

Adding a splash of color in an unusual place, like this orange soffit designed by Boulder's VaST Architecture, can brighten up a home's exterior without overpowering it.

Homeowners who buck the beige trend say color not only enlivens their home's exterior, it elicits colorful comments from passersby.

Text and photos by Petra Spiess

Bright red is usually best reserved for fire engines. But Jen and Tim Ward decided it was the perfect hue for their Westminster home. After their architect suggested they paint their place a tastefully subdued sage green, they had a color revelation—or rebellion—of sorts.

“Our home reminds me of a New England barn,” Jen says, and everyone

knows the best color for a barn. So, after testing 15 different paint samples, the Wards chose a bright red for their contemporary farmhouse.

“People love the house,” Jen says. “We get a lot of drive-by traffic and people often stop and comment on the color when we’re outside. It’s really flattering to know that people can applaud a strong color choice and appreciate the aesthetics. We can’t imagine ever living in a beige house again.”

Behemoth Blandscape

Like most of America, Boulder County is awash in a sea of beige, brown and gray homes. A June search of 280 homes for sale between \$300,000 and \$500,000 found only six painted in anything even resembling a bright color. A home is usually the largest single investment people make, so understandably most buyers are cautious—especially when purchasing with an eye toward resale. Bland colors appeal (or at least aren’t offensive) to the largest number of people. That’s why new subdivisions usually offer only 13 shades of beige for exterior home colors—it’s less risky.



Left: What's one benefit of a strong color? "It's easy to give directions—just look for the bright red house," says Jen Ward of her red home.

On top of that, homeowners' associations and architectural restrictions in many communities enforce the bland color code in perpetuity, ensuring that no lively hues will ever sneak in to disrupt neighborhood conformity. Hence, acre after acre of tasteful tedium sprawls across the landscape. But there's an increasing market for colorful homes; boldly painted abodes attract stares, and curb appeal sells. Non-offensive beige may be nice enough, but that daffodil yellow house really makes an impression.

McStain, a Colorado-based home builder with communities up and down the Front Range, finds that color attracts buyers. "Having some very distinct colors—

things that weren't just the normal beige you see in a lot of places—brought a lot of people to us," says McStain sales consultant Greg Cole.

Color Courage

Bright exteriors are more often found in new urbanist communities that tout this philosophy: difference is more interesting than sameness. Longmont's Prospect New Town, for example, is arguably America's most colorful neighborhood. Homes there sport periwinkle, chartreuse, flaming orange, neon red, purple and turquoise exteriors. People usually react strongly to these hues, says Prospect builder Dan Orner. "It's either love it or hate it."

Kelly Feeney, Prospect's color czar and a member of its architectural committee, describes how Prospect became famous for its hues. "The developer, Kiki Wallace, really wanted to push people to use interesting colors, because every [other] development is the color of a band-aid." But it was a bumpy road, Feeney admits.

In Prospect's early days, Wallace painted a house purple and "there was a major revolt among the homeowners." They weren't the only ones with comments, either. "People just walking through the neighborhood would stop and say, 'You can't paint a house that color.' It just blew people's minds," Feeney says. "Color is a lot like religion or politics; everybody thinks they're entitled to an opinion and they're going to make sure you know it." But strong colors attracted buyers, too. "A month later, people were asking me, begging me, could they have a purple house?" Feeney says. "Pretty soon, the development became known for color."

Colors like those on Pam Roberts' home: purple, cobalt blue and lime green. An artist who says the beach inspired her paint job, Roberts likes the attention the colors attract. "I used to watch people, because we get so many driving around and looking at the neighborhood, and I would see them look at the really cool orange house across the street and nobody would look at our house. Once we painted it, people started looking at our house, too."

BOLDER VIEWS

Here are some local neighborhoods with colorful homes you can roam for ideas for your home's exterior paint.

