

An Expert Perspective on Color

A Q&A With Color Consultant Darby Samargo

After studying architecture, art and design in North Carolina, Darby Samargo started her career in retail and store design for an architectural firm. She later moved to Denver and met James Martin, a pioneer in the color consulting field.

Martin founded The Color People, an architectural color consulting firm in Denver, and Samargo worked for the company initially in residential consulting and later transitioned into consulting for commercial properties. Samargo now owns the company.

She is also a member of the Color Marketing Group®, an international association of color design professionals that forecasts color trends.

Paint & Decorating Retailer talked to Samargo about the differences between residential and commercial color and how retailers can be sure they meet customers' expectations on paint and color.

***Paint & Decorating Retailer (PDR):* What are the biggest differences between commercial and residential property owners choosing colors?**

Darby Samargo (DS): A homeowner is very concerned with curb appeal, and it's about personal taste. They may not think immediately "How will my home sell in the future with this color?"

Commercial planning, on the other hand, is always concerned with the bottom line. Those property owners think about how the color on the building will affect retention, tenants and profits. There is a different need with that group.



Photos courtesy of The Color People

Darby Samargo's consulting firm, The Color People, takes into consideration the architecture and the historical significance of a property when deciding what paint colors to use.

PDR: What groups does your company, The Color People, work with?

DS: We work with both residential customers and with commercial customers. On the residential side, we work with small to large homes, but we built the company based on consulting for historical buildings. We've even dealt with historical town planning.

Currently, the majority of our work is with multifamily developments. There really is community development all over the country right now.

What's interesting about consulting for developers is that those clients are looking at commercial and residential trends. It's a business for our clients, the developers, but they're always focused on the residential market they're appealing to. For them, better colors mean more value added, which appeals to occupants. As occupancy increases, retention goes up.

We do stress to our commercial and residential clients that maybe what they see all around them and might gravitate toward is not necessarily what's going to be lasting and sustainable. We want to put them in a position to be relevant for an entire paint color cycle, which is about a decade.

PDR: What are the top three priorities you keep in mind when talking to consumers about color in their homes?

DS: First, understanding the tone that they are hoping to set with their color choices. They always tend to have that in their mind and believe that the home wants to take on a certain feeling. It can be different between interior and exterior.

It's also important to get a sense of the architectural feeling of the space. The scale, the balance, the surroundings and the level of detail. We always say a little house wants to make a little statement.

Lastly, it's important to ask our clients what's special to them about their home, if there are areas they want to highlight or enhance with color.

PDR: If you were looking to repaint your home, whether interior or exterior, what qualities would you want from your paint retailer?

DS: I would want them to have an understanding of my needs, both in the look and appearance of the paint and also my budgetary needs. All of our clients have that as a priority.

Something retailers should always make apparent to their customers is the richness of color compared to the durability in the paint.

Something we stress to our clients is sampling. It's really the only piece that's going to enable a homeowner to truly visualize colors working on their home. Retailers should be supportive and understand the steps of sampling.

In our business, we don't typically do renderings for our residential clients, and it's really hard to see what the color will really look like on a paint swatch. We work with painters and retailers on how to sample so their customers can see the colors in combination and in scale.

For example, instead of providing a two-by-two swatch, offer a sample that is able to fit on the side of the structure in an area about four feet square. It's important to choose an area where all the colors come together, such as the cornice, porch and gable.

Provide samples for trim, accent and body. A homeowner having the assistance of a painter or a retailer would really benefit because it enables them to visualize it in the place where it's going to be.

PDR: Where do you get your color inspirations?

DS: I love going to local food and craft markets for inspiration. Here in Boulder, we have a lot of niche markets, and people who are putting out that design have a high level of attention to what's moving forward.

I recently attended a music festival in Charleston, South Carolina.

It was put together by local musicians, and it was highly curated. They collected this scene of food, libation and music, and the whole venue was designed to a T. I found myself really looking around and being inspired by everything together in one space.

Music and markets are the most fun to look around for inspiration. ●



When consulting on color selection for commercial properties, The Color People takes into account the neighborhood, the type of business, the customer base and the longevity of color and design trends. Owner Darby Samargo says the paint color cycle lasts about 10 years.