



Windows on the World report

# The Downton Effect



The **Wood Window** Alliance



# A word from our Chairman

With our fixation on the future and our need to always be at the cutting edge of radical change, it is easy perhaps to lose sight of our past. The past can seem immaterial to some, but in fact our history and our heritage are the very things that provide our identity and beliefs to keep us grounded in this changing world.

As an organisation which proudly blends both the past and the future - tradition and innovation - in the manufacture of high quality, beautiful, timber windows, it is reassuring to see the value that is still placed on heritage when it comes to our homes.

Thanks to a myriad of factors, both cultural and economic, period properties are experiencing a resurgence in sales. Homeowners from every generation can see the financial and emotional potential in restoring a little piece of history. But while this trend for period is undoubtedly positive, it brings to the fore the challenge that we have faced as an organisation for many years - how to rectify the commonly-held misconception that you must compromise aesthetics or historical accuracy for practical functionality when it comes to older properties.

Nowhere is this more relevant than with windows. Inextricably linked to the architectural style of a house, windows define character. But too often, a misplaced and outdated fear of draughty wood windows, soaring energy bills and high maintenance requirements has left elegant period properties scarred with starkly out of place PVCu windows.

Wood has been the natural choice for windows for centuries. Huge technological strides in the manufacturing process mean there is no longer the need to trade beauty for performance,

durability or efficiency. Today's wood window frames have an average lifespan of 60 years and simply require a new coat of paint every eight years or so. Well-maintained, there is evidence to suggest good quality timber windows could last at least a hundred years. What's more, timber windows are particularly suited to triple glazing, making them incredibly efficient.

Our Windows on the World report looks at the growing trend for heritage, and how it is influencing our homes.

**Tony Pell**  
*Chairman, the Wood Window Alliance*



**“Wood has been the natural choice for windows for centuries.”**

**Tony Pell**  
Chairman





We live in a time of change and uncertainty. 'Innovation' and 'disruption' are buzzwords thrown out at every opportunity. Technology is changing how we live and work, and yet we increasingly crave that human connection. More people than ever identify as 'global citizens', yet 2016 saw Britain's decision to exit from the EU and take greater control of our national identity. It certainly seems true, as Greek philosopher Heraclites said, that the only thing constant is change.

This shifting landscape is clearly manifested in our attitudes towards the home. In a time of uncertainty, people tend to look to the past for familiar comfort, a sense of belonging and a solid foundation, and nowhere is this more tangible than in period architecture. According to Savills<sup>1</sup>, historic houses are some of the most sought-after on the market and their increasing scarcity creates appeal and therefore bankability – after all, period housing

stock is a finite commodity. With the rise of period TV dramas such as *Downton Abbey* and a flourishing trend for vintage, heritage clearly has both economic and emotional value.

We asked research group Canvas8 to help us explore the so-called Downton Effect. Surveying 1,000 British homeowners about their attitudes to British heritage and character in the home, we cross-referenced this with their library of consumer attitudes and behaviours and sought the commentary of Sarah Latham, founder of Etons of Bath, an interior design agency specialising in period properties. The result is a fascinating snapshot into some of the key trends impacting our relationship with our homes today, converging on the rise of the period property.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.savills.co.uk/research\\_articles/141280/216625-0](http://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/141280/216625-0)

## Key findings

### Preserving the past in the face of the future

Perhaps no surprise in the context of Brexit, 71% of homeowners agree that it is important to retain British heritage, whilst 80% say that period buildings are important to maintaining heritage in the UK. Many homeowners are embracing the concept of 'Heritage Gain', and are restoring the history and heritage of a property when it had previously been removed. Just over half would prefer to live in a period property, with Victorian and Georgian winning the battle of the historical styles.

### Protecting the period premium

The desire for heritage means that people are willing to pay an average 11% more for a house with well-maintained period

features. According to British homeowners, wood trumps plastic when it comes to character, yet almost half of those living in period properties have installed PVCu window frames in their homes thanks to outdated preconceptions in the aesthetics versus functionality debate.

