

Zoe Kyriacos

Takoma Park's Color Girl

by Sharon Burke

Almost overnight, the charming clapboard house on Maple Avenue became a neighborhood sensation. And all it took was a paint job.

The new coat of rich, egg-yolk golden paint, with multi-colored trim so incensed a nearby homeowner that he declared he would have sold his house had he known of his neighbor's planned palette.

"They like it now," noted Zoe Kyriacos, local color maven.

What started as a favor to friends has become a thriving sideline for the ten-year Takoma Park resident, who goes by her first name (some find her last name difficult to pronounce, even though "it really sounds just the way it looks.") Zoe, an interior designer by training and trade, has been coaching Takoma residents on color choices for their bungalows and Victorian homes for some five years.

"Color has always been my forte," Zoe said in a recent interview. "Ever since I was a little kid."

Zoe's eye for hues led her to study design, working for a number of private firms in the Washington area before settling into an interior decorating post at the University of Maryland, where colleagues call her "color girl."



PHOTOS: JULIE WIATT

Her friends, however, refer to her as "the design police." In a community full of eclectic paint schemes, "you just see houses that make you cringe," groaned Zoe. "I walk down the street all the time

thinking how I would do it differently."

According to Zoe, though, "how" she does it is actually fairly simple. "98 percent of the time," she said, "people know what they want and they just want someone to agree with them."

"The hard part," she added, "is picking which color goes where."

For an initial fee of \$100 for an hour, and \$60 for every additional hour, Zoe will begin a consultation by taping 8 inch by 11 inch paint samples to the wall. She bases her choices on such variables as what colors her clients are wearing and which area houses they like. "I go out of my way not to inflict my personal taste," she noted.

For a larger, more complicated exterior job, she will attach large panels to the side of a house. "That's a big investment," she said, pointing out that a full exterior painting can cost as much as \$5,000.

Most of Zoe's clients, which number around 20 per year, are referred to her by



local builders, architects and former customers.

Even though she always bows to her clients' taste, Zoe does play favorites. "I've never related too well to blue," she confessed, adding that she felt vindicated when a local realtor told her that blue houses are the hardest to sell, and yellow the easiest.

As for her own home, Zoe has never had an opportunity to paint the property, which she rents. "If I did," she noted, "it would probably be white — I have to work with color all day."