

# COLOR trends for custom homes

What's the hot new color? What's the latest trend in home products and interiors? As a custom builder or designer, you hear these questions constantly. As you know, having the right answers for your clients can translate into quicker sales and more satisfied buyers. Knowing what is hot in the marketplace will set you apart from your competitors.

The one true font of knowledge on this subject is an

organization called Color Marketing Group, the international organization that forecasts and tracks color trends. Its purpose is summed up in its tag line: Color sells and the right color sells better.

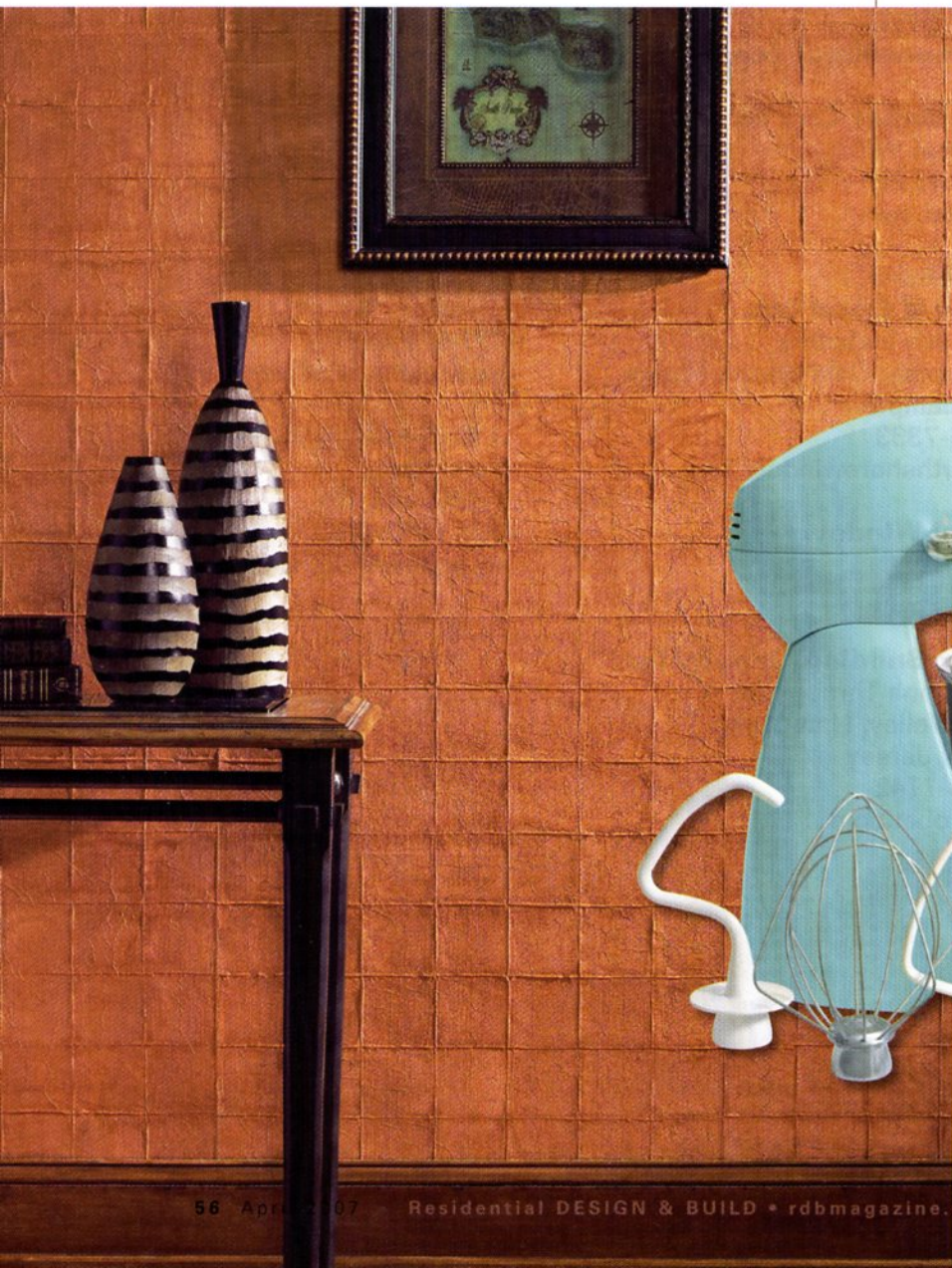
Twice a year, this group, made up of color professionals from major manufacturers from cars to carpets as well as hundreds of independent color consultants and educators, meets to assess the major trends in the marketplace and the effect of those trends on colors.

