

Classic Opening Acts

EXCEPTIONAL ENTRY DOORS & STORM DOORS

From oversized entryways to wider views and from longer warranties to larger returns on investment, today's entry doors give you more of what you want. However, supersizing might cost you.



By Drew Vass

There are countless areas in which size really *doesn't* make a difference. These days, however, the entryway to your house isn't one of them, according to architects and designers. When it comes to doors, they say, bigger really is better.

For this reason, entry-door manufacturers increasingly make products that reach as high as 12 feet and designs that they say provide more expansive views without adding to the size of your door. Longer warranties

on certain wood doors make them an increasingly attractive buy. Meanwhile, the grandest news about steel doors is the increased value in the event that you sell your house.

SUPERSIZED. Options for larger doors, wider views, longer warranties and higher returns on investment mean that you'll have bigger decisions to make these days when you shop for a new entry door. First, you'll have to decide whether to keep your current door height or trade up for one of the many new, readily

available 7- and 8-foot models. You also will face a tougher decision between fiberglass and wood, because the increased durability and longer warranties of some wood doors make them more competitive with fiberglass. If those options don't ring your doorbell, then you might elect simply to go with the material that provides the best return on investment—steel.

According to the 2015 Remodeling Cost vs. Value Report, which tracks and compares the effects of home-improvement projects on resale values, the return on steel doors

increased to 102 percent from 73 percent over the past 4 years. In other words, if you were to spend \$1,230 on a new steel entry door (including labor), you can expect that new door to add \$1,252 to the value (and sales price) of your house. In contrast, the return on fiberglass doors, which often cost twice as much as steel, is 73 percent. (Wood wasn't evaluated.)

If you choose to go with a steel door, you'll be far from alone, because 49 percent of all entry doors that are purchased these days are made of steel, according to American Architectural Manufacturers Association's 2013/2014 study of the U.S. market.

However, don't think that wood-door manufacturers are forfeiting their piece of the pie to fiberglass doors that copy their aesthetics but pair them with lifetime warranties. (Warranties

on wood doors typically are 5 years or less.) Instead, at least two wood-door manufacturers tell us that they made improvements that make their doors more durable, which prompted the manufac-

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turers to increase the warranty periods for those products compared with the conventional warranty length.

In February 2015, Simpson Door introduced an option that it dubbed Wa-

terBarrier, which adds a thin layer of medium-density overlay (MDO) material over the exterior surface of its wood doors as well as polyvinyl chloride (PVC) glazing beads (the molding that runs around the perimeter of the glass). This combination makes its wood doors more durable and water-resistant, the company says.

Three wood and materials experts tell us that MDO is a proven material for outdoor use and moisture resistance. Based on the adhesives and methods (heat-applied phenolic resins) that Simpson uses to affix the MDO to its doors, the experts with whom we consulted believe that those doors should be more durable than are those that are made of just wood. Consequently, Simpson extended the warranty on doors that include WaterBarrier to 5 years from 1 year. The WaterBarrier

✓ Best Buys in Entry Doors

Best Buy Categories

- [P]=Premium selection
- [M]=Midrange selection
- [E]=Economy selection



SEE PAGE 72

Best Buys in entry doors were selected based on materials, quality of construction and warranty.

We limited our Best Buy selections to fiberglass and steel units, because they account for about 87 percent of the U.S. entry-door market. We considered only manufacturers that have national distribution.

Best Buy selections are for a series. Unless otherwise noted, prices represent the base configuration for an 80-by-36-inch six-panel door that's prehung in a jamb. (Manufacturers sometimes use the word "frame" rather than "jamb" when referring to the external structure from which a door is hung. However, frame also can refer to the internal structural components of the door.)

Standard wood is untreated wood. *Treated wood* is treated with a chemical or under pressure to improve resistance to rotting.

All Best Buy selections among

entry doors that include a standard or treated wood jamb have been coated with a primer (paint-ready) finish.

All Best Buy selections come in a variety of styles that will affect the price of the door. Glass is an optional upgrade for each Best Buy selection. Handle, lockset and deadbolt hardware aren't included in the price.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change. NA=Not available.



