Improving Your Home's Exterior 1

Should you update or move — is that the question you are trying to answer? If the exterior of your home needs a change, try a facelift. An imaginative facelift (restyling of the facade) can be as simple as changing the color of the house or trim without any structural changes. Or the facelift may be as extensive as changing the style and shape of the house by adding a room or porch.

When you start a house facelift project, it's important to remember that it can be both extensive and expensive. It can also provide rewards such as:
• giving the house a new look (change color, trim or new windows and doors)
• reducing maintenance (painting, weatherization, etc.),
• improving the livability of the home (new private space, new entrances, new window areas), and
• improving or maintaining the value of the house.

One color consultant states that a good quality paint job can easily add $1,000 to the value of a house. The same can be true of a well-planned porch or deck that expands the livability of the house or new siding that reduces the yearly maintenance costs.

Costs

When deciding on the best facelift option for your house, consider:

1. What will the budget allow?
This will help establish priorities if there are several improvements that are needed. It may even help you determine what can actually be done.

2. What improvements/changes cost the most and which are less expensive?
For example, consider window and door improvements. Repainting and adding decorative trim may produce the changes you want at considerably less cost than replacement windows and doors. Which changes will give you the maximum impact for the minimum expenditure? Changing color on the house or trim can be the least costly way of making the house look brand-new. New siding may cost less than replacing windows and doors. Which improvements should be made to maintain the value of the house? Painting the house at regular intervals will not only maintain its appearance, but will help preserve the life of the wood siding. Re-roofing a house will prevent moisture damage to the structure, as well as improve the appearance.

3. Will the proposed changes fit the architectural characteristics or style of the house?
Do you want to retain the current exterior appearance, or to change it? For instance, replacing horizontal siding with vertical siding gives a totally new look to your house.

4. Who will do the work?
Are you handy or do you need to rely on a professional? For some persons, re-painting a house may be more than they want to attempt, while for others it may be a simple job.

5. How long will it take to complete the job(s)?
You need to get several estimates which include time and cost after you have decided on the exact changes you want to make.

House Style

Before you settle on the facelift project(s), be sure you know your house style and what will work. Most houses fit into one of five basic types: one-story ranch, two-story, split-level, one and one-half story, or three or more stories. Your house may be country in appearance or very contemporary, it may be of the Victorian period or a log cabin. Styles can be changed, but at a cost and the effort requires careful planning.

Two of the most important design "don'ts" in a housing facelift are:
• don't use architectural elements incompatible with the style (too thin columns on a two-story house); and
• don't add details that detract from the style (gingerbread trim often used on a Victorian house would be out of place on a basic ranch style house).

The key to a successful project is having a well developed plan and staying with it.

What types of housing facelifts can be done? Just about anything is possible, but not always practical. Try to determine how the architectural elements (doors, windows, etc.) could be modified, as well as how the whole house could be changed by siding or color. Some houses could benefit from window changes, such as adding a bay window to give depth to the exterior, making the windows longer to extend the visual depth, or adding shutters to extend the size of the window area. Others need a more interesting or inviting front entrance, such as double doors with

Adding trim can add interest to the exterior of your home.

beveled glass, sidelights or pilasters, or fan or transom windows with porticos. Wider steps, porches, and railings can all contribute to an exterior facelift. Changing the paint color for the house and trim often makes the difference you want. Accents, such as decorative trim, rails and hardware, can be used to provide visual emphasis for windows, doors, porches and steps.

