

### Kitchen Colors

Take design cues from historic bungalow colors and details, c. 1900 to 1925.

BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER



#### above

A page from Sherwin-Williams' Making the Color Choice catalog reflects how the color decision process had passed into the female domain by the beginning of the 20th century.

A color card from the mid 1920s illustrates the pastel color options available.

THE KITCHEN AT THE END OF THE BUNGALOW ERA WAS VASTLY DIFFERENT THAN THE ones illustrated in early 20th-century publications. These early kitchens were mostly Victorian-period holdovers. They consisted of a very simple large room lacking most of the modern conveniences seen 20 years later. Victorian kitchens were large to deflect the vast amounts of heat generated by coal stoves that were kept going all day to provide hot water for the household.

An example from the 1912 Sears *Modern Homes* catalog illustrates a room with only a sink, a stove and a table. Another example from a home decorator magazine, c. 1911, likewise shows only a sink and a table with no visible counter space. This kitchen is painted in Victorian-style colors: gold walls and darker gray woodwork. The Sears kitchen demonstrates the signs of the growing hygiene and sanitation movement, with its emphasis on

# Room colors became lighter, with cream walls and cabinets often highlighted by contrasting floors and furniture.

white tile walls and a polished wood floor. Sears retained the darker walls and ceiling of the early Victorian style. A kitchen view from around 1916 shows the first signs of built-in cabinets. The room size is large, as clothes washing and ironing were still generally carried out in the kitchen, along with all food preparation, which might include chicken plucking and cleaning. The kitchen space needed to be able to handle food preparation for large households with extended families and often included elaborate meals.

By the late teens and early 1920s, the kitchen was evolving into what we see today. A Benjamin Moore Paints kitchen portrayal presents a different picture from just a few years earlier. The modern upper and lower kitchen cabinets with glass doors are present as is a linoleum floor in a colorful checkerboard pattern. The biggest alteration is the addition of an ice box. Readily available electricity allowed for the proliferation of kitchen devices such as mixers,

#### top right

The introduction of electricity into neighborhoods radically altered the kitchen, allowing for lights and fans. Ice boxes, such as the one shown against the left wall, kept food fresh much longer than Victorian root cellars.

#### right

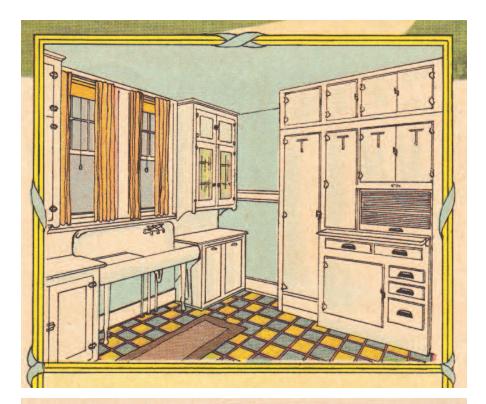
Kitchens were often large to accommodate not only food preparation and cooking but also laundry and ironing.

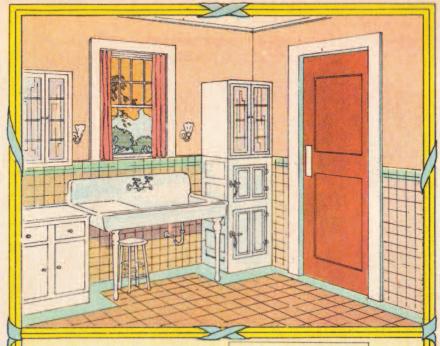






# Cabinets became a necessity to hold the growing number of pre-packaged foods available from the newly opened grocery stores.





refrigerators, lights and fans to keep the space cool in summer. Cabinets became a necessity to hold the growing number of pre-packaged foods available from the newly opened grocery stores. Container foods were becoming much more common: corn flakes were invented in 1894 and condensed soup in 1897, for example. Food preparation in the kitchen shifted toward cooking and storage, and away from slaughtering. Room colors became lighter, with cream walls and cabinets often highlighted by contrasting floors and furniture.

