The paint scheme of a building is the most visible and easily understandable feature of a building for most people to comprehend. Therefore it is one of the most important aspects of an historic properties design.

Choosing a pallet

For mid to late 19th century commercial buildings, (which includes most of downtown Winona), l the most historically accurate colors tend to be deep, rich, earth tones. This category includes a multitude of colors, but all in a tone that typically has a brown or grey (earthy) tone. These colors were used in combinations of three or four colors or tones of the same color. Another option is use "jewel tone" paint schemes. These are also deep and often rich colors that are brighter or less "earthy" in tone. Though less accurate in terms of the actual paint used historically, these color schemes can provide similar affects in terms of highlighting architectural features on historic buildings. Second and third colors for trims and highlighting architectural details should be of differing tint or complementary on the color wheel.

Buildings of an earlier era (such as the "first generation" wood structures in Winona) used light color pallets including whites or other pale hues. Browns and other earth tones continued to be used into the 20th century, but were not as often used in multiple combinations like in the high Victorian era. Other color schemes may be appropriate for buildings constructed after the mid 20th century.

Color Trends Over Time

Mid 1800's – Soft neutral shades of brown, gray, green, blue, tan (straw, sand, slate, earth) trimmed with white were popular.

Late 1800's – Colors darken and contrasts become more pronounced, olive & forest green, ochre, brick red, and dark browns were in style.

Early 1900's (20th Century) – Natural colors continue in fashion with a lighter and less complex approach (lighter browns, grays, greens & golds). Classical revival styles bring whites and lighter colors back to fashion.

Generally pastels and clear bright colors are inappropriate for Winona's historic district, particularly for a base color. Neon or fluorescent colors are not appropriate in the historic district.

Color Scheme Considerations

- Consider the context of your building in it location. What are the color schemes of the adjacent structures? Colors change in appearance when placed immediately next to other colors and results can often be jarring and even distasteful.

- Consider Massing – this refers to the relationship of solid components (walls, columns, etc.) to façade voids (windows, doors, archways etc.). Use these elements as clues to determine where similar and deferring colors should be placed.

- Consider Composition & Complexity. A simple building needs fewer colors than a more ornate one. Differing colors (or tones) on different façade planes will highlight features.

Color Placement on Historic Buildings
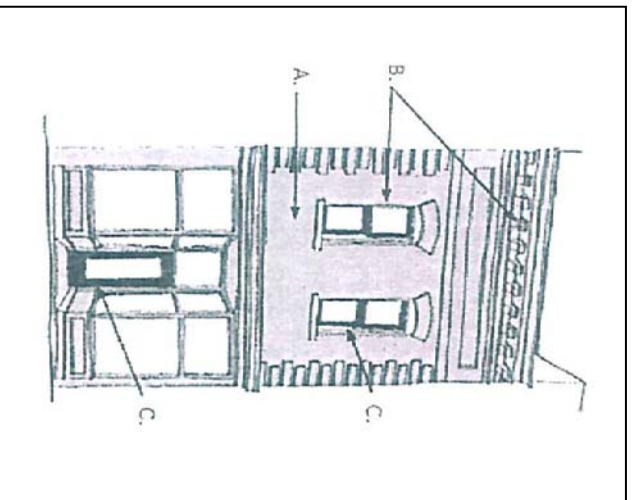
A. Wall or Base Color – wall surfaces and storefront piers
- Historically these often resembled natural building materials such as brick or stone
- Flat paint should be used for a base color

B. Major Trim or Second Color – cornices, window frames, window hoods, storefront columns, bulkheads
- Accent larger details and frame elements
- Consider gloss or semi-gloss to accentuate details

C. Accent Color – Storefront frame, doors, window sash, small architectural details/accents in cornice, window hoods and bulk heads
- May be more than one accent color
- Used in small amounts on smaller details (rosettes or embossed detail in cast iron)
- Consider gloss or semi-gloss to accentuate details

Other Tips

- Darker colors near the ground (main floor) help to "anchor" a building and prevent a top heavy appearance.

- Be cautious with the use of white and other lighter tints. It can give a feature or a whole building a glaring appearance, in particular when adjacent structures have darker schemes.

- A buildings orientation to the sun and the differing lighting throughout the day will affect its appearance with shadows and color of light (early morning and late afternoon light gives a yellowish tint).

- Paint color should be coordinated with the colors of unpainted natural materials (stone, brick, and varnished wood) on the building.

- Sanding a small patch (1 square foot) of original wall or trim by hand leaving a strip of each layer of color will provide an indication of the colors used on a particular building over time.