

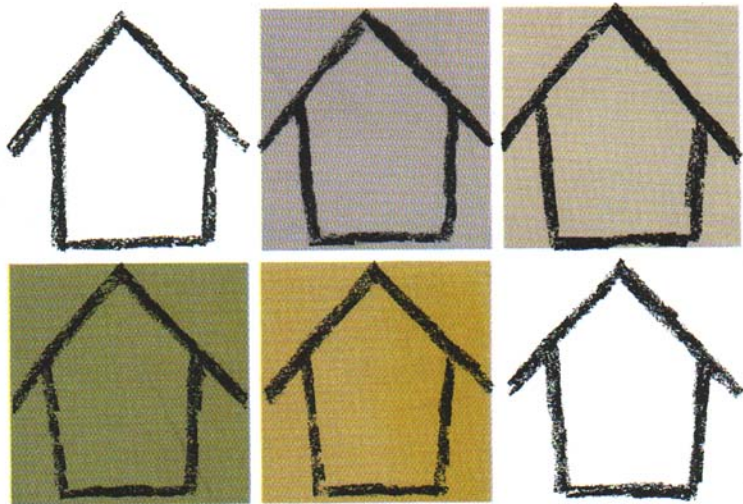
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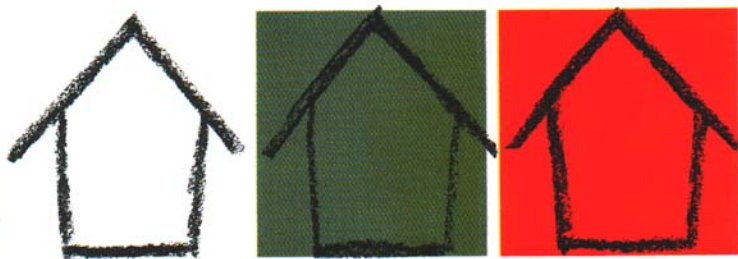
Color Planning for Home Interiors
Michigan State University Extension Service
Jane Graff, Home Furnishings
Issued March 1960
24 pages

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Color Planning for Home Interiors



Color Planning for Home Interiors

By Jane Graff, former Extension Specialist in Home Furnishings.

Cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics. Michigan State University and the U. S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. N. P. Ralston, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, East Lansing. Printed and distributed under Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914.

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Introduction

No matter what our income is, most of us are vitally concerned over getting the most for our decorating dollar. Easy-to-care for fabrics and sturdy construction are high on our list of "musts."

But – doesn't "getting-our-money's-worth" mean more than this? Do your purchases also give you your money's worth of beauty – of pleasure? Do the items you select give a glimpse of the *real you*?

You may ask, "What does all this have to do with a nice color scheme?" It has much to do with it! It spells the difference between just one more "pretty" room and an imaginative, personal one that satisfies your real needs. Imagination is often nothing more than the ability to size up your own individual situation and a willingness to be different. No one can think up original ideas for you, but here are a few questions to start you thinking.

- A. Do you like to figure how you might make something you want but cannot afford to buy? Do you look for ways to adapt ideas to your use? Can you think of how they might even be improved?

- B. Are you willing to throw out pet ideas and try for something better – when those ideas don't completely fit your way of life, your room, or your pocketbook?

- C. Have you collected ideas by studying magazines? Have you shopped enough to know what is on the market – and how much things cost? Do you look at magazines for IDEAS – suggestions here or there? Or do you say, “I could never have anything like that,” and flip the page?
- D. Can you see new or improved ways of using or remodeling what you have?

Let your own needs be your guide. Perhaps you've always longed for a garden, but live in a dark city apartment. Then sunny yellow walls, some out-door furniture and a long shelf for geraniums and other plants may give you a lift you never thought possible.

What about a young rough-and-tumble family? Don't muslin draperies, colorful denim slipcovers and area rugs make sense? They can be as good looking as wall-to-wall carpet and finer fabrics. A room need not be beauty-starved just because children play in it. Such a limitation forces us to do our best planning. The results can be more exciting than if we'd had complete freedom.

