



Fig. 23. The gabled brick-masonry buildings of Nybrogade were erected after the great fire in 1728.

The Great Fire of 1728

Copenhagen burned in 1728. The fire started on Vestergade, and a strong westerly wind saw to it that more than half of the buildings in the city were reduced to rubble²⁴.

Despite the devastation, the fire gave the city the opportunity to rebuild a more modern, less flammable city of tall buildings of solid brick construction, instead of half-timbered buildings connected with wooden fences. The city fathers decided to require that all buildings along the street be built of brick masonry; half-timbering was only allowed for rear buildings. The requirement for brick masonry was meant to prevent fire from spreading in the narrow streets, but it was also intended to set an aesthetic standard. The authorities wanted beautiful, uniform streets, and Johan Cornelius Krieger, court master builder, was asked to make calculations to demonstrate that building with brick masonry was not much more expensive than flammable, old-fashioned half-timbering.

Fig. 24-25. No. 8-10 Nørregade. Krieger is believed to be the architect of this building, once a professor's residence. It was built in 1730 of reused brick and the facades were therefore rendered and white-washed. The brick surrounds of the doors and windows were coloured grey, perhaps to resemble sandstone.

Fig. 25. Reconstruction of the original colours of the facade.

Fig. 26. Krieger's drawing of a model house after the fire in 1728.



Krieger worked out a set of model designs with specifications and cost estimates, and put them in a fine little book entitled *Berechnungen und Dessenins auf 3 differente grandgemauerte Gebäude* (Calculations and Designs of Three Different Solid Brick Buildings). See Fig. 26.

The facade drawings were made as engravings with hatched surfaces, light frames and cornices; the base and some of the pediments are illustrated with dots. What do these symbols mean? Unfortunately, masonry treatment is not described further, nor are the specifications that accompany the drawings, which indicate that the base and chimney were of reused brick: "*Steine von denen niedergeschlagenen und abgebrannten Mauren*"²⁵.



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Fig. 27. Strongly influenced by Krieger's model drawings, master cabinetmaker Mathias Ortmann built no. 41 Gothersgade as his own residence and workshop in 1733. It was here he built his ornate Baroque commodes. In 1749, Rach and Eegberg showed a red building, presumably of red brick with red windows and decorative elements in sandstone colour. A storey was added in 1829, and the facade ornamentation removed.



Fig. 28. No. 24 Overgaden oven Vandet, built before 1732, is reminiscent of Krieger's model drawings. The English bond masonry of the lower-storey was striped red and yellow. However, from the very beginning, the facade was painted over in red oil, perhaps some type of composite paint. Traces of it can still be seen.



BAROQUE AND ROCOCO

However, it is probable that the facades were of exposed masonry, as reused brick was only indicated for non-visible masonry. If the intention had been to render the facades, reused brick could have been used throughout. The cornices and base moulding must have been executed in sandstone - they are referred to as *Gesims Steine* and *Corniss Steine*, while the window surrounds may belong to the ornamentation executed in dressed or moulded brick. Probably any brick used in cornices or window surrounds would have been stuccoed and presumably painted grey to imitate sandstone. The dotted base could have represented dressed granite, but as granite is not mentioned in the list of materials, and the same symbol is used on part of the pediment, it is more likely to have been stucco. Thus, we must assume that Krieger designed his model house for execution in exposed masonry with brick window surrounds, perhaps cement washed or painted grey to look like sandstone; cornices and mouldings were envisioned of genuine sandstone.

No buildings were constructed exactly according to Krieger's model drawings. However, it is possible to find his ashlar pilasters, irregular window frames and festoons in the city, although not together on one facade (Figs. 24, 25 and 27)²⁶. Krieger's drawings were used as a source of inspiration, although results were more modest, including some half-timbered versions.

Getting people to erect buildings of brick masonry construction was slow work, while rear buildings of half-timbered construction shot up in profusion. In fact, rebuilding did not get started in earnest until the general requirement for brick masonry buildings facing the street was lifted in 1731. However, the regulation from 1683 was still in force: streets were divided into three categories, with varying requirements for building

materials and street widths, depending on the prominence of the street²⁷. The same year, the Copenhagen Fire Insurance Company was established, lending money to people wanting to rebuild, a great boon to new construction. By the middle of the 1730's, the city was largely rebuilt, so when the city reintroduced the requirement for brick masonry construction in 1737, it had very little impact.

