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## The Hidden Roofs of Washington Old and New Buildings Feature Commercial or “Flat” Roofs

They're the unseen, unsung roofs of Washington, D.C. Commercial or “flat” roofs offer no-frills protection at a modest cost, and usually can be serviced and repaired without expensive scaffolding.

But flat roofs are by no means a long-lasting or trouble-free solution, according to Wagner's flat-roof experts. People walk across flat roofs. Tradesmen damage them with their tools. And building owners mount heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) and other mechanical equipment, antennas and satellite dishes on the flat, accessible surfaces.

While steep roofs tend to be the private domain of professional roofers, flat roofs simply invite more traffic ... much of it by non-roofers.

Then there's the potential for leaks: Because flat roofs don't always shed moisture easily, water that ponds sometimes finds its way into the building.

Most troubling: The typical flat roof lasts only 15 to 20 years, then it must be replaced.

Many of today's large buildings are designed with flat roofs—think of big-box, warehouse-style stores like Wal-Mart. But flat roofs aren't con-



CHUCK WAGNER

**The Egyptian Embassy on Massachusetts Avenue is covered entirely by a flat roof.**

finied to new, contemporary-style structures. A number of Washington's historic buildings that don't appear to have flat roofs actually do.

As local architects and builders of an earlier era began to design and erect increasingly larger homes and commercial buildings, they wanted to maintain steep slopes in slate and

metal to preserve an architectural style, explains architect Cy Merkezas. “An architects’ ‘trick’ that we see on a lot of historic buildings is to create the impression that the angle continues up, that the roof line ends in a peak.” But, adds Merkezas, “they actually took the perceived pyramid and sliced it off.” As a result, “many

roofs around Washington that you think are entirely steep gables or mansards often have a hidden component that is flat—which causes architects to sweat heavily every time it rains!”

A recently completed Wagner project illustrates the problems that can develop with an aging flat roof, particularly one that is not properly installed. When the

## Wagner Knows Flat Roofs, Too

Although Wagner Roofing is known for its slate and metal work on historic restorations and on new buildings with steep-slope roofs, the firm's expertise extends to flat roofs, as well. Recent projects where Wagner has installed, repaired or replaced modified bitumen flat roofs include:

### CHURCHES

Bethesda Baptist Church  
Our Lady of Lourdes Church  
(Bethesda, Md.)  
Washington National Cathedral

### EMBASSIES

Embassy of Egypt  
Japanese Ambassador's  
Residence  
Embassy of Saudi Arabia

### SHOPPING CENTERS

Bradley Shopping Center  
(Bethesda, Md.)  
Crossroads Place Shopping  
Center (Falls Church, Va.)  
Shady Grove Shopping Center

### HOTELS

American Inn of Bethesda  
Hilton-McLean Tysons Corner

### OFFICE BUILDINGS

1411 K St., N.W.  
2233 Wisconsin Ave., N.W.

### RESTAURANTS

Clyde's (Rockville, Md.)  
Houston's (Georgetown)

### THEATERS

Arena Stage  
Avalon Theater

Call Chuck or Sheila Wagner for more information.

Uruguay government purchased the early-1960s building at 1913 I St., N.W., to serve as an embassy and residence, the structure was in poor condition, according to Joe Borger, C.P.M., executive vice president of Borger Management Inc., which represents the embassy. Modified bitumen roofing had been installed over an old slag roof, and Borger says the insulation was "saturated, like a sponge."

The old roof had to be completely removed, right down to the concrete deck. Then Wagner installed a new roof using tapered insulation, which is designed to better shed moisture. "We surmised—and Wagner Roofing confirmed—that the roof drains were inadequate and were contributing to the ponding. So we cut new internal roof drains," says Borger.

Today's architects, building owners and roofers are addressing the challenge of flat roofs with a range of solutions, driven primarily by building designs and client budgets.

At the Kuwait Embassy, a 1960s box-style structure at 2940 Tilden St., N.W., the enormous flat roof has always leaked. Wagner Roofing helped prepare a feasibility study for replacing the roof; the study is part of a larger proposal submitted by Merkezas to the Kuwaiti government to restore the entire embassy.

