

# color me beautiful

**E**very so often Zoe Kyriacos gets a frantic call from a panicked homeowner whose housepainters are due to arrive in two days. The homeowners haven't picked any colors for the exterior of their house. And they need to right away.

They call Kyriacos because she runs a sideline business as a professional color consultant. (Full time, she holds an interior decorating post in the Facilities Management department at the University of Maryland, College Park.) So she can certainly help the homeowner, but it's not how she prefers to work. Choosing colors, and even the choice to use color as a design tool on the outside of a house, takes time. It's a big decision. And it's not an easy one to make. Beyond the financial investment, the outside of a house says a lot about its owners' personalities. "Color can really make or break the house," Kyriacos says.

Color is often a forgotten tool in a designer's palette. It can perform many duties—and perform them inexpensively. It can make a house blend into its site or make the building stand out and demand attention. Color can make a new addition look old or make an old building look new. It can lend authenticity to a structure or help suspend an air of disbelief.

Remodelers aren't decorators, but they can help their

clients make smart choices about paint and siding colors. The earlier you have your client thinking about colors, the better the house will look and the happier and more comfortable your clients will be with the outcome.

## Personality test

Most homeowners would probably agree that the main reason for using color on the outside of their house is to express their personality. It gives onlookers a "hint of what lies behind the front door," says Mark Woodman of Mark Woodman Design & Color, who does color tracking and prediction work for such companies as Duron Paints.

Kyriacos notes that outgoing people tend to choose bolder colors than their less assuming neighbors do. Color consultant Pat Verlodt of Color Services & Associates, whose retainer clients include Alcoa, Andersen Windows, and Ace Hardware, says one of her biggest problems is that people tend to choose "chicken colors" for the outsides of their houses. Those include the whites, beiges, browns, and grays that line the streets of every town. She notes that 75 percent to 80 percent of houses in the United States are white. Her mission, as she sees it, is to help people "step out of the box, at least a little bit."

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PHOTOS: COURTESY OF OWENS CORNING



And she has some suggestions for easing them there. Her first tip is to paint the front door. That makes a welcoming statement to passers-by and helps the homeowners get comfortable with color a little bit at a time. (Door manufacturers, she notes, are providing more color options these days.) Her next step would be to extend color to the accessories of the house—the shutters, trim, and other architectural elements.

### The quicker fixer-upper

Beyond its obvious aesthetic appeal, color is an easy and efficient way to call attention to the appealing parts of a house. It is also one of the least expensive ways to fix problem areas, or at least make them less noticeable. Say a homeowner really likes the trim work on her house. Play it up. Use bold colors, and use more than one. Unusual or daring colors make the element they're covering stand out. But if the trim is either unappealing or minimal, it makes more sense to blend it in with the body color of the house. That way, it's not as conspicuous.

Woodman, who serves on the board of the Color Marketing Group, along with Verlot, says color can also make small things seem larger and large things seem



smaller. In general, light houses look bigger than they really are and dark houses look smaller. Little houses look bigger when their trim is close in color to the body color because there's no sudden end to the house.

The same goes for entry doors. If a house has a narrow front door that needs to look wider, make the door trim the same color as the door. If the door has sidelights, paint the panels and mullions of the sidelights the same color as the door. Both of those tricks visually enhance the width of the door.

Windows offer another area to either augment or fix using color. If a house has small windows, paint the window molding the same color as the house. If the windows are especially short and squat, Woodman recommends running an apron along the base of the windows. Painting that trim piece the same color as the window will heighten the windows visually. And painting any shutters the same color will go even one better. Another one of his tricks for playing up the size of the windows is



According to Owens Corning, the company's new Exterior Design System provides a "comprehensive guide to transforming your home's exterior." It includes a brochure that leads the homeowner through a series of questions designed to point the way toward decisions about the exterior of their home. Then it shows them pictures of the same house with five different color and accessory choices. (Two such combinations are shown left and far left, and another is shown on the next page.) One of the program's main benefits is that homeowners feel they know what to expect once they make their color decisions.

Before



to paint a thin outline in a different color on the outside of the trim (if the trim is white or ivory).

Woodman also says that color can help even the direst of architectural problems: the vast expanse of fascia with very few windows on the front of a split-level house. He says that making the front monochromatic makes the small number of windows stand out less. And don't be afraid to paint the bricks on a split the same color as the siding. That, too, can make the front of the house seem less divided.

### Local color

No color stands alone. And when it comes time to choose a color or colors for the outside of a house, there are many environmental factors to think about. "Homes rise from the ground," Woodman says. "They become a physical part of nature. So it's important to tie them back."

The first concern is the setting of the house. "If a

house is in the woods, it should look more organic," Kyriacos says. "If it's a Victorian near the street, the choices can be more bold." The site and landscaping also play a role. Woodman suggests avoiding a lot of green on houses in heavily treed areas because it darkens the house. In those situations, pick colors that complement green, like shades of red (see "Thanks for the Complement," page 67). Conversely, adding green to houses without many trees or greenery around it is pleasing to the eye.

