

Selecting Colors

By Katharine Conley

MANY PEOPLE ASK, "What color should I paint my house?" Roger Moss has already in his article stressed the importance of color placement. It is as significant a decision to place the colors properly as it is choosing the colors in the first place. The following guide should help you find color combinations that are historically appropriate and suitable for your taste.

PRE-1800 HOUSES were painted whatever colors were obtainable. White paint was not available in a pre-mixed form before the 19th century, but white lead was used to make white paint on site from early colonial days. Those people who could not afford or did not have access to white lead used whatever natural pigments they could (when they didn't simply leave their clapboards to weather) such as rust which made "spanish brown" and "indian red."

HOUSE COLORS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY between 1820 and 1920. Popular colors were pale, then dark towards the end of the 19th century, and pale again at the century's turn. These changes were made according to predictable changes in taste, but also according to changes in house styles.

BETWEEN 1800 AND 1840, houses were mostly painted in whites and creams with green shutters. The classical revival styles were most popular partly because Thomas Jefferson fostered them, thinking them best suited to the democratic ideals of the young American republic. After 1840, Andrew Jackson Downing helped start a fashion for romantic Gothic and Italian style cottages that were better painted in soft stone and field colors than in the more severe colors of the classical revival styles.

THE 1860's AND 1870's introduced more imposing formal styles like Second Empire, Renaissance Revival and Italianate. These larger houses were suited for their role in the expanding cities in which they were built. They were sometimes painted in pale colors to suggest the formality of stone palaces, but more often they were painted in dark greens and reds suggestive of the masonry and brick buildings they emulated. These darker colors were used by architects such as James Renwick, who designed some of the buildings in one of America's first national museum complexes: The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

BY THE 1880's AND 1890's, colors were not only dark but vivid and plentiful. Queen Anne and Stick styles both boasted a wealth of detail and color to heighten the effect of all those balusters, shingles, porches and towers. And these colors became more vivid as the century wore on. Initially they were predominantly painted in earth tones of green and rust, reminiscent of the natural pigments used in the glazes that distinguished Craftsman style Rookwood pottery. Later the hues were increasingly bright and joyously fanciful, similar to the luminous colors used by Tiffany in his art glass.

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY witnessed a colonial revival that brought back plain white and creams. The many-colored late Victorian Queen Anne houses were masked in white, as were houses of every other earlier style, whether they were built in a colonial revival style or not. The movement from pale to dark and back to pale had come full circle.

Choose By Style

WHEN SELECTING COLORS, the best place to start is with your house's style. If you choose colors that were initially intended for the style, you will show it in its best light. Even if your house was built years after its style was at its peak, (a Greek Revival built in 1870, for example), you should still paint your house in the colors suitable for that style.

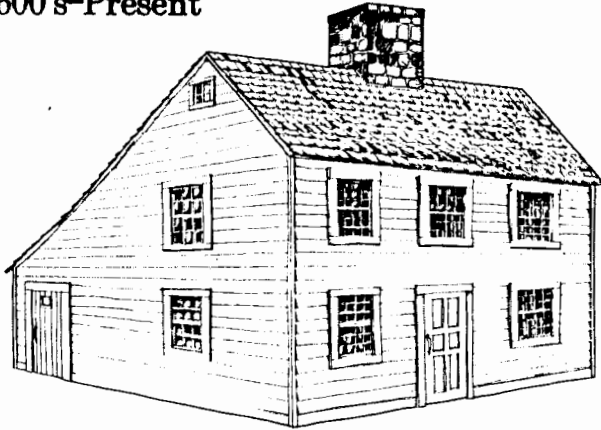
PAINT COLORS, like house styles, did not conveniently go out of fashion as soon as a new color combination or house style was introduced. Best to study the details on your house (shape, mass, type of roof, windows, porches), and determine which style it most closely resembles. Then choose colors accordingly. Most houses are not true examples of any one style. Frequently they are transitional and combine details or characteristics of more than one style.

IN THE GUIDE that appears on the following pages, the odds are you won't find a house that is exactly like yours. But you should be able to find a style--or combination of styles--that approximates it, and the color ranges that are suitable.

Illustrated by Charles Eanet. Queen Anne house adapted from "Gift to the Street."

