

What Every Homeowner Needs to Know about Roof Replacement

Successfully Resolving one of the Biggest Maintenance Expenses of Home Ownership

By Christopher Testa



Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Defining your Re-Roofing Need	3
Definitions and Terms	
What Exactly is a Roof?	4
Diagram 1: Common Terms for Parts of a Roof	5
Diagram 2: Typical Sloped Roof Construction	6
Common Roofing Performance and Uses	
“Green” Value	7
Warranties	7
Weight	10
Appearance	10
Lifespan	11
Maintenance	11
The Most Common Roofing Options for Homeowners	
Asphalt	11
Clay and Concrete	15
Metal	21
Slate	26
Synthetic	27
Wood	29
Re-Roofing Options	
Replace or Upgrade?	31
Increasing Energy Efficiency in Your Home	32
Warranties	33
Changing Roofing Styles	33
Pricing	35
Diagram: Roofing Life Cycle Cost Analysis	37
Getting on with the Job	
Preparation	38
Where and How to Buy	39
Financing	41
A Decent Job? How to Tell	42
Comparison Charts	44
Re-Roofing Checklist	47

Introduction

I've written this report because more than 29 years in the roofing and renovation business have taught me a lot. I've personally been involved with thousands of re-roof jobs. I've witnessed first-hand disastrous projects, delightfully successful ones, beautiful jobs, ugly jobs, satisfied customers, indifferent ones, and angry ones. I have collected photos of so many types of roofs both from the ground and on the roof that I have long lost count. I have sued and been sued, and I've been an expert witness in other people's lawsuits concerning their roof projects. I have no doubt you could learn everything I've learned by doing the same things I've done, but if you don't want to spend years working in the industry, I offer this report so you can have the information you need to be a more knowledgeable purchaser of a new roof for your home.

If you're reading this, you're either shopping for a new roof for your home or small business, or you've already bought one and you're curious about the advice you took. You could be a builder, or a designer, or an architect, looking for another perspective on roof materials. You might be a competitor who just wants to know what I'm doing. Whatever the case, I've written this so that my accumulated experience can benefit you, and help the state of my industry too. I'll likely never meet or speak to you personally. This is not an advertisement for my business. There's no pressure on you to respond or act or purchase from my company. My hope is that the analysis here will educate you if you're inexperienced and offer a few challenging observations to those of you in the same industry. Feedback and criticism is both welcome and encouraged.

When you've finished reading this report, you'll have a decent overview of the most common options for roofing materials and a basic idea of their history, value, and function. One caution to readers considering some roof materials that I have neglected to mention or discuss here only briefly— I'm focusing on products that have a well-known track record and are something you're likely to find. There are now, and always will be, new and interesting products coming onto the market. My experience has taught me one thing about new products— *be careful*.

The best example I can think of that illustrates this point happened to my neighbors. They were sold on a new product with an impressive sales story. As a replacement for their shake roof, it was good looking in the brochure and had a fancy technical description including some big company names (GE, for one) associated with both the design and manufacture. It had a 50 year warranty (see my discussions of roof material warranties further on in this report). They decided to use this product, even though it was one of the more expensive materials they examined, because they liked the look. It was an unfortunate decision. Not long after their purchase the manufacturer of this new synthetic roof product closed their doors. And not too much longer after that, my neighbors noticed sections of their roof were fading at different rates. Within a few years, instead of a roof that looked like wood shakes, they had a roof that looked like a checkerboard! On their very expensive home, their very expensive roof looks like a cheap plastic imitation. And the 50 year warranty? Of no value whatsoever. So, if you don't mind being a guinea-pig for a new idea in the business, then be my guest. But if you want some assurance that your new roof is going to be there well into the future, I recommend you pick a material that's been proven in the field to perform for years and years and years.