

Choosing an Ornamental Aluminum Fence

Understanding Ornamental Aluminum

All ornamental aluminum fences are not created equal! It is important to understand what materials are used and what design features are incorporated in the fence before choosing. With improved technologies, there are some *very significant differences* among brands that determine the product's performance over its lifetime and ultimately your satisfaction with your purchase decision. Factors to consider are:

- **Coating** – quality of the powder coating
- **Design** – visibility of fasteners and elegance of components
- **Warranty** – what is covered and probability that it will be honored

1. Type of coating

Because you and your neighbors will see the physical appearance of your fence every day, *the coating is considered by many to be the **most important factor***. For most people, the installation of a new ornamental aluminum fence is a purchase of several thousand dollars or more. You should expect to receive a product that will withstand the elements and look great for the lifetime of the fence, usually 20+ years.

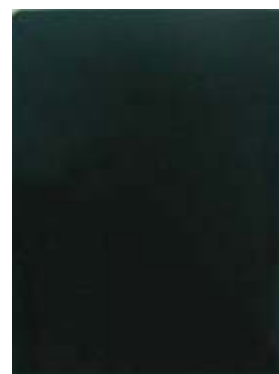
Architectural Grade vs. General Purpose Powder Coating

Powder coatings can be thought of in two broad categories, Architectural Grade and General Purpose. General purpose powder coatings have been used as an alternative to wet paint for years on items such as lawnmowers and bicycles which are not continuously exposed to the weather and sun. These coatings work well when you are not concerned about color fade or gloss retention. However, your ornamental fence adds beauty and value to your home so color and gloss retention is very important. As a result, it is recommended to choose a verified Architectural Grade powder coating. It is also important to note that all coatings will fade over time due to exposure to the elements and sunlight but an Architectural Grade coating will outperform a General Purpose coating in every aspect. Here are pictures taken after exposure equivalent to 5 years of South Florida weather. As you'll see, the grade of powder coating makes a big difference to how good the product will look in the future.

General Purpose Powder Coating



Architectural Grade Powder Coating



Performance at
5 years

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Comparing Apples to Apples

It can be somewhat difficult to distinguish among manufacturers' claims regarding their powder coating because the same standards are not used by all manufacturers. Some may use only a few tests such as salt spray and humidity resistance. There are at least **15 performance tests** as defined by the American Architectural Manufacturers Association (AAMA) to verify a coating as architectural grade. As with any claim from a manufacturer, a **third party validation from an independent testing lab** verifying that the manufacturer's product meets established standards of performance is the best way to ensure you are receiving a quality product and the manufacturer's claims are true and complete.

2. Design

The design determines how the fence will look and perform. For many years manufacturers have used screws to hold the pickets to the rails. A few things result from this design. First, it creates an unsightly look since you see the screw heads on one side of the fence. Second, the coating on the screws sometimes wears off over time which leaves a silver color screw head visible. Some screws may even pop out because of the expansion and contraction caused by the temperature changes.



Deterioration of coating on screw heads and brackets.

A few manufacturers have developed and patented screwless designs. These designs eliminate the disadvantages of using screws to attach pickets to rails and rails to posts. Screwless designs result in:

- **Good neighbor** fence (looks the same on both sides)
- **Cleaner** and more elegant appearance
- **Better performance** – no screw “pops” or screw head coating issues

3. Warranty

It is important to understand a few things about the warranty since the quality of the warranty may give you an indication as to the quality of the product. When buying a car, you would prefer 10 year 100,000 mile warranty to a 3 year 36,000 mile warranty. Similarly, most ornamental aluminum

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fence warranties cover defects such as cracking, chipping or peeling of the coating. But what if the warranty also covered fading per an industry standard. This is more like the 10 year 100,000 mile warranty for the ornamental aluminum fence. Another important question to ask is, “what is the probability the company providing the warranty be in business 5 – 10 years from now?”