### Putting the character into new builds

Heritage in the home doesn't necessarily have to mean adhering to one style – nearly two thirds of homeowners believe that period homes can have some modern elements and half enjoy mixing modern and period styles. Regardless of whether they live in a period home or a new build, two in five homeowners like their house to have period character. Meanwhile, one in four homeowners are bringing more vintage decor and furnishings into their home.



# Trend #1 Preserving the past in the face of the future

**“We are living in a fast-changing world; preserving these aspects of our past, specifically the parts we are most proud of, is reassuring and gives us a sense of longevity. We’re established, we’ve been around, we do things well and we build things that last.”**

*Sarah Latham - Founder of Etons of Bath*



In a bid to protect British history and connect to a simpler time, there’s a growing desire for character in the home. 71% of homeowners agree that it is important to retain British heritage, and 80% believe that period buildings are the way to do this. But, perhaps contrary to expectations, it’s not just the older generation who want to ensure we remember our roots - the sentiment is well spread across the age groups. A huge 74% of Millennials - those born between the early 80s and the late 90s - say it's important to retain British heritage, as do 67% of Gen X and 75% of Boomers and Seniors.

When it comes to homes, 55% of Brits find a period property most desirable, while just 26% say the same of modern builds. This isn’t just the case for older generations, young people dream of buying that perfect period property too. They might not fit the traditional stereotype of a historical home owner, but more than half (58%) of Millennials find period properties the most desirable.



## Why is this happening?

As it becomes increasingly difficult for young people to get their foot on the property ladder, period houses in need of renovation are often seen as a solution - projects offer the potential to not only add their own stamp but also to make money further down the line. Add in the fact that period properties can often be in nice areas with a greater sense of community, and it becomes clear why they are such an attractive option to young families.

A period property doesn’t have to mean a Georgian rectory - there are many older homes that are more attainable and still showcase British architecture at its finest. Victorian or Edwardian terraces, for example, are popular for first time buyers as they are more widely available and often more affordable.

The stereotype of period properties being solely the domain of the moneyed upper classes has well and truly been shattered, although the legacy remains - there is still a perceived cultural status that comes with owning a period property, something that appeals as much to Millennials as to older generations.

Whether they're lusting over the fabrics and fireplaces in Downton Abbey, or inspired by projects on The Restoration Man, period homes and interiors are being championed in the media. They have a stamp of individuality and authenticity, often the touch of a local craftsman or locally-sourced materials and an aesthetic that simply cannot be replicated in

new build houses. As our lives are catapulted into the future, generations old and young are showing more interest in recognising and celebrating the past. The ever-growing vintage and antiques market in the UK, second only to the US in size and worth around £1.8 billion, demonstrates how people love the idea of owning a little piece of history.

**"The stereotype of period properties being solely the domain of the moneyed upper classes has well and truly been shattered."**



**"Period properties have experienced a resurgence in interest, and this can only continue."**

### What this means for the home...

From fast fashion to our smartphones, consumerist culture means that we are constantly throwing away and upgrading our possessions. But historical buildings are built to last; they are the antithesis to the disposable culture in which we live. Period properties give us something that we can treasure, something which tells a story and provides a much-needed sense of permanence. Just as it is worth paying a little more for a period home - because it is nicer and will stand the test of time - it is also worth investing in wood windows because they add value to a property and last a lifetime.

According to a study by Edinburgh's Heriot Watt University, high quality timber window frames have an estimated service life of around 60 years - that's twice the life of a PVCu frame. Homebuyers will continue to look for a 'project' to take on old properties, seeking out homes and products in order to cherish and preserve the history that comes with them. This ongoing gentrification of period properties, known as Heritage Gain, will see homeowners rip out features that were once considered to be 'improvements' - such as PVCu windows and opulent carpeting - and reinstate traditional features such as old fireplaces, timber framed windows, original floorboards and ornate cornicing, for example. Period properties have experienced a resurgence in interest, and this can only continue.



