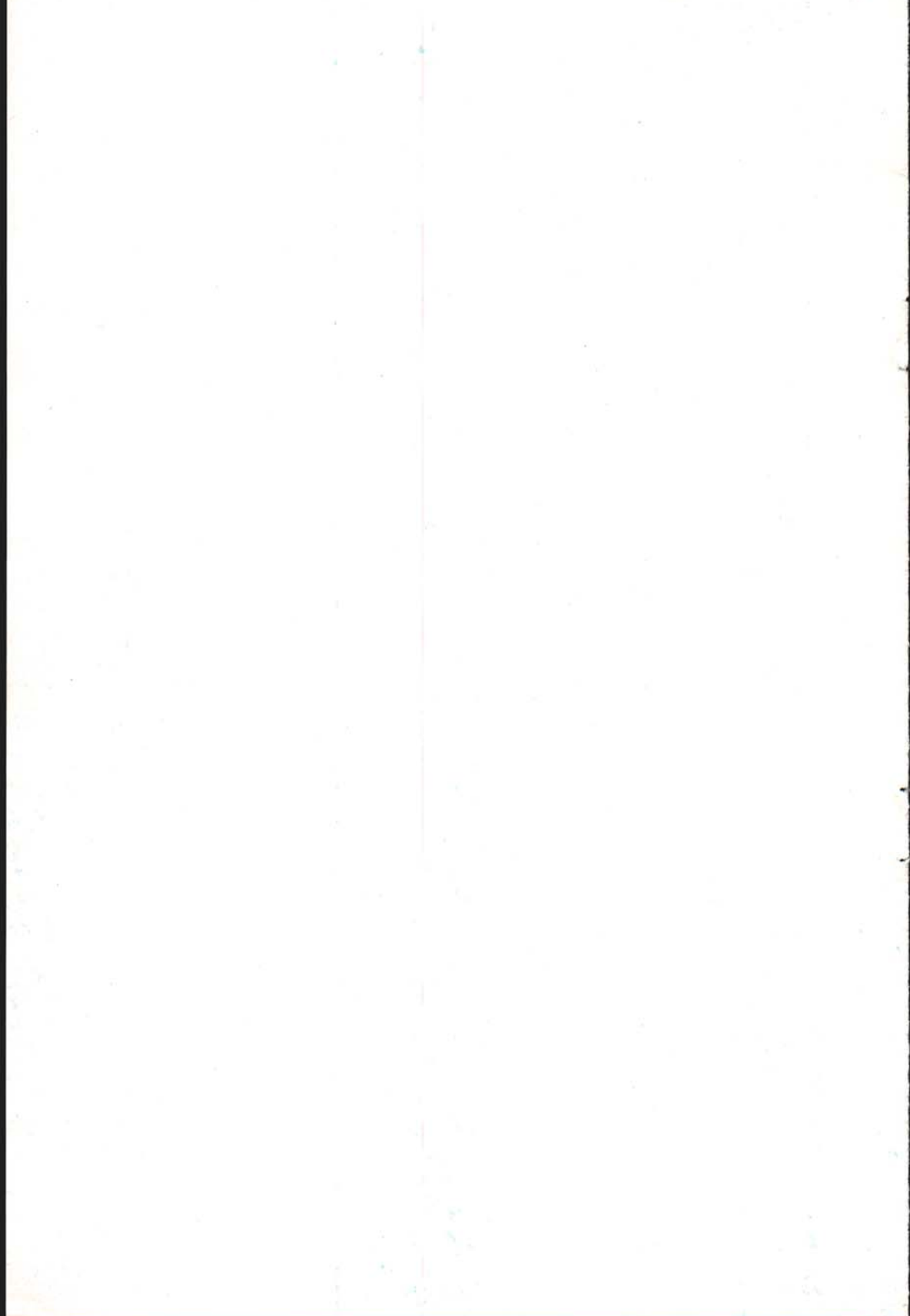


# COLOR *in* *Home Decoration*



# COLOR IN HOME DECORATION

---

GERTRUDE REIS

---

## THE MAGIC OF COLOR IN DECORATION

The magic of color can give beauty and distinction to a home if the homemaker understands color and knows how to use it in furnishing her rooms. Just as our pleasure in the world around us is largely in the colors found in nature, so too is our enjoyment of a room largely in the expressive and beautiful colors of the furnishings.

