

# YOUR OLD HOUSE

## TRUE COLOURS

Authentic Heritage Colour & Placement

*S Halfnight, Heritage Colourist & D Luxton, Heritage Consultant*



Photograph S. Halfnight '00

2919 East 29th Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia



# TRUE COLOURS

## *Authentic Heritage Colour & Placement*

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This pamphlet provides a practical approach to repainting the exterior of your heritage building using authentic colours. Choosing colours from the appropriate era for your building and placing them in coherent relationship to the building as a whole depends upon:

- regional historical information
- on-site research analysis and
- archival data.

The use of colour on your house is more than a surface treatment, it is part of its architectural expression. When colour and placement are followed through, element by element, with specific attention paid to style, age and region, your old house's appearance can return to its roots and show its True Colours.

This pamphlet is about authentic colour choices and how to make them.

Colour is often a very personal aspect of the home, where individuality and taste are expressed. Colour schemes that are not authentic, such as the 'Painted Ladies' approach to some Victorian homes, can be a playful presentation of a restored building. Nonetheless, colour use on our heritage buildings was part of the original architectural design and intent. Authentic colour can be the finishing step in restoring the integral presentation of heritage architecture. The use of appropriate historic colours can reveal and emphasize the building's original style and appearance.



Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL #7401

Houses on Lakewood Drive, Vancouver, British Columbia circa 1922

# INTRODUCTION

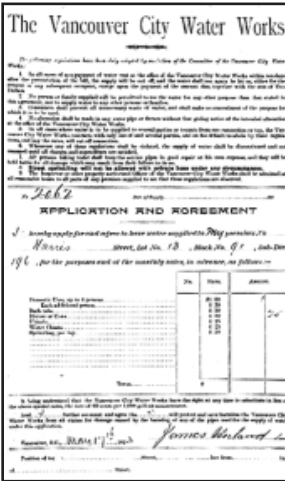
## REGIONAL HISTORIC INFORMATION

In the latter part of the 19th century, European settlers immigrating to Canada brought with them their familiar building types and styles. Settlement spread west across the country with the railroad and the first buildings were generally simple, vernacular structures. As communities were established, more elaborate structures could be erected. These were constructed from readily available materials, most often wood in the west coast region.

Pioneer buildings were left unpainted or were white-washed. As building trades became better organized oil based paints began to be used. Colour was an integral part of the style and appearance of the building. Paint was often mixed on-site using natural pigments and linseed oil.

When these communities grew and matured, architectural expression became more sophisticated, and grand. More pretentious structures reflected the growing prosperity of a new merchant class. Elaborate and finely detailed Queen Anne and Italianate styles were used extensively for both grand villas and simple cottages. Until the beginning of the 20th century, these homes were generally characterized by a palette of dark and earthy hues which emphasized their strength and solidity.

Following the turn of the century, tastes changed to favour the Classical Revival styles, which took a different approach to colour, using mid-range to dark body colours, with lighter tones highlighting the trim elements. This dramatic shift in the appearance of local buildings signalled a transition from the Victorian era to the Edwardian. Within a decade the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement began to be felt on the west coast, and the Craftsman bungalow rapidly became the most common form of newly built housing.



City of Vancouver Archives



# REGIONAL STYLE GUIDE 1880's-1930's

*Showing Themes of Period, Detailing & Colour*

## VICTORIAN ERA



Photograph Victoria Heritage Foundation

Victorian

circa 1910



Photograph Victoria Heritage Foundation

Queen Anne

### Victorian / Queen Anne

*Popular from the 1880s until about 1904, but seen as late as 1912*

- mid-range to dark body colour with darker trim
- asymmetrical, picturesque rooflines
- Queen Anne often included a turret
- extensive fretwork and carpenter ornamentation
- large variety of surface textures.

#### **Typical Colour Scheme:**

dark red body with dark green trim & gloss black sash.

### Italianate

*Popular from the 1870s until the 1890s*

- mid-range to dark body colour with darker trim
- more symmetrical in expression
- more vertical and restrained
- round-headed windows commonly used
- highly detailed ornamentation with bracketed cornices
- often with ornamental porches and balconies

#### **Typical Colour Scheme:**

similar palette to other late Victorian Styles.