The new buildings, which were called 'fire houses', were narrow, about four to five bays wide, and two or three storeys high, usually with a cellar (Fig. 29). Although their roof ridges were parallel with the street, many of the buildings resembled gabled houses due to their full-width attic facades. These false gabled houses are peculiar to Copenhagen (Fig. 31)²⁸. The infill between the half-timbering was of rendered brick, after which both brick and half-timbering were washed in bright colours. Emphasising the half-timbering by painting it a different colour than the masonry was probably not common, as no one would have wanted to call attention to this cheap, old-fashioned method of construction. The mullioned windows had small panes containing inexpensive greenish glass. Cellar windows had shutters, while the ground floor often had interior shutters. In buildings of brick masonry construction, relieving

Fig. 29-30. No. 7-9 Gråbrødretorv. Reconstruction of the original colours of the facade. The design and colour of the windows is not known.

Fig. 29. The facades in 1729.

Fig. 30. A storey was added to no. 9 in 1779, and the facade given a colour wash. In 1847, records indicate that the facade had been given a coat of oil paint. The colours of the windows and doors shown here are based on assumption.



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HISTORY OF FACADE COLOURS

Fig. 31. Prospect of Gråbrødretorv painted by Rach and Eegberg in 1749.

Fig. 32. No. 7-9 Gråbrødretorv.



arches were carefully designed above the windows. Relieving arches were built above gates and entrances, often with a moulded casing and keystone; sometimes an oval lunette was included above the door. Entrances usually had plain double doors, the street face often decorated with applied wooden mouldings. Prominent cornices stood in white-washed contrast with the dark-red masonry or red-washed stucco.

After the fire, it became common to give distinction to a finer, higher first storey - the *piano nobile* - which soon began to make its mark on the Copenhagen street scene. Prior to that, the ground-floor level had been the most prominent, as it was the furnished storey, with a storage area above²⁹. It was not until the beginning of the 1700's that it became common for several families to live above one another under one roof.

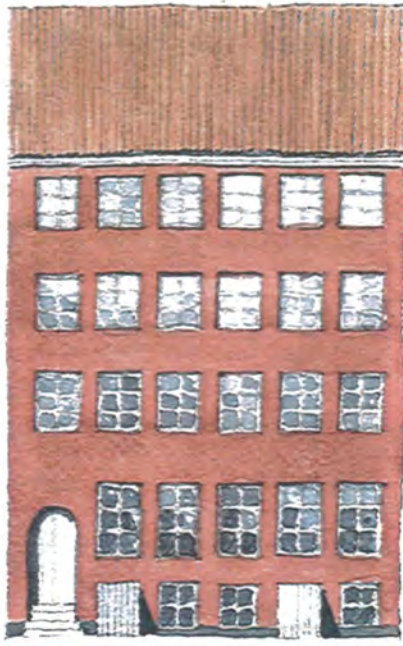


The south side of Gråbrødretorv has one of the best rows of buildings from the years immediately after the fire of 1728³⁰ (Fig. 31). If we are to believe Rach and Eegberg, many of the facades around the square were red. However, we cannot see from the painting whether the buildings were of red masonry or red-washed stucco. A colour analysis of no. 9 disclosed that the facade was originally of red brick, later given a wash of light yellow. A colour analysis of no. 7 showed a layer of grime on the red masonry, followed by a yellow layer, presumably a coat of wash. Therefore, it is probable that the original facade was of red brick (Figs. 29, 30 and 32).

Several facades from this period were originally built of exposed masonry and were rendered later: for example, no. 31 Gl. Mønt, no. 11 Valkendorffsgade and no. 15 Wildersgade.



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Fig. 33-35. No. 31 Gl. Mønt, built in 1732 of red masonry. It was not until a storey was added in 1831 that the facade was given a dark red colour, probably with composite paint. The windows were greyish white after the new storey was added. Shown are the original colour scheme of the building in 1732 (Fig. 33 - design and window colour are based on an assumption) and prior to 1831 (Fig. 34).



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Fig. 36-37. No. 11 Valkendorfsgrde from the 1730s is an example of a modest, late Baroque house, built originally of exposed red-brick masonry with sandstone-coloured moulding and an ornate sandstone entrance. The building was later given a warm white coat of wash. The original window colour is not known.



Baroque

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Rococo

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Neo-classicism

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THE CHANGING COLOURS OF COPENHAGEN

From the Renaissance to the period of neo-classicism, building materials were given the colour of the material itself. Thus, red roof tile was given a red glaze, yellow brick a yellow glaze, sandstone painted the colour of sandstone, marble marbleized and so on. There is considerable evidence that materials were painted primarily for protection, as well as to perfect them by evening out colour differences. As we mentioned earlier, the sandstone of the Chancellery was painted with sandstone-colour oil paint "*due to the various colours of the stones*". The purpose of Denmark's first brush stroke was presumably to protect material and extend its life-time, but exactly when people began painting to decorate building materials is a subject that has not yet been studied.

