

Brick Grades and Types: What Your House Is Made Of

SW, MW, Face, Common — What the Brick on Your Walls
Was Made For, and Why the Wrong Replacement Fails Fast

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Chapter 1: The Types of Brick for Houses — What's Actually in Your Walls

Walk up to your house and put your hand on the brick. That thing under your palm has a grade, a type, a manufacturing method, and a job it was designed to do. Most homeowners have never been told any of it — the brick was just "the brick," red or tan or whatever the builder picked from a sample board. But when a brick spalls, when a repair needs matching, when somebody tells you your chimney needs a different brick than your walls, all of that hidden information suddenly matters. This book is the decoder ring.

Here's the landscape in plain English. Brick gets classified three different ways, and they answer three different questions:

1. **Grade** — how much weather punishment the brick can take. SW, MW, NW: severe, moderate, negligible weathering. This is the durability rating.
2. **Type** — what the brick was made for. Face brick (meant to be seen) versus common or building brick (meant to be covered or used structurally). This is the

job description.

3. Manufacturing method — how it was formed.

Extruded (wire-cut, uniform, the modern standard) versus molded or soft-mud (pressed into molds, the old way, with that handmade look). This is the birth story — and it explains the texture, the color variation, and a lot about how the brick behaves.

Every brick on your house has one of each. A typical DFW suburban home built in 1995 is clad in Grade SW, face brick, extruded — the standard modern combination. A 1920s bungalow in Fort Worth might be soft-mud common brick, possibly a lower grade by today's standards, laid as structural walls. Same material family, very different animals. Treat them the same and you'll learn the difference the expensive way.

The rest of this book walks through each classification, shows you how to figure out what's on your own house, and explains the failure I see over and over: the wrong replacement brick, put in with the best intentions, failing in a few short years because nobody checked what the wall was made of.

Chapter 2: Brick Grades Explained — SW, MW, and NW

The grade of a brick is its weather rating — nothing more, nothing less. It tells you how much freezing, soaking, and general abuse the brick can take before it starts coming apart. The grades come from the ASTM standards that govern clay brick in America: ASTM C62 for building (common) brick and ASTM C216 for facing brick. The letters stand for the exposure the brick is rated to survive:

- **SW — Severe Weathering.** The toughest grade. Made for brick that gets soaked and frozen repeatedly: chimneys, parapets, freestanding garden walls, retaining walls, any brick within about six inches of the ground, and any horizontal surface where water sits. If the industry's weathering index for your area is high — and much of the northern US is — the standard says SW is the only grade to use.
- **MW — Moderate Weathering.** The middle grade. Fine for normal vertical walls above grade in moderate climates — the face of a house wall that sheds water

and isn't sitting in it.

- **NW — Negligible Weathering.** The indoor grade. Brick that's never going to see serious weather — interior walls, brick behind other cladding, backup walls. Here's a detail worth knowing: under ASTM C216, the facing-brick standard, Grade NW doesn't even exist. Facing brick is made to be seen outside, so it's only graded SW or MW.

How is the grade actually measured? Not by looking at it — by soaking it. The test boils dried brick samples for five hours and measures how much water weight they pick up. That boiling-water absorption is the durability index: Grade SW brick is limited to about 17 percent absorption, MW to about 22 percent. Lower absorption means denser, harder-fired brick that takes up less water — and water is what freezes, expands, and blows the face off a brick. NW has no absorption limit because it's not supposed to get wet in the first place.

Now the Texas translation, because this is where it gets practical. North Texas freezes — not constantly, but in cycles, and freeze-thaw cycling is exactly what the grades are about. Water gets into the brick on a wet 45-degree day, freezes

overnight at 25, expands, and pries at the brick's structure. Do that dozens of times a winter and a brick that wasn't made for it starts spalling — faces popping off, surfaces crumbling.

Here's the rule for your house: **the walls can be MW, but anything that stays wet should be SW.** Your chimney — full weather exposure on all sides, rain hitting it horizontally in storms — wants SW. The bottom courses near the ground, where splashback and soil moisture keep the brick damp, want SW. A freestanding mailbox column or garden wall, wet on both faces with no house behind it to shelter it, wants SW. The main field of the wall, vertical, shedding water, above grade — MW does fine there in our climate.