Therma-Tru Fiber-Classic

FIBERGLASS

[P] Therma-Tru Classic-Craft Oak

MSRP: \$913; Best Price: \$668

>>The Classic-Craft Oak is the least expensive fiberglass entry door that we found to combine a high-quality replication of the look of real wood with a lifetime warranty. **Classic-Craft Mahogany** (\$983), **Rustic** (2-panel, \$1,008) and **American Style** (2-panel, \$1,123) are also Best Buys.

Features:

- * Core materials: Polyurethane foam fill; composite top, bottom rails; hardwood-capped engineered-wood stiles
- * Jamb: Hardwood
- * Finish: Paint, stain-ready
- * Weight: 65 lbs.
- * Styles: 10
- * Warranty: Lifetime door, frame, components, finish

[M] Therma-Tru Fiber-Classic

MSRP: \$463; Best Price: \$389

>>The Fiber-Classic is the least expensive fiberglass entry door that we found to include a wood-grain finish, a lifetime warranty and at least 20 styles. No other fiberglass entry door that's in this price



Pella Encompass by Pella

range has more thermal insulation than this door does. Oak wood grain is standard; a mahogany wood grain is available for an additional \$82.

Features:

- * Core materials: Polyurethane foam fill; composite top, bottom rails; engineered-wood stiles
- * Jamb: Treated wood
- * Finish: Paint, stain-ready
- * Weight: 43 lbs.
- * Styles: 24
- * Warranty: Lifetime door, jamb, components

option costs \$100–\$250 (depending on door size and style). Doors that can be treated with WaterBarrier start at \$400.

Nonetheless, if you have your heart set on wood (instead of fiberglass that resembles wood), adding WaterBarrier to a Simpson door might be like purchasing a life insurance policy for the underlying wood. You should know that you'll be able to enjoy real-wood aesthetics only on the interior of the door, however, because the exterior is concealed by MDO, which comes primed but has to be painted.

If you want to have increased durability and wood aesthetics inside and out, you could always purchase a standard wood door and bake it in an oven—sort of. That's more or less what Lemieux Doors, which is now a Masonite brand, does with its line of *torrefied* (heat-treated) wood, which was

introduced in April 2012.

Torrefaction is a process by which wood is subjected to high temperatures over an extended period of time to extract its moisture. Masonite representatives back up claims of increased durability by pointing to the 20-year warranty that the company provides on its torrefied products. Three independent wood experts whom we interviewed tell us that, indeed, this process leaves wood more stable and less susceptible to bending, warping, decay and sun damage.

Masonite's Lemieux brand of torrefied wood doors start at around \$2,500, which is akin to the price of premium fiberglass models. Because of the products' 20-year warranty, we believe that Masonite's torrefied wood doors provide a viable middle ground between fiberglass doors that are backed by a life-

time warranty and typical wood doors, which typically have a warranty of 5 years or less.

LIVING LARGE. No matter which material that you choose, you'll find more 7- and 8-foot doors these days. If you're willing to go with a custom door, we found manufacturers that offer them up to 12 feet tall and 6 feet wide. That's nearly twice as large as a standard 6-foot-8-inch-by-3-foot door.

In case you're wondering whether this trend toward larger doors is driven by manufacturers looking for a bigger sale, architects, designers and builders with whom we spoke assure us that it isn't. For the past 4 years, they say, their clients increasingly asked for these larger options, primarily to allow for increased day-lighting but to make a bigger impression as well.

[E] *MSRP: \$300; Best Price: \$192*
>>The is the least expensive fiberglass entry door that we found in a brick-and-mortar store that has a polyurethane foam core and a lifetime warranty. It also is the least expensive such model that has laminated veneer lumber stiles, which make the door stronger than are doors that use plain wood for stiles.

Features:
* Core materials: Polyurethane foam fill; laminated veneer lumber stiles; wood top rail; composite bottom rail
* Jamb: Standard wood
* Finish: Paint-ready
* Weight: 100 lbs.
* Styles: 37
* Warranty: Lifetime door, 5 yrs. frame, components

[E] *MSRP: \$199; Best Price: NA*
>>The is the least expensive fiberglass entry door that we found, yet it includes the same design features as do models that cost \$47–\$140 more. This model, which is found at homedepot.com, also is the least expensive fiberglass

entry door that we found to include an all-composite jamb rather than standard wood, which means that this door is less susceptible to water damage or rot.

