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HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT BI-FOLD DOORS

BUYER'S GUIDE



IAN LONGBOTTOM

Managing Director,
Sliders UK

Sliders UK is a leading manufacturer and fabricator of Secured by Design patio doors, bi-folding doors and composite doors.



Bi-fold doors offer homeowners an opportunity to transform living spaces, creating light and airy rooms with the freedom to enjoy what's outside. Modern bi-folds are a great alternative to patio doors, a stylish way of enhancing an extension or even a way of linking spaces together such as a conservatory. However, as with any home improvement, take time to consider the options – material, colours, formats – and other aspects like energy efficiency and security.

Here are a few thoughts on what to consider when choosing bi-fold doors:

Picture a stunning panoramic wall of glass in your home. Something that modern bi-fold doors now deliver where space is limited or as a high-design, contemporary alternative to patio doors.

With ultra slim frames there's nothing to obscure your view or stop all that extra light flooding into the heart of your home. State of the art frames and hardware now mean that doors open with the lightest of touches and fold back flatter than ever before. That means you can create a continuous 'garden room' that stretches from inside your home to the great outdoors in one single uninterrupted space.

Aesthetics

As with any home improvement, it pays to consider the architectural style of your home and ensure that the system you choose complements it. This is not to say you should be seeking an exact match – contrasting traditional with contemporary can look fantastic when done properly.

Bi-fold doors made from timber tend to be traditional designs; with deep bottom rails and darker colours, while those crafted from PVC-U and aluminium offer understated profiles with slimmer sightlines and on-trend contemporary colours such as pale green and grey.

And when it comes to colour, it's not just a matter of exterior finishes: you can achieve striking contrasts by mixing and matching with the interior – be it in colour, white or woodgrain.

Here is a general guide on what colours to choose:

- ▶ Cream or light coloured window frame finishes go well with stone and buff-coloured brickwork;
- ▶ White or grey complement red brickwork;
- ▶ Solid colour or grey for timber weatherboarding.

With such a wide choice now available, dark woodgrain finishes like Rosewood are no longer as popular.

Choice of material

It is now generally accepted that no material is indisputably better than another. It all comes down to personal preference and, of course, budget. 80% of windows and doors in UK housing are PVC-U, around 10% Aluminium and 10% Timber.

PVC-U systems may offer some price advantages over aluminium, and are less onerous to maintain than timber.

Technical design, including hardware

Modern PVC-U bi-folds are designed from the bottom up using purpose-made systems, so ensuring that the doors work perfectly, time and time again, for years and years. Most bi-folds work on a track and roller system, which is crucial to smooth operation. Many will have a single track – often only at the top. While single-track systems can work well, a dual track carriage – with rollers at the bottom and security pins in the top track - offers better stability for smooth operation, guaranteeing trouble-free performance for the lifetime of the doors.

Hardware and handles are also critical for reliable performance, so establish whether the accessories to your doors are designed with bi-folds in mind, or are off-the-shelf that have been borrowed for use on them.



Configurations

In respect of configuration – the size of the doors, and how many panels comprise the opening – a huge range of bespoke options are available. Starting from the basis that minimum usual widths are in the range of 2m to a maximum of 6m; and, and maximum height is typically 2.3m; the choice is then yours – from two panels to seven, and in a host of combinations from paired to three and four panels. Think whether your bi-fold door will need to double-up as an entrance door. If it does, you will need to specify a ‘traffic’ door, which operates as a normal entrance door, with the door ‘stack’ set to one side (left or right) when folded back. If you don’t need an entrance door, you may want equal opening ‘stacks’ left and right, with no traditional exterior handle required, for a neater aesthetic.

Energy efficiency and triple-glazing

The general rule here is to go with the best energy rating you can afford, subject to considerations such as triple-glazing (below). It’s logical as it won’t just make your home feel more comfortable, it will also help minimise energy bills and increase sound insulation, reducing noise from outside. Aside from this, Building Regulations stipulate minimum thermal performance requirements for doors and windows: you should check with your local building control to discover the current requirements.

At present *Building Regulations Approved Document L* requires that ‘whole element’ doors meet a minimum energy performance standard of 1.8W/m²K U-value or better for existing dwellings in England and Wales.

In the search for increased energy efficiency, you may wonder whether it is worth the extra cost to have triple glazing rather than double-glazing. Many companies try to sell triple glazing and it is heavily advertised on TV.

However, bear in mind that it’s not necessarily the optimum value option. That’s because it could add around 30% to the cost of

the glazing (and bi-folds have a lot of glass) for relatively minor improvements in performance. And it can also be very heavy!

Thresholds

Consider what type of door threshold you require. Many people like the idea of a recessed fully ‘flush’ threshold to merge outdoor and indoor spaces. Buildings open to the public are also required to have a low threshold by law, to meet Part M of the Building Regulations. But if water ingress could be an issue (in areas prone to flooding, for example) you may want to opt for a frame at the bottom of the door.

Security

Most commonly bi-folds are on the ground floor at the rear of houses, which may lead to concerns that – like patio doors – they may be a target for break-ins. The new Part Q of the Building Regulations (from October 2015) dictates minimum security standards for doors, including bi-folds, in new houses – and so you can relax if specifying them as an option off-plan. Where the bi-folds are destined for an existing home – as a new opening or as replacements for old patio doors – then seek out Secured by Design (SBD) accredited systems. SBD is an organisation owned by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) that promotes a voluntary standard designed for quality security products.

Quality accreditations

For extra peace of mind, consider doors which have independent quality accreditation. One such accreditation is that offered by the British Board of Agrément Certificate (BBA) – and one that can be considered a ‘gold standard’ benchmark for home improvement products.

An Agrément Certificate is the mark of quality, safety and reliability that means the product is fit-for-purpose and is only awarded to those products and systems that have successfully completed a series of comprehensive assessments. These include laboratory tests, on-site evaluations, quality management checks and inspections of production and provide clients and specifiers the assurance that the product will perform as described.



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