Where homeowners get hurt is the repair. A mason — or a handyman — replaces spalled brick on a chimney with whatever the yard had in the right color, and the replacement brick is a lower grade than the exposure demands. It looks perfect for two years. Then the faces start coming off, and the homeowner concludes brick repair doesn't work. Brick repair works fine. Wrong-grade brick doesn't.

Chapter 3: Face Brick vs. Common Brick —

The Job Description

If grade is the weather rating, type is the job description: what was this brick manufactured to do?

Face brick is brick made to be seen. It's manufactured — or selected — for consistent color, clean edges, uniform texture, and a finished surface that needs no paint, no plaster, no covering. The face brick standard (ASTM C216) holds it to tighter dimensional tolerances than common brick, because when brick is the finished surface, irregular units make wavy walls. Face brick comes in the colors and textures builders choose from: smooth, sanded, flashed, iron-spotted, tumbled, and dozens more. When you picked your house's brick from a sample board — or when the builder picked it for you — you were picking face brick.

Common brick — also called building brick, under ASTM C62 — is brick made to work, not to pose. It's the structural workhorse: less uniform in color, rougher in finish, made to be covered by plaster or stucco, or used where appearance doesn't matter — backup walls, interior structural walls,

foundations. It's generally less expensive than face brick because nobody paid for pretty. In older construction, common brick often *was* the wall — structural brick walls three wythes thick, with the best-looking units facing out.

Here's the part that matters for Texas homeowners: **nearly every brick house built in Texas in the last fifty years is clad in face brick.** The veneer on your 1985 ranch, your 2005 two-story, your 2020 new build — that's face brick, one wythe, over a wood frame. Common brick on a modern Texas house would be unusual. But on older homes — pre-1960s, and especially pre-1940s — you may be looking at structural brick walls where the units are closer to common brick, sometimes soft and underfired by modern standards.

Why does the distinction matter for repair? Two reasons. First, **you can't replace face brick with common brick and expect it to look right.** The color, texture, and size consistency won't match, and the repair will read as a patch from the street. Second — and this is the expensive one — **you can't assume the brick on an old house has the durability of modern face brick.** Old common brick, especially soft handmade units, is more porous, softer, and far less forgiving of hard modern mortar. Put a hard

Portland-cement mortar against soft old common brick and the brick faces spall off within a few years — the mortar wins, the brick loses. The mortar must always be the softer element. On modern face brick, standard Type N mortar is the right partner. On old soft brick, you need a softer, high-lime mortar. Get the pairing wrong and the "repair" destroys the wall it was meant to save.

Chapter 4: Extruded vs. Molded — How Your Brick Was Born

Now the birth story: how the clay was formed into a brick before it was fired. There are two main methods, and you can usually tell which one made your brick just by looking at it.

Extruded brick — also called wire-cut or stiff-mud — is the modern standard. Clay is forced through a die under pressure, like toothpaste through a tube, and wires slice the column into individual bricks. The result is uniform: consistent size, sharp edges, smooth faces, and — because the clay is dense and the firing is controlled — generally high durability. Extruded brick can be textured after cutting: the surface can be wire-scratched, sanded, rolled, or imprinted with patterns. If your house was built after about 1960 and the brick looks crisp and regular, it's almost certainly extruded. Most Texas veneer brick is extruded face brick, and it's good stuff — hard, dense, predictable.

Molded brick — also called soft-mud or stock brick — is the old way. Soft, wet clay is pressed into sand-coated molds, which gives the brick its characteristic sanded face with

small creases and folds, slightly irregular edges, and that handmade, earthy look. Originally it was done by hand, brick by brick; modern plants do it with machines, but the look is the same. Molded brick has more texture, more color variation from unit to unit, and — because the clay is wetter going in — it's generally a bit more porous than extruded.