Popular colors and finishes are not pulled out of a hat. Rather, they directly reflect the pulse of the people buying them; how they feel emotionally, how positive or negative their feelings are about the economy, and how they feel about their lives in general. For many years, CMG noted how the stress of everyday life affects what people look for in products in terms of their color and how those colors make them feel.

All of us are stressed today by faxes, pagers, cell phones, e-mails, road rage, soccer games and more, so when we finally come home all we want to do is shut the doors, lock out the world, sit in front of the TV and call out for food. CMG members recognize this trend, often referred to as cocooning, as a long-standing driver of consumer choices. You've seen the

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effect of this trend in the prevalence of muted comfort colors, soft relaxed fabrics, overstuffed leather chairs, and other elements in the home that make us feel relaxed and sheltered from the stress of outside life.

The prevalence today of brick and stone exteriors, traditional and historic house forms, tile and articulated asphalt roofs, are responses to the desires of homeowners to have a house that feels solid, timeless and protective. Color trends for building exteriors are driven by the need to blend with and show off these materials to their best advantage.

Darker, richer home colors are now in high demand, and the trend will continue as the public at large remains completely unmoved by the beige homes that have proliferated for years and years. Strong but not overbearing colors are big now and will be in high demand as people continue to design homes with a sense of individuality tempered by good

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*Green building is a trend that is gaining momentum like a freight train. Natural materials used as both decorative elements and building materials are in high demand.*

product from iPods to cars to home decor. This, of course is great news for the custom builder or designer, who couldn't be better positioned to make the most of this trend.

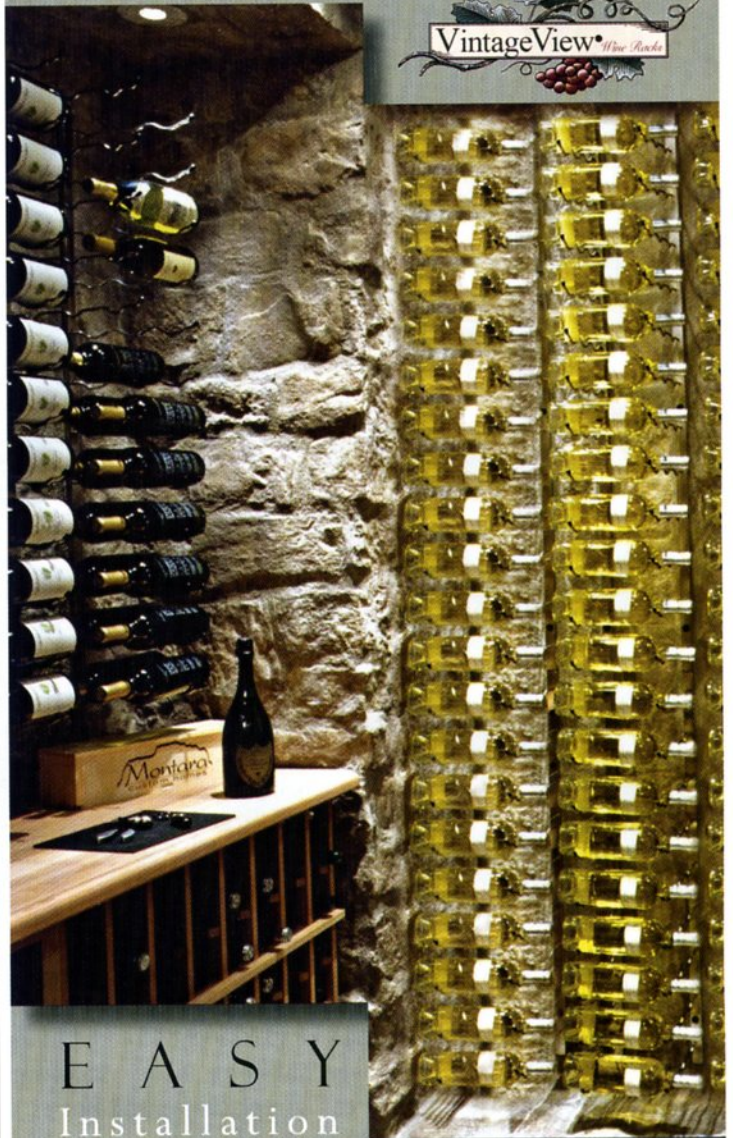
Take for example the highly successful Mini Cooper automobile. Buyers can not only choose the upgrades they want on their car, but can actually name it and track its progress through the manufacturing process. Both the Gen-X and Boomer generations have taken to customization in a big way. No one is happy with out-of-the-box products anymore.

