

SAINT JOHN HERITAGE CONSERVATION AREAS

# Paint & Colour

## INTRODUCTION

Paint serves to protect and preserve the materials, and should be renewed regularly. Exterior paint normally lasts five to eight years.

Colour can have a significant effect upon our impression of a building. Colour can be used to accentuate detail and decorative features, and to define the shape and lines of the building.

The exterior colours should be considered in relation to the design of the building as a whole.

Colours should be chosen that are appropriate to the age and style of the building. To reveal the previous paint colours scrape a small area, feather sand the edges down to the wood, and examine it with a magnifying glass.

Consider matching the original colours. Choose colours that are appropriate to the surroundings and blend in with the streetscape.

Double houses and row houses are best considered as unified elements with common colour schemes.

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

There are a number of things to consider in choosing appropriate colours:

- The colours should be appropriate to the age and style of the house.
- The wall colour will dominate any paint scheme.
- Avoid using too many colours.

The simple, symmetrical styles usually are best painted with simple colour combinations in a restrained manner.

Select the basic colour for the house, then choose colours appropriate for the trim, sash etc. from amongst the palette appropriate to the style.

### Traditional Colours

The traditional palette of colours used in Saint John appears to have been relatively limited and conservative in character. Dark rich colours such as forest green, burgundy, oxide red, black, brown and dark grey were prevalent.

Different colour combinations were used depending upon the style of building. Oxide or barn red and pumpkin yellow, or white or cream was prevalent early in the nineteenth century. White was the preferred colour during the Greek or classical revival era, being reminiscent of the white marble of the Greek temples.

By the middle of the century, white was completely out of fashion, light earth tones, and with dark green or brown shutters became the preferred colours until late in the century. Darker and more sombre hues predominated late in the nineteenth century, primarily in dark earth tones. The more elaborate decoration of the period was highlighted with additional colours.



SAINT JOHN





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### Choosing Paint

Paint consists of three components; a binder such as alkyd resin, linseed oil or a latex resin; a thinner such as turpentine, mineral spirits or water, and a pigment. The binder is the most expensive and the most important component. The amount and quality of binder affects the service life. The pigment contains both hiding pigment and fillers. A high content of hiding pigment provides more coverage per litre.

### Oil or Latex?

Both will provide about the same service life if of comparable quality. The choice is usually a matter of personal preference.

Oil-based paints have tradition on their side, and older buildings would have been painted with them. Unless you're removing all the old paint, don't apply latex paint over oil based.

Latex paints are convenient to use brushes and rollers can be cleaned in water. You can apply latex paints in damp weather and to damp surfaces, which offers significant advantages in Saint John. Oil-based paints should only be applied to completely dry surfaces. Latex paints also permit the passage of moisture from inside the structure. (the old layers of paint will negate this advantage)

### Types of Exterior Paint

#### *Primer/Sealers.*

Are used for unpainted wood, or for old surfaces that have lost most of the old paint. They prevent topcoats from soaking into wood, and provide a uniform paint surface for the topcoat.

#### *Primers:*

Promote adhesion between paint films. Are recommended over old paint. Cover with topcoat within one week.

#### *Metal Primers:*

Use anti-rust or galvanizing primers to prepare metal surfaces.

### *Topcoats (oil):*

Provide excellent adhesion and durability. Best applied with brushes, especially over old work. Some are self-cleaning, through controlled chalking. Provides a glossier surface than latex.

### *Topcoats (latex):*

Are quick-drying, can be applied in damp weather and to damp surfaces. Permit roller application. Colors are more permanent than oil-based paints. Matte surface permits less obvious touch-up than glossier oils.

### *Trim Enamel:*

Are usually alkyds, offer high sheen, bright colours with good longevity. Are slow-drying.

### Sources of Authentic Paint Colours

A number of paint manufacturers offer well researched selections of nineteenth century paint colours.

Benjamin-moore offers over 150 traditional colours in alkyd or latex in their "historical colour collection". Pratt & Lambert offer a colour selection known as "early americana colours". Sherwin-Williams (now bapco) features a 40 colour custom-mixed selection of authentic 19th century colours.

Be sure these 'Historical' colours are appropriate and true to your home.

### The Original Colour

To determine the original colour used, (assuming it hasn't already been removed), you must expose a 1 or 2 inch square of the first coat of paint. With a sharp knife carefully cut through the accumulated paint.

