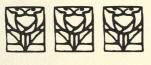
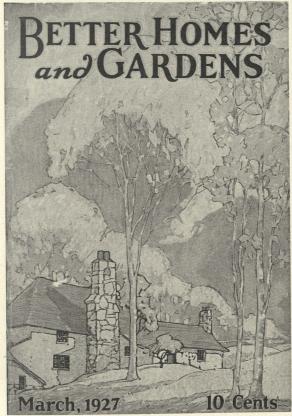
View from The Overlook



THE JOURNAL OF THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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WWW.CHHISTORY.ORG



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View the color versions of the illustrations in this article on our Cleveland Heights Historical Society's Facebook timeline and in our photo collection.

An Abundance of Exterior Color Ideas for Homes – from 1927

By Ken Goldberg

n article in the March, 1927 issue of Better Homes and Gardens entitled, "Becoming Color Schemes for the House: Answering the Old Question, 'How Shall We Paint Our Home?'" by Gertrude Woodcock, gives us insight into 1920s thought regarding color schemes, paint capabilities, and proper painting technique. As a charming piece of prose, the article stands as a classic in early Better Homes and Gardens entries; the magazine was in its sixth year of publication. Woodcock also wrote an article on decorating interior walls for another issue.



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"Becoming Color Schemes," in a creative but reasonably conservative publication, proves to us that many colors were used for American residences during the '20s. Indeed, "middle — American" Sears, in its 1927 catalog, listed among its 35 "Seroco house paints" a variety of colors such as "canary," "dove," "light blue," "pure blue," "Nile green," "oxide red," and "terra cotta." The whole assortment included seven grays, seven greens, six browns, five yellows, and one black (with certain classifications here open to interpretation).

Interestingly enough, these colors, plus white, are all very standard hues selected for 1920s houses today. One should keep in mind that the Seroco colors were for trim and/or main body color. There were definite differences in color placement from what has become standard in recent decades. For example, blues were used almost exclusively for trim, doors, and shutters, because blue paints were considered "fugitive" such that if one used blue it might discolor more quickly than other colors and the house would require painting sooner.

The reader should also consider these paints were used primarily for houses of styles dating long before the year of the catalog. They were common colors in 1927 for all periods and many styles of American houses, while shingle stains came in certain whites and off —whites, grays, browns, greens, and reds. This was true of wood -shingled roofs, as well as exterior walls.

We in Greater Cleveland, with Shaker Heights in our midst, may have a strong image of the wealthy neighborhood of the 1910s and '20s, where stucco should be creams and tans, half-timbers browns (or occasionally grays), all Colonials white with green shutters, etc. The Van Sweringen Co., which developed most of Shaker Heights and beyond towards the Chagrin Valley, did have very explicit ideas as to what Shaker's houses should be painted, according to style -



Top: Color pack from early 1900s Bottom: Sherwin-Williams handbook of ca. 1929



The back cover of the March 1927 edition of Better Homes and Gardens

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society, founded in 1983, is a state-chartered, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization.

Our Mission

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the diverse character and traditions of Cleveland Heights. As a community-based historic organization, the Society encourages and facilitates greater knowledge, understanding and awareness of the heritage of Cleveland Heights.

From the President:

One of our most historic, substantial, and certainly familiar edifices, Heights High School, has just been remodeled, renovated, and restored. Yes — all three. I wasn't in town when the Science Wing was added to Heights High, and I don't know if there was any organized opposition to its construction which effectively blocked the Hampton Court Palace-inspired façade, but it sure annoyed me when I found out what the school had looked like before. Never in a million years would I have anticipated that wing — obviously an exciting image in the 60's era — would ever be sacrificed for the sake of history and the school's 1926 image. Now we have the win-win scenario whereby an important complex in our midst combines 91-year-old architecture — including the notable, Georgian-style clock tower — with 2017 technology and design. A public open house will take place in September, and I hope as many of you who are interested are able to attend. Most likely you shall marvel at what you are experiencing.

— Ken Goldberg

Fall 2017 Programs

Co-sponsored by the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission, the Cleveland Heights Historical Society and the Heights Library

Doan's Corners

Monday, October 2, 7 p.m. Heights Main Library, 2345 Lee Road Speaker: Dennis Sutcliffe

Program includes audio clips from famous celebrities who performed in the neighborhood.

