

Paint By Numbers

If you've ever painted your house, you'll know that everyone from grandma to the garbage man feels free to weigh in on your color choices. BY CATHERINE LUNDIE

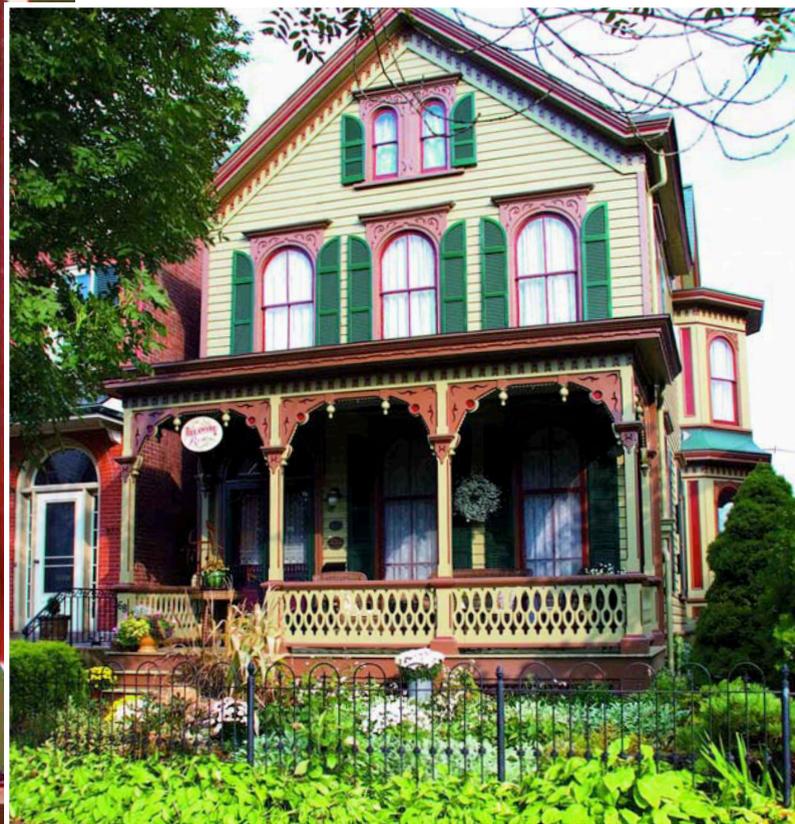
OLD-HOUSE OWNERS often feel a burden to live up to some ideal past color scheme. Relax! Remember that when your house was built, the homeowners most likely stood out front, color chart or paint samples in hand, just like you. They weren't infallible and you don't have to be, either. It's possible to indulge your personal color sense and give your home period-appropriate curb appeal too.

Standing in front of houses whose color schemes they liked, fan-deck in hand, is exactly what Lou Toboz and Ron Walker did when they chose paint colors for their 1887 Queen Anne in Lambertville, New Jersey. The setting was a visit to Cape

May, famous for its pristine Victorian-era homes. Each time a color or combination caught their eye, they matched it up with a swatch. The colors in their polychromatic paint scheme—reds, browns, and golds—work because they're closely related on the color wheel, a great trick to remember when you're dealing with the complexities of belt courses, gables, and gingerbread.

Not surprisingly, their home receives a steady stream of admiration from passers-by, encouraging the two men to start a color consultation business, Coryell Colors. "When in doubt, go darker," Toboz advises. "Many people want the look but get intimidated and end up with a washed-





1882 QUEEN ANNE

All colors from Sherwin Williams Preservation Palette

- BODY COLOR** 2815 Renwick Olive
- SHUTTERS** 2809 Rookwood Shutter Green
- WINDOW CASINGS** 2807 Rookwood Medium Brown
- WINDOW FRAMES, TRIM ACCENT** 2802 Rookwood Red

LIVING in a town filled with 19th-century homes, Roz Batt and Mike Hack enlisted the advice of other old-house owners (including Lou Toboz and Ron Walker) when they decided to paint their 1882 Queen Anne in Lambertville, New Jersey. In the four-color paint scheme, the body color is a restful olive and the shutters are an understated greenish-black. Following the credo that the brightest or darkest colors are reserved for trim, the window frames are a deep red, with the recesses picked out in red and a rich brown.

LEFT: Rich, earthy reds and greens have an affinity for one another and are a classic paint scheme color combination. **OPPOSITE:** The owners of a 1882 Queen Anne chose the boldest and darkest colors to highlight small architectural details. **ABOVE:** The overall effect visually “pops” through the skillful use of color.