Copenhagen's Master Painters' Guild was established in 1622, and for centuries prior to that, their craft had undergone enormous changes: from the early Middle Ages where painters were largely limited to decorating shields, to the Renaissance, where paint gradually came into use to decorate buildings. The Guild's coat of arms has three shields in memory of their origins. Gradually, it became an important part of the painter's job to 'brush' woodwork - what we today understand as painting, as opposed to decorating using paint.

The Guild's Articles of Association from 1684 show that the main emphasis was still on the decorative; an apprentice had to paint either a sacred or an historical scene in addition to a 'beautiful landscape' in order to complete his apprenticeship. However, in an attempt to ensure that painters could find the means to make a living, the trade was strictly reg-

Fig. 184. No. 25 Strandgade.

Fig. 185. No. 17 Amaliegade.

Fig. 186. Town Hall and Court House at Nytorv.

Fig. 187. Nos. 1-3 Store Strandstræde.

Fig. 188. No. 1 Fiolstræde, University Library.

Fig. 189. No. 34 Vesterbrogade, Hotel Savoy.

HISTORY OF FACADE COLOURS



Late classicism

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Historicism

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Art nouveau

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Fig. 190. Paint peelings from Copenhagen windows display a colourful past.



THE CHANGING COLOURS OF COPENHAGEN

ulated: sculptors were not allowed to decorate or gild the frames for their own works and “builders are not allowed to paint houses either inside or out with oil paint or brush with lime wash¹²⁹”. However, painters and masons had some difficulty agreeing over the limits to their respective trades. Professional jealousy brought a case before the court in 1749, with one party claiming that “in our city it has long been the custom for builders to brush their masonry with colour wash, including an amount of carbon black or red stone powder of crushed tile mixed into it¹³⁰”. Thus, in fact, it was the binder that determined whose trade it was. Another document in the case makes it very clear that timber was treated for protection, and that houses were painted yellow, red, blue or white.

As mentioned, the reason for colouring stucco is tied to the idea of imitating a material one cannot afford. Yellow brick was often painted red; red brick was considered finer than yellow. In the newer residential areas beyond the ramparts, buildings often had red brick on the facades that faced the street, and yellow brick facing the courtyard.

As we have seen, facades were painted with lively colours in the Renaissance and the Baroque, while rococo facades received their muted colour from sandstone or sandstone-coloured oil paint. Neo-classicism introduced smooth stucco facades that were either washed or painted in light colours, in contrast to the architectural elements of rose-grey Bornholm sandstone, which gave neo-classicism its distinguished bicoloration. The popular rusticated band of the lower storey introduced colour layering of facades, which disappeared again in late classicism, where the use of ash-lars became a low relief that often comprised the entire facade.

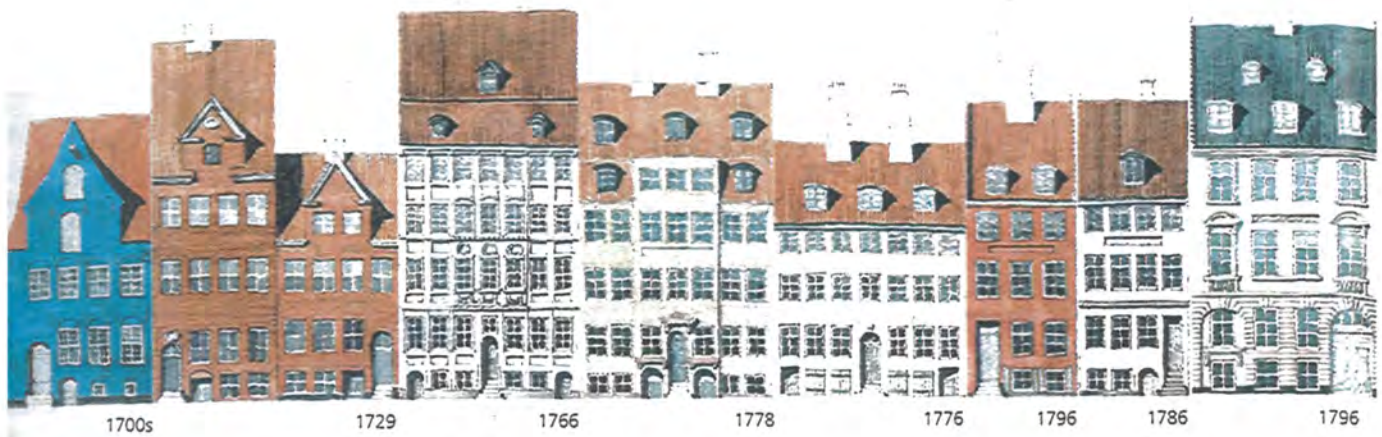


Fig. 191. Copenhagen townhouses. Reconstruction in chronological order from 1700-1900.