Don't let fashion or color theories frighten you from using your own ideas. Magazines attempt to keep us up-to-date. But they may make us wonder if our own preference – for pink and green, for instance – isn't as outmoded as an antimacassar. An exciting color scheme may come to a halt when a “helpful” friend asks, “Why in the world do you want pink on that chair?” And since we do have trouble visualizing the results, we begin to feel that pink is all wrong.

Color schemes become complicated only if we let them. You should have the courage to do exactly what you wish – within the limits of good sense. Every home and every family is a completely individual situation. No matter where you find helpful information, ask yourself, “Is this right for me?”

The following guide is planned to help those who are completely changing their color schemes, as well as those who are concerned only with a new chair cover. Whatever the problem, there are certain things that everyone needs to consider first.



Make A Plan and Stick To It

Many a snag can be avoided – and much money saved – if every purchase fits into a long range plan. Many a good plan has failed because it was abandoned in favor of a real “bargain” purchase.

PLAN FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Color can do much to camouflage architectural defects and poor furniture selection and arrangement. It can do for your room what icing can do for a none-too-successful cake.

But your color scheme has more chance for success if the furnishings fit the size and shape of the room. Re-check arrangement for comfort, convenience, and appearance. If new pieces are to be added, a new arrangement may influence their size and color.

Planning the use of space before adding the decoration is not new to the architect or industrial designer. But most of us tend to become too excited over decorative touches before we know our basic plan is good. (Imagine what would happen if an automobile designer dreamed up a sleek body for a car before knowing the size and shape of the space needed for the motor!) Too often, rather than building our homes around our families' activities, our families have to adapt themselves to their homes.

After checking the arrangement, begin planning colors for the largest areas of the room. Large areas include floors, walls, win-

dows and the largest pieces of furniture. Add the details last – the smaller pieces of furniture, lamps, accessories and accent colors.

HAVE A DEFINITE STARTING POINT

Your color change may be large or small, but do have a definite starting point. Choose something to which everything in the room can be keyed. It might be:

A favorite color – Begin with a color you especially like and want to see repeated. Try using several values – dark to light – of this color and vary the textures of the fabrics you use. Or pick it up in print fabric, wall-hanging or picture.

A magazine picture – You can copy a color plan from a picture even if the style of furnishings is different from yours. *The trick is to use the colors in your room in the same proportions that are used in the picture.* Colors do not have to be used in exactly the same areas, but the relative proportions, or ratios, should be the same. If a floral print has been used, and you prefer an abstract print or a stripe, you will have the same effect if the dominating colors in your pattern are the same as those in the floral.

Something with pattern – A print fabric provides one of the easiest guides to a color scheme. It can also tie together unrelated things you already have. For best coordination, be sure the color you select to be dominant in the room is also dominant in the fabric. Save one or two of the lesser colors for accents. Don't feel that all colors in the print must be picked up. Other starting points may be wall hangings, striped or patterned rugs, pictures or wall-paper.

Your possessions – loved or unloved – It may seem obvious to say that things you already own, and must use, make a good starting point. But sometimes we don't consider them as carefully as we could. We're tired of the old things, and can't get excited about them. We're uninspired, and ideas don't come easily.

Take courage! Tough problems often produce the most exciting results!

Perhaps your room needs to be unified, brightened or lightened. That large, bulky chair will seem least conspicuous if it

matches the wall color. Or, those none-too-attractive end tables can be camouflaged by painting them the color of the sofa they serve.

A color that now plays only a minor part in the room might take on more importance. For new accent colors, look for a print fabric with the dominant color the same as the major color in your room.

Here is a way of working that may be helpful: Mentally take a color inventory of your room, or make a chart like that on page 16. If the room is pink, green and red, for instance, estimate how much (i.e., what ratio) of each color is used. Remember that the wall is the largest area, the rug may be the next largest, and so on. These proportions of color will be very important when you begin to plan your new scheme.

Always look at small prints and tweeds from a distance to determine their general color effect. Tweeds are especially tricky. They may be woven of tiny bits of bright color, yet look almost gray from a distance. The general color effect – not the tiny bits of color – are what you want to know.