An older style house may be updated by adding trim (see illustration at the top of this page) and deepening the eaves and soffits to create shadow lines. Various building materials can be used to suggest quality (brick and stone, for example) and as visual accents. Details such as decorative doors with fancy hardware will give a rich look for a comparatively small price. This attention to detail will also help you achieve a "finished" look to the facelift.
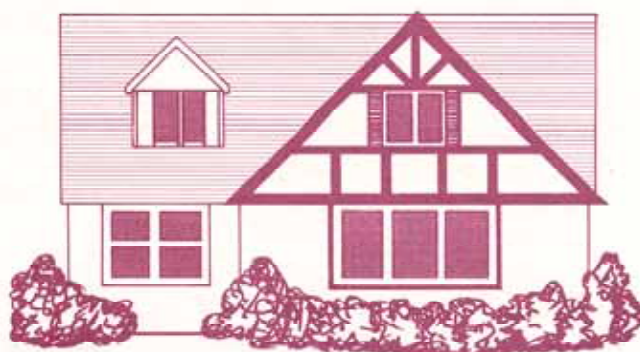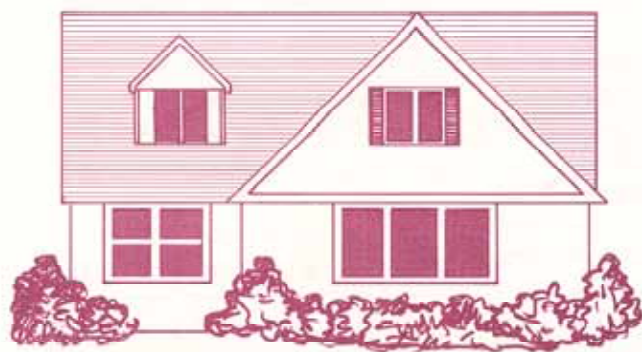
Design Makes A Difference

Changing the exterior appearance of your home is easier if you consider how design elements and principles can be used to downplay flaws or emphasize interesting details. The same design elements and principles that are used in painting a picture can be used when giving your house a facelift. Texture, proportion, balance, emphasis, line, and, most importantly, *color*, affect how your home looks. Changing one or more of these elements can make a dramatic difference, as shown in the illustration at the bottom of this page.

Texture is the roughness or smoothness of a surface. It can be used to add variety to an otherwise plain exterior. A small strip of brick or stone veneer could be used to accent conventional wood siding. Texture doesn't have to be used in large areas to be effective. Shutters, decorative molding or even window boxes can add texture on a small scale for eye-catching exterior changes.

Proportion refers to the relationship of the parts of the house to each other — the size of a front porch, for example, in relation to the rest of the house. Evaluate the front of your house to see if the relationship among windows, doors, added rooms, projections and other features is pleasing to the eye.

Using design elements can make a dramatic difference

Adding color, trim, shutters, window boxes, new windows or doors are ways to change the effects of proportion.

Parts of the house can be **formally balanced** against other parts, or offset and **informally balanced**. An example of formal balance would be a house with the same number of equally-sized windows on either side of a central door. Informal balance can be seen in a house where the front door and a window are offset from the center to balance a large picture window on the other side of the house.

Emphasis is the use of color, proportion, balance or line to draw the eye to a certain area of the house. A bright red front door or a red molding around the eaves, door or windows could be used for emphasis on a white or light grey house. As you plan your housing facelift, think about how you could add emphasis to existing exterior features with color or trim.

Line is expressed in windows, porches, siding, columns and even the roof. Vertical lines, such as those created by the use of casement windows or tall porch columns, create a feeling of height. In contrast, awning windows or lap-type siding have horizontal lines that give a feeling of length or width. Diagonal lines suggest movement and are often used on sections of siding for contrast. They also occur in the sharply-angled roof lines frequently seen on contemporary homes.

Color

One of the most economical and dramatic exterior improvements you can make is to change the color of your home. Before you make any changes take a drive or walk around your neighborhood. Make an inventory of houses you like and dislike.

Note the colors that seem effective or attractive to you.

Color preference is a personal matter, but there are some factors you may want to consider before selecting paint and trim colors.

Where to Use Color

A house has three major areas that can be painted: (See illustration.)

The **field** or body of the house is the largest area. As you make an inventory of homes in your neighborhood, you'll probably notice that fields painted in light colors, such as white, light grey, or buff, predominate.

The **trim** is made up of borders around doors and windows, as well as the soffit and fascia strips which edge the roof.

Accent areas include shutters, the front door, window boxes and porch railings.