The most important decision in selecting and assembling furnishings is what color they shall be. Decisions about color combinations must be made by every woman who plans her furnishings, whether these furnishings are purchased, made at home or are merely on hand to be used.

In the study of color each person should think of applying the various color suggestions to every item of furnishing and decoration to make color combinations that harmonize and are pleasing to the eye. For it is in such things as paint, wallpaper, rugs, curtains, slip covers, upholstery, pillows, table covers, and vases that right choices of color may make a whole room charming and beautiful. Color, whether in a single article or in the whole room, must not clash or stand out conspicuously, but should appear to blend or harmonize with the other colors in the arrangement.

## THE EMOTIONAL EFFECT OF COLOR

Colors have a definite emotional effect upon people and because of this effect, colors help to create the atmosphere of a home. Certain colors are capable of being cheering or depressing, soothing or irritating, welcoming or repelling.

Some persons are more sensitive to color than are others, and these persons are more responsive to the enjoyable or the depressing effects. But nearly every individual is conscious of some emotional response to color.

Colors and the feeling or meaning of them come through memory and the associations in our minds with various experiences and observations.

For a better understanding of the emotional effect of color each color will be considered by itself.

### **Yellow**

Yellow is the color of sun and light. It is a singing, cheerful color. Yellow calls forth a feeling of gayety, optimism, and even prosperity.

Because yellow more than any other color gives the effect of light, it is the most necessary color in decorating a home. The yellow colors used most are the modified yellows found in cream, ecru, ivory, and buff. These are pleasing wall colors because they seem to harmonize the colors used in the other furnishings.

Yellow brings life and sunshine into a room when only small objects are of this color.

The colors that we know as old gold, tan, and brown are yellow in different variations.

### **Red**

Red is the color of fire and danger signals. It is exciting and intense. It is expressive of vigor, boldness, and force. In decoration red gives an effect of warmth and splendor. It is not a restful color, and so it should be used in small objects or as a part of other decoration. Red may be used in books, flowers, and pillows, or as one of the colors in a drapery fabric. Sometimes a small chair may be covered in red.

Popular names for some of the reds are maroon, wine, and old rose.

Reds that have some yellow in them are known as peach, rust, and copper.

Reds that have some purple in them are mulberry, plum, and dahlia.

### **Blue**

Blue is the color of the sky, of deep water, and of the shadows on distant hills and mountains. It is associated with coolness, distance, space, dignity, and tranquility.

Blue counteracts the effect of too much warmth. But it is well to use small amounts of it in home furnishings for it can be cold and depressing when used in large areas. Blue walls, for instance, can appear to take every bit of warmth and sunlight out of an entire room and produce a forbidding effect. Large quantities of blue on the floor will often produce the same result.

Small amounts of blue, however, give a feeling of repose and of formality and may be used to advantage in some homes.

### **Green**

Green is the color of leaves and grass. It suggests cool shade and rest. It is a blend of warm yellow and of cool blue so it is both cheerful and calm, invigorating and restful.

A warm green will contain more yellow to make a yellow-green, while a cool green will contain more blue to make a blue-green.

Green is a color that may be used to advantage in many different color combinations. If green is used for a wall color it must be very light or it will distort other colors in the room.

### Purple

Purple is made of both red and blue, which possess opposite characteristics, and, when they are mixed, they cancel the effect of each other. So purple is somewhat vague and suggests mystery, shadows, and dignity.

The purple colors that are most effective are those which tend to have decidedly more blue in them to make blue-purple or more red to make red-purple for the color will then take on many of the qualities of the color it is most like.

### Black and White

Black and white are neutral colors, and when used together they give the most powerful contrast that it is possible to obtain. Contrast of this sort needs to be handled by highly trained decorators and for those persons of less skill, black and white may often be avoided.

Black can be used with dark colors but in a light color scheme it gives too much contrast and makes other colors appear faded. Decorators do not usually employ the "touch of black" to bring out the beauty of colors.

Pure white may be used with cool colors but cream-white is better with a warm color scheme. Off-whites are usually better in color schemes than the pure whites.

Small amounts of white bring life and sparkle into a room. If white is used in any one object there must be a repetition of it somewhere else in the room.

### Gray

Light values of gray are restful and pleasing. Dark values of gray are somber and depressing.

Gray may be warm or cool for it usually contains some cast of a color as blue-gray, green-gray, pink-gray or tan-gray.