RIGHT: A dark primer instead of a light one might have helped darken the trim color without the addition of extra pigment. **BELOW:** Extraordinarily dark colors can make good accent colors, picking out and accentuating architectural details.



DO:

- **PAINT LARGE TEST PATCHES** on each side of your house (especially before you order 20 gallons of paint). Color has a complex relationship with light, varying with time of day and weather.
- **MAINTAIN CONSISTENCY** in trim color, whether your home has one body color or two.
- Take into consideration the color and value of **YOUR ROOF AND FOUNDATION:** are they warm or cool? What colors best flatter them?
- **HARMONIZE YOUR COLOR SCHEME** with your streetscape and part of the country. An Arts and Crafts home in the north, for example, might be painted in browns and greens, whereas in warmer, brighter climates, a lighter color scheme would be appropriate.
- If your goal is a deep, saturated color, **USE A DARK PRIMER** rather than a light one.

1912 BUNGALOW

BODY COLOR (CLAPBOARDS) Benjamin Moore 511 Pine Grove
BODY COLOR (SHINGLES) Benjamin Moore 1302 Sweet Rosy Brown
TRIM Williamsburg (Martin Senour) CW120 Bryan House Chocolate

“**T**HE HOUSE was teal blue when we were called in,” laughs Barbara Pierce, who with partner C.J. Hurley does color consulting in Portland, Oregon. The new owner wanted a historically authentic paint scheme. He was also receptive to the idea of “top-weighting” the house with a rich color above a more subdued one. The more neutral, deep-olive body color went on the first-storey clapboards, with a rich reddish shade applied to the shingles on the top storey. For the trim colors, the homeowner wanted to evoke the feeling of being in the shade of the forest. He drew the line at a nearly black accent color, however, opting for a warmer dark brown on the belt course and eaves.

DON'T:

- **USE STRONG COLORS FOR THE BODY** of the house; neutral colors will hold their appeal better over time.
- **BECOME INFATUATED WITH ACCENT COLORS.** One or two bold accent hues will enhance detailing without distracting from the harmony of the whole.
- **TALK YOURSELF INTO A COLOR SCHEME** just because you believe it to be historically correct. You should find your colors both pleasing and easy to live with.
- **DISMISS THE IDEA OF A MONOCHROMATIC COLOR SCHEME.** A rich palette can be achieved using various tones of one color, with complementary trim.

1915 BUNGALOW

BODY COLOR Benjamin Moore Solid Color Stain Mahogany

TRIM Benjamin Moore 462 Vintage Vogue (with additional black)

WHEN Mary-jane Koser decided to perk up the color scheme on her Arts and Crafts bungalow, she chose a rich dark green as a trim accent for shingles stained the color of fallen oak leaves. She nearly fell off the ladder when she saw the first coat, however: "It was a pale mint green, like something from the Bahamas."

Puzzled, she returned to the paint store, where a salesman identified part of her problem: the house stood in full sunlight on top of a hill. The strong light effectively washed out the color, making it appear much lighter than the color on the paint chip. It took copious amounts of black colorant to achieve the right tint. Koser's conclusion? "Paint chips are good to a point, but it's really a matter of experimentation."

out scheme. If you don't like it, remember: it's only paint. You can always paint it again!"

Before hitting the paint store, it's wise to arm yourself with a bit more information. Roger W. Moss's *Paint in America: The Colors of Historic Buildings* (Preservation Press, 1995) is a classic research tool. Reproduction house-pattern books are a good source of advice, often containing color charts or sample schemes. While several paint companies have historic paint lines (See "Painting Online," p. 58), be aware that short of examining your home's original paint layers through a microscope, historic

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PAINTING ONLINE

Color consultants are largely local, best found through word of mouth. Some resources: **CJ HURLEY CENTURY ARTS**

(Oregon) (503) 234-4167, cjhurley.com

▪ **THE COLOR PEOPLE** (Denver) (800) 541-7144, colorpeople.com ▪ Lou Toboz and Ron Walker, **CORYELL COLORS**

(New Jersey), (609) 397-1946 ▪ Sean Steuber, **STEUBER & ASSOCIATES** (Pennsylvania) (215) 766-0730, steuberinc.com

Paint companies that offer historic color collections or palette advice include: **BENJAMIN MOORE** (800) 344-0400, benjaminmoore.com *Historic Color collection; Color Makeover Program offers customized color selection by professional designers* ▪ **CALIFORNIA PAINTS** (800) 225-1141, californiapaints.com *Historic Colors of America palette* ▪ **DURON PAINT & WALLCOVERINGS** (800) 866-6606, duron.com *Mount Vernon Estate of Colors, Colors of Historic Charleston lines*

