

Fresh Color Brings Fresh Prospects

BY JAMES MARTIN

The wide ex-prairie of Texas, just north of Dallas, is a sea of dirt and dust studded by the low silhouettes of apartment communities of similar height, architecture and color. From the nearby highway, distinguishing between dusty brown apartment buildings proves nearly impossible.

That was the challenge for Cyndi Price-Lampkin, Region Director of Westdale Asset Management. Her paired communities, Brookstone and The Terrace, owned by Sterling American, were a dull, dusty, dog-eared brownish color, indistinguishable at a passing glance from their three neighboring competitors.

Dusty brown on the dusty flat prairie was not the marketing statement Price-Lampkin

wanted to make, and when it was time to repaint, she realized that the company could spend money repeating the mistake or on completely transforming the communities with careful placement of new colors. Exterior services maintenance dollars are equal to critical marketing dollars.

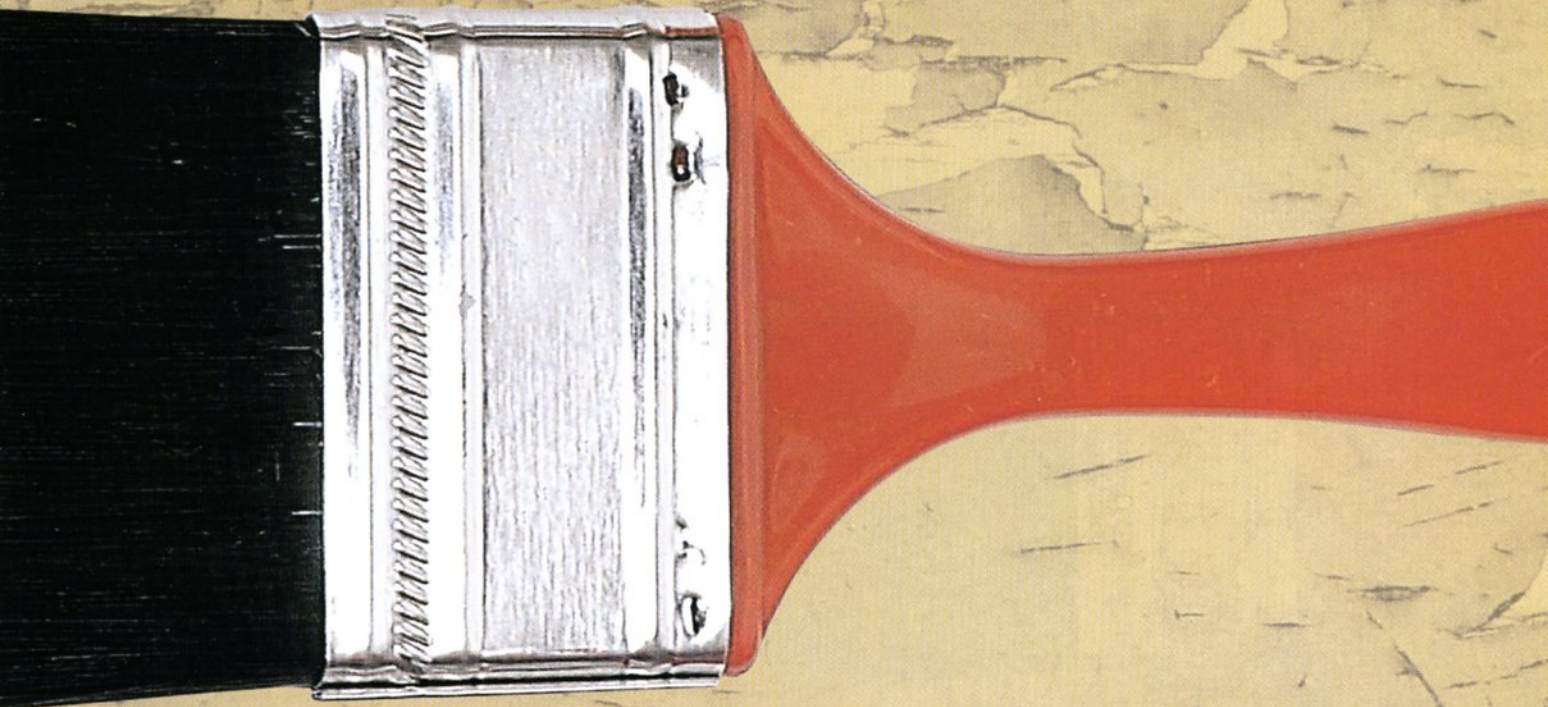
Complementary Colors

Price-Lampkin called a color consulting company to work some magic for the communities. The roofs and the siding, which were starting to show their age, were to remain. That dictated a color scheme that would make the roofs look their best and a body color dark enough to hide the siding's imperfections. Lighter colors show shadows and highlight imperfections.

