and market region, but she said installed prices per square foot were roughly \$3 to \$7 for vinyl, \$8 to \$12 for fiber cement and \$7 for steel or aluminum.

Some people just like the way it looks.

“You do see some statement homes that use metal siding, and the assumption is that there’s a demographic shift; these owners skew young,” Ms. Janness said. “If you want something modern, you’re not going to get that from wood or vinyl.”

[Sarah Jefferys](#) and her husband, [Stewart Osborne](#), who are both architectural designers, employed about \$15,000 worth of interlocking stainless-steel tiles on the home they designed for themselves on Wyckoff Street in Boerum Hill. Ms. Jefferys, whose firm, Sarah Jefferys Design, produced all the drawings and oversaw construction, loves how the metal facade captures the light.

“The metal has a luminous, sculptural quality,” she said. “The house can change color depending on the time of day or year, along with the weather.”

Ms. Jefferys had designed several homes for clients that used metal and wood and she has always loved the combination. So when the chance came to buy a small parking lot that sat right outside a historic brownstone district, she felt that she had the perfect opportunity to build a contemporary house using metal.

Ms. Jefferys is happy with the outcome, despite complaints from some neighbors who live behind brownstone or brick facades. She once asked a neighbor about the house, without revealing the fact that she lived there.

“I wasn’t thrilled when this neighbor said it looked like a giant refrigerator,” she said. “But I had the chance to build my own place and wanted to play with the look. And if you’re building new, why try to make it look like it’s old?”

Manny Tsarnas, whose backyard abuts the Jefferys-Osborne house, is one neighbor who isn’t too happy with the metal facade. From spring through early fall, at certain times of the day, sunlight reflects off the steel shingles and sends beams of light into his dining room.



Carl Persak and Erin Shakespeare in front of their renovated house on Sixth Avenue in Park Slope. Dave Sanders for The New York Times

“It certainly is different,” Mr. Tsarnas said. “Some of the neighbors have jokingly called it the Sardine or Tin Can. The beams that hit my dining room are not pleasant, but I like to think I’m a live-and-let-live kind of guy.”

Ms. Jefferys expects her shingles to acquire a patina, or to dull over time, because of oxidation, and understands that not everyone loves the look of a contemporary house.

“I know people have lived here for a long time and have a more traditional aesthetic,” Ms. Jefferys said. “But I think houses like mine celebrate the creativity of this city.”

When Amy Shakespeare, a partner in [Redtop Architects](#) in Manhattan, sat down with her sister, Erin Shakespeare, an executive at a foundation, and her brother-in-law, [Carl Persak](#), a yacht designer, to discuss her redesign of a multifamily house the couple had purchased in 2011 on Sixth Avenue in South Slope, Brooklyn, talk quickly focused on updating the old wooden exterior.

Big new windows to allow ample light were being considered when the issue of siding came up.

Mr. Persak admitted he did have “a moment of apprehension” when his sister-in-law suggested corrugated metal.

“Would I be breaking the rule?” Mr. Persak recalled asking himself.

But since his block didn’t have a uniform architectural look that he felt he had to adhere to, Mr. Persak was quickly convinced that a design leap was in order. Little did he realize what a conversation starter his house would be once it was finished.

“After we moved in, there was a point where it would take me 30 minutes to take out the garbage because so many people would stop and talk about the house,” he said.

For his free-standing, single-family house, Mr. Marshall said he spent about \$4,000 on siding, while Mr. Persak, who had to redo only the front and back exteriors, estimated spending “a few thousand.”

“Using metal is certainly a cost-conscious choice, but you’re also getting something lightweight that’s easy to install and energy efficient,” said [Simon Eisinger](#), an architect and a partner in Lynch/Eisinger/Design in Manhattan, which designed a new Park Slope house with silver steel shingles for a client who wanted a sculpture studio on the ground floor with a living space above it.



Vardon Owen Marshall and Erin Wilson outside their house, which they built, on Park Avenue in Clinton Hill. Dave Sanders for The New York Times

Metal has high solar reflectivity and emissivity levels, which makes metal homes cooler in the summer, leading to lower electricity bills with less need for air-conditioning, Mr. Eisinger said. As for holding heat in winter, he said, the insulation behind the exterior metal walls is much more of a factor than the material itself.

Metal shingles and siding, which can be ordered through building or roofing suppliers, are available in assorted colors; the Marshall-Wilson house and the Shakespeare-Persak house are a striking blue. Steel products may come with a protective coating to prevent rust.

After placing an order online, Mr. Persak said he was thrilled to see a huge truck pull up in front of the house with the supplies only two days later.

“I was surprised at how quickly it all went up,” he said, recalling it took his contractor a few hours to erect the front. “My contractor complained about a lot of other stuff, but this wasn’t one of them.”

Both Mr. Marshall and Mr. Persak say their exteriors haven’t shown much sign of wear, tear or fading. That said, not all metal siding should be categorized as easy to maintain, said Caleb Crawford, an architect and a partner in [Coggan and Crawford Architecture and Design](#) of Brooklyn, who designed the Marshall-Wilson house and several others with metal facades. Mr. Crawford said steel plates should be oiled or given a waxy coating once a year or so to prevent scratching.

When Oscar Schachter, a lawyer, and his wife, Amy Schachter, a management consultant, moved into an apartment in a warehouse-to-condominium conversion by Coggan and Crawford on Bond Street, on the border of Gowanus and Boerum Hill, in 2010, they said the previous owner gave them a 20-gallon pail of Tectyl, a type of corrosion-preventive coating, and told them to redo the steel exterior once a year.

“It’s more maintenance than it looks,” Ms. Schachter said. “We have experienced a fair amount of damage from salt spray during the winters, particularly on the lower portions of the building.” The damage, fortunately, has been only cosmetic.

The couple have hired various companies to maintain the lustrous look of the exterior, since working with industrial-strength chemical solutions is too daunting for them. One year, a firm they hired botched the job by applying a solution that was too thick and looked as if it were melting off the building.

Now the Schachters hire [Surface Resto](#), a Long Island firm, every one to two years to “dry-ice blast” the place, which involves spraying it with dry ice at high velocity, to clean off any grime and rust. Then the firm applies an acrylic seal. The total cost is about \$2,500.

The couple think the mahogany hue of the steel exterior is very handsome.

“I love the fact that it’s unusual,” Mr. Schachter said. “It stands out so much more than wood or brick.”

“And it certainly is the coolest thing I’ve ever seen,” Ms. Schachter added.

A correction was made on Jan. 17, 2016: A cover article last Sunday about Brooklyn houses clad in metal misstated the professions of Sarah Jefferys and her husband, Stewart Osborne, who used stainless-steel tiles on the home they designed for themselves in Boerum Hill. They are architectural designers, not architects.

How we handle corrections

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