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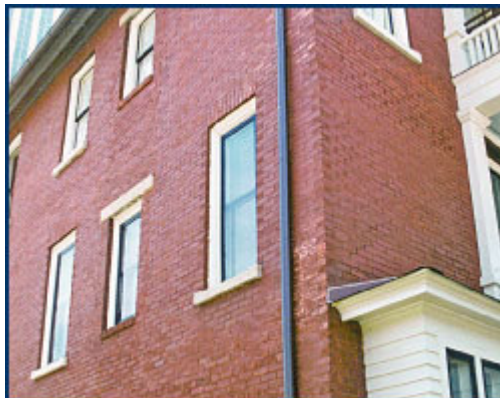
The Official Publication  
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## Colored Mortar

## Side Story: Solving the Problem of Unmatched Masonry

**Brooke Schmidt,**  
Managing Editor

When adding on to a masonry structure, it's "virtually impossible to match brick or block colors exactly," explains Russell Gray, President of Nawkaw Corporation just outside of Atlanta. "Brick and block are like wallpaper in that they must come from the same lot or run for them to match exactly. This is why there are so many mismatched additions."



To solve the mismatched masonry problem, Gray's company was the first in North America to offer masonry staining as a service. For government, institutional, commercial and even residential projects, masonry stains allow the new additions to be color matched to the existing brick, providing a look that is consistent and homogenous. Plus, the stains are much more affordable than decladding and rebricking a building. "Our cost to color a building is about 15% of rebricking," Gray says.

Gray says the idea for masonry staining originated in new construction where, every now and then, two different runs of the same brick were accidentally mixed together on the same building. "There was nothing structurally wrong with the brick. The color range just wasn't right," Gray says. "Sometimes one run was a little lighter or darker than the other run, and the results were visually displeasing."

Masonry color treatments are a stain, Gray says, referring to the fact that masonry stains penetrate into the pores of brick and concrete block; they do not cover the surface dwelling like paint. "We're not hiding the product; we're enhancing or changing its color," he says. "Our products soak into pores and only change the color; they don't change the surface textures. This is significant because it is the surface textures of these masonry products that make them feel and look so warm and pleasing to us. They are natural looking, and we want to preserve that look."

### Long-lasting

Masonry stains can last for 25 years or more depending on which product is used. If you're looking for a stain, Gray recommends doing your "due diligence" on the stain search itself. He recommends that



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contractors look for a stain with a solid warranty, extensive field and laboratory testing, and ask for references to find a reputable company.

"There are two key factors when it comes to masonry staining," Gray says. "The first is having the right product. The second is having qualified applicators who know what they are doing. At Nawkaw, we take up to two years to completely train an applicator. There are many techniques and various pieces of equipment to master."

Masonry stain application is an art form, much like faux painting. The stains can be applied with brushes, sponges and bags. Spray applications are also available.

### **In the Eye of the Beholder**

One of Nawkaw Corporation's prestigious masonry staining projects was the restoration of the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta. This historic site was once home to the famous author of "Gone With the Wind" and continues to be a popular tourist stop for visitors to the city.

Although project managers were thrilled that the staining of the home turned out just as they had hoped, Gray wasn't as excited about the final appearance. "They wanted the house to look just as it did when Margaret Mitchell lived there," Gray says. "Well, when she lived there, it was a somewhat run-down boarding house. So, that's what it looks like now."

Gray would have liked to see the brick stained back to the color of the original construction before the home was turned into apartments. But, the project just goes to show that masonry staining can accomplish a variety of looks.

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