Designing an Appropriate Addition for an Old House

Monday, October 9, 7 p.m. Noble Library, 2800 Noble Road Speakers: Trudy Andrzejewski, Cleveland Restoration Society & Kara Hamley O'Donnell, City of Cleveland Heights

Designing an Appropriate Addition for an Old House

Tuesday, October 24, 7 p.m. Heights Main Library, 2345 Lee Road Speakers: Trudy Andrzejewski, Cleveland Restoration Society & Kara Hamley O'Donnell, City of Cleveland Heights

Integration Experiences

Wednesday, October 25, 7 p.m.
Heights Main Library, 2345 Lee Road
Panel: Rev. Jimmie Hicks, Jeanne Madison, Susanna Niermann O'Neil & others. We invite those who have their own integration stories to share them with the group after the panel discussion.

SWP (Sherwin-Williams House Paint)

A FEW THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT OUTSIDE HOUSE PAINT

Outside house paint stands in a class all by itself. Like other quality paints, the colors must be clean cut and must not fade. But house paint must stand the weather.

Weather is not just wind and rain, not just extremes of heat and cold. Weather is all of these, plus the burning heat of the sun which carries with it the destructive action of the ultra-violet ray. These ultra-violet rays which possess such germicidal power and curative value in the treatment of disease, are destroyers of paint films.

WHY AND HOW PAINT DISINTEGRATES

Paint is not merely a simple mixture of ingredients. Chemical changes take place which must be understood and controlled or the paint will be unsatisfactory, no matter how good the materials may be, in themselves.

White Lead forms a compound with Linseed Oil which is rather readily affected by water. A house painted with White Lead paint "chalks," that is, sun and rain decompose the paint film and the pigment rubs off like chalk. White Lead paint is not the best paint for your house today.

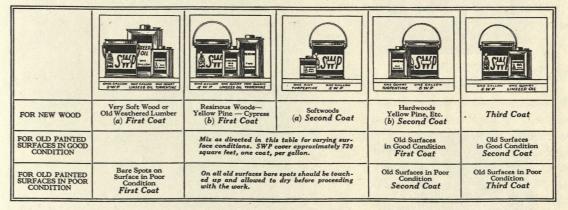
White Zinc, on the other extreme, forms a compound with Linseed Oil which is NOT affected by water. White Zinc paint does not "chalk" but in time, weather causes it to check or crack. This, of course, is really a worse fault than the chalking of lead paint because it leaves the surface in no shape for repainting. White Zinc paint is not the best paint for your house today.

It is possible to make a combination lead and zinc paint, however, in which the weaknesses of lead and zinc, when used alone, are overcome. By correctly proportioning the amounts of White Lead and White Zinc the paint does not "chalk" and wears away normally without the objectionable cracking and peeling of zinc paints.

SWP (Sherwin-Williams House Paint) is a combination paint made on a perfectly balanced formula containing Carbonate of Lead, Sulphate of Lead and Zinc Oxide. Sherwin-Williams have been making this paint on the same formula for fifty-five years. We make and furnish White Lead and White Zinc separately for various purposes—they are the best and purest obtainable at any price—but we consider SWP the best outside house paint possible to make.

How to Reduce SWP

ONE REASON WHY SWP IS A MOST ECONOMICAL PAINT



HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

Three-inch Brush, Small Sash-Tool, Putty Knife, Putty, Stepladder, Orange Shellac for knots, Raw Linseed Oil, Turpentine

From Sherwin-Williams booklet: How to Paint Your House — ca. 1927

ideas spelled out to architects and to early Shaker residents in pamphlets — and these ideas of the American Colonies and Greek temples were white, half-timbers on all houses in

They also disdained pure whites and blacks. Some choice was acceptable within the framework of a specific style (of the limited styles sanctioned) by which a house was identified, though many of these "traditional" color images

were derived from false information (i.e. houses of the American Colonies and Greek temples were white, half-timbers on all houses in England and France were in dark brown tones, etc.). Architects, designers, developers, and homeowners of corresponding neighborhoods in other cities advocated similar color schemes, but one should realize there was a wide variety of



SHERWIN-WILLIAMS **House Paint**

A WELL PAINTED HOUSE IS ONE LUXURY THE OWNER OF THE MODEST HOME CAN AFFORD



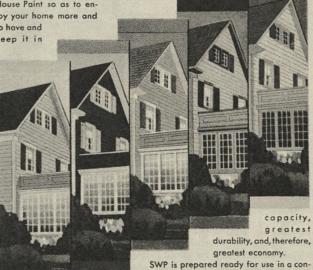
and observe whether he keeps it well painted or not and unconsciously form A well painted house is one luxury an opinion as to how prosperous he that even the owner of the most modmay be and what kind of folks they est home can afford. In fact, a man are. This is the reason (and usually not would have to be pretty rich to really because the house is going to fall be able to stand the expense of the apart if you don't paint it) why you repair bills which follow along when a drop into Paint Headquarters Store house is neglected and allowed to go and tell the clerk you'd like to enquire without painting.

