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Technicolor Dream Coats

Little Pink Houses (Purple and Blue, Too) Spring
From a Palette of Vivid Colors

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A violet house blooms in Chevy Chase, and it looks as if someone spilled the Crayolas in Del Ray.

Throughout the region, homeowners are flourishing peacock hues over a once-staid world of black and white and brick.

So who cares about resale values?

Jane Martinache would pass on an extra \$50,000 rather than drab down her purple and pink Victorian in Alexandria's Del Ray neighborhood. "I'd rather have someone who loved the way it looked than someone who wanted a white house," the graphic designer said. "I went through a lot of work to research the house and get it back to how it looked 100 years ago, and I wouldn't want to undo all that."

Not that she is thinking of selling any time soon.

The former church was white with green trim when Martinache began her restoration project two years ago. "I grew up in a military family with white exteriors and interiors. Always white."

So she painted the siding a rebellious purple and highlighted the gingerbread trim in lavender, pink and white. She chose the colors, slapping 20 shades on the shed wall outside her kitchen window, waiting for enchantment.



Getting started was a little intimidating. "The contractor said what a big commitment it was to paint the house purple and how it would affect the resale. My friends said the same."

But she decided, "If I was going to drive up and see it everyday, I wanted to make sure it was something I really loved."

When it came time to paint their petite Victorian, Martinache's neighbors, Maria Getoff and Peter

Hayes, brought out the giant box of crayons. The walls are bright blue, the fish-scaled gable is purple and the window boxes are raspberry. The green that trims the windows is one they invented, mixing this shade and that and naming the result Molly Green, after their daughter.

"We spent a lot of time throwing up shades to see what worked," Getoff said. "And the whole neighborhood got involved. People I didn't know would walk by and say, 'I like the one on the left.' "

A little more than six months later, they lucked into a larger house around the corner. "We didn't expect to be selling the house, or I would have done something more traditional," she said. "I was afraid we'd get fewer contracts."



Real estate agent **Jennifer Walker** of McEneaney Associates cocked her eyebrow when she first saw the place, then huddled with the interior designer who does the company's home staging.

"We thought it might turn people off," she said. "But we put it on the market Thursday and had two phenomenal offers at the open house -- it basically took four days."



If anything, the colorful palette may have given the sale a boost. The three-bedroom, one-bath house sold for far above the asking price.

"We had a lot of fun picking the colors out," said Paul Winkel of WinkWorks & Co., who painted the house. "It's very pleasing to look at. You take a little longer at the stop sign."

Winkel says people are becoming more daring in their color selections, even though a radical color change and extensive detail work can add from 25 to 50 percent to the cost of the transformation.

It's about time, he thinks, historically speaking. "In the late 1700s, there were bright colors," he said. "We see them as muted because they were faded. People want to make a statement: 'I have a nice house and I want to show it off.' They're saying, 'This is my house I can do what I want,' and eventually the neighborhood says, 'You know, I like that color.' And there you have it."

And people are also noticing the artfulness of painted trim. "That's why the detail was there in the first place," Winkel said. "White house with white trim? You can't see anything."

For both the body of the house and the trim, colors such as burgundy, aubergine and espresso are strong sellers at Alexandria Paint, said owner Bill Thornton. "People are getting a little experimental, more whimsical," he said.

Period colors are also popular -- earth tones for Arts & Crafts houses, pastels on Victorians, and warm yellows with French blue shutters to give a French country look to various home styles.

Besides the emotional lift they bring, colors have a very practical function. "You can use color to accentuate the good part of the architecture and draw attention from the bad," said Marjorie Berringer-Schuran, a color consultant and owner of Berringer Design and Consulting.

Case in point: A big, white house in Alexandria "that rambled on in styles from many additions -- none that matched each other." She unified the house and its hodgepodge of odd-sized windows by painting the body dark blue and the window frames grey to minimize their differences.

"At first, the owner said it's going to be so dark. Afterwards, the neighbors said, 'Oh my God, it looks so good.'"

