

Looking back on windows

Glass windows have come a long way since the 17th century, and the innovations continue.

One of the most important home improvement choices we can make is replacing or upgrading windows. However, the windows we take for granted as being part of home and building design are a relatively recent development.

Glass was discovered accidentally when someone, about 7,000 years ago, combined silica with ash and heated the mixture. Glass beads and bottles were in use as early as 2500 BC. During Roman times, glass was used for serving and drinking vessels. At that time, windows were either shuttered or covered with thin translucent

sheets of alabaster. The production of transparent flat glass proved elusive. Coloured pieces of glass were used in church windows but even the very wealthy still used shutters to cover the openings in the walls of their homes.

It was not until the end of the 17th century that the French learned how to make transparent sheets of polished glass called plate glass. However, this was still only for the rich. Where glass was used in windows, it consisted of small panes of hand-blown glass that was dimpled, and full of air bubbles and swirls.



George Kent stands behind one of the latest innovations in windows – impact-resistant glass.

Great strides were made in the manufacture of flat glass during the 19th century. Compressed air technology led to flatter, better glass panes. Glass prices dropped by the 1860s and glass windows became commonplace in the humblest homes.

The 20th century was an era of revolutionary technology. It was possible to produce endless ribbons of sheet glass. Processes were developed to strengthen glass through thermal and chemical tempering.

A major step in window evolution was the development of storm windows, which became popular early in the 1950s. They were later superceded by double glazing technology, with two or more sealed panes of glass and low-emissivity coatings, for improved energy savings. Developments in framing materials now mean that home-

owners choose from wood, aluminum, and precision-mitred, fusion-welded vinyl, in styles such as double hung, casement, awning, sliding or tilt-action.

So, what's on the horizon for window design? Technology has recently resulted in the self-cleaning window. This remarkable advancement – using Pilkington ACTIV Self-Cleaning Glass – is now available in the GTA from George Kent Home Improvements Ltd. Finally, a chance to take something off the spring clean-up list! ❁

■ *For information on the latest window technology, contact George Kent Home Improvements Ltd. in Mississauga at 905-670-2707, toll-free at 800-668-5439, or visit www.georgekenthome.com. They've been experts in windows since 1949.*
