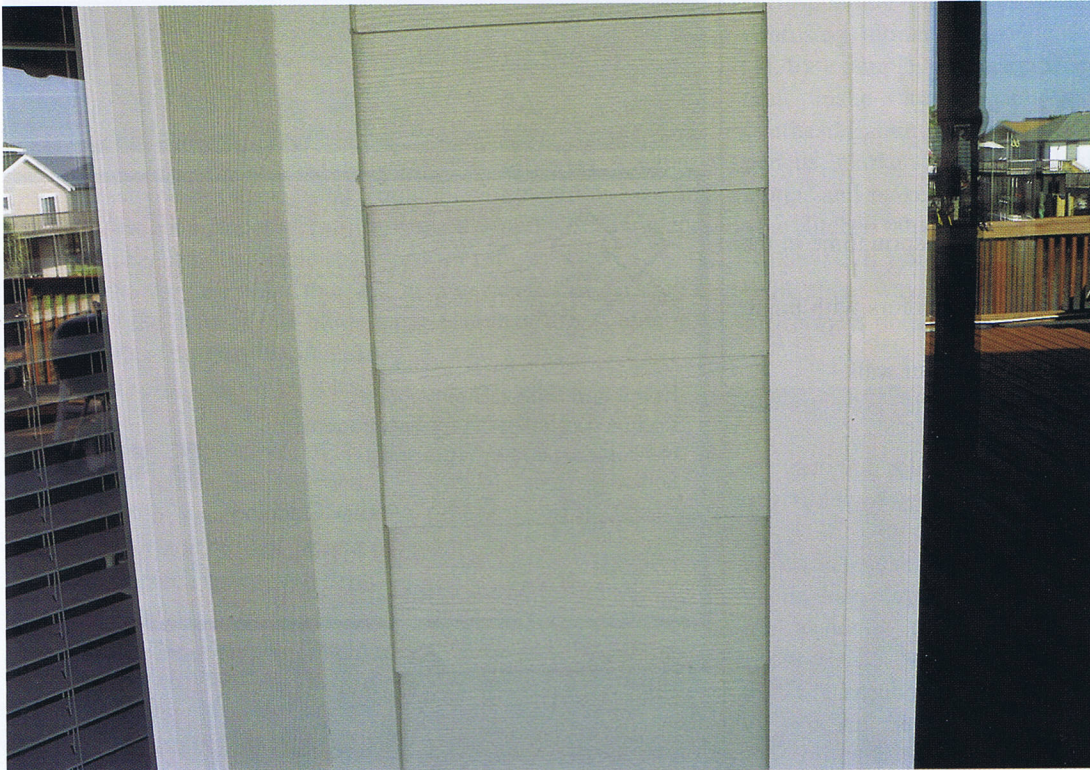


# Which Side

## Are You On ?



Can you tell which siding material this is?

Fiber cement.

BY CAROLIN SANTANGELO

A quiet debate continues over which exterior veneer is preferable for our coastal climate.

Should you choose vinyl or fiber cement siding? Fiber cement siding is the product you may know as 'Hardie board,' made by the James Hardie Bldg. Products, though other manufacturers, including CertainTeed, GAF, etc., make an equivalent product. Some of these manufacture both siding types.

Take any two builders and one may strongly proclaim fiber cement siding, the other, vinyl. Pose the question to the same two builders on another day, or for another project, and you may receive alternate answers. A smart builder will thoroughly quiz the homeowner to determine what is appropriate for the homeowner's purposes.

Fiber cement siding may 'look' more like wood, if only slightly; it is often stamped with a wood-grain texture, and its painted surface usually is an egg-shell finish. Vinyl has a crisp, almost perfect look; almost too perfect in a sense. Its finish also can be a variety of wood grain textures, with a typically more glossy finish.

Both products will stand up to our coastal conditions as long as they are applied correctly. (Manufacturers will nullify warranties if not installed correctly.) Vinyl siding can be rated for hurricane winds; check manufacturer's specifications to be sure your selection

will meet windstorm code requirements. Windstorm engineers also differ in their opinions of the materials.

Some engineers recommend fiber cement siding for use in their analysis of buildings, asserting it provides more rigidity to the structure. (As such it is a heavy material, and requires two people to install.) Other engineers will perform analysis for either vinyl or fiber cement siding, not differentiating one in preference over the other. Again, each is dependent on installation techniques, which the engineer will oversee during the replacement or new construction project.

Cement siding and an initial application of paint may cost only slightly more than the same project carried out in vinyl. Maintenance of vinyl nearly ends after installation, with a spray of the garden hose usually all that is necessary to clean it. Upkeep on cement siding, despite claims to the contrary by siding and paint manufacturers, in our area appears to often require repainting in as little as five years, (an issue which may stem from improper application) though longer periods may be possible, if conscientiously applied to manufacturer specifications.

Cement siding color is limited only by your imagination. Virtually any is possible, though some dark colors might not hold up in our hot sun, and some may not be acceptable to your home owners'