# Trend #2

## Protecting the period premium



### THE ESTATE AGENT'S PERSPECTIVE

**"Just instinctively we know that something with character will sell easily. It is absolutely true that if we have something that is decorated or presented in a more anonymous style, then it is harder to sell. There has to be a story in there, something to create more engagement. Period features evoke the presence of people in the past, they evoke a history, they give a depth and a resonance. It just brings a real richness to a space. That really interests and excites people, so they are certainly willing to pay more for houses with a sense of history or character."**

*Albert Hill, The Modern House*

Period architecture not only boosts the value of a house but makes it easier to sell, too. The desire for heritage means that people are willing to pay an average 11% more for a house with well-maintained period features. For a £500,000 Victorian house, that's a potential £55,000, and 39% of homeowners would pay more for a house with period character.

The period premium suggests that, in the eyes of a buyer, heritage trumps all other practical considerations such as the generally held belief that older homes are difficult to maintain and costly to run, thanks in part to draughty windows and a lack of modern insulation. Maintenance, affordability and energy efficiency are still seen as the top advantages of new builds, despite lacking the all-important character.

**"The desire for heritage means that people are willing to pay an average 11% more for a house with well-maintained period features."**

Perhaps because of these outdated beliefs around energy efficiency, people are still settling for plastic in their homes despite more than half (56%) of homeowners saying that wooden window frames have the most character. In contrast, just 8% say the same of PVCu frames, yet almost half of those living in period properties have installed PVCu window frames. Of the generations, it is the over 55s who are most likely to have PVCu frames.

Almost half of PVCu timber look-alike window owners think wood is the most aesthetically pleasing, but that PVCu is the durable material. They also say that PVCu timber look-alike is more aesthetically pleasing and has more character than PVCu, but is still not as attractive as real timber frames.



## Why is this happening?

Property prices have skyrocketed in the UK, meaning that people are looking to get the most for their money. Although often cheaper and coming with the assistance of 'Help to Buy' government schemes, modern homes retain a reputation for being poor quality which is hard to overlook. What's more, buyers can often find themselves paying a new build premium with an almost 'added extras' airline approach to all those appliances that should be part of the package.

Many modern homes can be generic, designed just to maximise profit with little thought given to space, architectural merit or even storage. Up to 20% smaller than those built in the 1970s, there can sometimes be up to 24 new build houses on a single acre - less Neighbourhood Watch and more

'I can see what my neighbour is watching'. With all this in mind, it is hardly surprising that buyers are prepared to spend more on a period property bursting with charm and offering greater space and maximum investment potential.

According to research by Halifax, it isn't just the period style of the property itself which can add value, but the kudos and associated benefits of the area. Proximity of large estates and stately homes<sup>2</sup> can add as much as 20% to the value of homes, thanks in part to the fact that they often sit within the same Conservation Area and as such will be afforded the same protection from future development.



*Sitting room in a Georgian Country House designed by Etons of Bath*

## What this means for the home...

Ignorance is one of the biggest threats to preserving period homes and the areas in which they are located. Some years ago, English Heritage warned against 'a plague of plastic on England's houses' and said that unsympathetic windows and doors (particularly PVCu) were the single biggest threat to property values in conservation areas<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, many homeowners still compromise aesthetics for functionality, often unaware of technological advances in timber window frames, which make this compromise redundant. The attention to detail in period homes makes the space feel more personal, as though someone has put effort and care into the design. As savvy homeowners realise the value in these details, the happier they will be to restore and preserve them, realising that there is no longer any need to sacrifice beauty for functionality now that technology allows the two to go hand in hand.



When it comes to timber windows for example, advances in the manufacturing process have made them more durable and easier to maintain. Keeping wooden windows in a period home no longer means living with draughts or rotting frames as - contrary to common perceptions, double glazed windows do not need to have PVCu frames!