To accurately distinguish a prime coat from a finish coat will require examining the samples through a microscope. Dirt will be found on a finish coat, and not on a prime coat.

An exact color match can not be achieved without instrument analysis by a colour specialist. The paint will have faded, yellowed or darkened depending on the paint and its condition. An approximation will suffice on most occasions.



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### MAINTENANCE

#### Paint Removal

Never use torches or paint burners to remove paint. The flame may enter the smallest surface crack, and burn un-noticed within the wall.

Remove loose paint with a scraper.

A heat gun may assist in stripping exterior trim and avoids the hazards of stripping lead paint.

A rotary disk sander can be used to remove paint from clapboards. The dust created may contain lead, and be toxic.

#### Preparation

If the old paint is in good shape, isn't chalky or peeling, then you needn't apply a primer. Wash the surface, scrape loose paint, prime the bare spots with an oil-based primer, and apply new paint.

Excessive chalking requires that you wash the surface, and prime with an oil-based primer. Chalking may be the result of inferior paint too thin an application, or excessive weathering.

On new wood, apply a primer-sealer as the first coat.

Choose a topcoat that is compatible with the primer.

#### Sagging and Wrinkling

Caused by applying paint too thickly, or quickly, or by painting in full sun. The surface dries and forms a skin, preventing the inner portion of the paint film from drying. Remove the wrinkles and repaint.

#### Blistering

Caused by moisture pressure under the paint, either from rain entering cracks and gaps or from interior moisture and condensation in the wall. Fix the cause before repainting.

#### Peeling, Cracking, Flaking and Scaling

Caused by uncorrected blistering, by resin from untreated knots, by grease on the surface when painted, or by painting over a glossy, hard surface, or over a damp surface.

Scrape and sand the affected areas, prime and repaint after solving the problem.

#### Checking, Alligating

Caused by painting over a greasy surface, painting at too low temperature, or before the primer has dried. May also indicate too much paint build-up on the surface.

Alligating will occur due to incompatible paints.

Remove these areas of paint, prime and repaint.

#### Bleeding

Caused by resin from untreated knots dissolving the paint. Apply shellac or a shellac based primer over all knots.

#### Mildew

Mildew is common on exterior painted surfaces, usually on warm, humid or shady surfaces. Mildew is the visible result of fungus growth on the surface of organic matter, and it feeds on the nutrients in house paint. A mildew resistant paint is only as good as the surface preparation before painting. Since mildew looks like dirt, place a few drops of household bleach on suspect areas to check for mildew. Mildew is present if the bleach causes the spot to lose its black-brown appearance.

To clean and sterilize the surface scrub with a solution of warm water, liquid bleach, and detergent. Use a medium soft brush, and rinse thoroughly with a hose afterwards.

### TYPICAL DETAIL

Three colours were typically applied to a building built before 1915, a dark, medium and light colour.

The correct use of colour will help show off the architectural style and character of your heritage building.

