

Colour Schemes for Historic Buildings



The following fact sheet provides guidance on painting and colours schemes for a property which is listed as a heritage item and is useful guidance for non-listed historic buildings.

Consent requirements

Painting or re-painting the exterior of a property which is listed as a Heritage Item is a change to the 'fabric, finish and appearance' and requires consent, but can generally be considered under the maintenance and minor works heritage exemptions under Clause 5.10(3) of *Glen Innes Severn LEP 2012*. Internal repainting consent applies only to State Listed Heritage Items for which there are also a number of exemptions.

You need to submit the minor works application, or e mail a request to Council with information about your proposed work including the colour scheme and materials. If Council is satisfied that the work is in keeping with the heritage values, it may approve it in writing. This must be in place before you start work. [Hyper link to Application Form](#)



Understand the place before making changes.

The use of traditional colours and finishes is important to maintain the significance and character of historic buildings, and to ensure that new infill development is sympathetic to the heritage setting. Inappropriate paint schemes can substantially change the character of buildings and streetscapes by introducing colours and textures which could not have been produced over 100 years ago.

Historical Background

Up until WW1, paints were made by hand and often on site, and continuing to the 1960s traditional paints were still used on most Australian buildings. Oil paints were generally applied on timber, metal and plaster, while water based washes and distempers were generally used on plasters and masonry surfaces.

The colour palette was made from pigments readily available at the time. This included stone and earth colours, dark reds, greens, creams and browns. Lime white was the traditional white, rather than brilliant white.

Gloss finishes were based on natural oils such as linseed and fish oil. These paints were used to repel water from wood surfaces as well as protecting structural and decorative cast and wrought iron from corrosion.

During the 1920s, ready-mixed, industrially-made paints emerged as petroleum products and synthetic resins became available. From the late 1940s acrylic paints became available which were water based and easier to use but many painters continued to mix their own paint until the late 1960s.

In more recent years there has been renewed interest in paints such as Limewash which is based on traditional mixes and include the heritage colour palette, and which is more suited to historic buildings in aesthetic finish.



Wall Colours

- Face brick or stone should always remain unpainted;
- Stucco or cement renders were either untreated or finished with pigmented lime wash to emulate a stone colours, especially facades with a classical design;
- Timber weatherboards were painted in various shades of stone colours, creams, yellows and occasionally a red oxide or venetian red to emulate brick.

Traditional paint schemes for historic buildings based on original paint scrapes and research.



Joinery/Trim Colours

- Architectural details were highlighted in colours such as Indian Red, Venetian Red, Brunswick and Carriage Green, Tobacco, and Chocolate Brown. Off White and Creams were also used to contrast against brick and stone.
- Black is not a colour represented on the heritage palette although black pigments were added to create colours.
- Dark green or red was generally used for cast iron balustrade to make it look robust although some historic photographs show evidence of light colours with dark handrails and other trims.

This colour scheme uses traditional colours to highlight the architectural detail of the façade.



Roof Colours

- Unpainted galvanised roofs characterise the heritage precinct and should remain unpainted or replaced 'like for like' when necessary.
- In the late 1890s metal roofs were sometimes painted with red oxide to resemble terracotta tiled roofs which were becoming fashionable. The paint also had the effect of further preserving the metal. If already painted they may be repainted to match the original.
- Slate or Terracotta tiled roofs should be retained where they are original or appropriate to the era of the building.

Slate tiled roof to Westpac Bank in Grey Street.



Red Oxide painted original corrugated iron



Fence Colours

- Light stone colours are historically found on early timber picket fences. Off white is also traditionally used rather than vivid white. Bright and dark colours should be avoided for timber fencing.
- Side fences were often left to weather or were protected with oil.
- Cast iron balustrades were usually painted in dark colours.

Picket fence in a traditional stone colour.



Side fence left to weather off



Signage

Signage can include a range of colours, including modest areas of corporate signage, providing that it does not dominate the building, and is within the original fascia depth and not above awning level. Traditional hand painted signage and raised lettering adds vitality to the streetscape. Illuminated signage needs consent but can enhance a building if well designed.



Heritage Colour Schemes are not just Cream, Red and Green!

A wide range of traditional colours are available for selection. Council's Heritage Advisor has a portfolio of heritage colour palettes from leading paint manufacturers which are available for discussion and use at site meetings.

Victorian (1838-1901)

Buildings of the Victorian era were often ornate reflecting the prosperity of the period, and often boasted intricate decoration using a great variety of colours. Architectural trims were picked out in contrasts. Subtle shades and tones were used to highlight mouldings. Paint effects of marbling, stencilling and wood graining were popular for interiors. The Glen Innes Town Hall is an excellent example of a Victorian era building which displays a colour scheme which makes the most of its grand scale and decoration.



Federation (1901-1914)

Federation era commercial buildings in Glen Innes include brick with roughcast decoration. Timber was still readily available and there are also many substantial residences from this period within the township. Decoration was less ornate than the Victorian period, but contained quality joinery work and influences of the arts and crafts movement.



Inter War and Post War

The period from 1914-1945, covered a range of architectural styles including a continuation of Federation styles to Art Deco designs of the 1920s and 1930s and Californian bungalow designs in domestic dwellings. Colours saw some shift from the Federation and Victorian colour palettes to include more variety with the development of ready-made paint and more choices after the 1930s. The brick bungalows of the 1950s are particularly representative of the post war era and should remain unpainted.



Need further information?

Council offers a free heritage advisory service and offers annual heritage grants to assist owners with re-painting. For further enquiries please contact Council's Heritage Advisor.

council@gisc.nsw.gov.au

