



Preserving Integrity

By Gary Hutton, General Manager of Black Millwork, distributor for Andersen Windows in the UK and Ireland.

The traditional timber box sash has been a part of British architectural landscape for centuries and is still a popular feature of both old and modern buildings.

Historically, some sash windows have been known to last for hundreds of years, with proper care and maintenance, but with today's building regulations and consumer expectations, most timber sliding sashes, in reality, have to be upgraded much more frequently.

This can present architects with an interesting set of problems, particularly on larger renovation projects, where the windows may be in various states of disrepair.

The main question for architects is how to retain or replicate the classic character of the original windows, whilst improving their overall performance, energy efficiency and maintenance requirements and what options are available.

The traditional approach has been to replace the entire window, which would automatically upgrade the performance of the window, but this is a radical, often unnecessary and costly approach, that has significant aesthetic considerations.

For one, thick PVC-u sections cannot reproduce the mouldings and the detailed characteristics of traditional timber windows, so 'like for like' timber or timber based composite windows are invariably more appropriate.

The other option, which is to repair the original sash, may be appropriate for one off windows, but for larger schemes, extensive repair work can be an elaborate, time consuming and costly process. Therefore, unless the windows are in a grade II listed

building, repairing may not be worth the time, expense and specialist treatment required.

Furthermore, although repairing the sashes may preserve the aesthetics of the original window, it is harder to upgrade their performance levels to that of a modern energy efficient factory fitted double glazed unit.

Architects therefore need more innovative, practical and cost effective alternatives that do not compromise the aesthetics, performance or their customer's budget.

One increasingly popular option, currently gaining ground in the refurbishment market is the new 'insert replacement window'.

This pioneering product replaces the rotten and broken down sashes, whilst leaving the trim and frame of the original window completely



intact. As the frames of most sash windows are set back into the brickwork and are protected from the elements, they are usually still in a relatively good condition and worth saving.

This practical 'middle way' can save massively on time, labour and expense as the installation is quick and simple, not necessarily even requiring a specialist installer or FENSA certification. In fact, in a recent project, a three man team replaced 22 rotting sash windows in just one working day.

As the new window already incorporates fully adjusted block and tackle spring balances, there is no need for complicated repair work, fiddly balance adjustment or replacement of the weights themselves. It is a completely self-contained unit.

Furthermore, the sashes themselves are made from a wood composite material, which is made from reclaimed pine wood fibre bonded with a thermoplastic polymer. This new material not only offers the strength, rigidity and thermal performance of wood but, as each wood fibre is coated with polymer, it is resistant to flaking, blistering, peeling, cracking and does not require external painting.

As the material is made from 50% recycled waste, it is also an extremely eco-friendly, sustainable option, which complements the window's natural timber construction.

Using this new approach, the overall performance and energy efficiency of old sash windows can be upgraded to the same degree as the best full frame replacements and the end result is seamless; a traditional wood based window, with a choice of exterior colours, which slots neatly into the original frame, complementing the building.

In large-scale renovation projects, where the sash windows are often in varying states of decay and disrepair, the insert replacement window can be used as required, both as an alternative or alongside compatible replacements.

In today's market, in which architects are expected to deliver practical, aesthetic and economically realistic solutions, the insert window could be tomorrow's way of preserving yesterday's sash window.