Features:
* Core materials: Polyurethane foam fill; composite stiles, rails
* Jamb: Composite
* Finish: Paint-ready
* Weight: 75 lbs.
* Styles: 12
* Warranty: Lifetime transferable door, frame, components

STEEL
[P] *MSRP: \$967; Best Price: \$332*
>>The is a repeat Best Buy selection, because these doors still include the thickest steel (20 gauge) of any steel entry door that we found, so they dent less easily than any other model. This model also is the only one to combine a polyurethane core with a lifetime warranty and at least 24 styles.

Features:
* Core materials: Polyurethane foam fill; steel frame
* Jamb: Treated wood
* Weight: 180 lbs.
* Styles: 29

* Warranty: Lifetime transferable door, jamb, components; 7 yrs. finish

[M] *MSRP: \$306; Best Price: \$348*
>>The is the least expensive steel entry-door series that we found that has a treated-wood jamb, a polyurethane fill and this quality of construction.

Other steel entry doors that are in this price range have jambs that are made of standard wood, which can be more susceptible to damage from moisture and insects.
Features:
* Core materials: Polyurethane foam fill; wood stiles, rails
* Jamb: Treated wood
* Weight: 81 lbs.
* Styles: 11
* Warranty: 10 yrs. door, frame, components

[E] *MSRP: \$168; Best Price: \$168*
>>The is the least

expensive steel entry door that we found, yet it has a lifetime warranty. This model also has a steel bottom rail, which means that the rail won't rot.
Features:
* Core materials: Polystyrene foam fill; laminated veneer lumber stiles, top rail; steel bottom rail
* Jamb: Standard wood
* Weight: 55 lbs.
* Styles: 16
* Warranty: Lifetime door, frame, components

For more information about the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 61.



"We've definitely found that the standard 6-foot-8-inch door isn't the default position anymore," says James A. Walbridge, who is the president of Tekton Architecture & Artisan Builders and chairman of American Institute of Architects' Custom Residential Architects Network. "I don't know if I would use the word 'fashion,' but larger doors are often about making a statement."

Jeld-Wen, Kolbe, Masonite, Pella, ProVia, Simpson, Stanley, Therma-Tru and TruStile report that they increased production of 7- and 8-foot models over the past 4 years. Of course, those taller doors come with bigger prices. Based on the quotes that we received, you can expect to pay from 30 percent to 50 percent more, on average, for those larger models. Unless you're replacing an equally oversized door, you'll have to shell out an additional \$1,200 for labor. That's the rough estimate that contractors gave us for increasing the size of a standard door opening.

FEELING FLUSH. Door models that have flush glazing are a growing trend.

Flush glazing forgoes the typical moldings that trim the perimeter of glass to deliver what door manufacturers describe as "cleaner" and "more contemporary" looks. Flush-glazed doors aren't new. However, now you're more likely to find them as a standard product instead of having to special-order them.

For example, Jeld-Wen and Simpson introduced flush glazing on standard doors in 2013. Therma-Tru added 8-foot models to its line of flush-glazed doors in early 2015. Meanwhile, Masonite planned to debut its first flush-glazed designs on a new line of fiberglass doors, which is dubbed VistaGrande, in June 2015.

Although most manufacturers say flush glazing is a matter of style, Masonite promotes its VistaGrande line in keeping with its nomenclature, with the promise of a "wider viewing area and cleaner appearance" that "yields up to 18 percent more viewing area."

A glass and glazing expert and one architect, neither of whom is associated with the entry-door market, tell us that

this claim is consistent with the design principles that are behind flush glazing, but they also say you shouldn't expect to be blown away by the results. Instead, they say that you should consider flush glazing primarily for its cleaner looks, which is how most manufacturers market them. Based on our side-by-side evaluations, we believe that you're better off adding more glass to your door or going with a larger model that has more glass if expanded views are what you desire.

