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Choosing exterior paint colors

Get creative, find a fresh look for your style

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Inman News**

So the time has come to repaint the outside of your house, but you're tired of the old color scheme. If you'd like to try something fresh and new that suits your style, some simple homework will help you get off on the right foot.

First of all, you might be interested to know what the rest of America is doing. According to a poll conducted by the Rohm & Hass Paint Quality Institute, the most popular exterior color is white or off-white, which was selected by 34 percent of the poll's respondents. Way too boring? If you were thinking of red or pink, you're at the other end of the poll, and can place yourself among only 4 percent of the people. In between, in descending order of popularity, comes beige, tan or brown (28 percent), gray (15 percent), blue (7 percent), and green or yellow (6 percent each).

Whether you're going with or against the crowd, there are lots of tips worth considering when selecting the perfect color scheme for your home. Here are some questions you'll want to ask yourself:

I What color is it now?

You want to ask yourself what you like and dislike about the current colors, and why. Are they too dark or too light? Too bright or too dull? Between the body color and the trim, are there too many colors on the house, or perhaps not enough? A good rule of thumb in your initial thinking about color is to decide what you like, and work from that palette of colors.

I Are their restrictions to worry about?

Some neighborhoods have restricted color choices, and you may need to check with your homeowner's association or architectural review committee for approval before deciding on a color. Certain historical neighborhoods also have restricted color palettes from which to choose.

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Certain color schemes are better suited for certain architectural styles than others. Southwestern stucco might do best with monochrome whites or pastels, while your ornate Victorian may look best with a coordinated set of three, four, or even more colors. Most paint dealers can provide you with color sample books that show coordinated groups of colors for various styles of homes.

I Look at your home's prominent features:

For some types of homes, color may be dictated by such highly visible and unchangeable components as brick or stone veneers, or by the color of the roof.

I Large or small?

Remember the basic rule of color dark colors can make a large house look smaller, while light colors can make a small house appear larger.

I Dark colors:

If you favor dark colors, you need to keep in mind that in harsh sunlight environments they are more prone to fading, and also absorb and hold in more heat. Very bright colors are also much more prone to fading.

I Light over dark:

If your existing house is a dark color and you want to paint a light color over it, you'll probably need to use a primer first in order to get that lighter color to cover. While this alone is not a reason to stay away from a lighter color that you like, it's important to know that you'll probably be facing some additional labor and material expense.

I Break out the crayons:

When you have some color schemes in mind, a great way to test things out is to sketch or photograph your house, then make several black and white photocopies of the picture or drawing. Using colored pencils, paints, crayons or other art supplies, color in the photocopies and see what you like.

I Try a computer program:

Many paint stores have sophisticated computer programs for you to try out your color scheme. You'll be presented with a variety of house styles, and you begin by selecting one that looks as close to the style of your home as possible. Then, use the computer to color in the body of the house, the trim, the doors, and other features. You can instantly change colors on one or more parts of the house, and you can use the computer's suggestions for

coordinated colors or simply choose your own.

I Buy a tester:

When you think you're got it nailed down, buy a quart of each color and test them out on the house. Paint them on in different areas, and avoid direct sunlight that can somewhat distort your view of the color. Testers are cheap insurance to see if you like the actual colors in their intended locations!

What's your opinion? Send your Letter to the Editor to newsroom@inman.com.

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