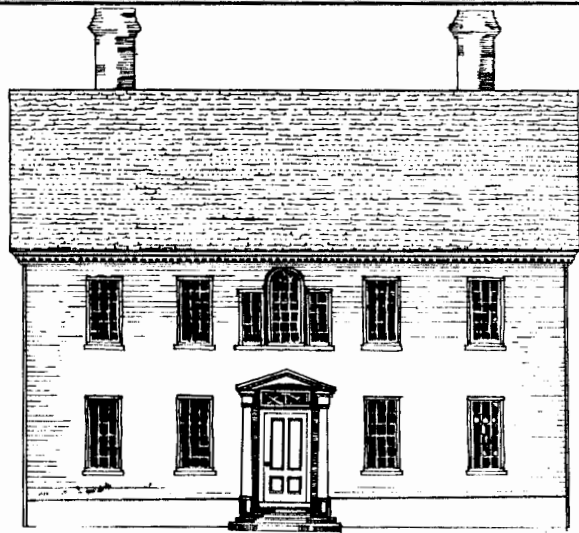
Saltbox

1600's-Present



Early saltboxes were usually left unpainted. Wood weathered to a brown-gray color; today, stain would be appropriate. Even after the introduction of paint, colors were limited. White lead was the pigment for white paint, while other natural pigments were used to make dark brown and red.

Body	Trim
White	Same
Spanish brown	
Indian red	
Ochre	



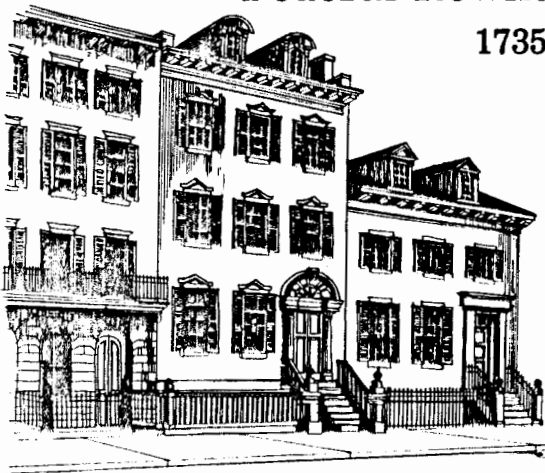
Georgian 1700-1800

The classic formal Georgian house would most often have been painted white, with green or black shutters. Earlier, less formal houses of this style were sometimes painted in the darker, colonial colors.

Body	Trim	Door
White	White	Dark brown
Dark brown	Same	Black-green
Barn red	Cream	Dark blue
Dark green	Any of above	Red

Federal Rowhouses

1735-1835



These urban houses were often painted in light, severe colors with white or cream trim. Doors were dark: Black or natural dark wood. Shutters were dark red, green or brown.

Body	Trim	Door
White	White	Black
Pale yellow	Cream	Natural
Cream	Same	Dark green
Medium blue	Any of above	Dark brown

Classic Farmhouse

1800-Present



These houses were built throughout the 19th century, and were painted whatever colors were popular at the time. Many were painted white, sometimes with red roofs. Often these houses were painted plainly all in one color, with only the doors colored dark brown or red for contrast.



Greek Revival

1820-1865

Suitably "classical" colors were white or pale yellow, accented with white or cream trim. Pale gray, blue, green, and yellow are also considered appropriate.

Body	Trim	Door
White	Cool white	Dark green
Pale yellow	Dark green	Medium blue
Light gray	Sandstone	Black
Sandstone	Any of above	Any of above



Gothic Revival/

Carpenter Gothic 1840-1860

Gothic Revival mansions and Carpenter Gothic Cottages alike were most often painted in light browns and pinks. Trim was done in the same or similar colors, or painted dark brown. Doors and shutters were dark.

Body	Trim	Door
Rose beige	Dark brown	Natural
Light brown	Medium brown	Dark red
Dark brown	Light brown	Dark brown
Medium blue	Light gray	Dark green

Vernacular Italianate

1840-1880

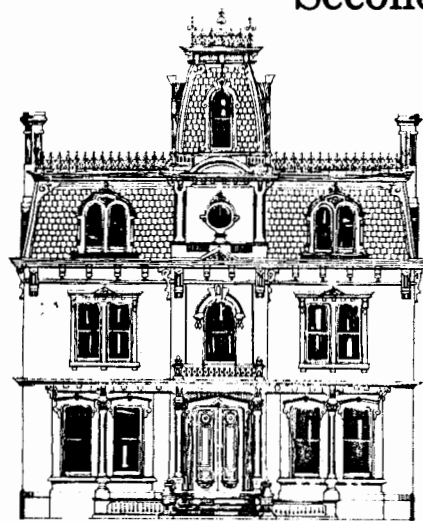


These were painted in warm, light colors with contrasting trim, and dark doors. Trim was often the same color, but in a different shade—lighter or darker. Colors range from cream to brown, gray to green.