▲ YOU look at your neighbor's house about SWP because "no applesauce

Left: National Lead Company brochure — 1927 Above: Sherwin-Williams handbook — ca. 1929 The trouble has been that house painting has been too often considered as SWP is the most durable and economone of the expensive necessities and this has taken away most of the honest pleasure of dressing up the home in a other kind, either ready prepared or clean Colonial Yellow, a cool Silver mixed by hand. It is made in one Gray or whatever your favorite color quality only and that is the very best. may be.

You decide to use the best paint on agents. can't afford to paint oftener than necessary. But your real reason for using SWP will be that it gives you the highest-toned color schemes, for one thing, and because the color keeps its dis- edge from over fifty years of experitinctive freshness for the long years forgotten

after the painters have gone and are paint of greatest covering So paint with SWP Sherwin-Williams House Paint so as to enjoy your home more and to have and keep it in



the handsome colors you like hest. ical paint that can be made, costs less per job and wears longer than any It is sold the world over by established

the market, of course, because you In the manufacture of SWP we spare neither skilled workmanship nor the quality of materials used in making it the finest possible.

Our unusual facilities and our knowlence enable us to manufacture a

sistency as heavy as is ever required. Fol-

low instructions for application carefully.

paint (and stain) colors available in the '20s, and all colors in the market were seen around Greater Cleveland, outside Shaker Heights, as well as around the nation.

Our article contains much that is worth quoting: "A shabby house has cast gloom over more than one fine garden": "Stereotyped color schemes are the curse of the American landscape": "The purpose of painting the trim a different color from the body of the house is to emphasize architectural lines. If certain parts of the trim are de trop paint them to match the siding and their power to attract attention will be removed": "In the selection of the trim color for your house the personality and charm of the place rests."

A few more: "To the average eye color is more important than form, so it becomes easy to alleviate some of the sins of the architect by wise choice of colors and clever use of trim tones". "To a certain degree house are like women. They look better in some colors than they do in others. Every woman knows that she looks ten years younger in certain colors, and that some make her look slim and others bring out the good points of her hair or complexion. This is true of houses, many of which look new and more attractive than ever before when the color scheme has been more thoroly [the magazine's own simplified spelling thought out, with the specific conditions in mind"; "Cheap paint is too expensive for the average pocketbook. It costs just as much to apply as good paint, it does not last as long, and it never looks as well."

EAGLE PURE WHITE LEAD

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This new "Soft Paste" form saves painting time, and painters have welcomed it for its greater convenience.

In 100, 50, 25, 12½ pound steel containers, both Soft Paste and Regular



The characteristic black and white Earl



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The advantages of Eagle Flatting Oil are many. It dries to a bear glossless finish, pure white in color, shows no brush marks, is enduring economical, and easily washed. Makes an excellent bronzing liquid (with a little spar varnish, and either bronze or aluminum powder); also or blending liquid for tiffany effects; and fine undercoating for enamel.

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HOME BUILDERS CATAL

equipment has changed. The author suggests the need for a house to be painted averages about five years, depending on climate and location, and that a test for the need to repaint would be for one to rub one's fingers over painted siding. If the paint comes off freely in a powdery substance (indicating the oil had worn out and only the pigment is on the surface), repainting is necessary.

The author also advocates painting three coats at a time to produce a satisfactory job —

Some of Woodcock's article is dated, as

paints have generally improved in stability. We

no longer use lead —based paint, and most

The author also advocates painting three coats at a time to produce a satisfactory job – probably one being the priming coat (in that era often the final color mixed differently). This practice is rarely followed today. Another suggestion is applying two coats, every two or three years. The author explains: "Houses in cities where soft coal is used or where there are many industries are likely to require painting more frequently."

Eleven suggestions for painting method are furnished. Most are applicable today, though the practice of burning off old paint in poor condition (even if "done only by an experienced painter") is not advised today, when we have more alternatives, nor is it even legal in Cleveland Heights and most other communities.

Since latex paint was not available in 1927, Woodcock did not delve into the problems caused by one's using latex over oil paint. She does, however, advice against using "porch paint" on cement surfaces, or "architectural varnish" on a floor.

As to colors and combinations, the author is quite definite as to her personal preferences, though they seem to follow the more tasteful practices of the era. She specifically mentions whites, creams, ivory, greens, grays, buff, terra cotta, browns, and reds. As the article appeared a full decade or so before the "white period," when

most American homes — regardless of style — were painted white, houses that were not very conscientiously "Colonial" were painted or stained in colors.