Here's why the method matters to you:

- **Matching.** If your house is soft-mud brick and the repair uses extruded units, the patch will look wrong even if the color is close — the texture gives it away. Molded and extruded read completely differently on a wall. Match the method, not just the color.
- **Porosity and mortar.** Soft-mud brick is thirstier — it sucks water out of fresh mortar faster. Masons account for this by wetting the brick before laying or adjusting the mortar. A mason who treats soft-mud brick like extruded brick gets weak mortar bonds.
- **Age and expectations.** If your house has genuine handmade or early machine-molded brick, it's old — and old brick was often fired at lower temperatures than modern brick, making it softer. That softness is not a defect; it's the nature of the material. But it

means the wall needs softer mortar and gentler treatment than a 1990s extruded veneer. No hard mortar, no aggressive pressure washing, no sandblasting — all of which destroy soft old brick.

One more Texas note: the "antique" and "tumbled" looks that are popular on new builds are usually extruded brick that's been distressed after firing to mimic the old molded look. It looks old but behaves like modern brick — hard and durable. That's fine, as long as the repair matches it with the same kind of unit. A genuinely old soft-mud brick and a modern tumbled extruded brick may look similar from the street and behave very differently in the wall.

Chapter 5: Sizes and Shapes — Why Your Brick Is the Size It Is

Brick sizes have names, and the names matter when you're matching. The standard American brick is the **modular** — nominally 2 inches high, 4 inches wide, 8 inches long (actual dimensions run slightly under to allow for mortar joints, typically with a 3/8-inch joint). Modular is the default for residential veneer across Texas. If your house was built in the suburbs anytime in the last half-century, your brick is probably modular.

But there are others you'll run into:

- **Standard** — slightly larger than modular in some dimensions; the old workhorse size.
- **King** — thicker and longer than modular. Shows up on some higher-end homes and commercial work.
- **Queen** — similar footprint to modular but thinner in height — more courses per foot, a different look.
- **Roman** — long and thin, a distinctive horizontal emphasis. Popular in mid-century and contemporary architecture.

- **Economy/jumbo** — larger units that cover wall faster.

Common in commercial, occasional in residential.

Why should a homeowner care? Because **replacement brick has to match in size, not just color**. A modular replacement in a king-size wall leaves joint lines that don't line up — the courses won't match, and the patch looks amateur from twenty feet. When you're sourcing replacement brick, measure: height, width, and length of an existing unit (pull one from a discreet spot, or measure at an opening where the full unit is exposed). Bring the measurements to the brick yard. A good yard will match size first, color second — because a perfect color in the wrong size is still a visible patch.

There's also the hole question. Many bricks — especially structural and some facing units — have holes through them: two or three cores in the wide face. These reduce weight without reducing strength, give the mortar more to grip, and in some applications allow reinforcing steel. Solid brick (no holes) is the classic residential veneer unit. When matching, note whether your brick is solid or cored — it affects weight, handling, and sometimes how the unit is laid.

Chapter 6: What Texas Houses Are Actually Made Of

Let me put the classifications to work on the houses you'll actually see around Texas, because the combination matters more than any single label.

The suburban veneer (1960s–today): DFW, Houston, Austin, San Antonio. One wythe of extruded face brick, Grade SW or MW, modular size, over a wood frame with an air gap and weep holes at the base. This is the overwhelming majority of Texas brick homes. The brick is hard, dense, durable — modern manufacturing doesn't produce much bad brick. When these walls fail, it's almost never the brick's fault: it's the mortar aging out (twenty to thirty years is normal), water getting in at flashing failures, sprinklers soaking the wall, or the wrong mortar used in a past repair. The brick itself will outlast all of us.

The mid-century structural (1940s–1960s). Some Texas homes from this era have structural brick walls — the brick carries the load, not just clothes the frame. Often extruded by this period, but sometimes softer units. These walls are

thicker, often with no cavity, which changes how water moves through them. Repairs need a mason who understands structural brick, not just veneer.

The pre-war bungalow (1900s–1930s). Soft-mud or early machine-molded brick, sometimes genuinely handmade, often softer and more porous than anything made today. Structural walls, lime mortar originally. These are the houses where the wrong repair does the most damage — hard modern mortar against soft old brick is a slow demolition. If you own one of these, everything in this book about soft brick and lime mortar is written for you.

