

Old House Rehabilitation and Restoration Information

Rehabilitating and restoring a historic house is an exciting challenge. All of your hard work will be richly rewarded when you successfully complete your project. Keep in mind, too, that you do not have to do it all yourself. Many professionals are available to assist you during every phase of your project: architects, architectural historians, landscape architects, contractors, and suppliers as well as researchers, librarians, and preservationists.

Throughout this information sheet, are references to “Statewide Preservation Organizations” and “State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs).” For the contact information to these organizations in your state, please visit www.nationaltrust.org/help/statewide_org.asp or call the National Trust’s Resource Center at 202-588-6164.

How Do I Start?

Before buying an older house, you should first determine the condition of the building by thoroughly inspecting it yourself or with a trained professional, such as an architect, structural engineer, or a building inspector with renovation experience. A local preservation organization can probably recommend an appropriate person. Carefully map out what you want to accomplish and budget how much money you can afford to spend. The next step is research. The more you know about your house, the more accurate your restoration will be. You will also save money by eliminating as much guess work as possible before beginning any actual work.

Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Search for deeds, tax records, property abstracts, and maps to determine your house’s previous owners and the history of the building. Your city or county records office can help you begin.
- Look through city directories, census records, and insurance maps for information on the house’s previous owners. Your public library and local historic society will have this information.
- Conduct a search of the house and its yard. An architect or archaeologist can offer advice as to what to look for, and don’t forget to search the rafters for records the former owners may have left behind.
- To determine whether the house is a designated historic structure on the local, state, or national level, or to find out if it is within a historic district, contact your State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
- If your house is a locally designated historic structure, or in a historic district, you may need local approval to make any changes to the exterior. Ask your local planning office.
- Easements or other tax abatement programs may be available to you. Again, your local planning office and local preservation commission are the best sources of information.

Financing the Restoration of an Old House

It can be difficult to find funds for your restoration project. As always, your bank, your family, or your friends are the tried and true sources of money for renovating an old house. Sometimes specific funds for preserving an old house are available at the local, state, or national level. For more information on funding the preservation of your historic home, please use the following link to the financial assistance section of our website: <http://www.nationaltrust.org/funding/>.

Not every state offers the same financial assistance for historic home owners, so it is a good idea to contact all of the following agencies in your state for information on their grants and loans: Historic Development Commission, Department of Planning and Economic Development, Housing and Redevelopment, and State Historic Preservation Office.

Painting Your Historic Home

There are several publications available for preservationists interested in paint colors. The National Trust’s Preservation Books carries “Paint in America: The Colors of Historic Buildings” by Roger Moss. For price and ordering information please visit the Preservation Books website at

www.preservationbooks.org. Mr. Moss has also written several other books concerning historic paint colors which are available at your local bookstore or library or through Amazon.com. The National Park Service's "Preservation Briefs" will also be helpful and can be accessed using this link: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm>. Two briefs which will be particularly useful are: "No.10 - Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork" and "No. 28 - Painting Historic Interiors." The National Trust has worked extensively with the Valspar Corporation to develop an exclusive collection of historical colors. The resulting American Tradition® palette, sold exclusively at Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouses, covers the spectrum of historic hues. It features 250 colors certified by the National Trust, having been developed from samples taken from the Trust's Historic Sites: examples include Woodrow Wilson Presidential Ivory, Lyndhurst Duchess Gold, and Woodlawn Plantation Pear. These 100% acrylic paints are available for both interior and exterior work and all carry a lifetime warranty. To see the possibilities they offer with the American Tradition Virtual Painter, please visit our website: <http://www.nationaltrust.org/marketplace/paint.html>. Valspar also supports preservation by donating a portion of every paint sale to the National Trust and by supplying paint to the National Trust's Historic Sites. In addition, Valspar supplied paint to the 12 sites featured in Home and Garden Television's Restore America - A Salute to Preservation 2003/2004 season.

What is the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of historically significant structures. The National Register was authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is administered by the Department of the Interior's National Park Service. Some of the types of properties nominated for inclusion in the National Register are historic areas in the National Park Service, National Historic Landmarks, historically significant properties nominated by federal, state, and local governments, organizations, or individuals. A National Register designation mandates that a property must be considered in the planning of federal or federally assisted projects impacting the registered property, and qualifies it for financial assistance from governmental funds for historic preservation when these funds are available.

For more information about the National Register of Historic Places, write to the National Park Service at P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013, or call the National Register's reference desk at 202-354-2213. The National Register's web site is also a good place to find information about the National Register. The web site offers general information about the program, specific information about registered properties, guidelines for nominating properties, and publications. The web address is www.cr.nps.gov/nr; to go directly to the National Register's publication site, visit www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/; to search for information about a specific property listed on the National Register, go to www.cr.nps.gov/nr/research/.

To find out if your home is listed on the National Register, go to this section of the National Register's website: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/research/index.htm>.