

Killer color

Knock 'em dead with a cool new coat for your house this fall

Painting the outside of your home is like dressing for dinner at your prospective mother-in-law's house: You want to leave a good impression and avoid any embarrassing stares. Below are seven dos and don'ts to help you put your home's best face forward. On the next page, see our Smart Picks so you can choose the right paint to avoid problems like fast fading and mildew.

DON'T ignore your home's historic features. Is your house a Cape, a Victorian, or a Colonial Revival? If so, go to www.architecture.about.com and click on House Styles, or turn to Virginia and Lee McAlester's "A Field Guide to American Houses" (Alfred A. Knopf, \$24.95) for ideas about the general palette and principles that apply. Victorian houses, for example, were designed with deep earthy colors in mind. Paint companies, including California Paints (www.californiapaints.com) and Sherwin-Williams (www.sherwin.com), offer historical color palettes matched to home styles. Also, your local historical society may be able to give you advice. But there are no hard rules; instead, use the guidelines as points of reference. If you stick close to them, you can't go wrong, especially if you live in an area steeped in history. If you move away from them, you'll know to do it thoughtfully.

DO check out hot new color schemes. If you feel like making a break with tradition, try taupe, gray, or yellow for the base. For the trim, consider deep purple, navy blue, brick red, or bright yellow (especially on front doors); or black for the shutters, sash, and front doors, recommends Debbie Zimmer, color and decorating expert at The Rohm and Haas Paint Quality Institute.



PURPLE PASSION You can get away with eye-catching colors if you don't mix too many together.

DON'T clash with the neighbors. Before you fall in love with Wedgwood blue, take a look around. If a neighbor's home is blue, you'll probably want to avoid it or at least find a complementary hue. Also consider the color of your roof and foliage. A dramatic red maple in the front yard might look nice with a soothing sage green, for example. Finally, think of how you want

your house to "read." Homes painted in darker shades tend to recede from the street. Want your home to stand out? Lighter shades help a house step forward.

DO treat your home's trim pieces like accessories. Most houses can easily handle three colors—one on the body, another on the trim, and a third on the sash

and doors. But stark contrasts between body and trim can be jarring. Consider lighter tones of the same color instead of, say, straight white trim. The trim on Victorians is usually darker than the rest of the house. Capes can be very plain with little or no contrast between body and trim. For much of the 19th century, sashes and doors were painted in deep colors to draw the eye into the building; that still works well. Interesting features such as medallions (see picture at left) are worth calling out with a separate color. But don't call out standard items like porches, gutters, and the thin band molding around windows.

DON'T overdo color combos or a glossy sheen. While a high-style Victorian might hold five or six different colors, don't be tempted to liven up a simple house with a complicated paint scheme. The simpler the house, the simpler the paint scheme should be. Also, reserve high-gloss paint for the front door and semigloss for the trim. A satin or flat paint is best for the rest.

DO try a few colors before you make a decision. Invest in a few quarts or tester pots of colors you're considering. Brush them on in big-enough sections to gauge how they'll look in different kinds of light.

DON'T go dark if you care about resale value. Dark and somber can put buyers off. And it makes a house look smaller. Bright, garish colors can scare away buyers, too, unless of course you're living in a place like San Francisco, where bright can be right. In general, though, you're better off blending in. Before you put your home up for sale, also consider touching up paint on window trims and front doors. "These eye-catching elements, if crisp and fresh, tell buyers here is a house that's well taken care of," says John Petrowsky, a real-estate agent with Hammond Residential GMAC in Cambridge, Mass.

THE BEST PAINTS

OK, now that you've got your colors sorted out, it's time for step two: picking the right paint for the job. That's important because you don't want your pretty new color to fade or—yikes!—fuzz up with mildew.

Our Smart Picks below are good at resisting dirt buildup, fading (blues and yellows tend to fade the most, by the way), cracking, and mildew. How do we know this? Because our expert paint testers literally watch paint dry—for three years. Our accelerated weathering tests simulate a paint's lifetime in sun, rain, wind, and other punishing outdoor

conditions. In total, we tested 37 paints and stains, including popular brands such as Behr, Benjamin Moore, Sherwin-Williams, and Sears.

Stains generally don't hold up as long as paints. Sherwin-Williams Woodscapes latex stain was a particularly poor performer. But some paints we tested also didn't last very long. Glidden's Evermore flat paint peeled badly after the equivalent of six years. Other fast faders were True Value's WeatherAll semigloss and McCloskey MultiUse satin low-luster paint. You can expect to get a good nine years out of our Smart Picks below.

flying colors



California Fresh Coat Velvet Flat

Price \$27 per gallon.

Why we like it It was the highest-rated paint we tested overall. In addition to being long-lasting, it was good at resisting dirt, fading, and mildew.

Where to get it Available in 22 states; www.californiapaints.com.

Another Smart Pick Glidden Spred-Dura (flat), \$15.

lovely luster



Glidden Spred-Dura Gloss

Price \$20 per gallon.

Why we like it It's not only the highest-rated glossy paint we tested, but it's also one of the cheapest.

Where to get it Independent dealers, Home Depot.

Another Smart Pick Glidden Spred-Dura Satin (low-luster), \$19.

stain maven



Olympic Premium 596 Latex opaque stain

Price \$21 per gallon.

Why we like it It's the only stain we tested that's great at resisting mildew, fading, and dirt buildup.

Where to get it Lowe's.

Another Smart Pick Behr Plus 10 opaque (alkyd, solvent cleanup), \$18. Or for a semitransparent look that shows the wood grain (sorry, it lasts just six years), try Olympic Water Repellent 511 (alkyd), \$19.