

For Immediate Release:

March 17, 2025

Media Contact:

Stephanie Mirah, Marketing and Communications Manager
media@thefrickpittsburgh.org; 412-342-4047

Kristin Garbarino, Director of Marketing and Communications
media@thefrickpittsburgh.org; 412-342-4075

The Frick Pittsburgh's Gilded-Age mansion gets a fresh update with a new, more historically accurate coat of paint

As Clayton undergoes a multi-phase preservation effort, the Frick continues to honor history through a contemporary lens

PITTSBURGH – As part of a multi-phase, multi-year project to preserve Henry Clay Frick's family home, The Frick Pittsburgh is proud to unveil the new, more historically accurate paint color for the house's brick exterior: Tavern Gray.

After reviewing samples taken from the house, the gray color was selected because it reflects the same color Clayton's bricks were in 1897. Samples of the ornamental wood and metal trim revealed that one of the original colors for those materials was a creamy tan, making it our new accent color.

"In our research, we consulted period guides, architectural handbooks, and interior decoration style guides," **Chief Curator & Director of Collections Dawn R. Brean** said. "Tastes in the 1890s were typically more subdued. We looked at various grayish-olive shades to find a tone that would complement the sandstone decoration around the house. We ultimately settled on a rich gray with mossy undertones"

Clayton, originally built in 1870, is undergoing preservation as part of a long-term plan to continue care of the building for decades to come. Restorations have been done throughout its existence like between 1891-1892, when it became the Chateausque-style, 23-room house that's still prominently displayed today on Penn Avenue in Point Breeze.

Clayton has and will remain open during the restoration, though sometimes the exterior will be impacted by scaffolding, fencing and other contractor activity.

The current preservation recommendations are outlined in a report by a team of architects from Perspectus Architecture, structural engineers from Barber & Hoffman Inc. and conservators from Heritage Conservation Collective. Per the recommendations of this team, the Frick is part way through removing the current paint from the bricks, repairing them and applying KEIM Mineral Silicate, a waterproof, breathable paint.

When deciding what paint to use, conservators from Heritage Conservation Collective were on site in late 2023 to take paint samples and test paint removal methods.

Back in their lab in Philadelphia, the conservators bedded the paint samples in a clear mounting resin, cut and polished the sample to expose the vertical stratigraphy, and then examined it microscopically. The process allowed them to determine that the brick body of the mansion has around 20 layers on the surface. That's about 150 years of paint!

The conservators suggested the Frick pick a paint color that reflected the period of significance after conducting a paint analysis, reviewing archival documentation and identifying colors typical of the period.

“What is so special about this moment in our preservation is that visitors can see both paint colors on the house – the former light yellow paint that is still being removed and the future Tavern Gray paint in the process of being added,” said **Interim Executive Director Amanda Gillen**. “A moment like this will not be seen again in a very long time, so I hope visitors coming in the next few months enjoy seeing the change in progress.”

In addition to wanting a more historically accurate paint color, the paint currently being removed was retaining moisture in the bricks, which, if left unchecked, could have caused premature failure of the bricks and could have eventually affected the interior finishes. To remove the paint, first, the bricks are steamed. Then, they are being mechanically scraped. Finally, they are stripped and cleaned with hot pressure washing.

Other than repainting the house, the Perspectus team also suggested the Frick repair and restore the exterior metal and woodwork, windows, and slate and flat roof areas. Preservation started in mid-2024 with the Frick prioritizing major deficiencies over less urgent repairs. The paint removal is ongoing. The second phase is projected to start later in 2025.

The Frick is familiar with peeling back the layers of history, so to speak, and does not shy away from examining and sharing history from a contemporary lens, which can be seen both through the award-winning **Signature Clayton Experience: Gilded, Not Golden** and the current temporary exhibition, **Kara Walker: Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)**.

Inside the walls of Clayton, the Frick is committed to sharing the complex history of the Gilded Age through a tour that focuses on the public and private lives of the Frick family along with average Pittsburghers who also lived during the period. The current temporary exhibition, Kara Walker: Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated), also highlights a contemporary artist who focuses on, as put by renowned scholar Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, remembering the misremembered parts of the Civil War.

"We are not reinterpreting the house through the new paint color but rather we are returning the house to a more historically accurate state, which has been made possible thanks to contemporary technologies and materials like the KEIM Mineral Silicate paint," said **Interim Executive Director Amanda Gillen**.

For images of the new paint color:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/kxobdbyk3v44hue3taiy7/AMQW74RNHVvw0w6OIRHRFel?rikey=424qi9bbtob9m7gsgswnl3y1z&st=gxiixn4&dl=0>

###

About The Frick Pittsburgh

The Frick Pittsburgh offers authentic experiences with art, history and nature that inspire and delight. Visitors of all ages and backgrounds are warmly welcomed to explore collections of fine and decorative arts, vehicles, historic objects, and buildings – including Clayton, the Frick family home and only intact Gilded Age mansion remaining from Pittsburgh's Millionaire's Row – left as a legacy to the people of Pittsburgh by Helen Clay Frick, daughter of noted industrialist and art collector Henry Clay Frick. Alongside these treasures, the Frick offers an active schedule of temporary exhibitions and programs on our 10-acre garden campus in the heart of Pittsburgh's East End. Information about The Frick Pittsburgh is available online at TheFrickPittsburgh.org.

For additional information or images, please contact Stephanie Mirah, Marketing and Communications Manager, or Kristin Garbarino, Director of Marketing and Communications, at Media@TheFrickPittsburgh.org