The new-build "old look" (2000s–today). Tumbled, distressed, "reclaimed-look" brick on new veneer construction. Modern hard brick underneath the costume. Treat it like modern brick for repairs — but match the distressed appearance, because a crisp new unit in a tumbled wall sticks out.

Chimneys, mailboxes, garden walls, retaining walls. Whatever the house wears, these elements live harder lives — full exposure, ground contact, water from all sides. They want Grade SW brick regardless of what the walls are. I see more wrong-grade brick on mailboxes and garden walls than

anywhere else, because they're small jobs where somebody grabbed whatever matched the color.

The pattern: Texas residential brick is overwhelmingly good, modern, hard-fired face brick — and it fails from water, mortar age, and bad repairs, not from being bad brick. The exceptions are the old houses with soft brick, where the material itself needs gentler handling. Know which house you have.

Chapter 7: What Kind of Brick Is My House?

— A Homeowner's Identification Guide

You don't need a lab. You need eyes, a tape measure, and ten minutes. Here's how to read your own walls:

Step 1: Look at the texture. Smooth, uniform faces with sharp edges — extruded. Sanded, slightly irregular faces with creases and a handmade feel — soft-mud/molded. Tumbled or distressed but with crisp underlying edges — modern extruded made to look old.

Step 2: Measure a unit. Height, width, length. Compare against the sizes in Chapter 5. Most likely modular. Write it down — you'll need it if you ever source replacements.

Step 3: Check the hardness. This is the field test. Take a nail or a screwdriver and try to scratch the brick face in a discreet spot. Modern hard-fired face brick barely marks. Soft old brick scratches easily and may powder. If your brick scratches easily, treat everything in the "soft brick" column of this book as applying to you: softer mortar, gentler cleaning, no pressure washer.

Step 4: Look at the color through a chip. Find a spot where the brick face is chipped or spalled. Modern extruded brick is usually fairly consistent color through the body. Some face brick has a flashed or coated surface — the color is on the skin, and underneath is a different shade. That matters for matching: a surface-flashed brick can't be matched by a through-body brick of the "same" color, because the variation won't read the same.

Step 5: Note solid vs. cored. Look at the top of a wall — a garden wall, the top course under a cap — or at any opening where you can see into a unit. Holes or no holes. Write it down.

Step 6: Estimate the age. If you know when the house was built, you know the era's typical brick (Chapter 6). Pre-1930s: assume soft brick and lime mortar until proven otherwise. 1960s and later: modern face brick, standard mortar.

Put it together and you've got a description like: "extruded face brick, modular, solid, hard-fired, 1990s — modern veneer." Hand that description to a brick yard or a mason and you've just skipped the entire guessing phase. The yard can match from it. The mason can spec mortar from it. Ten minutes with a tape measure saves weeks of wrong samples.

One caution: if your brick is painted, you're reading the paint, not the brick. Painted brick hides the texture, the hardness, everything. Don't try to identify through paint — find an unpainted spot (inside the attic at the chimney, behind a fixture, at the wall base) or accept that identification waits until the paint comes off. And think twice before painting unpainted brick — it's a one-way door that traps moisture and hides the wall's condition from every future inspection.

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Chapter 8: Reading the Brick — Stamps, Frogs, and What the Markings Tell You

Bricks talk, if you know where to look. Most brick has markings — and those markings can tell you who made it, sometimes when, and occasionally exactly what you're dealing with.

The frog. That's the technical name for the indent pressed into the wide face of many bricks. On extruded brick it's often a shallow groove or a textured panel; on molded brick it can be a deep hollow. The frog isn't decoration — it keys the mortar, giving it more surface to grip, which makes a stronger bond. When you're matching, note the frog: a deep molded frog versus a shallow extruded groove is another tell for the manufacturing method, visible even when the faces are weathered.

Manufacturer stamps. Many bricks carry the maker's name, initials, or logo pressed into the frog or the face — "ACME," "THORNTON," "MEXICAN," or a symbol. Texas has a long brickmaking history, and old walls are full of stamped units from regional plants, some operating, some gone for decades.

A stamp is a gift for matching: it names the manufacturer, and the manufacturer's records — or a good brick yard's memory — can identify the exact product line, its color range, and sometimes its grade. Photograph every stamp you find. If you're trying to match an unusual brick, the stamp is the first thing the yard will ask about.