Wood windows are far more energy efficient than people realise as they can now be double or triple glazed, with the modern manufacturing process making them particularly suited to triple glazing. Those who have a home that already sports PVCu frames will switch them out for more authentic looking alternatives full of character. Think reclaimed or replica wood casements, Georgian sash windows and elegant, vintage frames that embrace period authenticity such as narrow mouldings and sightlines but have all the

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-importance-of-the-downton-effect-5068gcmq60>  
<sup>3</sup> [https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/Conservation\\_areas\\_at\\_risk/caar-booklet-acc.pdf](https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/Conservation_areas_at_risk/caar-booklet-acc.pdf)

# Trend #3

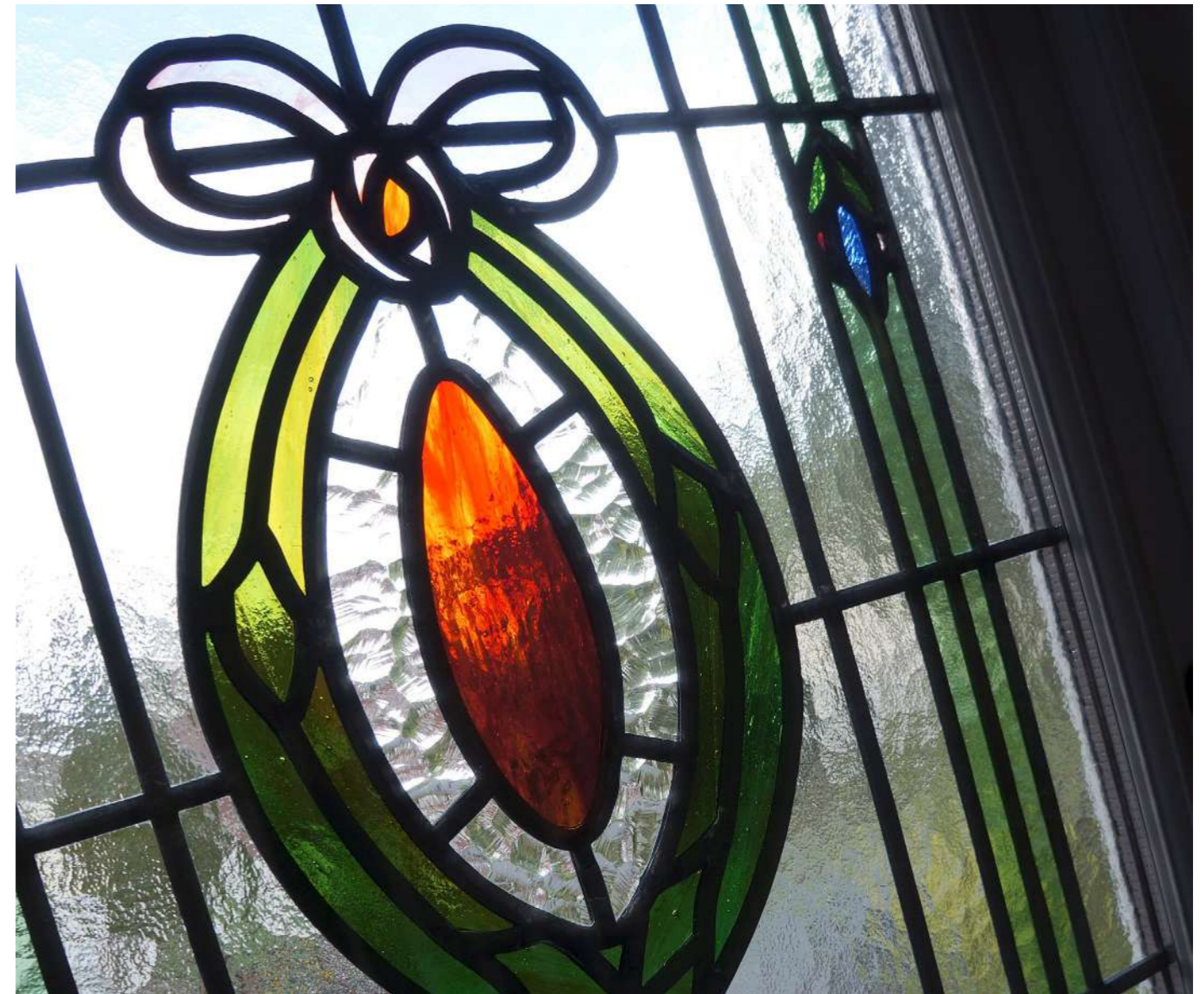
## Putting the character into new builds

