



PAINT

MAIN STREET IOWA TECHNOTES

Painting can be one of the most dramatic and affordable improvements made to a building. Proper planning and preparation, as well as choosing the right color combination, will ensure that your paint job is a success. When planning to paint, consider the time of the year during which the work will be completed. Good weather typically results in a better paint job.

The type of surface to be painted will determine what type of paint should be used. Stone, brick, wood, concrete block and metal require different paints and primers. Consult with your local suppliers for the appropriate paints and primers for these surfaces. In addition, a choice between oil and latex must be made. Oil paint is more durable but it is harder to clean up. However, some feel it adheres better and helps to preserve wood. Latex paint is less durable but easier to apply and clean up. (Keep in mind that once latex is used, it is very difficult to switch to oil. Likewise, once oil is used, it is best to continue with oil.) Durability will also be affected by the quality of the paint. High quality paint will not fade or peel as quickly as lower quality paint. Finally, be aware that there are three degrees of shine for paint: gloss, semi-gloss and flat/matte.

Preparing the building surface for painting requires the removal of all

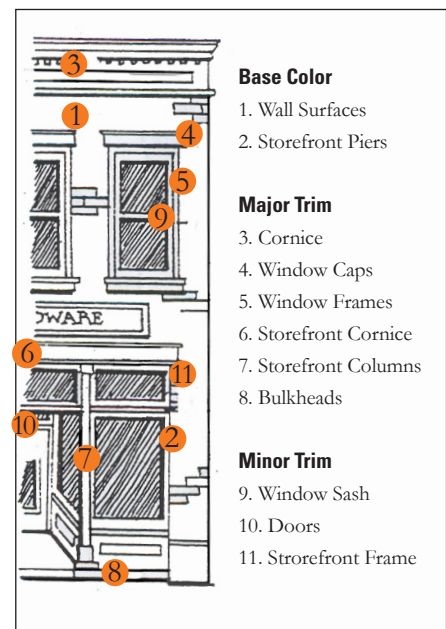
peeling or loose paint. Adequate surface preparation is critical to ensure the overall quality of the paint job. For instance, when painting aluminum, be sure to rub the surface with steel wool and apply a zinc chromate or other suitable primer before applying the finish coat. On an older building, a primer will seal the wood and help the finish coat adhere. For better paint coverage, try mixing a little of the finish color in with the primer.



Several factors should influence the color scheme of your building: your personal color preferences, colors used in the business identity and advertisements, and colors used on the interior of the business. Also look at your building in relation to the entire block or the entire downtown. The color of your building can affect the overall character of Main Street and relate your building to others on the street. Choosing the right combination of colors can also unify a building's elements within the facade. Three to four colors (including the base or

natural brick color) should be sufficient to highlight any facade.

The base color appears on wall surfaces and storefront piers. Often this color will be natural brick and will not require paint. If the brick or base material has been painted, it should be repainted a color that relates to the surrounding buildings. For the major trim color, it is usually best to use a color which contrasts with the base color but is a shade lighter or darker. Major trim elements include the cornice, window caps, window frames, storefront cornice, storefront columns, and bulkheads. The minor trim color should enhance the color scheme established by the base and major trim. A shade darker or lighter of the major trim or a neutral color such as grey or cream are good choices. Window



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sash, doors, and the storefront frame should all be included as minor trim. While care should be taken not to over-decorate the facade, a fourth “accent” color can be used in small amounts to bring out decorative details on cornices, window hoods or storefront columns.

In general, the simpler and less detailed the building you are painting,

blend with surrounding materials. For example, aluminum frames have often replaced traditional wooden storefronts and window frames. The shine and metallic color of the aluminum does not complement many historic buildings. To help blend this shiny metal, paint them the major trim color or a more neutral color.



the fewer number of paint colors you will need. Another good rule of thumb is to remember that single-color or two-color schemes are quite safe. If you are unsure of how to highlight details, don't. If you are uncomfortable selecting color combinations, many paint companies put together examples of paint color combinations for your reference.

Color can also be used to visually minimize facade problems. Incompatible materials can be less noticeable if painted to match or

Another factor to consider when painting an older building is historical accuracy. If the goal is to return the building to its original colors, carefully scrape or sand a small area of each painted surface. There are often several layers of

paint over the original color. To get a better idea of the true color, wet the original surface. The base color will appear more accurately when moist. It is also important to realize that white paint was not so widely used during the Victorian period as it is today. White seems to be too glaring and does not blend readily with the environment. Instead, try a slightly beige, cream or grey white to reduce glare.

Painting can be not only a dramatic and affordable improvement to

your building, but can also serve as a

Consider:

- Surface Preparation
- Historical Accuracy
- Color Scheme
- Oil or Latex?
- Weather

unifying factor in several ways. First, a properly chosen paint scheme can unify the building's elements by using the same colors throughout the facade. Paint can also help reinforce your business image. By repeating some of the same colors on your building that have been used on the interior and in advertising, the public is presented with a unified and identifiable message. Finally, painting your building can have a positive effect on Main Street as a whole. By choosing colors that are sensitive to and which complement your buildings surroundings, you can help Main Street present a unified image and a positive, inviting atmosphere.

For More Information:

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Additional Reading:

*“Exterior Paint Problems on Historic
Woodwork”
Preservation Brief #10
U.S. Department of the Interior*

*“Building Improvement File”
National Trust Main Street Center*