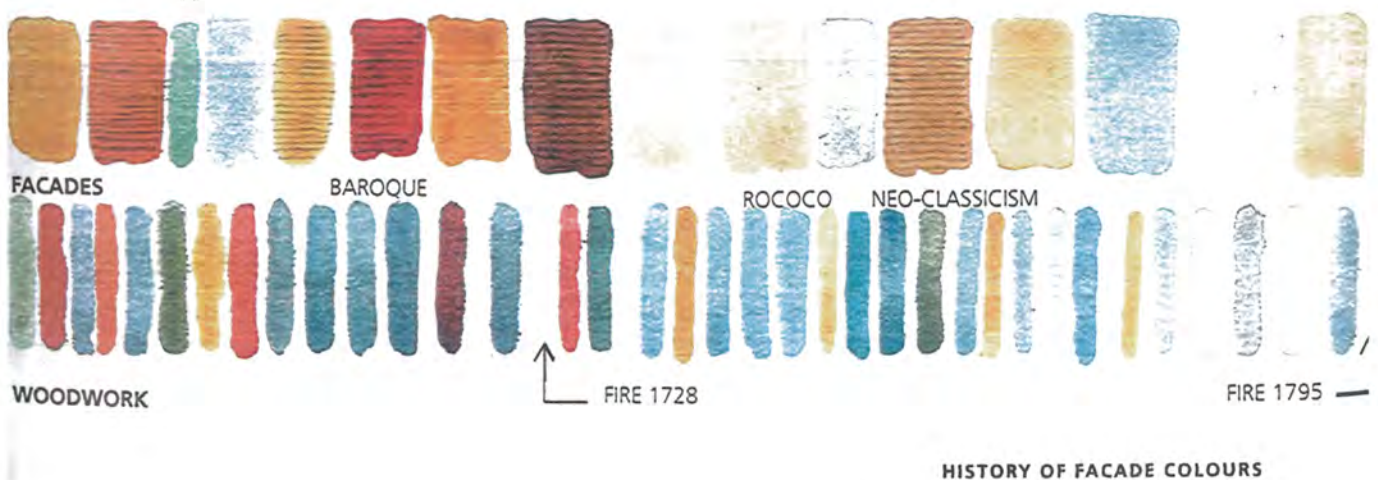
C.F. Hansen's architecture and rebuilding after the English bombardment of Copenhagen are characterised by stone-coloured facades, which were left in bare stucco in many cases. From the mid-1800s, it became common to paint facades in the old part of the city with oil paint in light colours, while the facades in the new quarter were left in exposed brick or cement.