Large amounts of gray are drab and monotonous. Cool gray does not harmonize well with the warm-colored woods of furniture, floors, or woodwork although warm tan-grays if kept very light may be used as a wall color.

### Warmth or Coolness of Color

Another expressive quality of color is that of warmth and coolness. This feeling about color is another of those that is based upon our associations and experiences.

Those colors containing large amounts of yellow or red are warm because they suggest fire and sunlight. Colors containing a large amount of blue are cool because they suggest ice and water.

Green and purple are both warm and cool because each of these colors contains some warm and some cool color. If the green is a yellow-green, however, it is warm because it contains more of the warm yellow, while if the green is blue-green it is cool because it contains more blue. In the same way, blue-purple is cool and red-purple is warm.

Warm colors are called advancing. Cool colors are called receding. Warm advancing colors seem to appear sooner in our vision, and they

tend to make an object more conspicuous. Cool receding colors are seen less readily, and because they are not so forcibly brought to our consciousness they make objects less conspicuous.

### DIFFERENT WAYS OF STUDYING COLOR

Scientists in the fields of psychology and physics and artists and decorators have various ways of studying and evaluating color. Each group is concerned with a different phase of color study, and their theories differ widely. The physicist is concerned with light rays and the combination of colored lights. The artist is concerned with dyes, paints, and pigments, while the decorator is concerned more with using fabrics, materials, and objects already painted and dyed than he is with the effect of light rays, or even with the mixing of dyes and pigments.

The Munsell theory of color is used as a basis for our home furnishing study because it seems to be the simplest and easiest to understand. In the Munsell system there are five principal colors—yellow, red, purple, blue and green—and all other colors are obtained by making various combinations of these five.

### THREE WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE COLOR

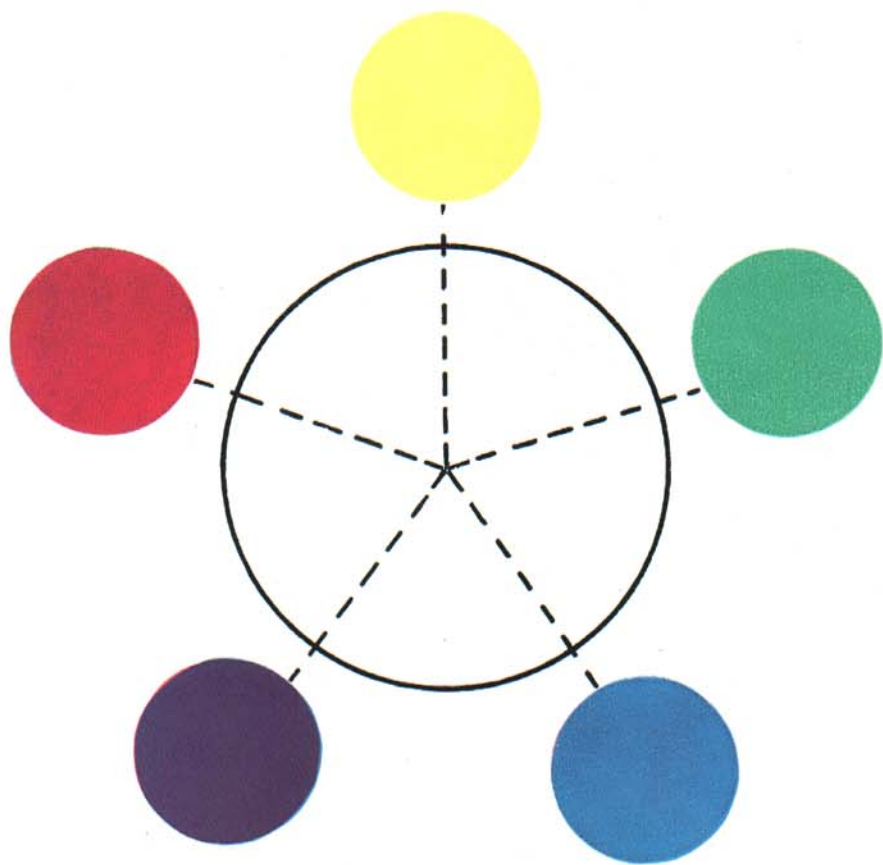
Three words, hue, value, and intensity are used to describe and identify colors. These words form a language of color that is of great help in using color and in developing taste in making color combinations.