Italianate



Photograph BC Archives HP1791

## EDWARDIAN ERA

### Edwardian

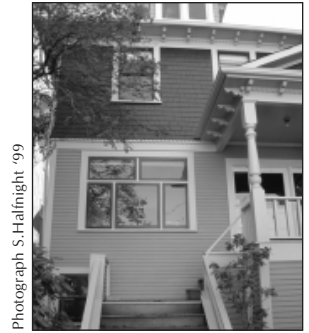
*Popular from about 1904 until 1914*

- mid-range to dark body colour with lighter trim
- base and upper body differentiated in materials and colour, usually light to mid-range below, dark above
- increased use of symmetry
- facade a mixture of narrow siding and shingles
- hip roof or gable variations
- usually with front facing full verandah

**Typical Colour Scheme:**

dark green body with buff trim & gloss black sash

Edwardian



Photograph S. Halmight '99

### Arts & Crafts / Craftsman

*Very popular from about 1908 on, persisting into the 1930s*

- dark earth tone body colours with cream or buff trim and dark sash
- half-timbering sometimes used in gables
- steeply pitched roofs with broad, overhanging eaves
- shingle siding was usually stained rather than painted

**Typical Colour Scheme:**

dark brown body with cream trim & dark green sash

Arts & Crafts / Craftsman



Photograph S. Halmight '99

### Tudor Revival



Photograph S. Halmight '99

### Tudor Revival

*Popular from the turn of the century until the 1930s*

- based on an Elizabethan vernacular
- allied to the Arts & Crafts movement
- common use of half-timbering, picked out in dark colours, against light stucco walls
- brick and stone used as foundation materials
- masonry chimneys emphasized as a vertical element
- stained glass and leaded windows are common
- flat paints commonly used on wall surfaces

**Typical Colour Scheme:**

earth tone body with dark trim & dark sash.

# FINDING YOUR ORIGINAL COLOURS

## *Tasks, Methods and Checklist*

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1.

### RESEARCH

#### *Discovering Style, Era and Date of Construction*

Determine the most accurate date for the construction of your house. This may involve some detective work and a trip to your local archives. Try to locate archival photographs of your home or a similar type of home from the same era. Records such as water and building permit applications are helpful in determining actual construction dates. Talk to previous owners and then confirm their anecdotal information with municipal records where possible.

2.

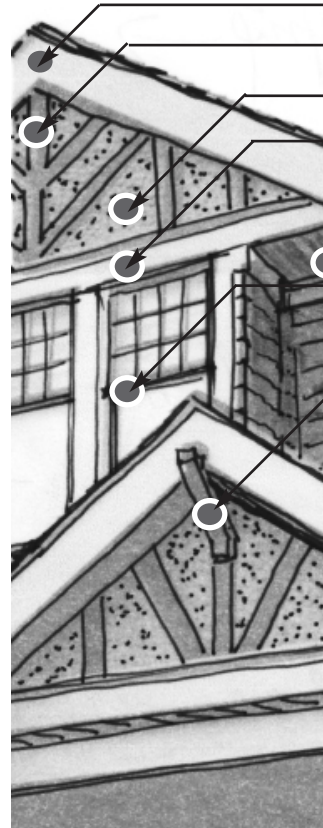
### ASSESS THE CONDITION OF YOUR HOUSE

#### *Discovering What is Original and What is Not*

- a. Document the building by photographing all four sides.
- b. Look with a critical eye to discover:
  - where damage has occurred in the past;
  - where renovations & additions have taken place.
- c. Use the photos (from a.) and a notebook to record:
  - repair and restoration required on siding / shingles, windows, soffits / eaves, gutters and roof;
  - missing elements such as brackets, railings, stairs (paint build-up residue known as 'ghosting' may reveal original, now missing elements);
  - damaged/broken elements needing attention.

Steps, porches, windows may have been altered or replaced. Often weather damage occurs in one area and not another. Experienced trades people with skill and the right tools / shop equipment are often able to repair rather than replace.