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**"The Downton Effect means that period character has become hugely aspirational. So many people just love looking at the property and the interiors. There's definitely more appreciation of artisan skills and craftsmanship. People are looking to salvage items, such as antiques or reproduction items inspired by original pieces."**

*Sarah Latham - Founder of Etons of Bath*

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Heritage in the home no longer means adhering to one period style - 62% of homeowners believe that period homes can have some modern elements and 49% like mixing modern and period styles. For many, it's more aesthetically intriguing to blend elements of the past and the future. Period homeowners are the most likely to adopt this approach, with over half saying they like mixing period and modern styles and 67% saying that period homes can have some modern elements.

Regardless of whether they live in a period property or not, two in five homeowners like their house to have period character, such as lovingly restored original floorboards, beautifully crafted timber windows or original handcrafted stone fireplaces. After all, although not everyone can afford a Georgian rectory or an Edwardian townhouse, the desire to pay homage to the past still remains.

One in four homeowners are bringing more vintage decor and furnishings into their home. The most important features for maintaining or bringing heritage to a home are fireplaces, doors and windows, with three in four homeowners citing each of these. Doors and windows are some of the most conspicuous elements of the façade and the interior of any home; they are worth investing in and, because they can be painted in a range of different colours, they can be easily incorporated in to - and made the hero of - any design scheme.

Another way to celebrate the heritage of a property is to use special period-effect glass or even leaded or stained glass when installing timber window frames. Forget the feature wall - this is all about the feature window and the inclusion of a beautiful piece of stained glass that throws dazzling multi-coloured light across a room is a bold and increasingly popular interiors trend.



## Why is this happening?

With so many sources of information and advice online and with the rise of social media, people are becoming more creative in how they approach home design. Blogs and social media are offering up inspiration and empowering people to break traditional rules. Mixing elements of the past and future allows for more creative freedom and individuality.

## "Mixing elements of the past and future allows for more creative freedom and individuality."

People are also looking to modernise by incorporating new functionality and technology into their period home. Be it an open-plan kitchen diner, underfloor heating or smart home devices and kitchen appliances, there are some modern luxuries we just aren't willing to give up. The ability to incorporate modern, tech-led functionality also extends to timber windows, which have undergone huge technological advances in recent years. Gone are the days when wood windows evoked images of mildew and mould. Now, they are available double and triple glazed, are easy to maintain, are environmentally friendly and can last for up to 60 years. You can even buy sliding sash windows with an additional tilt function that allows you to clean the window from the inside.

Regardless of where you live, character is a desirable trait. Research for the Royal Institute of British Architects found that Brits believe the 'feel' of a home to be more important than the functionality. Aside from requirements regarding living space and number of bedrooms, the most important issue when choosing a home is finding somewhere that has 'character'. Mixing old and new in house design and decor allows homeowners to achieve this.



## What does this mean for our homes?

The upcycling trend will continue, as people opt for unique pieces full of character over generic items from their local furniture shop. For those who don't want to take the full leap into vintage and heritage aesthetics, there are small details they can include to hint at the past. Exposed floorboards in the living room and timber frames painted to match the interior décor can provide a beautiful window into the past while not compromising on functionality or practicality.

There will be a focus on craftsmanship and detailing in interiors, and it will continue to define luxury. People will be looking for basic necessities such as light switches and plug sockets that beautifully blend into the period aesthetic, rather than standing out.





# We asked an expert Sarah Latham



Having looked at current trends that are influencing the way people feel about the types of properties they want to live in, we wanted to get one last view – from an expert. We spoke to interior designer Sarah Latham, founder of Etons of Bath, an interior design agency specialising in period properties.



*Sitting room in a Georgian Townhouse designed by Etons of Bath*

## Why are we seeing such a surge in interest for period properties at the moment?

It gives us that connection with the past. The heritage movement is emerging from a volatile political world. An awful lot has changed in the last year and that's definitely feeding into the trend for vintage and period features. Within properties, people are looking back to the past.