Body	Trim	Door
Warm brown	Beige	Natural
Dark brown	Warm brown	Dark green
Dark gray	Light gray	Dark brown
Light green	Medium gray	Any of above

Second Empire/ Mansard

1860-1880



Details were picked out in dark greens, reds and browns. Earlier houses continued to be painted in Italianate colors that resembled stone. Trim was generally lighter, with doors and shutters in subtle contrast to the trim.

Body	Trim	Door
Dark green	Beige	Natural
Dark red	Cream	Dark brown
Brown	Light brown	Green-black
Beige	Yellow	Any of above

Stick Style

1860-1885



Body and trim were painted contrasting dark colors (red, gray and brown) to heighten the decorative trim. Doors were often oak or another unpainted hardwood.

Body	Trim	Door
Medium gray	Dark gray	Oak
Indian red	Dark brown	Unpainted wood
Ochre	Green-black	Either of above
Dark blue	Beige	"

Stick-Eastlake

1870-1900



Bold, colorful contrasting color schemes—reds, greens, yellows with maroons and blues—earned these West Coast houses the name "painted ladies," even as far back as 1885.

Base	Body	Trim	Sash	Door	Cornice
Pompeian red	Olive	Bronze	Indian red	Oak	Terra cotta
Indian red	Maroon	Seal	Yellow	"	"
Granite	White		Bronze	"	Sky blue

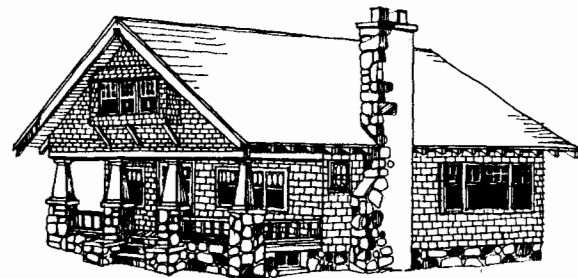


Colonial Revival

1880-Present

These went back to pale colors: Mostly white or cream, sometimes pale yellow, with white or cream trim. The difference from earlier, true colonial styles is the large size of the house and the frequent presence of a big front porch.

Body	Trim	Door
White	Cream	Oak
Light yellow	Warm white	Unpainted wood
Tan	Any of above	Either of above
Medium gray	"	"



Craftsman Bungalow

1900-1930

These bungalows, like other turn-of-century styles—Tudor, Shingle—were unpainted. The natural materials used, stone and wood, were untreated except for an occasional stain to darken the wood. Stucco, too, was left a natural color.

COLOR	CONSIDERATIONS	PURPOSE	MEMBERS
Body Color	Choose color based on roof, chimney, building materials and setting	Define building	Non-decorative elements
Primary Trim Color	If body color is dark, choose a light primary trim color, and vice-versa.	Outline building	Cornerboards, cornice, window and door surrounds, major structural members of porch.
Secondary Trim Color	Could be body color for 3-color scheme	Define details	Details such as recessed panels, cornice brackets, porch balusters
Accent Color	Should be a darker color than trim colors Use sparingly Could be primary trim color for 3-color scheme	Highlight fine detail	Details such as window sash and smaller details



Paint Companies With Historic Paint Colors



Terms Cash:

'Who makes historical paint colors?' is a common question we get from readers. There are many choices these days; here's a rundown of who's got what. Bear in mind that some colors are documented originals while others are adaptations.

Allentown Paint Manufacturing Co., Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 597, Allentown, PA 18105. (215) 433-4273. Breining's Ready Mixed Oil Paints, linseed oil/alkyd exterior paints. 12 colors originally produced from 1855 to 1913. Color card is \$3.

Benjamin Moore & Co., Dept. OHJ, 52 Chestnut Ridge Rd., Montvale, NJ 07645. (201) 573-9600. Historical Color Collection, 18th- & 19th-century colors, alkyd enamels and latex paints. Free interior and exterior color charts.

Finnaren & Haley, Inc., Dept. OHJ, 2320 Haverford Rd., Ardmore, PA 19003. (215) 649-5000. Authentic (Colonial) Colors of Historic Philadelphia, alkyd oil base and acrylic-latex paints. Free chart of interior and exterior colors.

Fuller O'Brien Paints, Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 864, Brunswick, GA 31520. (912) 265-7650. Cape May Victorian Colors and Exterior-Interior Heritage Color Collection. Victorian Color chart, \$1.30; Heritage Color Collection, free.

Martin-Senour Co., Dept. OHJ, 1370 Ontario Ave., N.W., Cleveland, OH 44113. Williamsburg Paint Colors, interior and exterior latex paints. Color chart \$1. Order from Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Dept. OHJ, Craft House, P.O. Box C, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Call (800) 446-9240 for the dealer nearest you.