#### Hue

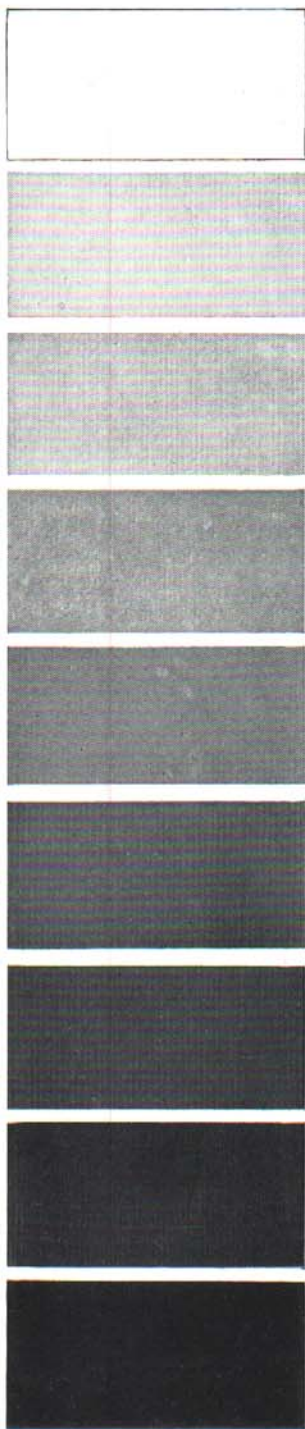
Hue is the name of the color or the color itself. To describe the five principal colors we call them by the simple names of yellow, red, purple, blue, and green. This is the same as saying the five hues of yellow, red, purple, blue, and green. When asked to describe a color one usually tells first its likeness to one of these five principal hues.

Every color can be accurately named by using only these five words or combinations of these words. This system, of naming by hue, will help to explain colors that are sometimes named in some of the following ways: Names from the material from which they are made such as Indigo, or those named from their likeness to something such as brick, wine, coral, turquoise, and plum, or the colors may be named for a manufacturer or a designer or even a prominent figure in politics. Such color names are somewhat indefinite, and when we seek to find or combine them it is difficult to be sure of exact harmonies.

The Munsell color wheel is a convenient diagram or picture of color relationships. All colors when analyzed for their hue can be placed somewhere on the color wheel. In this way we find that turquoise is blue-green because it comes at a point on the wheel which is between the principal colors of blue and green. In the same way it is found



A color wheel to show the principal colors.