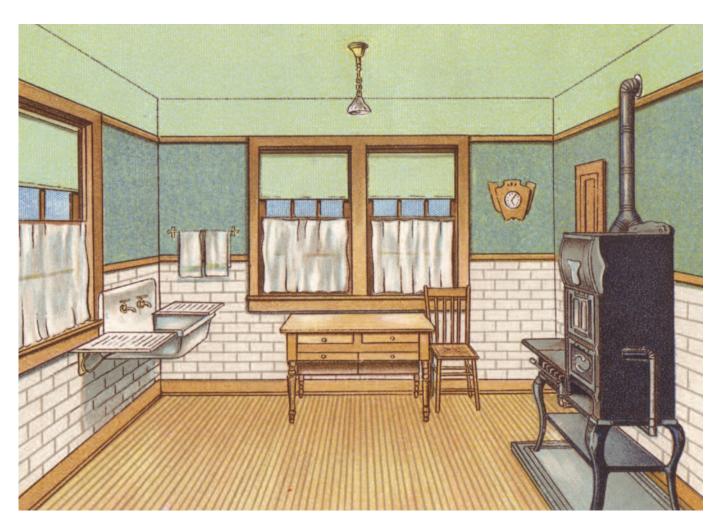
By the mid- to late '20s, the kitchen had become the efficient cooking station commonly associated with the bungalow era. The walls are full of cabinets with storage for everything from bread to knives and cereal boxes to Jell-O, which became available in 1899. The cabinets were usually painted in light colors. White—although not the bright white that we know today—was the most popular color, but many shades of cream were also in use. Some walls were tiled, but many illustrations of the era do not show any tile on the walls or floors. Floor

#### top left

By the mid 1920s, many kitchens had full walls of ornate cabinets to store the growing array of pre-packaged foods along with kitchen appliances now becoming available.

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By the early 1920s, kitchen cabinets were becoming popular. Kitchen colors were bright and cheerful, reflecting the prosperity of the period.



cloths and linoleum in bright geometric patterns were customary. The walls of the 1920s bungalow kitchen displayed a wide variety of color options. These were mostly light in color, tending toward the pastel, with greens, blues, creams and peaches being the most popular. Ceilings were mainly white or off-white to reflect light to the cooking surfaces.

#### top

Sears Roebuck, the acknowledged purveyor of public taste, displayed this holdover Victorian-style kitchen in its 1912 Modern Homes catalog. Note the lack of any cabinets.

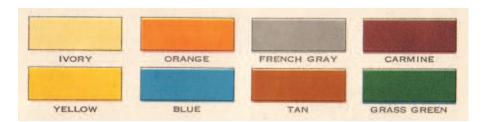
#### right

This image depicts a late-1920s kitchen with a brightly colored inglenook and dark cabinets.





### Seating inglenooks were popular throughout the later bungalow period.



Toward the end of the '20s and into the early '30s, kitchen colors again grew darker, with cabinets and woodwork appearing in brown and gray. Seating inglenooks were popular throughout the later bungalow period. Some were stained wood, but most were painted in bright colors such as kelly green, red and even gloss black.

The kitchen constantly evolved throughout the first three decades of the 20th century. New inventions and alterations in lifestyle necessitated the addition of appliances and storage facilities. Colors moved from dark Victorian tones to pastels and whites then back toward darker tones.

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#### from top left

Kitchen colors from a 1926 paint catalog. • The health and sanitation movement meant keeping floors in clean, polished condition. Yearly spring repainting was highly recommended.

• Eating in the kitchen became popular in the bungalow era. Kitchen inglenooks were popular, and these spaces were often painted in bright colors.



Books and Web sites for further information.

- Bungalow Kitchens, written by Jane Powell, photography by Linda Svendsen. Gibbs Smith, 2000. Visit bungalowkitchens.com.
- Bungalow Basics: Kitchens, written by Paul Duchscherer, photography by Douglas Keister; Pomegranate Communications, 2004. Visit powells.com.
- The New Bungalow Kitchen, written by Peter Labau, photography by Marco Prozzo; Taunton Press (2007). Visit barnesandnoble.com.
- houseinprogress.net/archives/000422.html.
- 1912bungalow.com/archives/2004/03/historical\_kitc.php.
- craftsmandesign.com/portfolio/kitchens/1903Bungalow.html.