

# COLOR MAGIC



## Paint and Texture Gives Apartments a Homey Feel

By **JAMES MARTIN**

**C**olor Marketing Group, the international group that forecasts and tracks color trends has a saying: "Color sells, and the right color sells better." At no time in history has this ever been truer; at present, there isn't a single product sold in this country in which the color does not impact people's buying decisions. Beyond the obvious products like fashion and cars, this is true for everything from the cheapest little plastic cup to home decor, outdoor products, electronics, and everything in between.

And now, buildings. People's infatuation with color has reached the multifamily market in a big way. Attractively colored buildings increase occupancy, retain current residents, and even inspire residents to take better care of the property. The right color choices can mean money in the bank.

### **Color Trends in Multifamily**

The most important thing to understand is not what specific color is the

**Wasatch Properties used color blocking to make Palladio Apartments in Salt Lake City more attractive to residents.**



trend, but the forces that drive that trend. People want a place that comforts or cocoons. We are all barraged by a myriad of outside forces that demand our attention and buffet our sense of well-being. We are paged, faxed, cell phoned, road-raged, and multi-tasked. All we want to do is get home, shut the door, sit in front of the home entertainment center, and close it all out.

"Home" is the operative word in the industry. In the same way "apartment complex" was supplanted by "apartment community," we are now marketing "apartment homes." Everyone wants an apartment that feels like home, one that provides comfort and solace, inside and out.

We want our buildings to feel soft and warm, not hard and cool, and this means we should use colors that are comfortable and homey—a fact that dovetails, not incidentally, with many communities' growing concern for the environment and things natural. The colors of choice are now those colors that mimic the colors of nature and have a soft edge to them.

Instead of the old sharp, cold white, we are using creamy whites and light tans. Dark trims are no longer well received, as dark colors can often make a building look and feel dark and closed up.

We want to live someplace that feels light and airy. This is true of stairways and balconies, and it is especially true with windows: light colored windows create a sense of fresh air and give individual units the impression of being light and pleasant when viewed from the outside.

Coupled with this trend toward natural color tones like sages, creams, russets, and khakis is an equally strong trend for deeper, richer colors. This is partly due to the aforementioned desire for solidity, for protective surroundings, and partly due to a dominant desire to live with color that runs across social boundaries and touches everything from high-end wallpapers to computers.

After a century of modernism's bias toward whites, we're infatuated with color: living in beige or gray

communities is not something that people are content to do anymore.

### Texture Is Where It's At

Another big trend is the use of varied construction materials on one project. Finding brick, stone, stucco, siding, and metal all on the same building is now common. This is due, in part, to the same desire to cocoon (and stone and brick can dramatically increase how solid a building appears), but also by a desire for buildings that reflect an evolved sense of style.

The industry has been stuck on siding and trim solutions for too many years. Mixing materials and blocking colors livens the environment, diversifies sight lines, and adds variety where there formerly was none. Color is used to emphasize the material changes.

This new multi-material look has proven so popular that there is a movement to repaint and retrofit older properties in order to break them up into sections and redefine them with segments and shapes.

The single block building can feel old, overwhelming, and tedious. Designers are bringing a new eye to these older buildings and recognizing that they can accentuate the architecture with clarity, charm, and personality by way of correct color placement.

The New Urbanist Movement and the popularity of inner city lofts also has had a huge impact on the industry. No longer is there a need to put a lot of space between buildings in large communities. Clustering buildings, varying their heights and architectural styles, and adding a mix of retail has become the wave of the future.

A large community can feel like a city, with places to eat, play, drink, shop, and get your clothes cleaned, all within walking distance. Time is such a critical commodity in our lives



Photo courtesy: The Color People



Top: People don't want to live in gray or beige communities that remind them of bad weather. So, this Denver property received a multicolor face lift.

Bottom: Highlighting garages with color not only shows them off, but enhances the visual texture of the community.

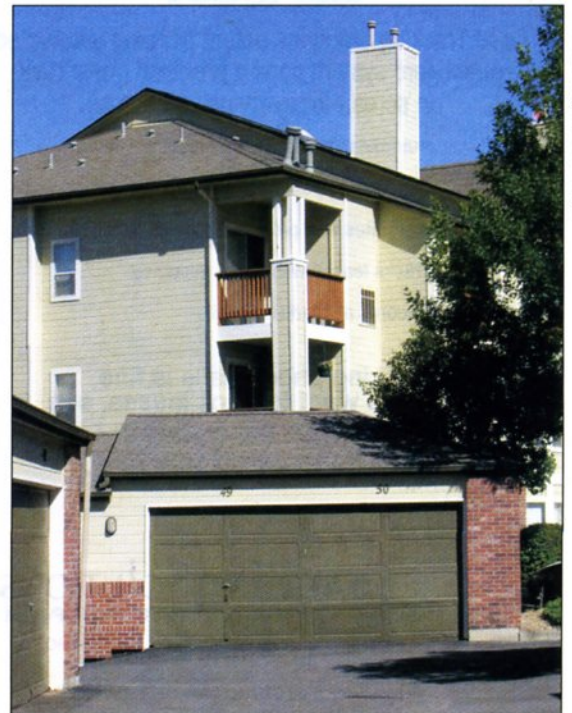


Photo courtesy: The Color People

that a living place that brings convenience to the home is extremely popular. Indeed, people are paying a premium for these properties.

## Show Off Your Garages

The last trend reflects all the rest: the increased popularity of enclosed garages. People are again willing to pay a premium for this luxury, and it is important to highlight this feature with color.

Instead of blending them away, it is important to point them out, not only so the feature is immediately apparent to someone shopping the property for the first time, but also to make driving or walking around the property more pleasant.

An endless parade of faceless white garage doors stretching down an alley is not the way to present this feature. Highlighting them with color not only shows them off, but enhances the visual texture of the community to everyone's pleasure.

While some are wary of painting



Photo courtesy: Lane Co.

Lane Co.'s Summer Crest apartments in Greenville, S.C., mixed materials to liven the environment and diversify sight lines.

garage doors, citing the maintenance expense, time and again property managers have seen the marketing benefit of strong attention to doors and garage doors reaping unexpected benefits. With color, maintenance dollars become marketing dollars.

Encompassing all these new trends is the pervasive use of color to set a tone, to highlight features, to provide a pleasant visual texture to the property, and to define the personality of your community.

They say you can't judge a book by its cover, but people are judging your property from the curb. Using color to predispose them to residing with you can translate directly into enhanced profit margins. **pro**

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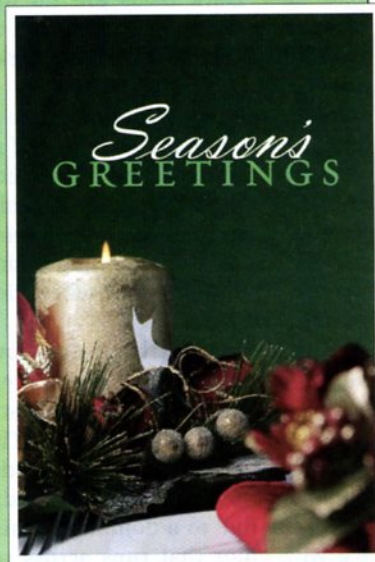
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