

Pretty Maids *All in a Row*

A turn-of-the-century town house gets a color revival.

BY JAMES MARTIN AND MEGAN SCHLEGEL

*M*ulti-family housing was commonplace in the teeming cities of the East Coast by the late 1800s. But in most of the country, especially in the West, people who lived in apartments were looked down upon—even considered a bit suspect. Proper people lived in houses. So when apartments and row houses were introduced, it was essential that they be made of the highest quality and placed in good locations.

Row houses were built for the same reasons condominiums and town homes are built today: They are cheaper than houses with land, and they have no grounds to maintain. But in Denver, Colorado, they had never caught on in a big way, even though the leading architects designed them.

New Terrace was built in 1889 and is thought to have been designed by the Baerronson brothers, architects of some of Denver's most prestigious homes. (The records were lost when fire hit the Building Department in 1893.) The row houses, which continue to be a significant structure in the neighborhood, contain 10 units, culminating at the corner with a signature turret marking what was once the owner's unit. The rest of the units were rentals for the next hundred years until the building was turned into condominiums in the early 1990s.

At that time, the building was repainted from a style similar to San Francisco's "Painted Ladies" to a more current palette of mauves. This rendition, designed by architect and unit owner Chris Craven, was

featured in the book *America's Painted Ladies* by Michael Larsen and Elizabeth Pomada.

With the turn of the 21st century, the owners felt like the late '90s mauve color scheme was dated and affecting the resale value of the units. Since the property was in need of painting, they decided to update the look. The owners were undecided about the colors but knew they wanted to highlight as much of the building's elaborate architecture detail as possible.

Since the structure had received numerous paint jobs over the years, it made little economic sense to strip the brick and stone. The idea of going back to the natural colors of stone and sandstone was broached, but everyone was happy with its colorful look.

Before



When we were brought into the project, we chose the main colors to show off the basic elements of stone and brick, with the brick being khaki green, and the stone base and belt courses a deeper green. This gave the building a solid base, made it seem more sited on the ground, and showed off the rich articulation of the stone lintels and sills, which returned the feel of the organic materials of the masonry.

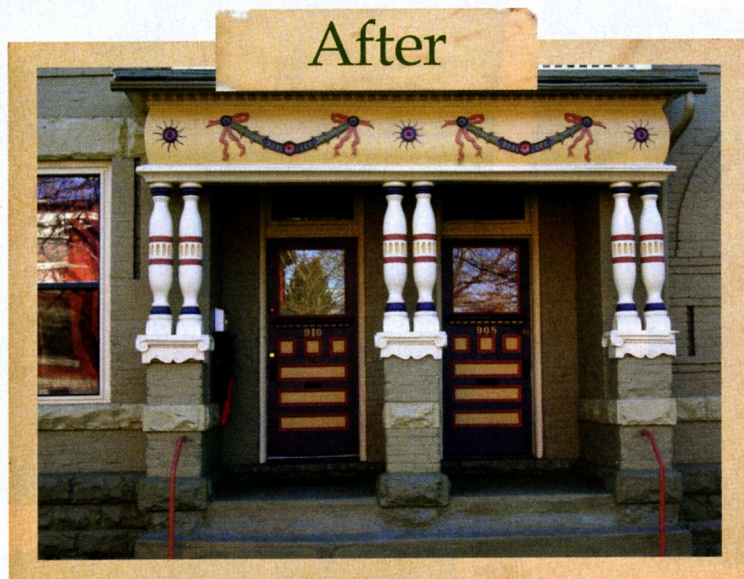
The porches were next on the list since they were the most visible part of the building, greeting people every time they come and go. Colors were chosen to pop out, but not jump off, the building. The specific color patterning was selected in conjunction with the design choices for the cornices. It was essential that both of these similar elements have a common color patterning (for instance, all the friezes are yellow) to create a visual balance to all of the elements and tie the whole building together.

We were specifically asked to make the doors as colorful, detailed and fun as possible. Although they were originally painted faux oak, they had been wonderfully colorful for years, and were among the most popular elements of the building—a selling point for many residents.

It's common that when people seek to highlight detailing they lose sight of the design commonalities and get carried away highlighting all the various pieces. The result is often an overwhelming barrage of “stuff.” We overcame this by choosing colors that have familial hues—in this case a common yellow base. The greens, yellows, reds and purples all have a common thread of yellow running through them. The variety of color values (the light to dark scale of color) allows the viewer to appreciate the numerous details because they do not fight with each other for attention. You can see this balance of hues and values in the porches and columns.

One of our primary design principles is that seeing a building of any style should be like meeting someone: You want to get a nice impression, but you don't want to know their whole life story right off the bat; the details should unfold as you get to know them. Similarly, in a building like this, we would like people to discover some nuance of its design every time they pass by—or better yet, come home—and let the real intricacy of its beauty be discovered over time. ☞

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After

