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by annie selke

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Barking up the Right Tree

May 24, 2012



Take a good look at the siding on this house. If you were in front of it right now, what's the first thing you'd do? If you said "Run my hands all over it!" you're not alone. Marty McCurry, cofounder of [Highland Craftsmen, Inc.](#), manufacturer of Bark House Shingles, says "The surface texture absolutely differentiates it from any other siding product. Even though you see this material day in and day out, when it's taken out of its normal environment, you can't believe what you're seeing and feel compelled to put your hands on it."

While bark siding may seem novel, its use can be traced all the way back to the Native Americans, who wrapped sheets of bark around some of their structures. The square-shingle siding we see today originated in the 1890s, when architect Henry Bacon (yep, the same guy who designed the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC) was commissioned to create Adirondack-inspired cottages in the hills of Linville, North Carolina, and designed a shingle from American chestnut. (For a more complete history, check out [Bark House Style: Sustainable Designs from Nature](#) by Chris McCurry, Marty's wife.)

The basic process of creating Bark House Shingles starts with stripping the bark off fallen poplar trees; watch this handy little [video](#) for a bird's-eye view. It's then transported to the processing plant, where it's cut to size, air-dried, and brought up to boiling temperature in a kiln. Finally, the shingles are squared, graded, and packaged for delivery. Although bark-shingle houses are more prevalent in the Southeast—Highland

Craftsmen's home base—they're now found as far and wide as Texas hill country, Lake Tahoe, throughout the Rockies, and along the coast of Maine.

Noting that some of the original late-1800s bark-shingle houses are still standing, McCurry explains, "Bark is Mother Nature's protection for the wood underneath, so it's already fire resistant, water resistant, bug resistant." It's also breathtakingly beautiful. The shingles begin with a subtle mosaic of color from light to dark that's determined by the original tree's exposure to sunlight. Through the years, they darken to a natural patina that can't be replicated with a paintbrush.

Bark House Shingles are more expensive at the outset—prices are comparable to that of premium wood siding—but it doesn't need to be stained or painted every five to seven years, like traditional wood siding. In fact, bark shingles can last, untreated, up to 75 years . . . so chances are that you won't be the one paying for replacements. Even better: Highland Craftsmen is all about ethical and green practices (they even plant a tree for every job they complete; take a peek at all of their [eco-friendly certifications and awards](#)), and they offer a variety of bark products, from handrails to molding and furniture—so you can go au naturel without breaking the bank.







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1. sandie
[May 24, 2012](#)

Is it Highland Craftsmen or American Craftsmen?

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o Abby
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Hi Sandie,

It is Highland Craftsmen. You can learn more about them here: <http://barkhouse.com/about-highland-craftsmen/>

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2. Ismail
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I am so sorry for your loss. Even when you are expecting it, it is still hard. The first week is the hrdseat in my experience. Just try to distract yourself and cry when you need to. Sam was an adorable and cheerful little dude and we all know that you gave him a good life. He was part of your family. My advice is to keep his things but put them out of sight for now. Create a memorial of some kind. My dog Agnes died in October and I still haven't put together hers but I have photos and her collar to use. Best wishes for you in this difficult time.

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