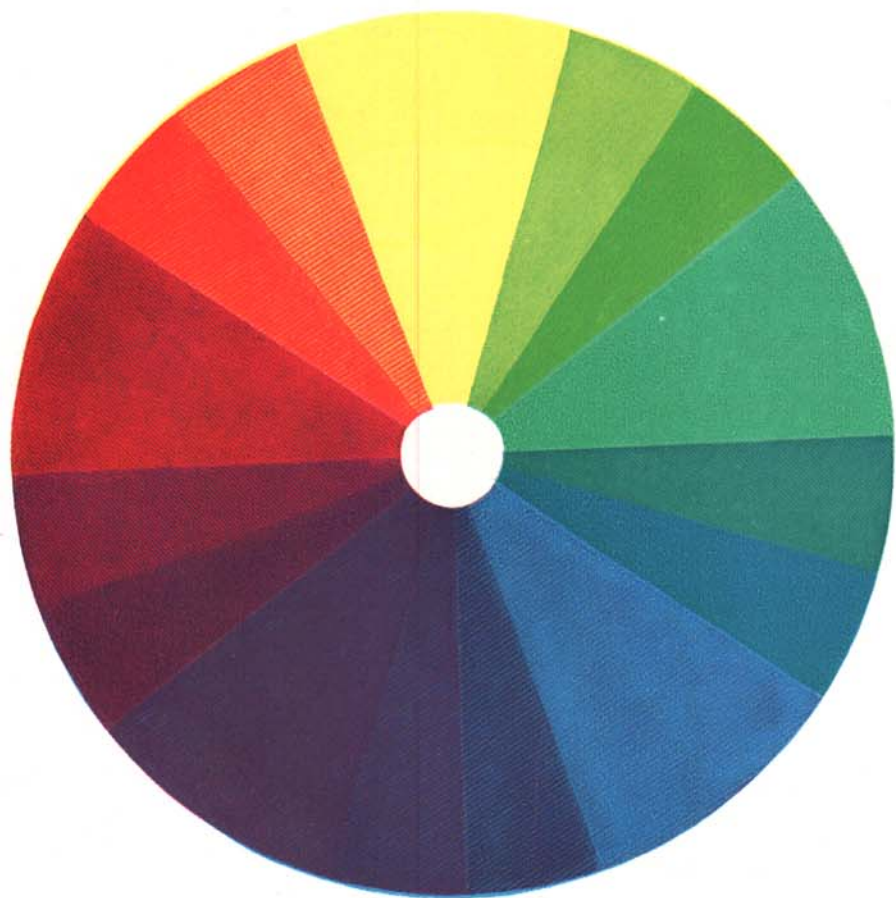


A value scale from white to black.





To show intensity ranging from bright to dull.



A color wheel to show color relationships.

that apricot comes between yellow and red and is a combination of the two colors.

The symbol to keep in mind for hue is a circle with the various colors side by side on this circle.



### Value

Value is the lightness or darkness of a color. A true value scale is something like a ladder with white at the top and black at the bottom, and in between these two are many steps of gray from the lightest near the top to the blackest at the bottom. The symbol to keep in mind in order to remember value is a ladder with white on the top step and black on the bottom.



This value scale from light to dark may be found in the world around us. Nature follows this scheme with the sky light in color, with trees and growing things a little darker or about medium in darkness and the earth the darkest of them all.

A well-furnished room illustrates a value scale also, with the ceiling being lightest in color, the walls slightly darker, the furniture and draperies still darker, and the rugs and floors forming the base of the scheme by being the darkest colors of all.


By applying this value scale to every color it is found that each color comes in all values. The lightest values are those which are nearly white or those which look as though white had been mixed with them. The medium range are those which appear to have been mixed with gray, and then farther down the scale there are those which are nearly black or which appear to have been mixed with black. For example, sky blue is a light value of blue, Alice blue is a medium value of blue, and navy blue is a dark value of blue. Another example is lavender, a light value of purple, violet, a medium value of purple, and eggplant, a dark value of purple.

In the same way cream or ivory are light values of yellow, tan is a medium value of yellow, and brown is a dark value of the same color. Sometimes the red-browns are a dark value of red-yellow instead of dark values of pure yellow.

### Intensity

Intensity is the brightness or dullness of a color. A road running from east to west with a brilliant sunset in the west and dull, soft colors in the eastern sky may be used to illustrate the range of intensity from bright to dull. On this roadway of color the brightest possible hues are at one end and the colors range gradually through less brilliant hues all along the way to the other end of the road where the colors are almost faded out into grayness.

The symbol to keep in mind to remember intensity is a road stretch-

ing out in two directions and with bright colors at one end and dull ones at the other. 

Almost every color may be found in the whole range of intensities from very bright through the medium and finally to very dull intensities.

For home decoration the most beautiful colors are neither the brightest nor the dullest but somewhere near the medium intensities. Very bright colors are harsh and dazzling, dull colors are sad and lifeless, but medium intensities are rich and interesting. The homemaker may choose medium intensities that tend a little toward the bright extreme or a little toward the dull extreme, according to her personality and the particular room she is planning, but she will still keep her color selections in the middle group of intensities.

## COLOR COMBINATIONS

### Three Definite Color Schemes

#### One-Hue

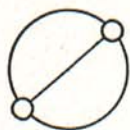
A one-hue color scheme is created by using one color only but making a combination of different values and intensities of this color. An example of a one-hue scheme is the combination of light blue, medium blue, and navy blue.

One-hue combinations are safe and correct but they are apt to be monotonous and much less satisfying than the use of more colors.

#### Complementary

Complementary color schemes are made by combining any two colors

which are directly opposite each other on the color wheel. The complement of blue is yellow-red. The complement of green is red-purple.



Two complementary colors are as different from one another as it is possible for any two colors to be. This bold contrast of

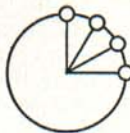
color is apt to be striking and unrestful when used in large amounts.

If complementary colors are being used in a room they appear best when they are found only in small objects and decorative accessories. They are not pleasing when used in large amounts as on walls and floor.