Muralo Co., Dept. OHJ, 148 E. Fifth St., Bayonne, NJ 07002. Georgetown Colors in 100% linseed oil and latex paints; also calcimine paint. Write for name of distributor - no literature.

The Old-Fashioned Milk Paint Co., Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 222H, Groton, MA 01450. (617) 448-6336. Genuine milk paint in powder form in eight colors. Send \$.60 for color sample card.

Pittsburgh Paints, PPG Industries, Inc., Dept. OHJ, One PPG Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15272. Historic Colors of the 18th and 19th centuries are greyed tints and shades that complement old homes of all periods. They're available for interior and exterior in alkyd, oil, latex, and acrylic paint. Free color folder.

Pratt & Lambert, Dept. OHJ, 75 Tonawanda St., Buffalo, NY 14207. (716) 873-6000. Early American Colors from Greenfield Village duplicate colors of the 18th and 19th centuries; available for interior and exterior in latex. Color cards, \$.50.

Sherwin-Williams Co., Dept. OHJ, P.O. 6939, Cleveland, OH 44101. (216) 566-2332. Heritage Colors, 40 historic paint colors documented in the book *Century of Color: Exterior Decoration for American Buildings 1820-1920*. The colors are available in either latex or oil-based paints. \$2 color card.

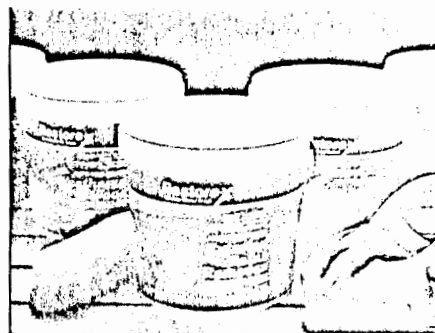
Stulb Paint & Chemical Co., Inc., Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 297, Norristown, PA 19404. (215) 272-6660. Old Sturbridge Paint Colours and Old Village Paint Colours, authentic 18th- and 19th-century colors, for interior or exterior use. Available only in oil-based paint. Color cards, \$1.

If you don't find what you're looking for in the Restoration Products pages you're sure to find it in The Old-House Journal Catalog.

Renewer & Remover

Restore-x Exterior Paint Remover and its companion, Weathered Wood Renewer, are relatively safe and economical for stripping (prior to repainting) or renewing weathered, stained wood.

The Exterior Paint Remover is a professional-strength, lye-based (sodium hydroxide) product that will remove paint and heavy-bodied stains from wood, masonry, and metal. It comes ready to use; a gallon covers from 150 to 200 square feet when brushed or rolled on. After a waiting period, the surface is scrubbed with a stiff brush and the old finish is rinsed off. If the chemical remover dries out before it is rinsed off, it can be reactivated and softened by misting it with water. After rinsing away the sludge, you neutralize the wood with an oxalic-acid conditioner that should also bring back the color of the wood.



The product's drawbacks are similar to those of other chemical paint removers. The water rinse will probably raise the grain. You have to wait until the wood is thoroughly dry before repainting. Also, the manufacturer suggests that in some cases a high-pressure (not garden hose) rinse is necessary to remove the paint. High-pressure washes can cause damage similar to sandblasting. Nevertheless, the product offers a convenient way to buy an effective and economical paint remover.

The Weathered Wood Renewer, chemically similar to the Remover, will remove both weathering discoloration from unfinished wood, and semi-transparent stain from previously treated wood. It's intended to give siding, decks, fencing, and outdoor furniture the look of new wood. Neither product works on baked-on enamel finishes, epoxies, or plastic/polyurethane-based clear finishes. Restore-x is sold nationwide at lumberyards and building suppliers; for the dealer nearest you and a free brochure, write to Restec Industries, Inc., Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 2747, Eugene, OR 97402. (503) 345-1142.

COLOR GUIDELINES FOR OLDER HOUSES

Because of the differences among localities, the absence of precise color rules, and the varying individual preferences of the original owners, the color

guidelines presented in the table on pages 185-187 are not set standards. They indicate a general framework for selecting colors in keeping with particular architectural styles at the time they were popular.

