

Interior Design – Five Months in the Life

21st Century Georgian

This is about a journey through a spectacular project that took five months to complete. For this conversion project we specified 37 paint colours, six glaze colours, five marbles, six stains for four kinds of wood, metal railings and numerous handles, knobs and switch plates.

By Sylvia O'Brien // Photos: Paul Wright, ACI Wright Architects



The project was described as a 'Georgian on seven levels' over 7,000 square feet. The home's Georgian renovation included interior design, and the architect, Paul Wright, ACI Wright Architects, recommended that the client hire a specialist in the coordination of the fabrics, upholstery and colour. At this point I joined the team. Wow, from my perspective as a colour contractor, all I could think was "This should be interesting."

April

At the first meeting with the homeowner he expressed that he wanted an 'Old World look but with a fresh translation.' He used the term 'country genteel' and directed me to a pile of books he'd been studying on Georgian rooms. It was clearly the client's dream home. Seven levels of structure dictated numerous alcoves and a labyrinth of halls and stairs. It was fascinating... and it took four hours to complete the initial tour.

Paul and I worked well together setting up sample panels for the client to see as he needed to feel and touch every aspect before it was approved. "Colours are so important that they can make or break a design and we had a strong sense of what we were trying to achieve," said Paul. "It was so important to achieve the look of an aged Georgian home and the colour palettes were all part and parcel to that end."

Over the following week, a colour palette began to emerge. I wanted to accommodate the updated classical aspects, the asymmetry as well as the symmetry of the interior. What I knew about the Georgian palette became the foundation for the new choices, but the colour choices were not literal. To keep the palette in context I felt that slightly hazy and warm versions of a classic Georgian colour sensibility would suit the layers of colour this type of structure deserved.





May

Handcrafted reproduction plaster moldings were in place by this time, and they were spectacular. The paint palette was shaping up with pale olive, grey greens, pearl greys, rose browns, deep red, faded salmon pink, pale dijon and warm neutrals. Massive stained glass skylights in gold and brown (a modified reproduction of one in the Woolworth's Building in New York) informed the upper halls and the stairwells that were the core of the house. A warm pale brown, the colour of crème brûlée was perfect for the walls washed in the light from above (opposite page).

Paul's strong background in Georgian architecture was very evident and I was amazed at how he transformed the modern 1960 original house into an aged Georgian home.

This month we worked on colour for the dining area (rose brown), kitchen (pale dijon), guest bedrooms (salmon pink, tans, grey greens), guest bathrooms (soft caramel, pale grey) and the powder room (a little jewel in dark red with a copper ceiling and fixtures).

The master suite was expansive and included one main bedroom and three anterooms ... ensuite, dressing room and atrium. Variations of pearl grey wrapped the bedroom with its vaulted and articulated ceiling. The darkest tone went on the ceiling to emphasize the profile of the moldings and create a more intimate feeling in the room. One wall was complete built-ins with a fireplace in the centre. This was an imposing structure so I brought in my trusted faux finish expert to soften the feeling of it with antiquing techniques. The plaster cornices and ceiling moldings received the same glaze treatment. All three anterooms were painted a warm neutral I fondly call peanut. The ensuite bath was influenced by its own stained glass skylight – a unique and beautiful piece designed by the architect.



June

We weren't finished paint colour selection yet, but it was time to focus on wood stains and marble.

Jatoba, white oak, red oak flooring and cherry wall paneling. How to make it flow? By the time we finished, in general, the flooring was slightly darker than the wainscot, walls or cabinetry. The exception was the library with its herringbone Jatoba floor. The darker sections of the Jatoba were about the same tone as the stained cherry walls. So much visual heat is generated by all the warm wood tones in this two-level space, that I used a pale olive green on the walls and columns. The cooling effect of the green balanced out the feeling in the space, and it complemented the red and orange undertones of the wood. The jewellery in the room was the spectacular heavily embellished circular cast metal staircase to the upper level (above).

Marble selection warranted a group trip to the marble slab warehouse. What a wonderful place! With five marbles and two granites to select as well as various wall tiles; the process went on intermittently for over a month. Marble for floors and fireplaces, granite for countertops, classical wall tiles were all pieces of the puzzle.

July

Time to tackle the living room. A silvered green colour direction suited this space with its wall of five windows overlooking the Rosedale Valley ravine (hence the seven levels). Its correlation with the greenery outside created an easy visual flow. A very classical and symmetric space, the living room was encrusted with stunning plaster reproduction moldings at the cornice and vaulted ceiling, beautifully lit from lighting hidden in the cornice. Decorative paneling on the walls and columns presented a perfect opportunity to introduce tonal wall and ceiling colours. The final touch to this room was to articulate the decorative organic plaster ceiling treatments with glaze antiquing. This same colour group and application was extended to the centre hall, which was open to the living room (below).



History of Georgian Colour Schemes

c.1714–1830

Early in the period Georgian colour palettes started off in strong burgundies, sage greens, dark browns and grey. Later in the period they became softer, lighter – understated and elegant – which is the influence used as the client preferred lighter tones: pale warm greys, light pea green, butter yellows, delicate pinks, red clay and pale stone.

To immerse herself in the feeling of the palette, the author referred to the following books:

- Classic Georgian Style Lady Henrietta Spencer Churchill
- Georgian House Style Ingrid Canfield
- The Georgian House in Britain & America Steven Parissien
- Natural Palettes for Painted Rooms Donald Kaufman & Taffy Dahl

August

The very last room to tackle was the entry foyer. Colour in this space was of key importance. It's the true introduction to experiencing the entire interior. I saved it for the last on purpose. What a beautiful room to work with, heavily articulated by decorative wainscoting, painted wood panelling, layers of cornice and ceiling moldings and sumptuous chandeliers.

Five colours in paint and glazes wrapped the walls and ceiling of this space giving it warmth and relaxed elegance. Versions of red clay down to heavy cream layered to address the homeowner's vision of 'country genteel'. In blues, greys or greens it would have been too formal. My goal was to present the foyer as an introduction to the interior; but at the same time, keep it in context to the red brick exterior:

By the end of August we were almost done. Just a few more handles, knobs and switch plates to spec colour for. The homeowner and the architect were a delight to work with. I do miss our weekly meetings.

I was pleased to be part of this journey. The outcome is truly satisfying. My next project will be a gutted Victorian row house destined to be modernized. I think I'll call it a 21st century Victorian!

Sylvia O'Brien, a colour specialist with a 35-year career in colour and design, works with private clients, architects and interior designers, specifying colour and finishes for all building materials (inside and out). Her articles have been published in national shelter magazines, and her projects often showcased in Toronto newspapers. She is the only colour specialist with an affiliate membership to ARIDO (Toronto chapter). www.colourtheory.net