When the residence of the Netherlands ambassador at 2347 S St., N.W., was renovated (see *Wagner Rooflines*, Fall 2000), the Dutch insisted on the highest possible quality in every aspect of the project. Wagner Roofing was asked to replace "everything above the gutter line," says

## Up on the Roof ...

The Uruguay Embassy roofing job presented Wagner Roofing and property manager Joe Borger with some tough challenges.

The six-story embassy stands between an eight-story building and a 12-story structure. This limited the project to one crane, since the adjacent taller buildings made it impossible to maneuver beyond the perimeters of the embassy's roof. Because neighboring buildings were occupied, noise and other activities had to be controlled. In addition, the extensive roofing project proceeded while the embassy's top-floor conference room, ambassador's office and minister's office were being redecorated.

"The project required a lot of coordination," says Borger. "But in spite of a tight schedule, difficult access, the need to coordinate with electrical and HVAC people and the fact that a complete renovation was going on inside the building, we pulled it off." Not only was the embassy roof replaced in a professional and timely fashion and within budget, but "not a drop of water leaked into the top-floor rooms."

Merkezas, whose firm, Archetype, was U.S. architect for the project. The original metal that covered the flat roof had been replaced with a built-up roof. To meet the client's performance criteria, including low maintenance and long life, Wagner removed the asphalt-based roof system and installed a soldered-seam stainless steel roof.

The Egyptian Embassy and ambassador's residence at 2301 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., is covered entirely by a flat roof. "In renovating that structure, we decided to use a variation on a multi-ply, built-up roof—a much older technology and the best we thought we could afford for the budget," says Merkezas.

In recent years, several technologies have emerged to alleviate some of the problems inherent in flat roofs. One innovation is tapered roof insulation; its slope eliminates ponding, while the insulation provides an additional layer of protection. New membrane systems like sheet rubber roofs are more impervious to

water because fewer seams reduce the likelihood of leaks. For example, at the Franklin School at 13th and K Sts., N.W., Wagner removed a leaking tin roof and replaced it with a less expensive rubber system.

So far, none of these innovations can match the track record of built-up roofs—what Merkezas describes as "those older, smellier systems that alternate layers of felt and tar—as many plies as you can afford. That technology's been around for a hundred years or more, and you still can't beat it."

At the same time, most architects, building owners and roofers would probably agree that no single roof system has universal application.

As Tim Schmitt, Wagner project manager and estimator, explains, "There is no one 'perfect' roof system. There is simply the best system for a given situation. And modified bitumen is strong, durable and the best choice far more often than any other roof system specified." ●

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## Letter From the Vice President Rediscovering Life's Small Pleasures

The world has changed since our last newsletter was published. We all experienced the tragedy of September 11, and we will forever be transformed by the events of that day.

After the initial shock and the depression that followed, I have finally begun to enjoy and be thankful for the beauty in my life.

This spring has been particularly gorgeous in Washington, and to me the gardens, flowers and trees have never been more colorful. Working in our own garden at home has helped me feel connected to something solid ... rooted. It is comforting to see that the cycle of the seasons goes on ... that flowers bloom and fade, the birds nest, the butterflies flit and the grass grows. I am rediscovering joy in the simple things of life—gardening, reading, exercising and, yes, even roofing.

I would like to tell you about the National Roofing Contractors Association and what it is doing to help. NRCA has organized the repair and replacement of the Pentagon's roof system. The

restoration involves rebuilding part of the structure and repairing more than 40,000 square feet of slate roofing. Please visit their web site at [www.nrca.net](http://www.nrca.net) and click on the "NRCA Pentagon Project."

Be sure to look at the photographs. NRCA members have made financial contributions, as well as material and labor donations, to support this project. Wagner Roofing is proud to be part of those efforts.

Chuck and I appreciate the opportunity to work for you and hope you will continue to give us that opportunity.

Thank you,



Sheila Wagner



## In the Works

These Wagner jobs are in progress or recently completed. To discuss or visit these or other projects, call Chuck Wagner or Sheila Wagner at 301/927/9030. (Unless otherwise noted, jobs are in Washington, D.C.)