Note: *There is more information in other "Your Old House" pamphlets on Paint, Wood Siding, Wood Windows, Masonry (see back cover).*



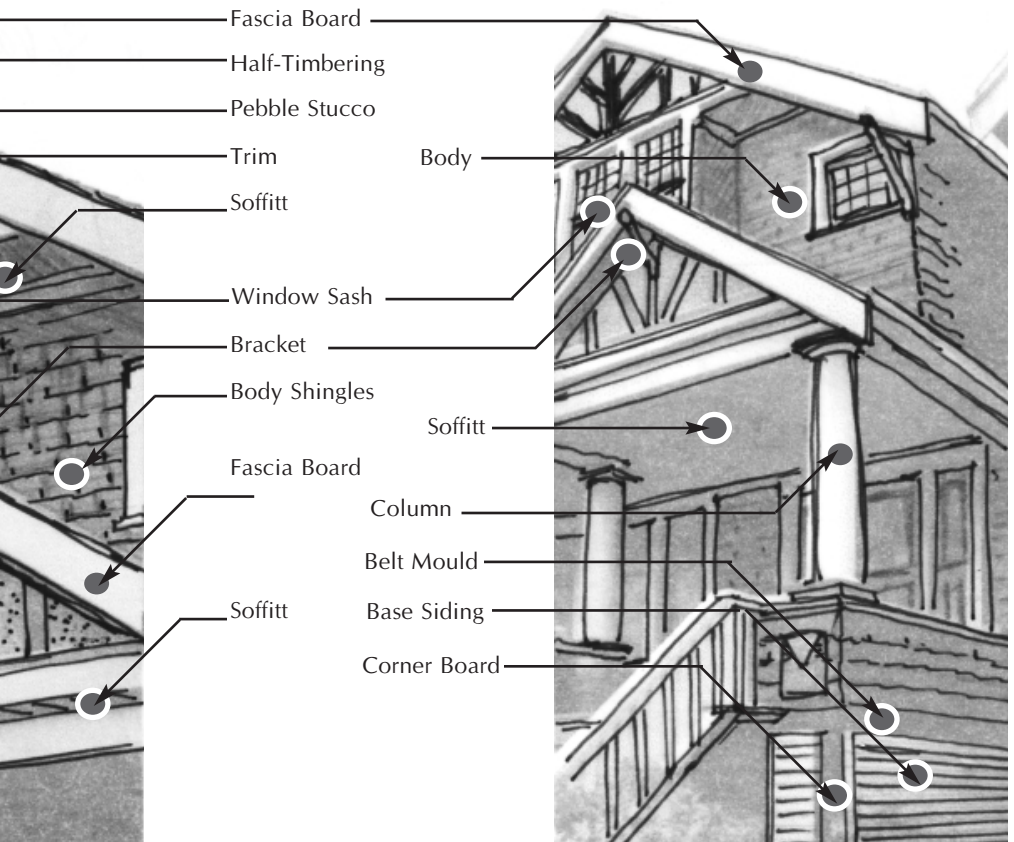


## 3.

### SAMPLING & VISUAL ANALYSIS

#### *Scraping away the Layers to Determine the Original Colours*

- Take exterior paint samples by scraping away layers of paint from original parts of your home until you reach the first layer. Feathering the edge of your test patch as you go allows you to distinguish each individual paint layer. You will need to assess whether the first layer is an undercoat used to prepare the surface, or the first colour.
- When scraping take care not to damage the wood surface.
- Avoid breathing paint dust as older paints may contain lead.
- Wash hands after scraping and dispose of any debris carefully.



# EXPLORING YOUR OPTIONS

## Colour Sketches & Paint Chips

### 3. continued

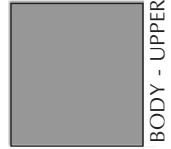
#### SAMPLING & VISUAL ANALYSIS

##### Determining the Original Colours

- Take scrapings from each type of surface area: body, trim and sash, including samples from different areas of the house.
- It is helpful to label each sample and element of the house from which it came, for future reference.
- Avoid renovated sections, and choose sampling sites which have had minimal exposure to prevailing weather and winds. The north side of your home receives less sun weathering. In sheltered locations under window frames and porch rooves, the paint will retain more original colour because it has been protected from sun and weather.
- Once scraping is complete, do a visual analysis of each sample using a magnifying glass (8-10 times magnification is most useful).
- Note that interpretation will be required as chemical composition can change over time.
- When samples are confusing and inconclusive the assistance of a heritage professional may be helpful. For a reference guide to heritage professionals contact the Canadian Association of Professional Heritage Consultants at CAPHC, PO BOX 1023, Stn Y, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2T7 or 'heritage@caphc.ca'