WIRELESS OPTIONS. It seems that no area of home improvement escapes the trend of wireless home automation these days, and entry doors are no exception. You now can special-order Pella doors that have the door-maker's proprietary wireless deadbolt sensor.

In January 2015, Pella unveiled a deadbolt sensor for new Pella and Architect Series doors under its Insynctive line of wireless home-automation products. The sensor allows you to check the status of your door's lock through a smartphone, tablet computer or other

Best Buys in Aluminum Storm Doors

Best Buy Categories

- [P]—Premium selection
- [M]—Midrange selection
- [E]—Economy selection



SEE PAGE 72

Best Buys in aluminum storm doors were selected based on materials, quality of construction and warranty.

We considered only manufacturers that have national distribution.

All prices for Best Buy selections are based on an 80-by-36-inch door and include a matching frame and standard handle and lock hardware. Unless otherwise noted, all prices reflect a series, because storm doors come in a variety of styles and configurations.

All Best Buy selections have removable or retractable screens.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change.

[P]

MSRP: \$428-\$605;

Best Price: \$306

>>The

series is a repeat Best Buy selection, because its 1-7/8-inch frame still is the thickest of any aluminum storm door that we found, and it now is the least expensive model to include a built-in retractable screen as standard.

Features:

- * Styles: 4
- * Colors: 7
- * Warranty: Lifetime door; 5 yrs. retractable screen; 1 yr. hardware

[M]

MSRP: \$293; Best Price: \$179

>>The is the least expensive aluminum storm door that we found that has a 1-5/8-inch frame. We also like this single model's reinforced corners and

four heavy-duty hinges, because they make the door even sturdier. We just wish this model had a lifetime warranty on the door.

Features:

- * Styles: 1
- * Colors: 8
- * Warranty: 20 yrs. door; lifetime hardware finish; 1 yr. latch set, air closer

[E]

MSRP: \$80-\$116;

Best Price: \$98

>>The is a repeat Best Buy selection, because it remains the least expensive aluminum storm door that we found to be covered by a lifetime warranty. Simply put: If you're looking for an inexpensive storm door that has solid construction and pleasing aesthetic features, we see no reason for you to spend more than you will on the price for this series.



Features:

- * Styles: 6
- * Colors: 3
- * Warranty: Lifetime door; 1 yr. paint, hardware, components

For more information about the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 61.

computer when the sensor is linked to a Z-Wave-compatible home-automation system. That option costs \$218: \$109 for the deadbolt sensor and \$109 for Pella's hub, which links the sensor to the home-automation system.

If you don't have a home-automation system, Pella offers a wireless status indicator that displays your lock's status for \$109. You still have to have Pella's hub, which brings the total for this option to \$327.

When ordering the Insynctive deadbolt sensor with your new entry door, the door and its jamb come prepped for the required hardware, which Pella suggests having installed by one of its certified dealers. It's worth noting, however, that Pella's Insynctive system won't allow you to lock or unlock your door from a remote location. You still have to handle that the old-fashioned way—by manually latching or unlatching your deadbolt. If remote locking or unlocking is what you're after, you'll have to wait for Pella to add that feature. Based on the company's comments, we speculate that you might see that option in the near future.

In the meantime, as an optional upgrade for its doors, ProVia offers two Schlage-brand keyless, wireless locks that allow you to lock and unlock your door from virtually anywhere. ProVia tells us that this option adds \$468 to the price of one of its doors. For those who can handle the installation themselves, you should know that we found retail prices for the same locks that are as low as \$196.

Ultimately, you'll have more choices for proprietary wireless technologies that are integrated into entry doors. Jeld-Wen, Kolbe and Masonite report that they're considering options for their doors, although none provided details. Meanwhile, representatives for Pella suggest that we all "stay tuned," because this is "only the beginning." ●

Drew Vass is a regular contributor to Consumers Digest. He has written about replacement windows, garage doors, power tools, and bathroom and kitchen remodeling.



Go to ConsumersDigest.com to learn about the anatomy of a door, so you can decipher technical jargon when you shop.