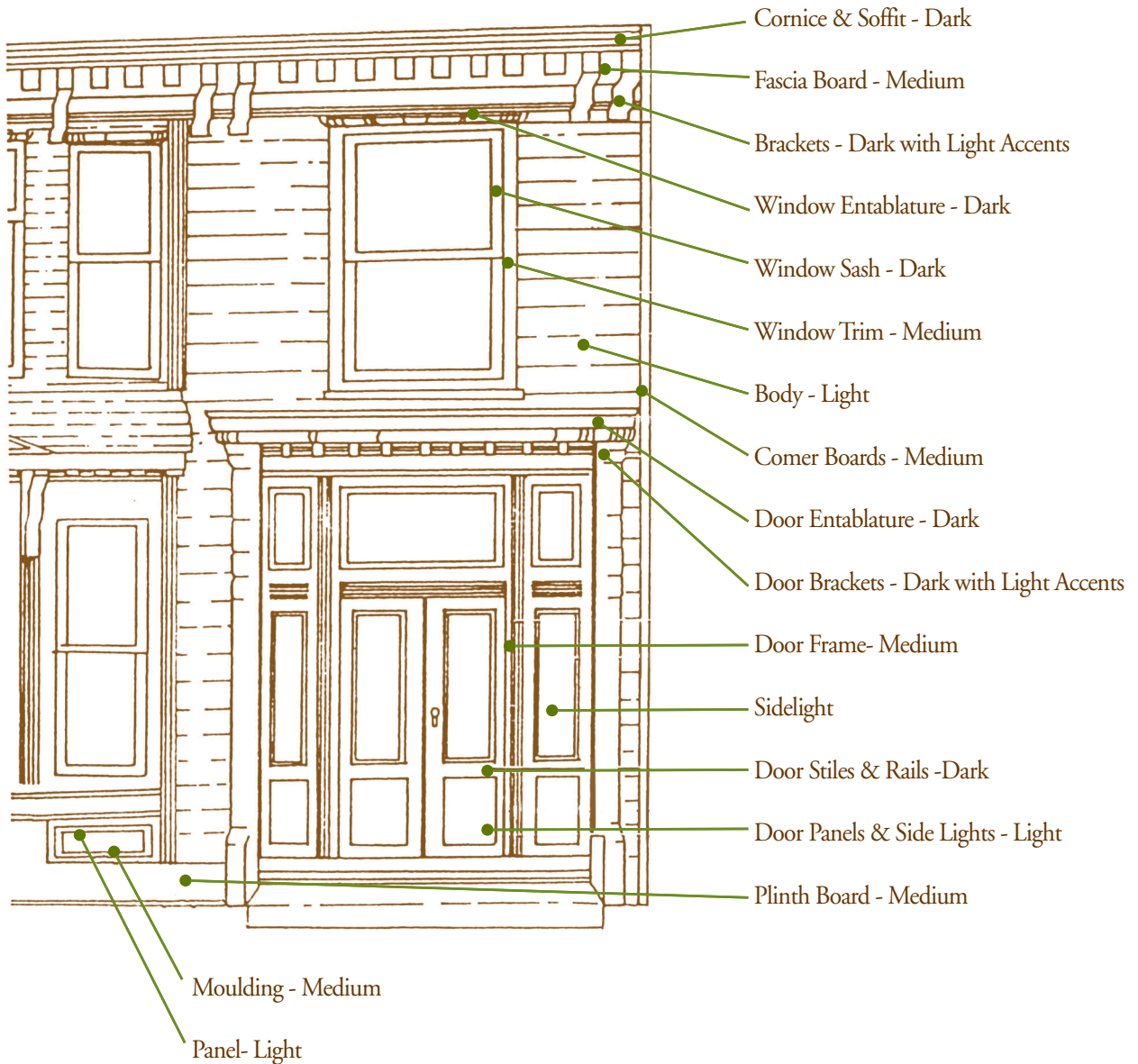
There are three ways to combine colours on a historic building:

1. Monochromatic colours: tones and shades of the same colour. (ie. blues)
2. Complementary colours (ie. blue & green)
3. Contrasting colours (ie. blue & burgundy).



