Wabash Valley Trust for Historic Preservation

The Resource Guide

Design Guidelines for Lafayette Local Historic Districts, and Guide for Preserving and Restoring Your Historic Building

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For More Information:

Log on to the City of Lafayette website at www.lafayette.in.gov

or visit the Wabash Valley Trust for Historic Preservation site at www.wabashvalleytrust.org.
Section 9: Paint

Guidelines:
- A Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained to paint a previously unpainted masonry building and features, including brick, terra cotta, concrete and stone.
- A Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained to paint previously unpainted metal building elements of copper, brass or bronze.

Painting wood
Surface preparation and paint type and quality are keys to weathering performance of painted wood. Surface preparation methods will affect historic wood surfaces only to the extent needed to provide appropriate surface for optimal adhesion of coating layers. The following steps are based on over ten years of research at Purdue University (which is ongoing) – including two actual case studies of historic houses painted with these methods (13 years since painting and still in good condition). This information will help owners determine what needs to be done and how (www.agriculture.purdue.edu/fnr/faculty/hunt/index.htm).

Homeowners may find it difficult to determine how far to go with surface preparation prior to repainting their historic building. Proper and appropriate surface preparation of wood prior to a new paint coat will be the determining factor as to the length of the new paint coat’s life. Lesser degrees of surface preparation produce lower performance lives of painted wood.

It is probable that paint accumulation on houses built before 1978 will contain lead-base paint. Lead is a health hazard and precautions should be taken if coatings of lead-base paint are disturbed. Cautionary
information can be found at www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadinfo.htm#remodeling.

**How far do I go? Assessment of paint coat**

On several representative paint surfaces, test the existing paint adhesion with a carbide-tipped paint scraper. If the paint comes off easily or the paint is alligatored (deep cracks through paint thickness), go to B (remove all paint). If adhesion is strong and patches of loose paint few, then proceed with A (Standard surface preparation for repainting).

**A. Repaint: standard surface preparation**

1. Scrape (carbide-tipped much better than steel-tipped scraper) all loose paint from building, then lightly sand to feather the edges of scraped areas and lightly sand all surfaces (for better paint adhesion).

2. Scrub all surfaces with water and be sure all dirt and chalk is removed. Use mild detergent if needed. Rinse well.

   Allow to dry for two sunny days.

   Note: Pressure/power washing should only be used if great care is taken: 1) pressure is at a setting low enough so that damage is not done, and 2) the stream is directed downward against siding so water does not get under the siding into the stud cavity.

3. If mildew is present it should be killed with a solution of one part bleach to 2 to 3 parts of water. Scrubbing may be necessary. Rinse and allow to dry. Protect exposed skin and eyes.

4. a) If existing paint is oil/alkyd (most common on old buildings) then prime coat and repaint with alkyd.

   Note: Determine if existing paint is oil/alkyd by breaking paint chip between fingers. If it has a brittle crack/snap it is oil/alkyd. If the chip is pliable it is latex.

   b) If existing paint is latex then prime and repaint with 100% acrylic latex primer and paint.

   c) If you don’t know what was used previously use oil/alkyd primer followed by one or two topcoats of 100% acrylic latex paint.

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**Helpful Tips:**

Removing and scraping through paint layers with a knife can often help determine previous paint colors, and paint chip analysis can be done to determine original paint colors. Sometimes, paint residue can be found on brick buildings or where features have been removed.

White and lightly colored paint is less susceptible to early failure than dark paints.
B. Remove all existing paint then paint
If heavy paint build-up (alligatored) or peeling and flaking.

Paint removal: There are several methods for removing all paint from a building and it is necessary to weigh the pros and cons of each before selecting a method (or methods) to use. Refer to www.agriculture.purdue.edu/fnr/faculty/Hunt/index.htm for a discussion of paint removal methods.

Painting bare wood
- Lightly sand the surface with 50 to 80 grit paper, including new replacement material. A roughened surface holds paint better than a planed surface.
- Wipe surface with a tack cloth or fine stream of water to remove dust from sanding.
- Liberally brush on a paintable water repellent preservative (check the Purdue University Website for more information) especially in joints and drip edges. In addition for replacement pieces soak cut ends in the water repellent preservative for 30 seconds. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for drying.
- Minimize exposure of treated wood surfaces before prime coating with 100% acrylic latex primer.
- Minimize exposure of primed wood before application of two coats of 100% acrylic latex semi-gloss paint, minimizing exposure between coats.

For additional suggestions about preparation to paint, paint application and use of preservatives to prevent and arrest decay refer to the Purdue University Website.