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The Punchlist Profile

James Martin Solves Color Conundrums in All 50 States

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Denver colorist James Martin – founder of The Color People, an architectural color consulting firm – recently completed a 25-year mission to color the world – or at least all 50 states.

By Diana Murphy

Until recently, colorist James Martin was a man with a mission — to complete a project in all 50 states.

Martin is president of The Color People, the architectural color consulting firm he founded in 1979 in Denver. Considered by many to be the pre-eminent color specialist in the United States, his job is to help clients choose colors for their homes or attract the most shoppers to a mall.

Throughout his career, Martin has colored rental storage facilities in

Washington, office buildings in Colorado and shopping centers in Florida, and created color guidelines for scores of residential communities throughout the country. He also teaches seminars, writes articles for trade publications, and is developing a line of colored vinyl siding.

His quest to color in all 50 states began more as a strategic business move.

“I started doing color here for Victorian houses, but since you can’t paint in the winter, I decided I’d better take the company national,” Martin said. “I found projects here and there and started adding states, and pretty soon that was the goal.”

Twenty-five years later, Martin is finished coloring in all 50 states. But what took him so long?

“I was holding out in Hawaii, trying to find just the right project there,” he said. “Of course, I wanted to do that one in person too.”

The project he picked involved applying a fresh color scheme for an historic church on Kauai.

“I was celebrating my 25th anniversary [of opening the firm], and the church was celebrating its 125th anniversary – it was a great match,” Martin said.



James Martin

Finding work in all 50 states wasn’t that tough. The most difficult state to bag was Vermont.

“For some reason that was the hardest one,” he said. “You’d think with so many old houses out there, it wouldn’t be. But I guess all they really want out there are white and green.”

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Martin's most satisfying project took place in Ketchikan, a small Alaskan town that was, at the time, looking to lure tourists off the many cruise ships that sailed the local waters.

"You'd have all these humongous ships coming up to the port, just dwarfing the town, but why would anyone want to get off their floating palace to go into this little town?" Martin said.

In a word, color.

"We applied a fresh color scheme to the entire downtown in an effort to beguile a few people to get off the ship and spend a little money," Martin said. "It was a matter of economics and civic pride."

Today, Ketchikan is a major destination for Alaskan cruise tourists.

"It was kind of a long, slow process because the seasons are so short," Martin said. "But we were really pleased with the results. It was very successful."

The project illustrates the power of color when it comes to marketing a business or creating curb appeal in a home.

"Your building speaks volumes about you and your business. It's the biggest sign you've got," said Martin. "We come in and try to show off the architecture of a building to the best advantage and set a tone with colors that reflect the kind of building it is."

New colors also make sense when it comes to money.

"People have to paint anyway, usually every seven years," Martin said. "For the same price as painting, you can completely change public perception. Maintenance dollars become marketing dollars. It's the cheapest, most cost-effective change you can make."

Now that Martin's domestic mission is accomplished, he's already set his sights on a bigger goal — coloring the world. Having created a color design for luxury apartments in India, he already has a head start on his global quest. <<