

The Public Historian at Home
Episode 2: Choosing Historic Paint Colors for Exteriors

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Transcript

[Description of opening: The opening depicts a fast-motion video of the host using blue, brown, and gray colored pencils to color a sketch of a porch. The words “THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN AT HOME” appear at bottom in all caps in a black sans serif typeface. The video transitions to the Rutgers University-Camden logo onto the screen. The opening is accompanied by upbeat music.]

[Scene 1: Nicole Belolan is depicted leaning against a brick wall with paint splatters. She has long brown hair swept to the side. She is wearing glasses, pear earrings, and a pastel-striped shirt. Nicole Belolan says the following.]

Hi, I’m Nicole Belolan, and I’m the Public Historian in Residence at the [Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities at Rutgers Camden](#). And welcome to The Public Historian at Home.

[Scene 2: Viewers see a photograph of the front of a brick house with wood trim. There is a small subcompact car parked at left.

There are large cedar trees surrounding the house. The movie effect makes the house look like it's in an old silent movie. There are birds signing in the background.]

[Scene 3: Nicole exists a green door and walks to street-level to talk into camera in front of a brick house and beige-colored porch. The porch is covered in some paint samples. Nicole is wearing red pants and a shirt with a floral print on it. She has long brown hair and glasses. Nicole says the following:]

Welcome to the Public Historian at Home. Today's we're going to be talking about preserving historic porches—like the porch on our house built in 1916 in Riverton, NJ. As you can probably see from the paint samples on the porch, one component of this project is going to involve choosing the color that we want the wooden components of the house to be after we remove the paint you're seeing here today. Now, I read recently in an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer, that one of the top DIY projects people are pursing right now during the coronavirus crisis is painting. So I thought it might be fun for us to talk a little bit about the process that we're going through to choose the colors that we're going to put on our house.

[Scene 4: This is a static color photograph of Nicole shoveling snow outside of the house. The porch is in view. Nicole says the following:]



Nicole Belolan's Collection

I love porches. They are semi-private extensions of the home. They're particularly useful if you don't have air conditioning. Here's a picture of what ours looked like before we started dismantling it. You can see that the main color on the porch was this yellowy beige color and the accents were painted with a green and a red.

[Scene 5: This is a static color photograph of the base of a wooden porch column. The column is showing signs of wood rot. Nicole says the following:]

One of the reasons we started dismantling the porch in the first place is because we noticed a lot of wood rot. So, as we were working on fixing the wood rot, we figured this was a really good opportunity to paint the house—the wooden components on the house—colors that we liked better.

[Scene 6: This is a static digitized image of a historic engraving. The engraving depicts Mount Vernon facing the Potomac River.

Mount Vernon is a large domestic building with a copula. The house has a large open-air porch on front. The image includes people and two horses walking in front of the house on a hillside. Nicole says the following:]

Porches, of course, have a long history in Euro-American culture, dating back at least to the eighteenth century. For example, you might have in mind [George Washington's Mount Vernon](#). This is an image of it, digitized through the [Library Company of Philadelphia](#). Mount Vernon, of course, has this grand piazza that overlooks the Potomac [River].



Engraved by Samuel Seymour after William Russell Birch, 1812, "Mount Vernon, the seat of the Late General Washington," Published around 1860 by John McAllister in Philadelphia, PA. Available online through the Library Company of Philadelphia, https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/Islandora%3A100?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=2d98b3ab00c18932e23e&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=12.



[Scene 7: This is a static digitized image of a black and white photograph. It depicts a light-colored log cabin featuring a metal roof and porch. There are two chairs on the porch and a man and woman standing in front of the house. There is a brick building at back right. Nicole says the following:]

This is another photograph of a porch. This one is in my own collection. I don't know where it was taken. But I love the fact that it shows a couple and gives you some hints as to how they used the porch. Here you see a couple chairs that they put on the porch. And if you'll look really closely, you'll notice that the chairs are upholstered in fabric—and that fabric is decorated with a floral pattern. Even though this photograph is in black and white, you can imagine the color that this fabric would have lent to this otherwise relatively simple home. You can actually collect photographs like this as well. They're actually quite affordable. You can get them at antique malls and on eBay. So, if you're looking to learn more about a particular aspect of home life, photographs at antique malls are a great place to look.