Color Can Fool the Eye

Light or dark, bright or dull, color can affect how large the house seems. Light colors tend to make a form look larger, so if you have a bungalow-style or other small house, you might choose light grey instead of dark grey. Bright colors catch the eye, while duller ones can camouflage problem areas. Suppose, for instance, you have added a room with exterior wood siding onto a brick house. If you want the

TRIM

FIELD

ACCENT
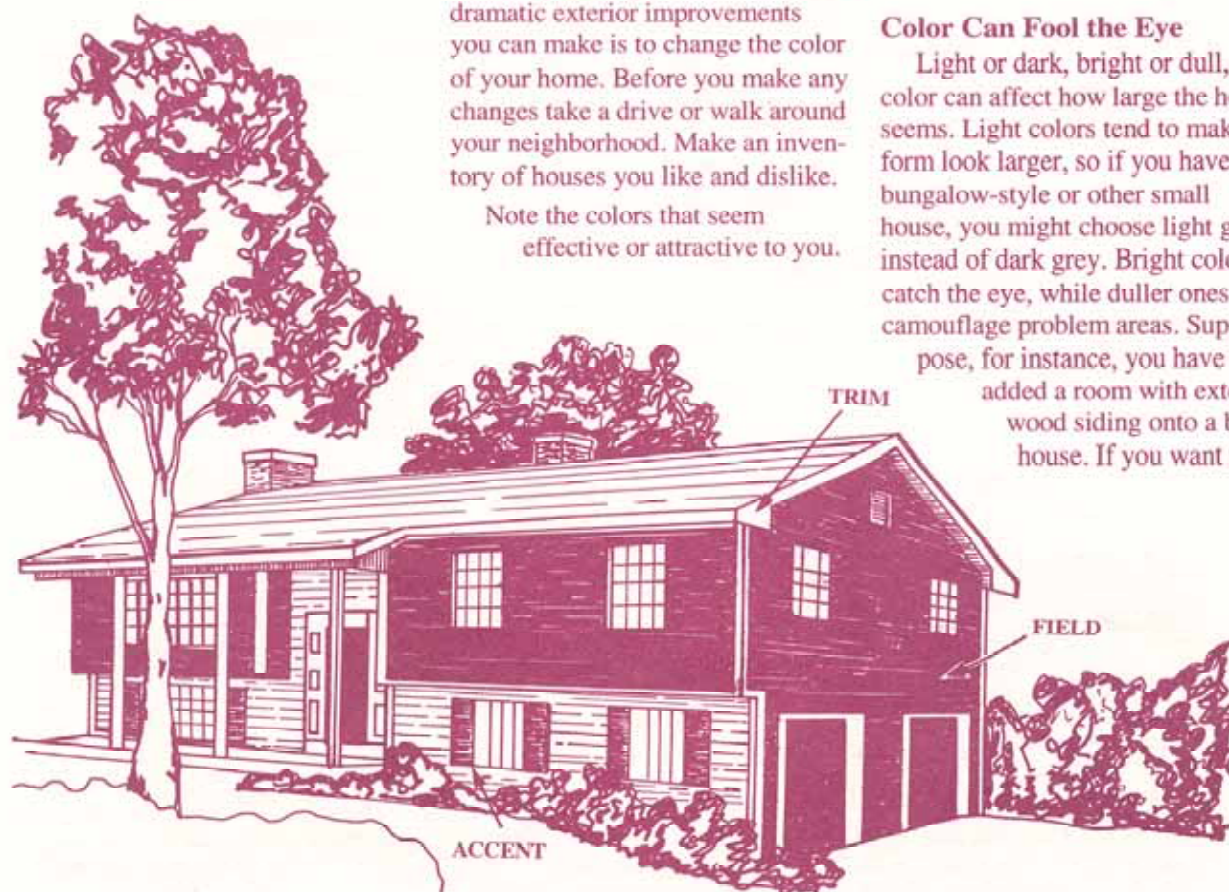
Major areas of color

Unifying the house with color

addition to blend in with the rest of the house, select a color close to that of the brick instead of one that contrasts with it.

The size of the house can help determine the color scheme to be used. If your house is large and has interesting architectural details like Victorian trim, then more colors can be used. If the house is large but bulky looking or has features that compete for attention, it may be better to use one main color to unify the front of the house. Then use an accent color in a smaller area like the front door for contrast. (See illustration at the top of this page.)

On a small house, a simple color plan that uses one or two colors may make the house seem larger. Small or boxy houses may look more attractive when the trim around the roof edge and the underside of the eaves is the same color as the field or body of the house. A simple color plan can also minimize unattractive details, such as oversized trim around doors and windows.