**Clyde's Restaurant (Maizel Construction), Rockville, Md.:** New cedar shakes and hot fluid applied liquid membrane roof

**Cosmos Club:** New modified bitumen roof and copper skylights

**Embassy of Egypt and Ambassador's Residence (Renovations Unlimited):** Main roof—4-ply built-up; carriage house and loggia—coal tar pitch membrane, lead-coated copper cornice

**Embassy of Japan, 4000 Nebraska Ave., N.W.:** Modified bitumen

**Gallaudet University, Washburn Arts Center (Clark Construction):** Modified bitumen and lead-coated copper water table

**George Washington University:** New modified bitumen roofs

**Georgetown Incinerator (The Ritz-Carlton Hotel) (Kadcon Corporation), 1001 Wisconsin Ave., N.W.:** Prepainted metal roofs, treated 20-year-old wood shingles

**Jackson Place townhouses (GSA), Lafayette Square:** Restore lead-coated copper roofs

**Kreeger residence (Gibson & Associates), Poolesville, Md.:** New slate and copper roofs and gutters

**National Geographic Society:** Paint exterior overhang; replace modified bitumen roof

**Robert E. Lee boyhood home (Oak Grove), Alexandria, Va.:** New slate roof and copper gutters and downspouts

**Saint Albans School:** New copper valleys and roofs

**The Argyle Apartments (Wayne Gleason), 3220 17th St., N.W.:** Lead-coated copper cornice

**The Envoy (Borger Companies), 2400 16th St., N.W.:** New modified roofs

**Washington National Cathedral:** New batten seam lead roof

## Slate-Roof Specialist Bob Wooldridge Wins Roofing's MVP Award

Bob Wooldridge, slate-roof specialist and long-time Wagner Roofing employee, was one of three Mid-Atlantic Region winners of the roofing industry's second annual Most Valuable Player Award.

The National Roofing Contractors Association and the Roofing Industry Alliance for Progress presents the award to individuals who have made significant contributions to the industry.

The award committee based its selection of Wooldridge in part on an enthusiastic endorsement by Dr. Betty Belanus, education specialist with the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, who called

Wooldridge "a master craftsman and one of the leading experts on slate roofing in our area."

Wooldridge was among the Wagner employees who demonstrated their crafts for the million-plus people who attended last summer's festival on the National Mall, and Belanus praised his "visitor-friendly" presentation and patience in answering questions about roofing in general as well as slate work. "Visitors were especially drawn to Bob," she added, "because I believe that, like me, they could sense his strong commitment to his craft and his love of working with slate and copper to make an incredibly durable and beautiful product." ●

## Visit Wagner at the Building Arts Festival in October

Wagner Roofing will return to the annual Festival of the Building Arts at the National Building Museum in 2002. To coincide with the opening of the museum's new Do-It-Yourself exhibition, this year's festival will take place Saturday, Oct. 19 (instead of the customary second week in September). Wagner's roofing team has been a popular feature at previous events, with demonstrations of slate, copper and shingle roofing techniques.

# Washington Post Interviews Chuck Wagner About Slate

Chuck Wagner, president of Wagner Roofing, was one of several local slate experts interviewed by *The Washington Post* for the article



“Does Your Roof Rate Slate?” in the May 11 Real Estate section. Here are several excerpts from the *Post* article:

“People have asked me what to do many a time,” said Chuck Wagner of Wagner Roofing Co., a Hyattsville company started by Wagner’s grandfather in 1914 and lauded for its slate work on historic restorations and new buildings. “Of course, money is a factor. But usually the person who sticks with slate lives in a traditional neighborhood” where slate roofs predominate and are highly valued, Wagner said. “These homeowners are purists, and it’s the character of the neighborhood and of the house that they want to maintain.”

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“I looked at the fake slate, and maybe it

might have been okay to use it if I didn’t have real slate” elsewhere, said Cecelia Leake, a real estate agent with Sotheby’s Washington Fine Properties, who has hired Wagner Roofing to add slate to a portion of the roof on her house in the Wesley Heights section of Washington. The section being replaced was previously covered with asphalt shingles. “I tend to be a purist. I like everything to be consistent, and I just couldn’t bring myself not to do it,” said Leake.

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“People are spending a fair amount of money to make their houses look old and authentic, and this fits the style,” said custom builder Jim Gibson, whose firm Gibson & Associates has used Wagner Roofing on five slate roofing projects in the past year. ●

## Who We Are

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