HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

PAINTING ARCHITECTURAL IRONWORK

On many older homes you'll find architectural ironwork – scrolled wrought iron fences and railings on steps or porches, cast iron mailboxes and light fixtures – all features from an earlier time that add a great deal of charm. After all these years, however, most of this ironwork needs attention.

THE TRADITIONAL METHOD

It's important that architectural iron be protected from the weather (usually with coatings such as paint and galvanizing), or it will eventually rust away. Maintaining ironwork has traditionally required a lot of time and elbow grease. The typical method has been to scrape and sand the fixture down to bare metal, prime it with a rust-inhibiting primer, and then repaint it. Power tools with wire wheels or sanding disks can reduce the time required to prep the surface, but a lot of detail work still must be done by hand. Otherwise, the only way to avoid this laborious procedure is to disassemble the item, take the parts to a sandblaster, and then prime the bare metal immediately to prevent “flash” rusting.

RUST CONVERTERS

Rust converters in the form of brush-on liquids or sprays offer an attractive alternative to all that work. First introduced to industry in the 1950's, these products (like Duro's Extend®) are now found in stores selling building supplies, hardware, paint, and auto parts. They usually contain tannic (or nintannic) acid combined with a polymer solution (called the “vehicle”).

1. Before you apply the product, you should scrape away any loose rust or paint flakes, but you don't need to sand or grind the metal to a shine.
2. Apply the rust converter. It will cause the rusty areas to turn bluish-black as the surface is stabilized; where any old paint is left, the polymer vehicle dries clear.
3. After the converter has dried, coat the entire surface with a rust-inhibiting paint, such as Rustoleum®, to protect the metal from further deterioration.

Following these simple steps whenever you see signs of rust will add years of beauty and usefulness to your ironwork. But, as Neil Young once sang, “Rust never sleeps....”

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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