

Preservation Points
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS)
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Interior Painting

Important as it is to retain the exterior characteristics of a historic building, (Preservation Points: Preservation Planning), retaining the interior characteristics is just as important. In this article, painting will be discussed.

The advent of latex paints has markedly simplified the painting process for the do-it-yourselfer. Latex paints are water-based as opposed to oil-based, thin with water, spreads quickly and easily, dries in about an hour has little or no odor and is easy to clean-up.

Preservation Point: Research paint colors which may be original to your building.

Walls and ceilings should be done in flat latex. Trim, doors, shelves, and other woodwork should be done with semi-gloss latex enamel also known as a satin finish. Kitchen and bathroom walls can also be painted with a satin finish. Do not use high-gloss latex enamel. High-gloss enamels accentuate imperfections in the painted surface and do not offer any additional advantages of longevity or maintenance.

The following are some simple guidelines for interior painting:

- It is best not to use more than two colors in a single room. A basic rule of thumb is to use a darker color for the walls and a lighter shade of the same color for the trim.
- If at all in doubt, use a single light color, preferably a white or off-white.
- If selecting off-white, be sure to use one that is tinted with a color that goes with existing colors or woodwork. Hints of color in white paint makes it “off-white”.
- Light colors make a room seem larger; dark colors make a room seem smaller and cave-like.
- If you have dark wood trim, avoid very light colors on walls. This tends to make the wood look even darker. Especially avoid white or offwhite.
- Paint the ceiling white for more light and a feeling of airiness.
- Historically accurate colors are a safe bet and a conversation piece. (Victorian Interior Decoration by Roger Moss is one source).
- Wainscoting that needs to be repainted should be done in warm earth tones like beige, straw, ivory or eggshell.
- Stairway balustrades can be accentuated by using the wall behind it as a foil. If the balustrade is a light color use a darker color on the wall, and a light color on the wall if the balustrade is dark.
- Do not paint unpainted wood, brick, stone, tile, or floors.
- Do not paint over wallpaper with an oil base paint.
- Do not paint over wallpaper that is not properly hung, peeling, cracking or brittle.

- Test colors by first painting a sample area, especially when using multiple colors or if you have natural wood trim.

Preservation Point: Try not to cover architectural details by using too much paint.

Proper surface preparation is essential to a successful paint job. Washing, scraping and sanding are necessary to ensure proper adherence. If paint removal is required, never use a propane torch. The wood could get damaged and paint will not adhere well to charred wood. Heat guns or heat plates are another alternative, however, all three methods may pose a health and safety problem. Since older paints may contain lead, the heat may oxidize causing poisonous fumes. If the wood gets too hot, it may ignite; in some cases, debris, or dust behind the wall may also ignite.

Chemical strippers can be used but again, caution must be taken with regards to fumes that may be generated. Protective breathing devices such as High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters should be used. Ask your paint distributor or hardware store for more information.

Finally, follow all Federal and State requirements for the disposal of lead paint.

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society is dedicated to the preservation of Alameda's historic structures and Neighborhoods. For further information on AAPS, phone 510-986-9232; write P.O. Box 1677, Alameda Ca. 94501 or visit www.alameda-preservation.org.