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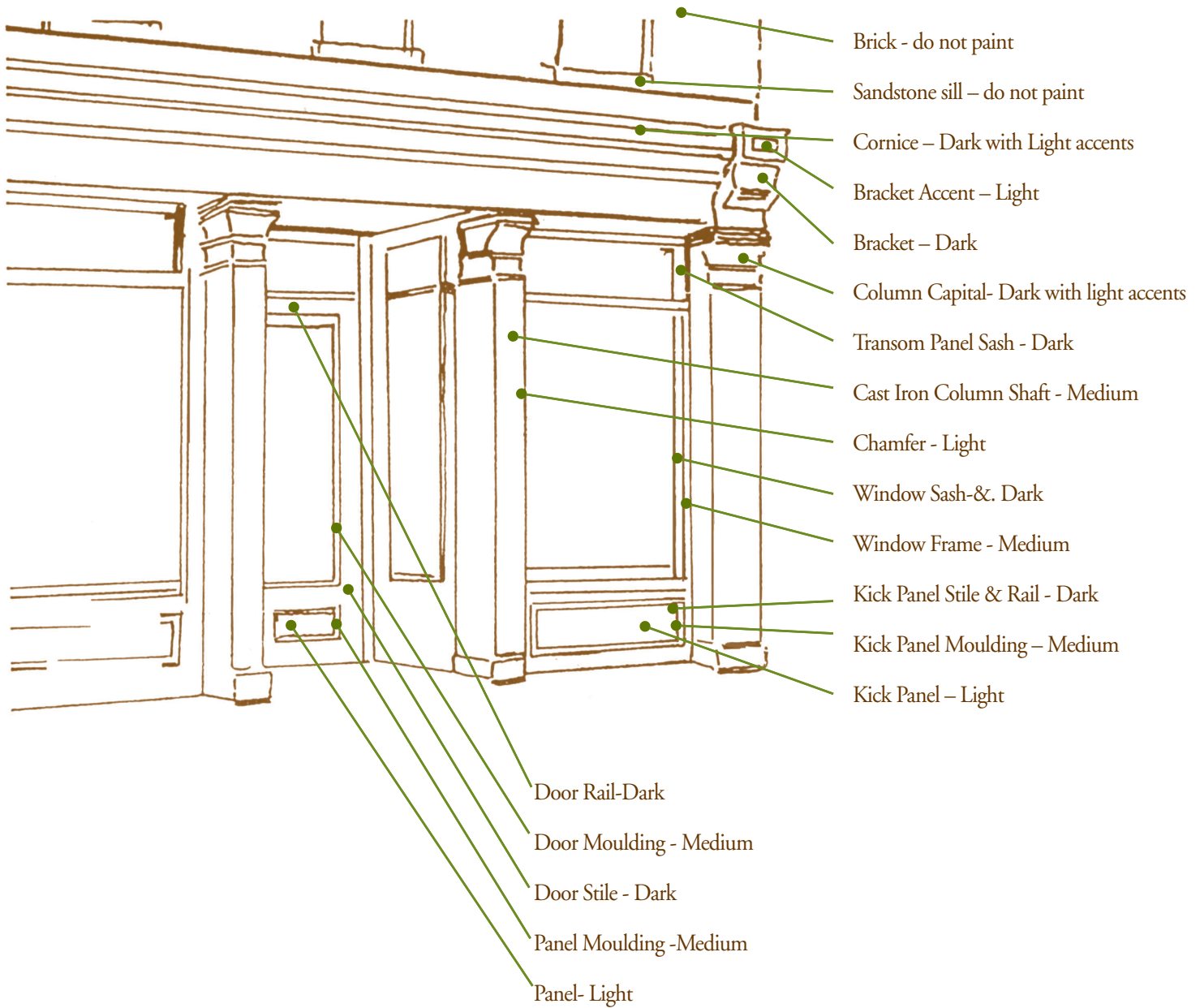
**COLOUR PLACEMENT ON RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS**





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**COLOUR PLACEMENT ON STOREFRONTS**





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YES

NO

The following check list gives practical tips to help you choose the paint colour for your heritage building.

Answering each of the questions will help you to decide what paint colours to choose and where to apply them on your building.

Refer to the Practical Preservation Guidelines on Paint & Colour for more information.

- Have you checked the original colours of the building.
- Did you look at the exterior finishes of the nearby buildings in selecting your colour to ensure your colour choice is in keeping with your neighbours?
- Have you chosen at least three paint colours - a dark colour, a medium and a light colour? Please list the paint company and paint number

(ie. Benjamin Moore HC-115 Georgian Green).

Dark \_\_\_\_\_

Medium \_\_\_\_\_

Light \_\_\_\_\_

The Heritage Planner has samples of paint colours used commonly in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Drop by the  
Community Planning Department,  
10th Floor City Hall to examine the colour samples.

Check List for painting your heritage building.

Proper preparation if the surface and application of paint will add years to your paint.

- Do you know what kind of paint to use (ie. oil or latex)?
- Have you scraped all loose and old paint from the building surface before beginning to paint?
- Have you washed the surface with TSP (Tri Sodium Phosphate)? Available where you buy your paint.
- Will you let the surface dry for three days before applying the primer & paint?
- Is your primer compatible with the paint you'll be using and with the existing paint?
- Do you know that brick, sandstone and other masonry surfaces should never be painted?



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### References

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University Of Toronto Press, 1980

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Practical Conservation Guidelines,  
application forms for Grants and Certificates  
of Appropriateness and other useful  
information for fixing up your older building  
is available from:

Heritage Staff | Planning & Development  
10th Floor, City Hall  
P.O. Box 1971  
Saint John, New Brunswick | E2L 4L1  
Phone: (506) 658 2835  
Fax: (506) 658 2837

Email: [Heritage@saintjohn.ca](mailto:Heritage@saintjohn.ca)

Online: [www.saintjohn.ca/heritage](http://www.saintjohn.ca/heritage)

**Property Owners!** Contact Heritage Staff  
before you begin to make any plan purchase  
supplies or hire contractors. Advice on ways  
to save you time, money and energy will be  
offered free of charge.