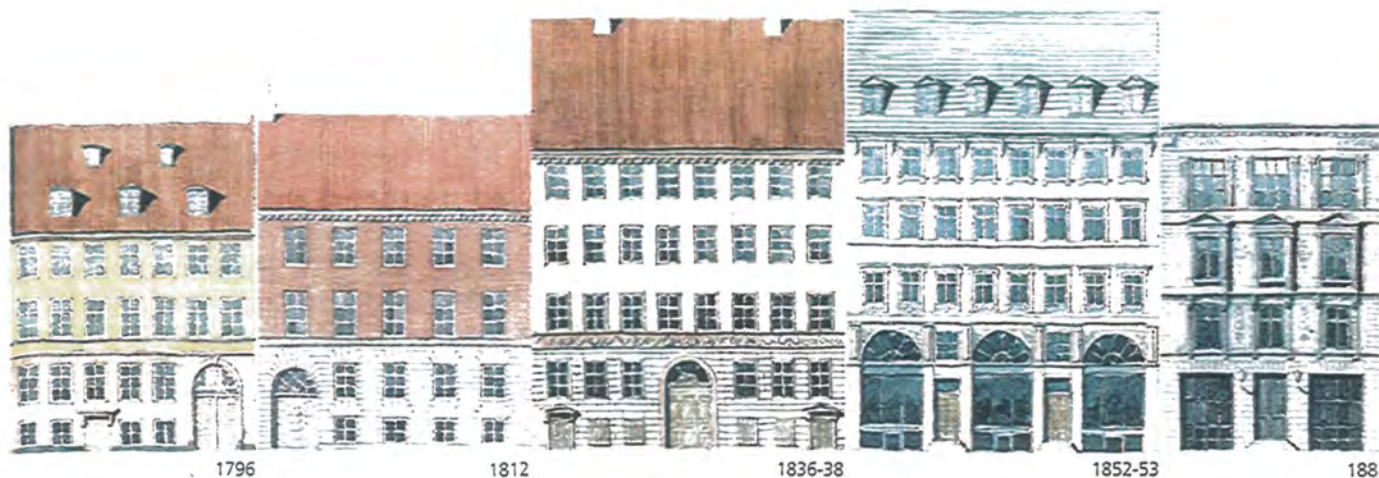
That Copenhagen's painted buildings had very light facade colours at the beginning of our century is supported by a remark in the membership magazine of Copenhagen's Master Painters' Guild in 1909: *"If we take a closer look at oil colour, for facades it is largely white, and one might ask if we are to use lead white or zinc white for the facades?"* Grey-white facades still dominate the Copenhagen streets that were once inside the ramparts.

Fig. 192. Typical facade and window colours shown on a timeline indicating the great fires of 1728 and 1795, the bombardment in 1807, and the fall of the ramparts in 1856. The upper row shows facade colours; the lower row shows the changing colours of windows.

Windows, doors and entrances in ordinary buildings were usually painted the same colour. Woodwork was only painted in several colours for prominent architectural projects.

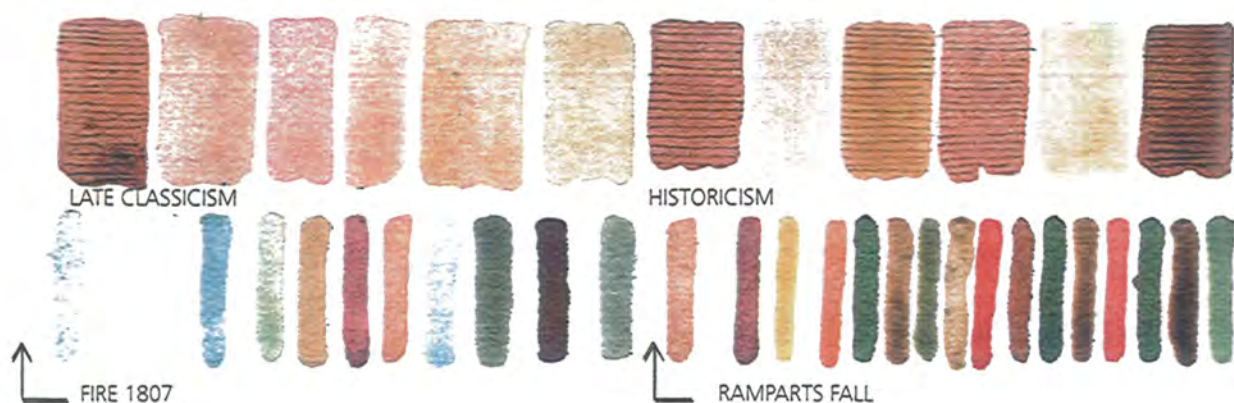
In the Baroque period, windows were painted rather dark: cool pearl grey, ochre yellow or Pompeiian red. In the Rococo period, windows were





predominately a slightly lighter medium grey, which is also called pear grey, while neo-classicism seems to have preferred a grey-white colour. Late classicism used dark colours for windows, which were perceived as voids in the facade. Under historicism, windows were also dark, preferably brown in imitation of mahogany or walnut. Today coloured windows have almost disappeared from the Copenhagen street scene; most of the windows in the city are white, while doors and entrances are dark green. The dark-green colour, mixed by adding zinc yellow to Parisian blue, became common at the end of the 1800's. It is understandable enough that the dark green doors were popular at a time when antique bronze entrances were admired. Since that time, dark green has come to dominate Copenhagen entrances almost exclusively.

After investigating the colour history of Copenhagen, it is clear that the city has had refined colour standards that have been forgotten. Studying the changing faces of the historical buildings yields a treasure trove of imagination and refinement, which can serve as inspiration for contemporary colour choices for the city scene.



THE CHANGING COLOURS OF COPENHAGEN