Older homes in Huntington village, Northport, and Cold Spring Harbor have something new houses cannot copy: character that took a century or two to build. Their roofs are part of that character. They are also where decades of repairs, previous owners' shortcuts, and hidden surprises tend to collect. Replacing a roof on an older home means respecting the building while fixing what time has done to it.

What Makes Older Roofs Different

Homes from the Victorian era, early Colonials, and mid-century Capes were built with different framing, different decking, and often different expectations than modern construction. Common things you may find once the old roofing comes off:

- Plank or skip sheathing (boards with gaps) instead of solid plywood
- Multiple layers of old shingles, adding weight and hiding problems
- Rafters or framing that has settled, bowed, or been modified
- Minimal or no insulation and ventilation compared with modern standards
- Original or very old chimneys with deteriorated masonry or flashing

None of these is a reason to panic, but each affects the plan and the budget.

Local Conditions That Age Roofs Faster

Salt air near the harbors accelerates corrosion of flashing and fasteners. Nor'easters push rain into aging seams. Mature trees shade slopes, encourage moss, and clog valleys. Freeze-thaw cycles work into small cracks every winter. On an older home, these effects have had a long time to accumulate.

Start With a Careful Inspection

A good inspection of an older roof includes the attic. Look for stained boards, damp insulation, daylight, rusted nail tips, and signs of past leaks. Ask the inspector to photograph what they find and explain what must be done now versus what can wait. On a historic house, it is reasonable to ask whether decking and framing can be repaired in place rather than replaced wholesale.

Material Choices That Respect the House

Material General Character Typical Considerations Architectural asphalt Widely available, many styles Fits most budgets, less period-authentic Cedar shake Traditional New England look Needs maintenance, higher cost Natural slate Very long-lived, classic Heavy, requires skilled installers Synthetic slate or shake Imitates the look at lower weight Compare warranties and appearance Standing-seam metal Durable, clean lines Suits some styles better than others

Lifespans and costs in this table are approximate and vary by quality and installation. If your home is in a historic district or an incorporated village with design review, confirm what is allowed before choosing a material.

Slate and Other Specialty Roofs

If your older home has slate, do not assume it must go. Slate often outlasts the fasteners and flashing that hold it on, so repair or partial restoration can be the smarter move when the slate itself is sound. A roofer experienced with slate can tell whether you are facing individual repairs or a full re-roof. This is not a job for a crew that mostly installs standard shingles.

Structural and Weight Questions

Replacing a light roof with a heavier material, or removing multiple layers to find damaged framing, can change the load on the structure. When the plan involves heavier materials or visible sagging, ask whether a structural review is advisable. It is cheaper to find out before the work than during it.

Ventilation and Insulation

Many older attics were never designed for modern airflow. Poor ventilation can shorten the life of a new roof and contribute to moisture and ice problems in winter. Ask your contractor how they plan to improve ventilation without compromising the look of the house, and whether any insulation changes would be worthwhile.

Flashing, Chimneys, and Details

Older homes usually have more chimneys, dormers, and decorative features, and the flashing around them is where leaks typically start. Copper or other durable flashing metals are common choices on better jobs, though cost varies. Make sure the proposal states what flashing will be installed and where.

Finding the Right Contractor

Choose someone who has worked on older homes and can show examples. A trusted provider of Long Island Exterior Co. should be comfortable discussing sheathing, framing, and period-appropriate materials, not just shingles. Confirm that any home improvement contractor holds a Suffolk County Consumer Affairs license, and ask for proof of liability and workers' compensation insurance.

Permits and Historic Review

Roof replacement typically requires a permit. In unincorporated hamlets such as Huntington Station, Greenlawn, and Dix Hills, that is the Town of Huntington Building Department. Incorporated villages, including Lloyd Harbor, Huntington Bay, Northport, and Asharoken, run their own building departments, and designated historic properties may face extra review. Confirm with the correct office before you order materials.

Planning for Surprises

Set aside a contingency for decking and framing repairs. Ask how the proposal prices rotted boards and how extra work is approved in writing. On older homes, surprises are the norm, not the exception.

The Bottom Line

A roof on an older home is both a repair and a preservation decision. Inspect thoroughly, choose materials that suit the house, plan for hidden conditions, and hire someone with real experience on homes like yours.

About the Author

Thomas K. is a writer with years of hands-on experience in residential roofing, including restoration work on older Colonials and Victorians. He helps homeowners weigh preservation and practicality before starting a job.