It's also fun to pick up on colors that are in a house's garden. That way, the garden space is extended onto the building, and the eye is led to the focal point: the house. Woodman especially likes using a red front door on a house with geraniums leading up the front path.

Beyond setting and site, the region of the country that the house is in plays a big part in choosing colors. "You must bear in mind the geography and nature of the area," Woodman says. "And take a look at nature's palette. Coral, turquoise, and pink work in Florida



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because those colors are found in nature there. They don't work as well in the mountains of West Virginia." Along the same lines, certain materials are tied to areas of the land. A stucco house in muted colors fits in the Southwest, but perhaps not elsewhere, due to the environment and sun exposure. "Peach is a beautiful color on stucco," Verlodt says, "but it's kind of creepy on cedar."

In fact, the far Southeast (meaning Florida) and the Southwest, according to Woodman, are the main anomalies in the United States, when it comes to color. But other regions do have their own subtle differences. Soil variations mean that bricks are different colors in different parts of the country. And areas by the water that get those occasional overcast days beg for the blues and grays that just don't look right in sunnier climates. Cool

colors work in some regions—mainly warm climates. But even in warm climates, warm whites and light terracottas can help keep a house cool. And warm colors work in cooler climates. Rich colors like brown, dark green, and gray help houses stay a little bit warmer in the winter.

### Help is on the way

After collecting clues from the homeowner, the setting, and the region, it's time to look back at the actual building. Kyriacos suggests you look at what the house gives you—the roof, foundation, any siding that won't be getting a new color. That helps determine the palette to choose colors from. The roof, especially, is an important color to match because it can occupy 30 percent to 50 percent of what a person sees of the front of the house.

But after considering all those variables, what if a color still just doesn't jump off the card at you? Well, it may be time to bring in the experts. Fortunately, there are a lot of them.

#### MARK WOODMAN'S 5 RULES FOR CHOOSING EXTERIOR COLOR

1. If there's a community association, find out if there are rules dictating color choice and what they are.
2. Take a look at the house. Mark what is not going to change, such as the roof color. This helps to determine the color palette.
3. Look at the lot. If there's a garden full of perennials, don't make the colors on the house clash.
4. Look at the houses next door. Don't make your house look bizarre next to them.
5. Go further into the neighborhood and see what you like and don't like.





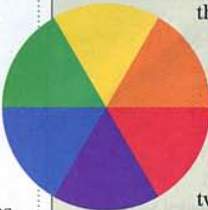
People like Kyriacos, Woodman, and Verlodt are hired by major companies to help you and your clients. "It scares people that they don't feel comfortable combining colors," Verlodt says. But almost all the paint companies will guide you in choosing palettes and complementary colors. Verlodt consulted on a paint card that Ace Hardware uses. Once you or your client pick one color that you like, turn the card over and there are nine others that go with it. That is especially helpful if you can match the card to the color of an existing element, such as the roof.

Exterior building product companies have stepped into the arena to help, as well. According to Owens Corning, the company's new Exterior Design System provides a "comprehensive guide to transforming your home's exterior." It includes a brochure that leads the homeowner through a series of questions designed to point the way toward decisions about the exterior of their home. Then it shows them pictures of the same house with five different color and accessory combinations. The collections are broken down into different themes, so the homeowners can find either houses that are similar to their own or choose a style they'd like to emulate. The brochure aims to make the consumer feel like they know what to expect once they've chosen their products.

Knowing what to expect is one of the most important parts of helping your clients visualize their home with the colors they've selected. The color experts unanimously agree that you must test the color on the house. "The biggest problem is people pick colors inside and then the color is different outside," Verlodt says. Sunlight makes the color look lighter, and large expanses obviously look different than small samples. Kyriacos uses 7-foot sample patches that she tapes to the side of the house for her clients to check out. Verlodt suggests buying just 1 gallon of paint at first and painting a good-sized patch on the house. Then have your clients look at

The region of the country and setting of a house play a big part in dictating what colors should be used on the exterior of a home. White stucco (above, right) is a great choice in warm climates because it helps keep a house cool. When gardens are full of perennials (above center and left), the color of the house shouldn't clash with the plants.

#### THANKS FOR THE COMPLEMENT



Certain colors go with certain other colors, and one of your best tools for picking good combinations is the color wheel. It consists of three primary colors—red, blue, and yellow—and three complementary colors—green, orange, and purple. On the wheel, the primary color is across from its complementary color. Green is the complementary color to red because combining the two non-red primary colors, blue and yellow, makes it. The same goes for the other two complementary colors: Orange complements blue, and purple complements yellow. The reason complementary colors go so well together is because when they are viewed side by side, all the primary colors are represented.

it at different times of the day and from different angles, near and far from the house.

#### Set the tone

Color is much more than just another choice along the path of a remodel. It involves personality and emotion. It ties homeowners to both their homes and their community. It can make bold statements, or it can smoothly blend the house into the background.

Encourage your clients to make decisions they'll be happy with for a long time. But don't worry too much about picking color that will last a lifetime. After all, color is quick, easy, and fun to change—once it's been chosen. **R**