

Flemington Historic Preservation Commission

Guidelines to Exterior Paint Colors

Within Flemington's historic district, exterior paint colors contribute significantly to preserving the borough's historic character. For applicants seeking to repaint properties within the historic district, HPC recommends the use of historically appropriate exterior paint color schemes. Applicants are encouraged to select colors that are suitable to a property's age and style, and that are compatible with surrounding buildings in the historic district. Compiled below are brief descriptions of historical color treatments. Please note that these descriptions are intended to illustrate the types of color treatments that were popular during each of the architectural periods. These descriptions are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather are meant to serve as a guide to assist property owners.

Colonial

Through 1780, early Colonial architecture tended to be faithful to the traditions that were familiar to European settlers. Dark exterior colors, such as deep reds, warm grays, and tans, were popular at this time.

Federal

Federal architecture (c. 1780-1830) was closely related to the earlier Colonial architecture, but with a lightness and delicacy in the proportion of certain details, such as columns and moldings. Exterior color schemes in a Federal home also tended to be lighter than in their Colonial counterparts. Homes constructed in the Federal style were often painted white, gray, or light ochre. Shutters were usually painted a dark color such as green or black. Window sashes would typically have been painted white.

Greek Revival

Green Revival (c. 1825-1860) architecture took inspiration from the classical period and buildings tended to resemble Greek temples. Residential and public buildings were frequently painted white, soft gray, or a light tan in order to imitate natural materials such as stone. Trim would often be painted white, while shutters and doors might be painted dark green or black.

Victorian

The Victorian period (c. 1840-early 1900s) witnessed several architectural styles, including Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne. Properties built during the Victorian period were likely to have more varied and intricate color schemes than their Colonial, Federal, and Greek Revival predecessors. Architects such as Andrew Jackson Downing, E.K. Rossiter, and F.A. Wright encouraged using color in a way that would be harmonious with a building's natural surroundings. During this period, popular exterior colors included deep earth tones such as rich browns, dark reds, tans/ochres, warm grays, and an array of greens. Black paint would often be mixed into primary colors to "dull" or darken the shade, creating more muted color schemes. Window sashes were often painted dark green or black so that the sash would appear to recede. In general, color schemes were lighter in the years leading up to the Civil War, and become darker in the 1870s and 1880s.

Colonial Revival

In the early 20th century, Colonial Revival homes gained popularity nationwide. Light pastels, such as pale blue, yellow, or gray, were frequently used for the body of the home. Shutters were often painted black, dark green, or a deeper tone of the body color. White was typically used for the window sashes.

For homes of all styles and ages, HPC generally discourages painting previously unpainted masonry surfaces.

Historic Paint Palettes

The following historic paint palettes are available from major paint manufacturers. Each palette offers a wide range of options that are suitable in a historic context. This list is for informational purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement of any particular brand or product.

- Benjamin Moore: Williamsburg Color Collection
- Benjamin Moore: Historical Colors
- California Paints: Historic Colors of America
- Fine Paints of Europe: Mount Vernon Estate of Colours
- Sherwin Williams: Historic Collection
- Valspar: National Trust for Historic Preservation Collection

References

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *Cottage Residences, or, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and Their Gardens and Grounds: Adapted to North America*. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842.

Guild, Robin. *The Victorian House Book: A Practical Guide to Home Repair and Decoration*. Buffalo: Firefly Books, Inc., 2008.

"Preservation Hot Topics." *Historic New England*. Web. 30 July 2015.
<<http://www.historicnewengland.org/preservation/regional-resources/preservation-hot-topics>>.

McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2013.

Ross, Roger. *Century of Color: Exterior Decoration for American Buildings, 1820-1920*. Watkins Glen: The American Life Foundation, 1981.

E.K. Rossiter and F. A. Wright. *Authentic Color Schemes for Victorian Houses: Comstock's Modern House Painting, 1883*. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001.