Unequal amounts of two complementary colors are more pleasing than an uninteresting half and half division. A large amount of green with only a small area of red-purple is better than the same amount of each.

#### Analogous

Analogous color schemes are made by combining colors together that are neighbors or side by side on the color wheel. It is safe to use colors together that form about one-fourth of the color circle, although it is possible to use even more neighbors together so long as the series does not go far enough around the circle to include the complement of the first color.



Analogous colors have charm and a gentle harmony because they are closely related by a common color which runs through all of them. This one color which runs through them ties them together and makes them appear to blend together.

Some examples of analogous harmonies will be listed: blue, blue-green, and green—all have some blue; green, yellow-green and yellow—all have some yellow; blue-green, green, and yellow-green are related by some green in each; yellow-green, yellow, and yellow-red are related by some yellow in each.

## FOUR GUIDES TO COLOR HARMONY IN ANY SCHEME

### 1. Plan a Color Scheme Around Some Beautiful Object

Plan a color scheme for a room around some beautiful object such as a drapery fabric or wall hanging, a picture or a rug. With this definite scheme of color harmony worked out by a skillful artist or designer one may deliberately plan the whole room from this. Look for articles and colors that fit into this scheme.

For example, a length of printed linen in the colors of red-purple, blue-green, dull blue, and a little old gold and white may be chosen for a wall hanging and give the plan for the whole room. Red-purple coarse mesh net curtains could be used as the only curtains and pushed back to appear as draperies. A carpet in two tones of dull blue could be used on the floor. Blue-green and old gold pillows could be used on a plum-purple studio couch. White vases filled with corn flowers and red-purple zinnias, and white lamp bases used on green table covers would still further repeat the colors of the original linen fabric of the wall hanging.

### 2. One Color Should Dominate

In every color scheme one color should predominate by its being used in a larger amount than the others. If yellow, rust and green are being used together, green may be made the dominating color by simply using more of it and by using only small touches of the other two.

When two or more colors are used in equal amounts they produce a mixture with no particular color effect. This type of combination has no emphasis and no character. But as soon as a larger amount of one of the colors is used, the scheme has a definite character and produces a pleasing effect. The dominating color may be warm or cool according to the exposure of the room.

The dominating color in a room should be found in more than one place in the room in order to give the greatest interest.

### 3. Choose Color to Suit the Exposure of a Room

Cool colors of green, blue, and blue-green are pleasing in a room receiving a great deal of sunlight during the day or in one where the windows are not shaded by porches and trees. Cool colors modify strong, warm, sunlight and temper the glare that it sometimes gives in a room.

Warm colors of tan, rust, brown, and yellow look well in a room receiving only a little light or sunshine. The warm hues cast a cheerful glow over the cold shadows of poorly lighted rooms.

Neither the cool colors nor the warm ones are used alone but with each group of colors some of the opposite kind are used to give variety and interest.

#### 4. Key Colors to Make Them Harmonize

Combine colors together that belong in the same key to obtain harmony. When bright colors are used with other bright colors they are keyed for brightness. So long as a decorator is using a bright key of color she will not choose any of the dull hues for they will be out of key with the intense harmony.

Dull colors do not combine well with bright ones for one kind of color destroys the beauty of the other. Using bright colors and dull ones together makes the bright ones seem harsh and bold and the dull ones seem lifeless and faded.

But if the decorator wishes to use a dull key of color then she may choose as many dull colors as she likes, and they will combine well together. One dull color will serve to enhance and bring out the soft, rich beauty of another one in the same dull key.

It is a safe plan for the average person to use keyed schemes, combining bright colors only with other bright colors and combining dull colors only with other dull colors. A skilled and well-trained colorist and decorator, however, can create harmonies that are not always keyed.

It may be remembered that a very small amount of color out of key with the whole scheme will not necessarily destroy the harmony of the combination. It is the larger amounts of color out of key with a scheme which give a disturbing effect in color harmony.

Examples of keyed color combinations can be found in the different rooms of a home. Bedrooms are keyed to light, delicate colors. Recreation rooms and sometimes kitchens are keyed to bright, gay colors, while living rooms are keyed to medium, rich colors.

### POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT COLOR

#### *Three Color Words—*

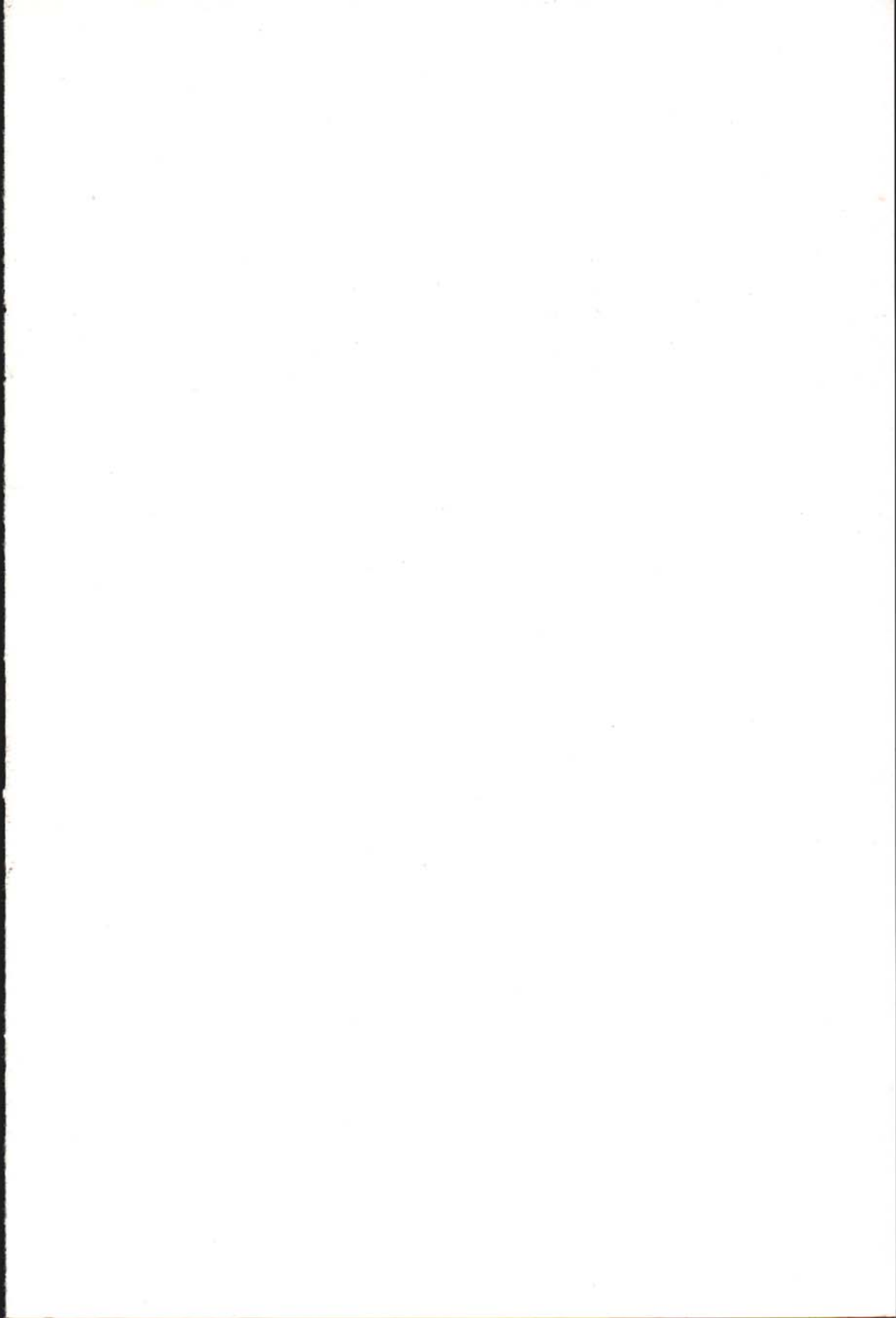
Hue  
Value  
Intensity

#### *Three Definite Color Schemes—*

One-hue  
Complementary  
Analogous

#### *Four General Rules for Making Pleasing Color Combinations—*

Plan the whole scheme around a beautiful object or fabric.  
One color should dominate.  
Choose colors to suit the exposure of rooms.  
Key colors to make them blend.



COLOR IN HOME DECORATION  
EXTENSION BULLETIN 169 (Reprint)  
AUGUST 1938



Printed and distributed in furtherance of the purposes of the cooperative agricultural extension work provided for in the Act of Congress May 8, 1914. Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science and U. S. Department of Agriculture, co-operating.

R. J. BALDWIN, Director, Extension Division