The most successful color schemes often use three or fewer colors. In a two-part color plan, the siding or field is painted one color and the trim and accent areas are both painted in the second color. With a three-part color scheme, the siding or field is one color, the trim another color, and the shutters or doors use a third color. If more than three colors are used, the fourth should generally be a darker or lighter shade of one of the other colors, unless the fourth color is used in a small area, like the front door.

Traditionally, downspouts and gutters have been painted the same color as the background they are mounted on so that they blend in rather than stand out. A newer trend treats gutters and downspouts as part of the trim, so that they contrast with the field of the house. The downspouts become a color accent at the corners of the house when used this way.

Since it is a comparatively small area, the front door can be painted the brightest color of those used. This color accent can be a darker, brighter version of the color used for the field or trim. Or it can be an entirely different color which is used to draw the eye to the entrance of the house. Red, for example, is a bright color often chosen as the accent for the door. If the door seems small compared to the rest of the house, it will appear larger if the surrounding trim is painted the same color as the door.

Selecting Colors

Select the color for the field or background first, since this is usually the largest area. If the color you like seems too dark or bright

2-part color scheme

3-part color scheme

for such a large area, remember that it can be lightened or "greyed down" enough to provide an attractive or more subtle color. Next, pick trim and accent colors to coordinate with the field. These colors can be a darker shade or lighter tint of the color used for the field. You may want to use a contrasting color that is quite different. Remember that when a strong contrasting color is used, it will tend to emphasize the trim.

Texture should be considered when choosing colors. For example, if your house has a stucco surface, then peach, sand or cream may be more appropriate than dark colors. The rough surface of stucco tends to make darker colors look uneven. Brick is another textured surface that may look better when painted with a light color.

Foundation and roof colors are strong visual elements, but they are usually neutral enough (black, grey, tan) to blend with colors selected for field and trim. These areas can also be used as a starting point for the overall color scheme. If the house has a black roof, the color selected for the field and trim can be greyed down, rather than used at full color strength. If the roof is tan, then tints or shades of brown could be used for the color scheme, with a bright accent for color contrast.

Testing the Color Scheme

Because the field of the house is such a large area, you may want to make a color test first, especially if the color change will be quite different. Get quarts of the new paint colors you want to use for the field and trim. Find an area of the house where there's a window and paint part of the siding next to the window with the new color. Paint the trim color on the window frame and the accent color on a shutter. Try living with these colors for a week, then tone them up or down if they seem too dull or too bright.

Updating Traditional Color Schemes

Traditional color schemes can be updated with a new application of color. **Primitive or Early American** houses are characterized by brick or frame siding. There are usually large areas of trim and few architectural details to accent, except for shutters and doors. Williamsburg colors are appropriate, such as grey-green, slate blue, straw or tan for the field, and dark red, cream or white for the trim. Black, red or blue are good choices for the accent color. To vary the accent or trim, a more vivid color, such as deep fuscia, can be used.

Victorian houses have many areas of trim and accents. You might wish to draw or sketch the house first, and then use colored markers or pencils to give an idea of how trim and accent colors would look. Traditional colors for field and trim include red and dark green, dark green and gold, gold and cream or brown, shades of pink, dusty blue and green. Updating might mean using a light color, such as ivory or cream, for the field and doing the trim in dark red with green shutters as accents.

Colonial homes have moderate trim area. Repeating the field color in the trim tends to unify the color scheme. Traditional colors are white field with grey trim or grey field with white trim. Cooler or warmer greys can give a different, yet still traditional look. Accents of dark red, green or dark grey might be used. Or another update would be to do the field in light peach, the trim in white and the accent in grey-green.

Contemporary homes often have wood siding or siding that is painted or stained in wood tones. Contrasting color on trim around windows and on the front door is an inexpensive way to soften the dominant wood tones.

Changing design elements can add interest.

This publication has given you an overview on planning an exterior facelift for your home. If you would like more specific information about ujpdating windows, doors, siding or roofs, you may wish to request other publications in the *New Faces for Old Places* series. Single copies of the following North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service publications are available free of charge:

New Faces for Old Places series:
Improving Your Home's Exterior, HE-346-1
Selecting Siding For Your Home, HE-346-2
Selecting Exterior Doors: The Pros and Cons, HE-346-3
Selecting a Roof: Pros and Cons, HE-346-4
Renovating or Replacing Windows, HE-346-5

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