She said, "I think things go in cycles, and people are looking for a little more individuality in the house. We are in a relatively conservative area, but people are trying to bring personality to the home. And they're not afraid of color because they've spent so much time being afraid of it that they just say, 'Forget it. Okay, done that, been there.'"

They are certainly not afraid of color in California. "On the West Coast, offbeat colors are almost normal, and feng shui [the ancient Asian art of arranging spaces] is taking off like lightning," said Holly Ziegler, a real estate agent and author of "Sell Your Home Faster with Feng Shui." So mainstream is the practice in her state that Ziegler teaches a course for agents through the California Department of Real Estate.

"It's ancient common sense," she said. "The art of harmony and balance in your space -- or the color of your house."

When people select unusual or vivid colors for their homes, "it's a way of claiming their individuality -- 'I'm me, here I am, and I'm proud of it.'"

She said, "When you use offbeat colors, you're calling attention to yourself. 'Oh my goodness, she's painting her shutters periwinkle! Isn't it lovely.' It's nice to have individuality."

If resale value is a worry, the safest way to get away from bland is to work with earth tones. "Earth is the most fundamental, the grounding element. It includes yellows, ochres, browns, terracotta," Ziegler said.

Tuscan colors are particularly good. "Sage, russet, burnt umber . . . They make people feel secure and confident. Color is very powerful psychologically. You're dealing with emotion."

Yellows and other shades of green are also excellent choices. "Metaphorically speaking, green is birth, new beginnings, spring," she said. "Greens are very soothing and restful, they don't jar the senses. Various shades of green on one house can be very beautiful."

Are there problem colors? While a red door generally speaks of welcome, a red house is something else again. "It's the bull-in-the-china-shop color -- like having a fist coming at you. With the exception of a natural tone, like brick . . . red is too powerful," she said.

Anthony Wilder would paint the brick, too. The owner of Anthony Wilder Design/Build said: "Most brick is unattractive. Builders don't pay any attention to the color, it's red or orange."

He singles out Arlington: "All that red brick, like rows of military houses. It's so repetitious and predictable. I think people are getting tired of that dah-dot dah-dot look. With paint, you can change a house from a cold, hard, red surface to a warm, happy house -- it's night and day."

Even if you just paint the trim. "I saw a red brick on Rockwood Parkway -- up on a hill. Gorgeous house. Red brick and turquoise trim. Now that was nifty -- or someone with a lot of experience. Think about a rusty orange shirt and a turquoise necklace. Stunning."

Many people get overwhelmed by color, Wilder said. "There's so much to consider. Open the color palette, and there's thousands of shades and you have a panic attack and don't want to pick anything . . . so we pick black and white. Very predictable. It's just a can of paint! Put a swatch up on the surface and look at it."

When in doubt, "pick what you always wear," he said. "Change is wonderful. Sometimes it's scary -- it's like jumping off a cliff into the water. Scary, but you come up buoyant and laughing. You feel you've conquered the world."

But beware of too much exuberance, said Kristen Gerlach of Gerlach Real Estate, who cautioned that if you're thinking about resale, pale is best.

"When you're doing a house for resale, you need to have as many people get excited as possible, and there are people who don't like any color," she said. "They like neutral and yellow and creamy colors. . . . Boring sells. Trust me."

Pale colors also make a house look bigger. "If the house looks small for the money, they're not going to analyze it and say, 'It's brown so it looks smaller.' That's something a lot of homeowners don't grasp. They get mortally wounded when I say, 'Get out the brush and the white paint.' It's not their taste that's bad; it just doesn't sell to the masses."

Still, she concedes that a green house she recently listed for \$1,945,000 sold quickly. "But that might be a function of lack of inventory," she said.

And it is a bit of a surprise that Gerlach's own home is . . . purple.

"I like purple," she said. "It's lavender with purple shutters and a purple door . . . but I warned my husband, if he ever sees a painter and cans of yellow paint, to start packing, we're moving."

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