Woodcock offers many color —scheme suggestions. Among them are the following: "Consider the colors of the house next door and the colors and complexity of your landscaping"; "Never paint a small house brown, dark green or red; buff, light gray, green, pale gray, white, cream or ivory are preferable"; "If your garden is still in its "raw states," and if the house is prominently located, soft, neutral tones — — such as gray green, soft gray, buff or pale terra cotta — look best."

Woodcock also states the "duller tones" — brown, slate gray or bottle green — are most appropriate for large houses "not softened by sheltering trees or the abundance of surrounding shrubbery"; "A bit of wit: Take a hint from nature in selecting color schemes. She has chosen a very inconspicuous gray coat for one of her larger children, the elephant, while tiny birds and insects are brilliantly toned. Nature makes use of many shades and tints, using pure color only occasionally and in spots."

If the color scheme one decides on clashes with that of a neighbor or a house across the street [actually caring about the latter is the height of paint —color discretion...] a slight modification, such as lowering or graying your colors or altering the trim tones, "may avoid a pronounced discord." If your neighbor is painted red, avoid green, "unless you have the wicked type of humor that is amused by the perpetual 'Merry Christmas' aspect of the street. The green can be changed to gray green, while 'Tuscan Red' as a roof color would bridge the gap."

Concerning house colors selected with a sensitive eye for the colors of the garden, Woodcock recalls homes she has seen with colors of house and nature harmoniously blended.

Home Builders

Combinations offensive to the author are also recalled, such as on a home she came upon with luxuriant ramblers with masses of glowing pink flowers clinging to a house neat and trim but painted "an exceptionally ugly shade of red."

Delicate flowers require delicate house shades, writes Woodcock. A white, light gray or cream paint is well suited as background to a strip of feathery cosmos. The author is particularly entranced with "vivid yellow" and "rich blue" combinations, such as yellow zinnias against a blue fence. She noted, in that case: "It was the clever selection of that particular shade of blue for the shutter color, that created the effect." She also reflects on how attractive was a one —floor cottage she had seen with a hedgerow of hollyhocks, as well as a "prim little old — fashioned garden" alongside a small house painted old ivory with Delft blue shutters.

As was favored by the van Sweringen Co.'s designers and other writers of the period, Woodcock suggested certain color combinations for specific house styles. For small Colonials, she preferred pure white, ivory or cream for walls, with sage green, light olive green, or medium blue for trim and roof (frame roofs were frequently painted or stained in solid colors at this time). She also liked "Colonial yellow" for siding and "shutters blue" (apparently a common term in 1927) for trim, shutters, and roof.

For houses of Italian or Spanish derivation the author suggests walls of deep buff and trim of "Italian villa pink" or terra cotta.

For those houses "of no marked architectural degree," she suggests (according to house size or location): a body of old ivory and trim of sage green, light cream and pale olive green, Colonial yellow and dark tan, ash gray and "warm drab," stone gray and gun metal gray, dark gray and sage green, light blue and light brown, or light tan and chocolate brown. Wood adds: "Endless variations of these treatments will suggest

themselves. By varying the tint a little, a really new and refreshing color scheme may be evolved."

Since the article was written a generation after the dark hues and multi —color schemes embellishing Victorian homes went out of favor, Woodcock suggests painting ornament ("ornate products of the jig —saw") on the older houses the same color as the siding.

The author only discusses the painting of wood. Stucco on homes was rarely painted in 1927 in Greater Cleveland, but it is surprising she does not remind one to keep non —variable stucco, brick, or stone in mind when selecting paint for wood. She also avoids mentioning stains and such, but one can probably assume she refers to stains as well as paint when specifying colors.

It is important to note Woodcock makes no reference to the concept of restoring a house to its original colors. The 1920s was an era when there was little interest in the U.S. in preservation issues, except for buildings considered truly historic.

Community preservation organizations were rare. In the '20s, clapboarded 19th-century homes were being re-sided with cedar shake siding. Towers and elaborate gingerbread millwork were being removed in favor of "Colonialization" or overall design simplification. Within fifteen years after this article was written, many houses with stained shingles got painted, usually lighter colors, and many a house, including Victorians, were painted bright white.

What would Woodcock say about the synthetic sidings used on houses the past 80 years? Blast stripping of the '80s? One can only venture a guess. What might she say about the violets, oranges, sharp pinks, mauves, turquoises, chartreuses, shocking blues and greens, brilliant yellows and mustard yellows dotting certain neighborhoods of Greater Cleveland today? "Abominable!" one can hear Woodcock mutter under her breath....

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