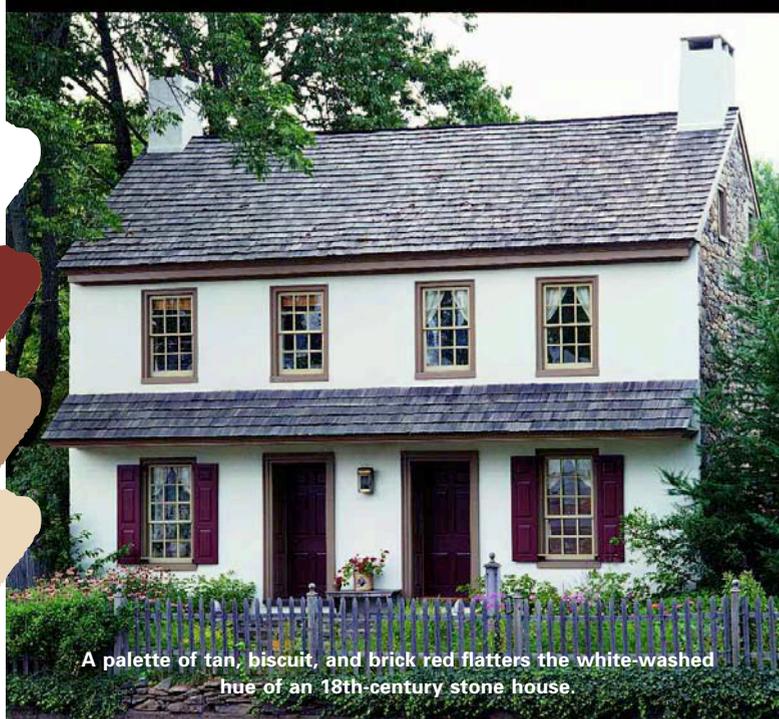
▪ **FINE PAINTS OF EUROPE** (800) 332-1556, finepaintsofeurope.com *High-performance paints with high concentrations of pigment* ▪ **HOMESTEAD HOUSE PAINT CO.** (416) 504-9984, homesteadhouse.ca *Craftsman Collection, Gothic and Italianate Palette*

▪ **MARTIN SENOUR** (800) 677-5270, martinsenour.com *Williamsburg line of historic colors; online Palette Match*

▪ **OLD VILLAGE PAINT COLOURS** (800) 498-7687, old-village.com *Traditional paint palette in oil or latex* ▪ **PRIMROSE DISTRIBUTING/OLDE CENTURY COLORS** (800) 222-3092, oldecenturycolors.com *Oil- and acrylic-based paints in an early American palette* ▪ **SHERWIN WILLIAMS** (216) 566-2000, sherwinwilliams.com *Historical "Preservation Palette," interactive Color Visualizer*

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A palette of tan, biscuit, and brick red flatters the white-washed hue of an 18th-century stone house.

1790 STONE COLONIAL

All colors from Williamsburg (Martin Senour) except stucco

BODY COLOR Whitewashed stucco (comparable color: CW 711 Palace Pale White)

DOORS AND SHUTTERS CW 109 Williamsburg Palace Arms Red

TRIM CW 118 Chowning's Tavern Rose Tan

WINDOW SASH CW 306 Bracken Tenement Biscuit

“MY FIRST PLAN was to paint it all dark red or Spanish brown,” says Charles Frischmann of his circa 1790 stone house in rural New Jersey. “But that seemed a bit too early and primitive for this place.” Early paint colors were more primary than later shades, says Sean Steuber, who did much of the restoration work on the house and suggested the color scheme. The chosen colors are complementary in hue, and successfully flatter the whitewashed stone exterior.

authenticity is a relative thing. In many cases, “paint companies have only revived the colors that they think they can sell today,” says C.J. Hurley, an artistic designer, and (with partner Barbara Pierce) a paint color consultant in Portland, Oregon. “Paint in the store is really just a drop in the bucket; if you can’t find the color you want, a consultant has a whole library that can be tapped into.”

Choosing a pleasing palette is as much about placement and visual impact as it is about color harmony. As a general rule, medium-weight or neutral colors in a shade you like are

good choices for a “body” color that covers—or grounds—most of the house. Use brighter or darker colors that complement the ground color as accents on doors, windows, eaves, and architectural trim. It takes skill and knowledge to choose the correct colors, and with the correct amount of complementary contrast, Hurley says. Colors should also harmonize with the surrounding landscape.

However you choose to approach a paint scheme, your home will benefit from using the colors that were originally intended for it. C.J. sums it up: “Pay respect to the house.” ♦