

Smarter Living FEBRUARY 5, 2015

8 simple guidelines for choosing exterior colors

HIGHLIGHTS

When choosing exterior colors, beware of trendy looks.



When choosing exterior colors, it's smart to blend in with your neighbors. CRISTINA LAPPIN



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Think back to avocado green kitchen appliances. Did shivers just go down your back or did you get a pang of nostalgia?



No doubt, color can evoke a visceral response, whether for interior or exterior decorating, clothes, makeup or cars. It makes a first impression, accentuates attributes and softens flaws, and offers a glimpse into your personality.



The colors you choose can also be influenced by many sources – friends and neighbors, magazine photos, designs on TV shows, or by experts who annually select what the next year's big colors will be in home decor, fashion, and graphic and industrial design.

This is where the tale turns cautionary: What's hot today usually has a short lifespan and is always subject to debate. Take a look at these three examples of the Color of the Year for 2015:

- Paint manufacturer Benjamin Moore describes its Guilford Green as "a neutral that's natural. A silvery green that works with, well, everything. Just a brush, dipped in a can, whooshed on a wall, and a whole lot of happily ever after."
- Rival Sherwin Williams calls its Coral Reef "an uplifting, vivacious hue with floral notes" and "the perfect blend of pink, orange and red."
- Pantone Color Institute describes its Marsala as "a naturally robust and earthy wine red" that would "enrich the mind, body and soul."

These colors may be nice, but how much of a good thing would you want in or on your home?

Rather than chasing trends, you can be sure you'll be happy for years to come by following 8 simple guidelines on choosing exterior colors.

1. Deciding between bright and cheerful colors or deep, rich earth tones will influence all other decisions.
2. You don't have to be a color expert, but you should take a little time to learn how colors work together. (Or find someone who does.)
3. You'll want to make your home distinctive, but for the sake of your neighbors, you should pick colors that will blend with your surroundings.
4. Make sure your choices in siding and trim don't clash with materials you are not going to replace, such as roof shingles, brick, stone and tile.
5. The size and lot location of your house matters. Light colors can make a house look bigger and dark colors can make it look smaller. If the house is set back in the lot, a lighter color can also make it look closer to the street.
6. Landscaping will continue to grow and change colors as the seasons change, so trees, shrubs and flowering gardens need to be considered.
7. Use neutral colors to de-emphasize things such as an air conditioning unit or gutters and downspouts, and use contrasting or accent colors to highlight things such as architectural detailing, porch railings, windows and front doors.
8. Computer renderings can give a general idea of what colors will look like, but large swatches (about 2 by 3 feet) give a truer representation of colors.

Take a look at the swatches at different times of day. The colors will look different as the intensity of the sunlight changes.

Once you have selected your favorite neutral color palette, consider making it last. No one wants to invest thousands of dollars every few years to keep that paint looking fresh. Many wood substitutes are now available as painted planks, but – buyer beware – their finishes degrade just like paint. Better are cladding products that are certified and under warranty to retain their color. Vinyl and other polymeric siding manufactures incorporate color that won't chip, pit or peel, giving homeowners peace of mind that they won't have to paint or repair the finish. Keeping your home's exterior looking fresh and timely doesn't have to be challenging.