- **ANNA'S FARM** in Lafayette, at Baseline Road and Homestead Street just west of U.S. Highway 287.
- **BRADBURN VILLAGE** in Westminster, at Bradburn Boulevard and 120th Avenue.
- **ERIE VILLAGE** in Erie, at East County Line Road and CW Bixler Boulevard.
- **HOLIDAY NEIGHBORHOOD** in Boulder, just north of Broadway and Yarmouth Avenue.
- **IRIS HOLLOW** in Boulder, just east of Iris Avenue and Folsom Street.
- **PROSPECT NEW TOWN** in Longmont, southwest of Pike Road and U.S. Highway 287.

—Petra Spiess





Above: Eclectic architecture and eye-catching colors go hand in hand at Longmont's Prospect New Town development.

Barbie's Getaway

Shannon Pittser had a very particular vision of the house she wanted to build—a fanciful pink and green Victorian. But it took her six years to find a place that would let her build it. Deemed “the Barbie Dream House” by her neighbors in Erie Village, the colorful home has “a fairyland feel to it,” says Pittser, who doesn’t worry about resale value and wanted “a Wonderland” home. She is surprised, however, by people’s reactions to her gaily painted place. “They’re amazed,” she says. “People stop all the time to take pictures.” In fact, the best thing about her home is its uniqueness. “Everybody’s living in cookie-cutter houses these days. When I come home, it’s home; it makes me feel special.”

Which brings up another point: Colorful exteriors can be a form of self-expression. “It’s something you really just enjoy about those colors,” Roberts says. “You want your house to look cool—and be a reflection of you.”

Although bright houses aren’t for everyone—or even the majority—it takes moxie to paint a significant percentage of your net worth turquoise. Then again, when was the last time a beige house made you smile?

Petra Spiess is a Westminster-based freelance writer who lives in a bright yellow house surrounded by colorful flowers—the more obnoxious the better!

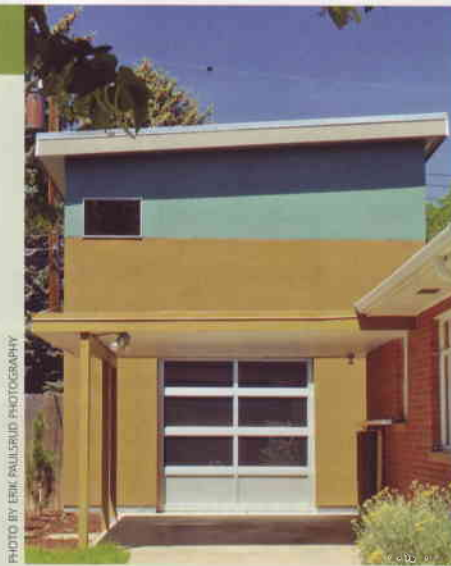


Neighbors alternately call this pastel Erie Victorian “the Barbie Dream House” or “the Wedding Cake House.” Now the only thing left is for Ken to propose.

BRIGHT IDEAS

Before taking the bold step to brighter paint for your home’s exterior, read these tips:

- 1. If you have a Homeowners’ Association, check regulations to see if the color you want to use is allowed. If you don’t have an HOA in your neighborhood, talk to neighbors before painting to let them know which colors you’re considering.
- 2. Paint large swatches (a minimum of 3-by-3 feet) of the colors you want to use for the main body and accents, and live with them at least a week. Alternatively, paint large poster boards and mount them against the side of your house. Observe the colors at different times of day, as lighting significantly changes hues.
- 3. Many paint manufacturers allow you to experiment with different colors by “painting” the body and trim of a virtual home on their websites. Try swatchbox.com, benjaminmoore.com, behr.com or sherwin-williams.com.
- 4. If you like color, but hesitate to paint your whole house, start with a small area, like



the front door, that can be easily changed if you don’t like it.

- 5. If your home has historic or classic architecture, investigate traditional color palettes—some are very colorful.
- 6. If you’re computer-savvy and have Photoshop, download a digital image of your home to your computer and test out different colors using Photoshop.

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