

Exterior Paint Selection

Selecting the right paint is crucial to a long lasting finish and maintaining historical accuracy. Determining a paint that meets all necessary criteria can seem overwhelming with many manufacturers and mediums, but by investigating certain key topics it will help narrow the options.

Guidelines for Exterior Paint Selection

- The following should be considered when selecting the paint color:
 - What color paint was most recently on the building?
 - Has paint analysis been conducted for the site?
 - Is there a change in the period of interpretation?
 - Who manufactured the paint & when was it manufactured?
 - What was the color formula used and has the manufacturer changed their formula system?
- The following should be considered when selecting the type of finish:
 - Historical precedent for alternate finishes (white wash, stains, linseed oil paint).
 - Type of paint currently on the building: oil vs. latex.
 - Sheen of the paint: flat/matte, satin, gloss or high gloss.
 - State and Federal laws regarding VOC (volatile organic compounds) content.

Property Care White Papers

Paint: Exterior Paint Selection

Technical Information for Exterior Paint Selection

The following should be considered when selecting the paint color:

- What color paint was most recently on the building?
 - When selecting the proper paint color, the color should be replaced in-kind unless there is a change in interpretive approach or research provides additional information.
 - Color information from past painting projects should be documented in project files and may also be found in the Paint Task Force files. If paint analysis has been performed, the color identified in that analysis should always take precedent over previously painted colors. Labeled paint sticks stored in the Lyman Carriage Barn may also provide information about paint history.
- Who manufactured the paint and what was the color formula used?
 - It is typically best to order paint from the same paint company as previously used and to provide the vendor with as much information as possible, including the paint color, number and formula used.
 - Determine when the building was last painted and if the manufacturer's color formula system has changed.
 - If it is desirable to switch paint manufacturers, provide the new shop with a sample of the paint (i.e. shingle, piece of clapboard, or a draw down card) for color matching. Though several manufacturers will claim that they can match other companies' formulas, this is the best method to ensure color match.
- Has paint analysis been conducted for the site?
 - Paint analysis can provide details on the color and make-up of the finish during the period of interpretation;
 - Paint analysis can also provide color matches in the form of the closest commercially available match, a CIE L*a*b match and a Munsell match.
 - If no paint analysis has been conducted at the site, determine if this paint project is the appropriate opportunity to obtain a chromachronology.
 - If obtaining paint analysis, also request draw down cards with the correct color along with the Munsell color match and large-scale color chips to document the color choice.
 - If a Munsell color is matched make sure to document the store and color formula for better consistency in the future.
 - It is generally accepted that if there is a commercial match that accurately represents the historic color then that color should be used. If no commercially available color matches the color identified during analysis, a custom mix must be obtained.
- Is there a change in the period of interpretation?
 - If there is to be a change in paint color, the Proactive Preservation and Interpretation Planning committee (PIIP) must be consulted and will ultimately make the final decision.
 - If a change is proposed, the rationale will need to be documented and paint analysis will likely be required.

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- Testing
 - Prior to painting the entire surface paint a small area to ensure that the paint matches the desired color.

The following should be considered when selecting the type of finish:

- Historical precedent for alternate finishes (whitewash, stains, linseed oil paint).
 - During the period of interpretation, was the feature white washed or stained instead of painted?
 - Returning to these finishes can have maintenance implications that should be addressed.
- Type of paint currently on the building: oil vs. latex.
 - When choosing an oil or latex product, determining the existing paint material is important as mixing the paint types can cause failure due to different drying methods and coefficients of expansion and contraction.
 - If switching paint types from oil to latex, an alkyd primer should be used.¹
- Sheen of the paint: flat/matte, satin, gloss, or high gloss.
 - The paint's sheen can dramatically impact the way the color appears, changing the appearance of the surface. It is crucial to match the existing sheen especially when painting only a portion of the surface—the wrong level of gloss could make the new paint seem awkward and incorrect.
- State and Federal laws regarding VOC (volatile organic compounds) content.
 - Oil paints have been used traditionally in exterior applications, but they are becoming harder to buy as state and federal laws regarding volatile organic compounds (VOC's) render some oil paints illegal.
 - A full phase-out of oil paints is likely in the near future, so the switch to latex water based paints is inevitable.

¹ George Nash, *Renovating Old Houses*. The Taunton Press: Newtown, 1998. pg. 204.