#### TYPICAL CONTRAST & TONE Relationships of Light & Dark

*TIP:*  
Most houses will have 3 colours, one for the body, another for the trim and a third for the sash. Sometimes you will find a 2 colour or a 4 colour scheme. This is an



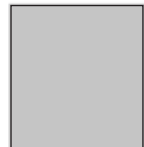
BODY - UPPER



TRIM



SASH

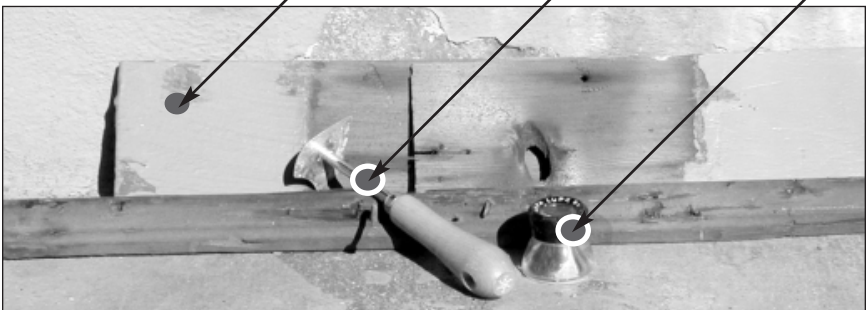


BASE - LOWER

Shingle & Sample

Scraper

Magnifying Glass





# VISUAL DECISION MAKING

## 4.

### EXPLORING YOUR COLOUR OPTIONS

#### *Coloured Sketches & Paint Chips*

- Using the information gathered from the scraping and visual analysis of your paint samples, from your photodocumentation and archival information, diagram the original scheme in colour, to help you visualize the effect of these colours in combination, with the original emphasis and placement.
- Visually explore the possibilities, while keeping a record of colours you like on other houses in the neighbourhood.
- Develop two or more possible colour schemes: One that shows the original colour scheme and one or more that would be authentic to the building's era and style.
- Ensure that you maintain the relative placement of dark and light tones.
- Subtle changes can make a big difference, so take the time to explore the possibilities of the original scheme as well as other variations and options.



#### TIP

- *for a quick and easy way to create a base diagram/sketch - take a front view photo of your house, enlarge and lighten it on a xerox machine to be used as a base for colouring. Then draw an outline in pen and make enough copies to explore colours with paints or pencils. A huge variety of pencil crayons are available in art / hobby supply stores. Make sure that your colour sketch includes all the architectural elements on the house - such as brackets, eaves, railings, corner boards, watertables, trim and sash.*

# CHOOSING YOUR COLOURS

## *Making a Colour & Paint Plan*

5.

### PREPARATION & PAINT FINISHES

#### *Colour Plan, Priorities and Emphasis*

- Choose the scheme you want.
- Take your coloured drawings to a paint store and select actual paint colours and finish. Test each colour on the house to make sure you like the effect in true daylight. Each face of your house will have a different light exposure, so colours will vary and look different on different sides. This is also true of sunny and cloudy conditions.



### **BEFORE:**



Photograph S. Halfnight '99

42 West 10th Avenue

### **AFTER:**



Photograph S. Halfnight '99

# YOUR COLOUR PLAN

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- Older paints were oil based and often had lead as part of their chemical composition. Shingles used on siding and rooves were often stained rather than painted. Sash was usually a high gloss finish, the trim was glossy, the body of the house was painted or stained, and sometimes shellaced (if siding). This is an issue of emphasis, as colours were deepened and intensified by using glossy finishes. A gloss finish is usually a harder, more durable paint surface. The preparation required and the quality of the material to be painted must be taken into consideration when you and your painter agree on a cost for the contracted work.

- Label each element of your house on your drawing with the formulated paint colour and surface finish required.

- Your colour plan is now complete. Give a copy to your painter. Put a copy of this plan in your file (sketch and paint colours chosen). In addition, you can make your own colour sample cards for future reference by painting the actual paints used on large cards.

- If repairs are required before painting, make a priority listing, budget and time-line.

***for example:*** if your roof and gutters need replacing,  
have this done before painting  
and choose the gutter and roof colours  
to complement the new paint scheme.

- Gather names of painting contractors and ask for quotes and references. Your paint store professionals and your painter are good resources for you with their wealth of experience and technical background.

