

TPS  
**REVIEW**

## Coatings for Porches and Decks

Many projects include features such as decks, stairs, and porches constructed of pressure treated lumber that owners intend to leave unpainted. While in some applications a painted surface may be hard to sustain, some sort of cyclically applied coating enhances the performance of exterior wood, including pressure treated wood.

Under the Standards, review concerns generally focus on the visual quality of a wood feature as it relates to the historic character of the building, rather than on the performance of the feature's materials. Finish is just one aspect of visual quality and must be considered in the context of the overall design of the feature. Determining whether the design of a feature is in keeping with the Standards involves considering both the significance of the element and its location on the building.

Significant exterior features such as entrance stairs and porches on primary elevations help define the historic character of a building. To be in keeping with the Standards, the component millwork must have a finish that is consistent with the building itself, which in nearly all cases will be paint or stain. Like other details of an important feature, the finish may need to be written into a condition if it is not defined in the certification application.

At the other end of the spectrum are features added to secondary elevations where there is limited public visibility. Considerable latitude is generally acceptable in the design of such features, and project approval will not rest on the application of a finish to the millwork. While a set of simple pressure treated wood stairs built for second floor access on the rear alley elevation of a small commercial block should have a water-repellent coating, this will not be written into a condition for approval.

Where a new feature will not quite fit either of the circumstances described above, the importance of the finish will vary from project to project. For example, stairs or stoops may be added to a building where they are not significant features, but are still readily visible. To minimize their impact and keep them compatible with the historic character of the property, these features will generally need to be stained or painted.

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