With that in mind, it was clear the com-

munities needed a palette to bring them into the 21st century. Westdale Asset Management wanted to create a color scheme that was trend forward, but not too forward, so the communities would look fresh during their entire paint cycle. Colors that are about to fall out of popularity can quickly make a community feel 10 years behind the times, even when the paint is only three years old.

The new body color for the Westdale Asset Management communities is a greenish khaki. Not only is it unique, but it also highlights the greenery of the mature planting and uses the landscaping to its best advantage. More importantly, it works nicely with the brick, allowing that important feature to lend an impression of quality and solidity to



*In a sea of dusty brown buildings,
an updated color palette
can draw drive-by traffic.*

the entire community.

During the process, it's important to consider how best to highlight a building's architectural detailing in a manner that will subtly but insistently draw the eye and create lasting emotional resonance. From an emotional perspective, windows are the most important feature on a building. Dark windows make a place look ominous and closed up, while lighter windows look bigger and give the impression that the apartment homes are sunny and airy.

The windows of Westdale's units lacked prominence. To make them more visible, the trim and corner moldings were painted the body color. A trim color of fresh cream was added, which blends nicely with the body color, to frame the windows and doors. By cutting the paint across

some of the vertical trim, the windows became more dramatic and gave the property visibility in the dusty prairie locale.

The overhead surfaces were also painted a light cream so the balconies and interior walkways could feel lighter and more pleasant by reflecting more light into the apartment homes. Most people dislike dark spaces in apartment buildings, so making the apartment homes feel lighter—and safer—can dramatically increase resident satisfaction.

Balconies and entry stairways are exceptionally important, not only because they affect curb appeal, but because they are places where residents spend much of their time. Highlighting those spaces creates visual focus and differentiates a community from its competitors. Owners and man-

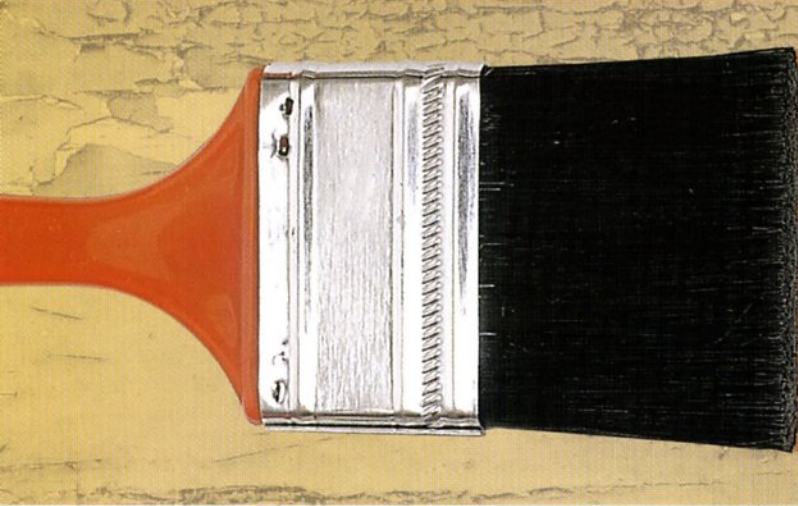
agers can't underestimate how important it is to make coming and going a gratifying and pleasurable experience for residents.

A Touch of Pizzazz

The final step is to add some pizzazz, and doors are arguably the most important detail on the property. Residents rarely see the apartment owner, but every time residents open their front doors, they're effectively shaking hands with the owner. If residents' experiences at the front doors say, "This is special. These people care about how this looks," then that tells them that the owner cares about them as residents. Wash or repaint the door and trim every time a unit becomes vacant. Use high-gloss latex enamels to replicate the look and finish of an expensive home,



Westdale Asset Management painted its two Dallas communities a greenish khaki with light cream trim and bright red doors.



"I was amazed at the new traffic source: 'color of doors' and 'exterior colors.'"

— Cyndi Price-Lampkin, Region Director, Westdale Asset Management



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The windows, balconies and stairwells were highlighted to give them prominence and differentiate the communities from their competitors.

and don't allow lazy painters to paint doors with a roller, which can leave a tacky stipple texture.

Price-Lampkin confirmed that making the doors the focus of a building can have dramatic payoffs if the colors are just right. "When the color samples first arrived, I was a little taken aback," she said. "Although I had used red before on doors, I had never thought of the red-orange that our consultant chose for The Terrace/Brookstone. And, on top of the green tones, although the pictures looked good, I was still hesitant.

"Then, all of the colors went up and my property looked awesome," she said. "I thought it was just me getting used to them. My traffic started picking up and so did the leases. On my sites, we don't accept 'drive by' as a traffic source; we question the prospects to see just what made them stop. When polling the traffic for Terrace, I was amazed at the new traffic source: 'color of doors' and 'exterior colors.' Prospects were stopping and leasing because of the color schemes."

Color is the marketing tool of the 21st century. Prospective residents are judging

communities from the street, and based on what they see, they're making quick and subconscious decisions regarding the quality of the building and its management. Step into the new world of color and watch the bottom line improve with increased leases, increased retention and increased resident respect for the community. ■

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