Nicole Belolan's Collection

[Scene 8: In this scene, Nicole is on the inside of the porch, gesturing to bare wood as well as painted surfaces and windows. Nicole says the following:]

So, now that we're inside the porch, you can see where we've done a fair amount of paint removal on this side in particular. You can also see where we still have our work cut out for us, including all of the windows. The transoms, which are now gone, are currently out to a restoration expert. We're going to be doing all the paint remove and all the painting ourselves. But we're leaving the more complicated tasks—like the structural repairs—to the professionals.

[Scene 9: In this scene, Nicole is on the inside of the porch, sitting on a rocking chair in front of a glass door. She is sitting with a book and a ceramic antique chamber pot. Nicole says the following:]

Now, when it came to choosing the paint itself that we would be using on the wooden components of the house, we kept in mind a number of factors: health and sustainability; longevity; historic paint colors; and our own aesthetics. Ultimately, we chose a linseed oil paint. And, you might know that linseed oil [paint] has a wonderful reputation for longevity, and it's relatively non-toxic. Now, of course, we have to find the intersection of the color palette offered by the linseed oil paint; historic colors that would have been available in the period; and our own taste. There are a number of factors that we're keeping in mind when it comes to choosing the colors. And, I think Florence has an opinion about those colors as well that she would like to share with you. But, I'll tell you a little bit about my color preferences first.

I am inspired by the things that surround me. So, we collect a lot of antiques. Maybe you do too. In our kitchen, we have a lot of ceramics and glass on display. Including, this chamber pot! This, of course, is something people would have used historically to go to the bathroom before indoor plumbing. And, I really love this chamber pot for its colors. I love the yellow. I love the brown. I love the blue. And, this is just something that I keep around and think about in terms of its color scheme that helps inspire the way I decorate the house inside and out. There's also a painting that I saw at an exhibition at [the Frick \[Collection\]](#) a couple months ago. The [exhibition was all about George Washington](#)—a sculpture that was made of George Washington by Canova, an Italian artist. And, this painting caught my eye. It's actually [a painting of Canova himself by an artist named Thomas Lawrence](#). And, this has nothing to do with our house, but I really love the red, the brown, the cream, and the blue that you can see in this painting. So, these are two sources of inspiration for paint colors for me.



Thomas Lawrence, Portrait of Antonio Canova, c. 1818, available online through the Detroit Institute of the Arts, <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/portrait-antonio-canova-67953>

[Scene 10: This is a static color photograph of scraped wooden paint. Nicole says the following:]

In addition to thinking about the colors that we like, of course, we also looked to the porch itself and what we could find on it. So, for example, as we were scraping paint, we could see in this spot that the porch had been various colors of beige and yellow, green, and blue.



Nicole Belolan's collection

[Scene 11: This is a static color photograph of scraped wooden paint. Nicole says the following:]

And in this image, which is from the floor, you can see a similar history of colors. You can see a green, blue, and a yellow.

We also took into consideration historic colors associated with the nineteen teens and twenties.



Nicole Belolan's Collection

[Scene 12: This is a static color screen shot of digitized house catalogues on the Internet Archive. Nicole says the following:]

You can learn about these by going through a variety of types of home catalogues, many of which have been digitized and are available for you to view through third party web sites like the Internet Archive.

[Scene 13: This is a static color screen shot of a 1916 catalogue by the Aladdin Company It depicts multiple color swatches and is titled, "PICK YOUR FAVORITE COLOR for YOUR Aladdin HOME." There is an illustrated likeness of a man in a red and white turban at the upper right and left. Nicole says the following:]

For example, these are two pages from a catalogue that would have advertised partially pre-fabricated homes that you could buy, and then bring on site and assemble them there. We haven't been able to find our particular house plan in one of these catalogues, but, they're still useful for learning more about how these houses would have been decorated inside, and, how they would have been painted on the outside. So, these two pages are from [a catalogue from the Aladdin Company from 1916](#). In the catalogue,

you'll see a lot of examples of plans of houses. But also, in the back you can see examples of outbuildings you could have purchased—like sheds, and barns, and garages. And in the back, they also included lighting that you could have purchased, furniture. And, there are also some examples of color palettes, just like ones that you see here. We started off by working with colors that more closely matched what is available here. First, we selected a light blue and a yellow, all of which you can see on this Aladdin catalogue.



