

## *The Power Tool of Color*

By Joanne M. Anderson / [jmawriter.com](http://jmawriter.com)

One of the most powerful tools in the home builder's box does not have a cord or a battery pack, yet it can stimulate the senses, brighten someone's mood, enlarge the perception of space and even close the deal - or not - on a new home sale.

Claude Monet, founder of the French impressionist painting movement, once stated: "Color is my day-long obsession, joy and torment." No doubt, it's the same for many builders who are no longer comfortable with just "builder's beige" or the contemporary "greige," a gray-beige mix.

While neutral tones are still the most popular for interior paint in new homes, many builders are more closely examining style, architecture, natural daylight, target market and geographical region to determine interior, complementary color schemes. A single-level beach home in Florida, for example, is more well-suited to pastels, while a timber frame, mountain home among the Ponderosa pines of Colorado could more sensibly embrace greens and browns of that natural landscape. Likewise, an adobe house in the southwest can exude warmth with bold accent walls in turquoise and orange that would be way out of place in a New England saltbox or a farmhouse on the central plains.

If you look around the Internet long enough, you can find almost every color is trending somewhere. One site promotes pastels for 2015, and another one chooses medium shades, and still another advocates bold, bright colors in small doses. The challenge to the builder is choosing colors which more universally appeal to the masses, and for that, there are a few basics of color psychology.

Shades of red, orange and yellow exude warmth and excitement as seen in fire and sunshine; these are active colors. The passive blues and greens are more connected to the peace and serenity found in landscapes and water views. Green is the overall most restful color, a blend of the qualities of blue with the cheerful attributes of yellow. Browns, creams and grays are neutral. Dark colors make a room feel smaller, while light ones project more space.

The astute builder checks sample colors as daylight changes because lighting alters color, making it appear darker, lighter, washed out, redder or more yellow. It certainly looks much different on a wall than under a store's fluorescent lighting or in a paint-swatch light box. "Depending on the style, location and other factors, we are splashing creative, complementary colors inside even a spec home ~ oranges, greens, blues, yellows, some neutrals and the ubiquitous shades of white and cream or natural stain on the trim," quips long-time builder Don Hughes.

And speaking of trim, this is where accent colors can break up the monotony of vertical space. A chair rail, crown molding, fireplace mantle, recessed cubbies and built-in bookcases can instill a wow factor into an otherwise average-looking space. There are

trim ideas and mantle makeovers galore on [thisoldhouse.com](http://thisoldhouse.com), and they can be just as attractive and appealing in "this new house."

While color selection may not be a day-long obsession for home builders as it was for Monet, it is a very important component of the new or renovated home and therefore worthy of the kind of attention given when choosing building materials, subcontractors and kitchen cupboards. The latter, of course, also factors into the paint color in the kitchen. Ever the heart of the home, the kitchen may have the least wall space of any room, but how it is handled with color can have a huge impact.

Like many things in life, the whole house can make a big splash, but in the words of Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes books: "It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important." Color is not a little thing. It's the trim, the cubbies, the mantle, the backsplash, the staircase railing --- those are the details which take average to amazing.