What stamps tell you about age. A stamp from a plant that closed in 1960 dates the wall as well as any deed. Regional brick histories are surprisingly well documented — collectors and preservation societies track which plants operated when. For a historic home, identifying the manufacturer can be the key to finding reclaimed matches from the same plant and era.

Color variation within the wall. Look closely at your wall and you'll see the units aren't identical — some are darker, some lighter, some have dark flashes across the face. That's normal and desirable; it's called the color range, and it comes from position in the kiln during firing — hotter spots fire darker. "Flashed" brick is deliberately given those dark markings by controlling the kiln atmosphere. When matching, you're not matching one brick — you're matching the range. Bring several samples showing the light end, the

dark end, and the middle. A yard that matches to a single unit will give you a flat, uniform patch in a varied wall.

Efflorescence vs. the brick's nature. Sometimes what looks like a color problem is just salt. White haze on new brick usually washes out over the first year of weather. Don't judge color — for matching or for worry — until the wall has been through a few good rains.

Chapter 9: Why the Wrong Replacement Brick Fails Fast

This is the chapter the whole book has been building toward. The premise is simple: **a replacement brick that doesn't match the original in grade, hardness, and type will fail — and it will fail fast, sometimes within a few years, while the surrounding original brick lasts decades more.**

Here's how the failure works, mechanism by mechanism:

The grade failure. Original chimney brick was Grade SW — dense, low absorption, made for saturation and freezing. The replacement is a pretty color match but a lower grade — more porous, thirstier. Every rain, the replacement soaks up more water than its neighbors. Every freeze, that water expands inside it. Within a few winters, the replacement's faces are popping off while the original brick around it looks fine. The homeowner thinks the repair was defective. The repair was fine — the brick was wrong.

The hardness failure. This is the mortar side, and it's the most destructive. Old soft brick — handmade, underfired, porous — gets repointed or reset with hard modern Portland-

cement mortar. The mortar is stronger than the brick. When the wall moves with temperature and moisture — and every wall moves — something has to give, and it's supposed to be the mortar. That's the design: mortar is the sacrificial element. But hard mortar doesn't sacrifice; it holds, and the soft brick faces tear off instead. Within a few years, the brick around every hard-mortar joint is spalling. I've seen whole walls ruined this way — not by age, not by weather, by the wrong mortar on the right brick. The rule is absolute: **the mortar must never be harder than the brick.**

The porosity mismatch. Even at the same grade, a replacement brick that's significantly more or less porous than its neighbors behaves differently in the wall. More porous: it stays wetter, grows biological growth faster, freezes harder. Less porous: it sheds water onto its neighbors, concentrating wetting at the joints around it. Either way, the patch ages at a different rate than the wall, and within years it looks — and performs — like a patch.

The size mismatch. Wrong-size replacement in a sized wall means joints that don't line up, courses that drift, and a patch that's visible from the street forever. It's cosmetic, not structural — but "cosmetic" on the front of your house is real

money at resale.

The common thread: every one of these failures comes from matching on color alone. Color is the last thing to match, not the first. Grade first, hardness second, type and manufacturing method third, size fourth, color fifth. A mason who talks about the first four before the fifth is a mason who understands brick. One who starts and ends with "yeah, I can match that color" — keep looking.

Chapter 10: Matching Brick for Repairs — How It's Actually Done

So how do you get it right? Whether you're sourcing brick yourself for a small repair or checking a mason's work, here's the process:

Start with identification. Chapter 7's six steps. You need the description before you shop.

Go to a real brick yard, not a big-box store. Masonry supply yards stock dozens of brick types and have staff who match brick for a living. Bring a sample — an actual brick from the wall, pulled from a discreet location (behind a bush, inside the garage at an opening, anywhere it won't show). A photo helps; the physical brick is decisive. The yard will match size, texture, and color from the unit in their hand.

Ask for the grade. Specifically: "Is this Grade SW?" for any chimney, ground-contact, or freestanding-wall repair. If the yard can't tell you the grade, that's information too — buy where they can.