- Ensure that the preparation stage is agreed upon and included in the quote. Have your painter put up test patches of each colour on your building for you to approve.

- Good luck and enjoy the transformation!

TRUE COLOURS is a heritage colour research and paint granting program of the Vancouver Heritage Foundation. This program restores heritage homes to their authentic exterior paint colours. Research is done to find the original colours, the building is prepared for painting using good conservation and maintenance practice and the new colour scheme is authentic to its architectural style and its Vancouver context.

Benjamin Moore Paints has been the corporate sponsor for the TRUE COLOURS program. They have been a partner in the matching and on-going development of a Vancouver Regional Heritage Palette and the supplier of the paint.



Special Thanks to the Vancouver Heritage Foundation Board for their vision and support of the TRUE COLOURS initiative; the Vancouver Foundation grant support for the writing of this pamphlet; and Robert Lemon, for the seed idea and the name TRUE COLOURS.



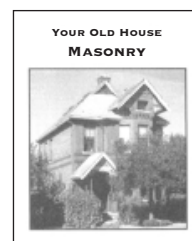
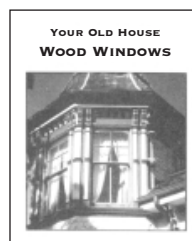
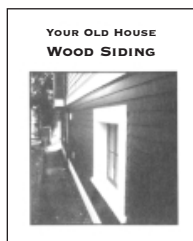
TRUE COLOURS Pamphlet working group has been assisted by Diane Switzer, Executive Director of the Vancouver Heritage Foundation, Robert Lemon Architect, and Kimberly Bercov, Research Assistant.



The Vancouver Heritage Foundation can be contacted through our Website [www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org](http://www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org)  
Voice-mail: 604-871-6603



*OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES . . .*



# HISTORICAL TRUE COLOURS



**VC-1**  
Oxford Ivory



**VC-2**  
Craftsman Cream



**VC-3**  
Pendrell Cream



**VC-4**  
Harris Cream



**VC-5**  
Dunbar Buff



**VC-6**  
Edwardian Buff



**VC-7**  
Edwardian Cream



**VC-8**  
Mount Pleasant Buff



**VC-9**  
Strathcona Gold



**VC-10**  
Comox Gold



**VC-11**  
Kitsilano Gold



**VC-12**  
Mount Pleasant Tan



**VC-13**  
Bute Taupe



**VC-14**  
Dunbar Grey



**VC-15**  
Haddington Grey



**VC-16**  
Comox Sage



**VC-17**  
Victorian Peridot



**VC-18**  
Pendrell Green



**VC-19**  
Comox Green\*



**VC-20**  
Vancouver Green\*



**VC-21**  
Harris Green



**VC-22**  
Pendrell Verdigris



**VC-23**  
Edwardian Pewter



**VC-24**  
Point Grey



**VC-25**  
Harris Grey\*



**VC-26**  
Edwardian Porch Grey



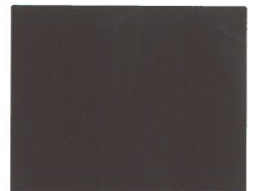
**VC-27**  
Strathcona Red



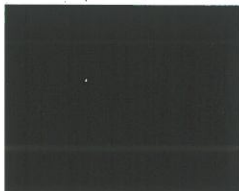
**VC-28**  
Mellish Rust\*



**VC-29**  
Pendrell Red\*



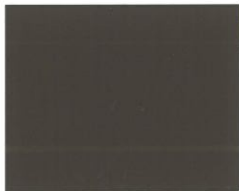
**VC-30**  
Hastings Red\*



**VC-31**  
Mellish Mahogany\*



**VC-32**  
Craftsman Brown\*



**VC-33**  
Harris Brown\*



**VC-34**  
Strathcona Mahogany\*



**VC-35**  
Gloss Black\*\*

\* These colours are shown in Benjamin Moore Collection® Soft Gloss finish, due to the extreme depth in colour. When tinted in Benjamin Moore Collection® Low Lustre, a slight variation may be observed.  
\*\* Black is available in low lustre or soft gloss finishes. For true authenticity, the Vancouver Heritage Foundation recommends the Benjamin Moore Collection® Impervex High Gloss product.