Thanks to an increasing awareness of the value and importance of period properties, we are seeing more examples of beautifully preserved and adapted homes. It is building the appreciation of the visual, financial and social values of having a period property. That understanding is improving all the time and that can only inspire the next generation of homeowners. Our passion and diligence today will pass on to the next generation.

## We talk a lot about the cultural kudos that comes with owning period properties, particularly for younger homebuyers. What does that really mean?

There is the kudos that you might be part of a cultured world. People are looking for that project, the place that has been left untouched for 30 or 50 years. That's a prized opportunity giving a buyer the sense that they can take on the challenge and give a property that preservation and, in doing so, secure its future. There's a philanthropic status in that.

Sarah has more than a decade of experience working on listed and historically significant properties nationwide, so we asked for her top three tips for restoring character into a period home.

**1** Look for authenticity: try to uncover the story of the house and put the original features back in - these will look the most authentic. If you find markings on the walls that show there was a picture rail there once, reinstate it. If you think there was a ceiling rose, put it back in. If there used to be timber sash windows, install new ones.

**2** Visit neighbouring properties: If there is a similar property nearby that was built in the same era or by the same architect, go and ask the owners if you can have a look around. They may have period features still in place that might have disappeared from your property. Equally they may have had things done to them over time that you might be considering, so you can see if it works in practise and if it feels right.

**3** Let the building tell its story: I let the building speak for itself. Avoid creating pastiche interiors, or something that feels themed or faux. You need to let the building and its history tell you what is going to be possible and what will be fitting.

### Is it surprising that it isn't just the older generation who are keen to own a period property?

Everyone, young and old, can appreciate good design and good architecture. It is evident that people are striving for that character right from an early age.

### Period properties will simply be out of budget for many homebuyers. Can they achieve the same character in a modern build?

Absolutely. Architectural detailing is the most powerful way to bring character into a home. People struggle trying to get the balance right. Find something that is elegant and fitting to the property but doesn't look too fussy.

### As an interior designer, how can you merge old and new successfully in a property?

Some of the best extensions to period properties are ones that really mark themselves as being new. There's juxtaposition between the new and the old, and therefore, you're avoiding pastiche. You are creating something that is beautiful and modern and contemporary, that fits alongside and connects with the original building. When it comes to windows, who prefers a PVCu casement window to a Georgian sash window? It's characterless, and the materials used are ugly, whereas a Georgian sash window has the history that goes with it, and beautiful proportions. You can now enjoy the beauty of period style windows but with modern functionality - no compromise necessary.

### What are your views on the type of materials used for windows in period properties?

Replacing wood windows and doors with PVCu in a period property is criminal. Wood, however, is a natural material, with a natural texture, feel and weight. It can be painted easily and can be fixed if anything goes wrong. Nowadays you can have all the efficiency of modern double or triple-glazing without having to compromise on the period detailing. If people don't understand the impact of modern materials, such as PVCu, they risk long-term damage to the authenticity and value of their home.

**"When it comes to windows, who prefers a PVCu casement window to a Georgian sash window? It's characterless, and the materials used are ugly, whereas a Georgian sash window has the history that goes with it, and beautiful proportions"**



# About the Wood Window Alliance



The Wood Window Alliance (WWA) is a group within the British Woodworking Federation that promotes and champions the beauty, efficiency and durability of wood window frames. We are made up of over 20 members manufacturing many different kinds of doors and windows, and all meet our demanding quality, performance and sustainability standards.

We believe windows are one of the most important design features of a building making a significant contribution to the efficiency and beauty of a home. Many people don't realise that modern wood windows, whether traditional or contemporary in style, are double or triple glazed for exceptional energy-efficiency.

The quality and engineering of wood windows in the UK have undergone a

revolution in recent years, with huge developments in technology leading to an improvement in their performance and durability - making them some of the highest quality and best value windows and doors available. The WWA's mission is to let homeowners know that wood windows and doors are the modern, sustainable, cost-effective and beautiful choice.

Founded and managed by its members, the WWA is the benchmark for the industry, providing the reassurance of high quality, performance and sustainability standards. People who haven't experienced modern high-performance wood windows before will be amazed at the difference they make to the warmth of a home and our website has been created to help them find a supplier they can trust.



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