Buy extra. Brick is made in batches — kiln runs — and color

varies between runs. Buy 10 to 20 percent more than the job needs, from the same batch, and keep the spares. Five years from now, when another brick spalls, you'll have exact-batch matches sitting in the garage instead of starting the hunt over.

For old or unusual brick, consider reclaimed. When the original brick is a soft-mud handmade unit from 1920 that no plant makes anymore, reclaimed brick — salvaged from demolitions — is often the only true match. Reputable architectural salvage yards grade and sort their stock. The caveat: reclaimed brick's history is unknown — you don't know its grade or its firing. Use it for appearance-critical repairs on old walls, set it in appropriate soft mortar, and don't use reclaimed units for chimneys or severe exposures unless you know what you're getting.

Match the mortar too. The replacement brick goes in with mortar matched to the existing — in strength, color, and texture. Same hardness rule: never harder than the brick. On modern veneer, Type N is the default. On old soft brick, a high-lime mortar. The mason should be able to tell you what he's using and why, in one sentence.

Test before committing. For any repair bigger than a few

bricks, have the mason lay a small test panel — a few square feet — and let it cure. Mortar changes color as it cures; wet mortar and cured mortar are different shades. The test panel is where you confirm the match before it goes on the wall. A mason who resists a test panel is telling you something.

Chapter 11: The Mortar–Brick Partnership — Why Hardness Matching Is Everything

I've mentioned the hardness rule in every chapter because it's the single most important technical idea in brick repair, and it deserves its own plain-English explanation.

Brick and mortar are partners. The brick is the strong, durable element; the mortar is the weaker, sacrificial element — softer by design, so that when the wall moves, the mortar yields instead of the brick cracking. This isn't a flaw in mortar. It's the entire engineering concept. Mortar is supposed to be the part that gives.

The partnership works when the mortar is softer than the brick. It fails catastrophically when the mortar is harder than the brick. And "harder" here doesn't mean "better" — it means higher compressive strength, more Portland cement, less lime. Modern Type S mortar is very strong. Against modern hard-fired face brick, it's usually fine (though Type N is still the standard choice for veneer). Against soft old brick, Type S is a weapon — the mortar holds rigid while the brick faces tear away around every joint.

This is why the old houses need lime mortar. Traditional lime mortar — high lime content, low Portland — is soft, flexible, and even slightly self-healing: small cracks can reseal themselves through lime redeposition over time. It's weaker than modern mortar, and that's the point. On a wall of soft handmade brick, lime mortar is the correct partner — it yields, it breathes, it lets moisture move through the wall instead of trapping it.

The practical rule for homeowners: **when anyone proposes mortar work on your house, ask "what type, and is it softer than my brick?"** On a modern Texas veneer home, the answer should be Type N, and the mason should be able to say why. On a pre-1940s house with soft brick, the answer should involve lime, and if the mason reaches for the same bag he'd use on a new build, stop the job. The bag doesn't know what wall it's going on. The mason is supposed to.

Chapter 12: Buying Brick — What to Ask at the Yard

Whether you're a homeowner buying a few units for a mailbox repair or checking that your mason sourced correctly, here's the conversation to have at the masonry supply yard:

1. **"I need to match this."** Hand over the sample brick. Let them measure it.
2. **"What grade is the match?"** You want to hear SW for severe exposures, and you want them to know without guessing.
3. **"Extruded or molded?"** The match should be the same manufacturing method as the original.
4. **"Is it the same size — height, width, length?"** Not "close." Same.
5. **"Same batch for the whole quantity?"** And buy the overage now.
6. **"What mortar do I use with this brick?"** The yard knows the pairing. Listen to them.

And the questions that tell you you're in the wrong place: if

they can't tell you the grade, if they suggest "this one's close enough" on size, if they look blank when you say "soft-mud" — thank them and go to a real masonry supplier. Brick matching is a trade skill; buy it from tradespeople.

A note on cost, since I promised honest numbers in this series: individual brick units are cheap — typically well under a dollar to a few dollars per brick depending on type and quantity, with specialty and reclaimed units more. The material is never the expensive part of a brick repair. It's the labor — cutting out, matching, setting, tooling — and the expertise to match correctly. When a bid seems high for "just a few bricks," you're paying for the matching and the hands, not the clay. That's as it should be.