Aladdin homes built in a day, Catalog no. 28 (The Company, Bay City, MI, 1916), digitized by The Association for Preservation Technology from the collection of Floyd Mansberger, and made available by the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/AladdinHomesBuiltInADayCatalogNo.281916/>.

[Scene 14: This is a static color screen shot of a 1916 catalogue by the Evercote Company. It depicts multiple color swatches and

is titled, “Ready Mixed House Paint Colors.” Nicole says the following:]

Ultimately, after a lot of trial and error, we decided on a medium blue, a dark brown, and a beige, similar to colors I found on the page of [this catalogue from Evercoat paint](#), and this is from the same time period. And, just like the Aladdin catalogue, it’s made available to you on the Internet Archive.



Charles William Stores, Inc., *Evercote brand paints* (New York: The Company, 1916, Digitized from the Collection of Columbia University Libraries, and made available through the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/evercotebrandpai00char/>

[Scene 15: Nicole is sitting on green concrete steps in front of her green door and brick house. Nicole says the following:]

So, you can see the colors that we chose for the wooden components of the house: this gray, this brown, and this blue. But, once we decided [on] the colors, we had to decide what components would be what color. I did some sketches. I’m not an

artist, but it really helps me decide what to paint what. So here we have a sketch of the porch so you can see what our overall plan is for that. And here's some sketches of the windows on the house—this is what most of our windows look like. And then this is what the windows look like in the basement.

Now, if we were working for a museum like Mount Vernon, we would be looking to follow more codified guidelines about the colors that we would be using on the house, who's applying the paint, how they're applying it, what kind of paint they're using—because it's our own house, we have a little bit of leeway there. And, we are using what the National Park Service calls “retaining the historic character” [of the house]. Because we're doing research on the types of colors that would have been available when the house was first built, that certainly qualifies as a form of preservation.

I hope, today, that I gave you some inspiration and some sources that you can use to learn more about the historic colors that would have been, maybe, on your house or a favorite building that's in your municipality.

If you have any questions that come up about researching the history of your house, feel free to send me an email. I'd be happy to try to answer it if I can. And, thank you so much for joining me on this episode of The Public Historian at Home.

[Description of conclusion: The conclusion depicts a fast-motion video of the host using blue, brown, and gray colored pencils to color a sketch of a porch. The words “THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN AT HOME” appear at bottom in all caps in a black sans serif typeface. The video transitions to the Rutgers University-Camden

logo onto the screen. The opening is accompanied by upbeat music.]

Resources

Best Practices

Aleca Sullivan and John Leeke Preservation Brief 45, October 2006, "Preserving Historic Wood Porches," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/45-wooden-porches.htm>

Your local historic review board

Materials

Material Collections, Healthy Materials Lab at Parsons School of Design, <https://healthymaterialslab.org/material-collections>

History-Secondary Sources

John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

History-Primary Sources

Aladdin homes built in a day, Catalog no. 28 (The Company, Bay City, MI, 1916), digitized by The Association for Preservation Technology from the collection of Floyd Mansberger, and made available by the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/AladdinHomesBuiltInADayCatalogNo.281916/>.

Charles William Stores, Inc., *Evercote brand paints* (New York: The Company, 1916, Digitized from the Collection of Columbia University Libraries, and made available through the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/evercotebrandpai00char/>

Historic House Museums, such as George Washington's Mount Vernon, <https://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/location/piazza/>

Houses and buildings where you live

Current Events and Contemporary Connections

J.D. Power and Associates, Press Release, "With COVID-19, Consumers are Jump-Starting Home Improvement Painting Projects, J.D. Power Finds," April 9, 2020, <https://www.jdpower.com/business/press-releases/2020-paint-satisfaction-study>.

Gary Thompson, "Home-improvement projects for coronavirus quarantine," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid19-home-improvement-projects-20200409.html>

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