Another huge trend that CMG'ers report is the public's concern with the environment. Globalization has given all of us a new realization that what one country does affects the entire world. We see whole species and open spaces vanishing before our eyes. This has given rise to a new respect for nature and an attendant rise in the desire to have natural elements in our lives.

Green building is a trend that is gaining momentum like a freight train. Natural materials used as both decorative elements and building materials are in high demand. Cost-effective, well-insulated buildings now come standard. Products made from renewable resources are well received and even demanded by buyers. CMG members involved with flooring talk about the new interest in materials such as cork, bamboo and tile flooring which combine not only the "natural" moniker but are also customizable, being offered in myriad colors and finishes.

Interiors are where you will find the most emphasis on color trends because so many interior products are closely related to fashion. Check out the colors in upscale women's shops and you will soon see them in these decorative home

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*The public's desire for color has transcended its long-standing prudence; you'll find green sofas and blue washing machines.*

items. Throw pillows, rugs, drapes and decorative items from lamps to candles have long come in fashion-forward colors because they are easily replaceable and not especially costly. This will continue.

## Big-ticket color

The big news is the demand for colors in big-ticket items such as sofas and carpeting. These products traditionally have tended toward neutrals because they would stay in the home for long periods of time. The public's desire for color in their lives has transcended its long-standing prudence to the point where you find bright green sofas and navy blue washing machines.

Indeed the trend in color today is not so much which color, but color in general. There is not a product sold whose color is not impacting its acceptance in the market. Of particular interest to home builders and designers is the kitchen — always a huge reflection of this key trend. Floors,

cabinets, countertops and large appliances come in choices unheard of as little as five years ago. Again, customization prevails.

One trend of note in the kitchen is called counter-scaping in which manufacturers provide bowls, utensils, linens and small appliances in bright, fun colors which punctuate kitchens using colorful combinations of counters, cabinets and the like. Add to this: tiles; multicolored, layered finishes; metallics and glass are new and hugely popular. Everyone is discovering that bright, strong colors on kitchen walls pull all these elements together. The kitchen is where homeowners now experiment with colored walls because there's a limited amount of wall surface on which to make a mistake.

## The new colors

So what are the new colors? CMG reports that while colors with an environmental tone remain important, the new colors are fresher and cleaner. In other words, colors are less muddy than the khaki tones and deep mossy greens you have been seeing for quite a while. Look for yellow-greens with a sharper, more lively cast. Notice that yellows are fresher and happier, reds have more chili-pepper pungency. These new colors reflect the public's more optimistic outlook.

Our fears from 9/11 and our long-term cocooning tendencies have created something of a void, and now homeowners want to step out and put some spice back into their lives. We want to re-energize our lives. We are not a country of retiring people, and we are ready to strike a more hopeful note. Color is an easy way to do this.

You will see color in every product on the market, and you will notice people responding favorably to homes that have colored walls, colored appliances and colored facades. So go ahead, try taking a chance on a house with a deeper body color, or interior walls that are not white, or kitchens constructed in some of the new floor and counter materials. I predict you'll get a response from your buyers that will pleasantly surprise you. ▀

*James Martin is a longtime member of Color Marketing Group and owner of Denver-based The Color People architectural color consultants. His specialty is creating market-driven color schemes for single- and multi-family home builders and building products in all 50 states.*