Chapter 13: Questions Homeowners Ask Me About Brick Types

Can I use brick from a different part of my house for a repair? Sometimes — it's called "robbing" brick from a hidden area (inside the garage, behind landscaping) to repair a visible spot. The match is perfect because it's the same brick. The ethics depend on the situation: robbing from a structural or weather-exposed hidden area to fix a visible one just moves the problem. Robbing from a truly protected spot for a small visible repair is legitimate practice. Your mason will know.

My house has two different bricks — is that normal? Very. Builders often used one brick for the main walls and a different one — an accent, a soldier course, a different color — for trim, arches, or the chimney. Identify and match each one separately.

What's the white powder on my new brick? Probably efflorescence — soluble salts coming out of the brick and mortar as the wall dries. On new construction it's common and usually fades as the wall goes through wet-dry cycles. If it

persists for years, look for a water source. It's not a brick-grade problem.

Are expensive bricks better bricks? Not necessarily. Price tracks appearance — unusual colors, handmade textures, custom sizes — more than durability. A plain extruded SW face brick that costs less than a dollar can outlast a pricey tumbled specialty unit in a severe exposure. Buy the grade and the match, not the price tag.

Can brick be too old to reuse? Brick doesn't expire, but it does have a history. Reclaimed brick from a demolition might be a century old and perfectly sound — or it might be soft, underfired, and ready to spall. Judge the unit, not the age: hardness test, porosity, condition of the faces. Good old brick is excellent brick. Bad old brick is just old.

Why does my neighbor's brick look fine and mine is spalling? Different brick, different exposure, different water. Maybe his wall is MW in a sheltered spot and yours is the same brick on a chimney. Maybe his sprinklers don't hit the wall and yours do. Maybe his house got the SW batch and yours got whatever was on the truck. The wall tells the story — read it before you assume.

Should I worry about the brick on a brand-new house?

Walk it, photograph it, start the notebook — but modern brick on a new Texas home is almost always good material. What to watch on new construction isn't the brick grade, it's the installation: mortar droppings in the cavity, weep holes left blocked, flashing details. The brick is fine. Make sure the wall was built right around it.

What does the stamp in the frog mean for my repair?

If you can read the manufacturer's name, you've got a head start — the yard can look up the product line instead of guessing from color alone. Photograph it and bring the photo. Even a partial stamp narrows the field enormously.

My brick has holes through it. Is that a problem?

No — cored brick is normal. The holes lighten the unit and give mortar more to grip. Just make sure replacements are cored the same way if the originals are; a solid unit in a cored wall is a minor mismatch in weight and appearance at edges.

Can I mix grades on the same wall?

You can, and it's done all the time — SW where the exposure is severe (chimney, base courses), MW for the sheltered field. What you can't do is go the other direction: putting MW brick where SW is needed. Grade up for exposure, never down.

How do I know if my old brick is too soft for modern mortar? The scratch test from Chapter 7 is the field answer: if a nail or screwdriver scratches the face easily and raises powder, that brick wants a soft, high-lime mortar. When in doubt on a pre-1940s house, assume soft and spec soft — the cost of being wrong in the soft direction is a mortar joint that wears a little faster; the cost of being wrong in the hard direction is destroyed brick faces.

A Final Word

Your house is made of decisions — somebody chose that brick's grade, its type, its size, its color. Most of the time they chose well, and the brick will outlast the mortgage, the cars, and probably all of us. When it needs repair, the job is to respect those original decisions: same grade or better for the exposure, mortar softer than the brick, size and method matched, color last.

The wrong replacement brick fails fast. The right one disappears into the wall and lasts as long as the originals around it. Now you know the difference — grade, type, method, size, color, in that order. That's the whole book in one sentence.

For the rest of the library — costs, maintenance calendars, hiring guides — visit [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>). The [Brick Industry Association](<https://www.gobrick.com>) publishes the technical standards behind everything in this book, if you want to go deeper. And when a repair needs hands that know [brick identification and repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — matching the unit, the mortar, and the method — that's what we do.

About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system — (469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).