

THE TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF TRIM

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There is genuinely nothing more breath-taking than elegant moldings and trim within a custom home. After 30 years of architectural practice, I can confidently say that it is the addition of millwork that humanizes the scale of a home. No matter the size of the house, the addition of extensive millwork helps to compartmentalize each space, define each room, provide character and warmth, and overall excite and thrill the eye.

During the Renaissance era, being a trim carpenter was considered a prized trade. The interiors of centuries-old European high-level estates far exceeded our homes today when it comes to detailing. These arts are no longer as readily available or affordable. However, there still exists



The foyer sets the tone for every home. No matter how grand or small, this welcoming space is the first part of your house that you and guests see. This elegant entry stair wraps a paneled, two-story entry hall and undoubtedly, makes a powerful first impression.

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This larger trophy newel post with recessed paneling will soon be a sturdy and stylish statement at the start of these elegant stairs. To imagine something unique or unseen and make it a reality is very rewarding—both for the architect and the homeowner.



the rare opportunity to design at an intricate level of detail and embellish a custom home. This is, without a doubt, one of the most joyful areas of architectural practice. To imagine something unique or unseen and make it a reality is very rewarding—both for the architect and the homeowner. Did you know you can design your own custom baseboard or crown and cut a knife for the profile that is uniquely yours? This knife has a cost of approximately \$150. Not so overwhelming when constructing a truly custom home.

So, what exactly does millwork mean? Millwork is defined as any woodwork produced in a mill. But in the architectural profession, millwork further defines all wood installed in a project: running baseboard or crown, the closet shelving, the ceiling coffers, the fireplace mantle, the flanking bookcases, etc. Millwork can be assembled to create the most stunning spaces. With the internet today, there is access to millions of images of millwork installations. So, technically, the sky is the limit with regard to inspiration.

Aside from beauty and creativity, cost should also be a consideration. Generally, you do not see extensive millwork in subdivision homes precisely because of the cost. Each homeowner with a budget needs to decide if they want more overall square footage and less trim and detailing or less square footage and more trim and built-ins. This is a very personal decision for each homeowner. The addition of heavy detailing throughout the house ties to the style of home. If a contemporary home, you may not see built-up layers of painted trim. Instead, you might see expansive walls of mahogany or walnut. Equally expensive. Fundamentally, eliminating wood applications help reduce overall costs. But, the beauty dissipates with the loss of millwork.

A fun tidbit. Historically, trim was reserved for the first floor of the house as it was an expensive component to add to colonial homes. Further, all trims on the first floor were more substantial and more ornate. When using lath and plaster, the baseboard was installed first because it acted as the stop-block for the thick layer of plaster necessary to coat the irregular hand-split lathe boards. This process made baseboards as thick as even 2." Today, baseboard material is typically 5/8" to 3/4" thick.

The wood material used for interior trim today is quite broad: finger-jointed pine, clear pine, finger-jointed poplar, clear poplar, clear Douglas fir, and various other exotic woods. Finger-jointed material is made from short linear sections of wood and is not as stable as clear



This three-story open staircase features the owner's metal sculpture at the base, made from a DC-10 airplane wing.

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wood. Thus, it is less costly. All custom homes utilize clear poplar for painted trim except for large panel areas. Often, this is where MDF, or medium-density fiberboard, is used. Medium-density fiberboard is the most stable product for large surfaces such as raised or flat panels for wainscoting.

The Architectural Woodwork Institute (AWI), founded in 1953, is a professional trade association that helps set standards for this industry. Member companies are typically the fabricators of fine finished woodwork, millwork, and furniture. Millwork can be field or shop fabricated. It can also be field painted or shop sprayed. Each option results in different outcomes being a desire for old-world brush strokes or high-level lacquers. Each of these desired outcomes are very personal to a client.

Eased, beaded, raised, ogee, quarter round, beveled, flat: these are just a few of the terms used to describe millwork details. Trim design is an art, where only the artist uses wood and a saw to create incredible outcomes. This artist or carpenter needs the originator of the design though they alone can be very creative. That originator is the architect or interior designer or both. Being that originator is one of the most fulfilling parts of architecture.



Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. While Cathy revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, she is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts and her work serving the special needs community through the firm's Purposeful Architecture studio. An award-winning residential architecture and interior design firm specializing in exceptional homes and luxurious estates throughout the East Coast from Plymouth, MA to Warm Springs, VA, Cathy has grown her team two-fold in the past three years. Purple Cherry Architects truly loves the journey of bringing together their clients with stunning pieces of property where they can build the home of their dreams.

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Open-plan family room and kitchen featuring two islands, coffered ceilings and expansive water view flow harmoniously together.



The scale of this reading room is reminiscent of the 19th century and showcases walls fully covered in raised paneling, built-in bookcases, custom mantel and crown moldings. Note the fun striated green wallpaper in the back of the bookcases.

All images courtesy of Purple Cherry Architects