POSSIBLE PAINT COLORS FOR OLDER HOMES

Architectural Style	House Siding or Body	Trim	Shutters and Blinds	Sash
Seventeenth Century	Probably unpainted with exposed wood siding left to weather to soft, warm earth tones of browns or light grays	Same	Same	Same
Eighteenth Century - Georgian				
1700 to about 1750	Barn reds Whites (Virginia) Yellow ochres Dark evergreens Gray greens Bluish sage greens Warm grays Chocolate browns Ochres Taupes Tans Fawns	Whites Creams Sometimes same color as body of the house Less common: red browns grays yellows	Deep greens Blacks	
Around 1750 to 1780	Creams Whites			Dark green putty lines, or entire sash in New England
Federal 1790 to 1830	Houses with wood siding, gentle pastel shades: light yellows creamy beiges bluish grays smoky blues muted greens Off-whites	Lighter tones than siding: off-whites creams pale yellows buffs restrained blues	Urban houses: rich greens dark reds deep browns blacks Creamy off-whites	
Greek Revival 1820 to 1860	Whites Rural New England soft shades: pale yellows light blue grays buffs muted green grays smoky grays	Whites For nonwhite houses: gray blues olive greens buffs evergreen greens	Bottle greens Chrome greens Vivid greens	Whites Putty lines: black or green black

*Preserving & Maintaining the Older Home
by Shirley Hanson & Nancy Hubby*

POSSIBLE PAINT COLORS FOR OLDER HOMES (Continued)

Architectural Style	House Siding or Body	Trim	Shutters and Blinds	Sash
Gothic Revival 1820 to 1860	Light earthy colors: fawns warm grays gray tans stone grays stone browns smoky grays slate grays straw colors rose beiges chocolate browns	Same color as the body of the house but in a contrasting shade Light-colored home with darker trim Darker-colored home with lighter trim Creamy off-whites	Dark greens Deeper shade of body of the house Natural wood color, stained	
Italianate 1845 to 1880	Warm, neutral hues on early houses: earth browns muted stone grays yellow ochres peachy tans moss greens Later houses: yellows grayish greens terra-cotta reds dark browns blue grays	Early houses: creamy off-whites beiges same color as body of the house but in a darker or lighter shade Later houses: evergreen greens deep browns dark olive greens	Early houses: warm browns Later houses: deep forest greens reddish browns	Sometimes: blacks chocolate browns deep greens
Stick Style 1855 to 1900	Natural weathered grays Neutral hues: soft browns light sage greens whites Maroons Terra-cotta reds Ochres	Dark grays Buffs Evergreen greens Dark browns Accent colors: blacks chrome yellows peachy tans	Dark forest greens	Sometimes: whites
Mansard 1860 to 1880	Maroons Rich earth tones: warm red browns stone grays lead grays blue grays dark terra-cotta reds chocolate browns umber browns olive greens evergreen greens sage greens Dark golden ochres Burnt oranges Parchments Yellowish beiges Soft tans	Color contrasts with the body of the house: evergreen greens light chocolates whites beiges creams yellows	Slate grays Green blacks Dark browns	Sometimes: velvety browns or grays
Romanesque 1875 to 1895	Natural masonry	Red browns Chocolate browns Dark stone grays		

POSSIBLE PAINT COLORS FOR OLDER HOMES (Continued)

Architectural Style	House Siding or Body	Trim	Shutters and Blinds	Sash
Queen Anne 1876 to 1900	Early houses: warm brick reds terra-cotta reds buttercup yellows deep sands medium olives fawns deep greenish yellow ochres gray greens	Wood houses: maroons medium chocolate browns slate grays umber browns evergreen greens rich tans chrome yellows sage greens sap greens burnt siennas	Evergreen greens Dark reds Tans Dark blues Two tones	Maroons Dark reds Olives Deep greens Alizarian crimsons Whites Putty lines: sometimes vermilion
Mostly multicolored				
Harmonious tones, three to five on one house, to empha- size asym- metrical lines, varied textures, and decora- tive details	Later houses: soft ash yellows muted grays olive greens medium ochres bluish bottle greens tans dark browns sage greens yellowish avocados nutmegs russets sandish taupes	Stone or brick houses, earth colors: burnt siennas dark coppers Indian reds chocolate browns sand colors maroons deep tans rich ochres dark burnt oranges whites		
	Less common, with sin- gle colors or contrasting shades of the same color: browns grays olives	Less common, with houses having single body colors: contrasting shades of the same color		
Shingle Style 1880 to 1900	Weathered or stained shingles: deep grays earth browns silver grays moss greens	Natural wood oiled or stained with deep Venetian reds Less often, whites		Similar to trim
Muted, mono- chromatic earth tones				
Revivals of the Georgian and Federal Styles 1885 to 1940				
Georgian Revival	Whites Pale yellows Soft buffs Muted terra-cotta reds Pale olives Medium grays	Whites Creamy ivories	Dark bottle greens Deep olives At times, the same color as the body of the house	Whites (especially on brick or stone homes) Same color as trim Dark greens Sometimes black putty lines
Federal Revival		Brick houses, whites		