Your chart will give you an idea of what you have. The chapter ON THE COLOR SCHEME will help you use this information.

MONOTONY? NEVER!

Whether you plan to use three colors or one, your room need never look monotonous. The following suggestions will make it more interesting and help you avoid the temptation to use too many colors.

Vary the values – Every scheme needs some value contrast. The same value of green throughout a room would be monotonous indeed. Try making the walls and draperies a very light green, the sofa a slightly darker green, and the rug darker yet. Or if green appears only on furniture, use a medium value on the sofa and a lighter value on two chairs.

Vary the color – The use of closely related colors will add interest to a room. By using some blue-green with a green scheme, you achieve variety and still keep emphasis on green.

Vary the textures – The softness of velvet, the crisp smoothness of chintz, and the roughness of linens and tweeds make for a rich

variety. Combinations of textures avoid the sameness that just one texture and color can give. Be sure fabrics used together are in character with each other – and with your room.

Add a pattern – If you like pattern, add interest to rooms in a lively way with wallpaper, printed fabrics, or rugs with woven design.

Any one – or all – of these suggestions can be used in any room. Browse through magazines. Examine pictures which illustrate how these ideas have been used.

WHAT ABOUT ACCENT COLORS?

An accent *is* an accent because it contrasts with everything else. It calls attention to itself; plan where you want that attention to go.

Accent colors are automatically introduced through patterned wallpaper, fabrics, rugs; through pictures and accessories; and also in small pieces of furniture.

If you plan to use accent colors on miscellaneous items such as throw pillows or lamp shades, be sure these items add to the over-all scheme. They should not be irrelevant spots of color.

The fewer accents you use, the more effective they will be. If used haphazardly, or in great abundance, they may detract from the scheme.



The Color Scheme

EMPHASIZE ONE COLOR FAMILY

There is no sure formula for a successful color scheme, but there are ways of working that produce happy results most easily.

Start by making any one color most important in your plan. (It could also be white, gray, or another neutral.) Using this one color throughout the room, especially on the large areas, will give a unified background — a feeling of order. This unified background helps hold the complete color scheme together.

If too many objects in the room contrast with each other in color and value, they all stand out and make the room seem cluttered.

Furniture and accessories aren't the only things that produce a cluttered look. Doors and windows also break up continuous wall space. Unless some of these things are tied together by one color, they contribute to a "busy" look.

Don't be afraid that using a lot of one color will be uninteresting. This is almost impossible if you follow some of the tips on avoiding monotony. Variety is easy to get; unity takes planning.

For best unity, the dominant color (or neutral) will cover two-thirds or more of room area. Most of it will be on background areas. Use the rest on the largest pieces of furniture, and perhaps in some smaller amounts elsewhere. In this way, one color will be carried *into* the room as well as all the way *around* the room.

Usually a smaller amount of a second color, plus one or more neutrals and an accent, will provide all the color any room needs. Remember that equal amounts of two colors are more likely to be monotonous than interesting. A great variety of color seldom adds gaiety – only confusion.

CHOOSE BACKGROUND COLORS CAREFULLY

Notice how color is used out-of-doors. Large areas – grass, trees, sky and earth – are of soft greens, blues, browns and grays. Against this background, small amounts of brilliant flower colors are much more effective than they would be against other bright colors. Notice, too, the great variety of greens. Search for gray rocks – or brown ones – and see how many different tones you can find. A small rock collection might be the inspiration for a color scheme.

Brilliant colors are the “prima donnas” of the color world. They demand large amounts of white, off-white or pale beige or gray for relief. White shows them off and makes them sparkle. If you like exciting color schemes and wish to use pale neutrals on most of the furniture (possibly even on the floor), bright walls may be just the thing for you. If the brilliant colors are on the furniture, you will probably prefer a pale neutral on the walls.

Begin by planning the background areas – walls, floor, window treatments. Then work the largest pieces of furniture into the scheme.

When you're sure the background area and largest pieces of furniture hold together in color, work on colors for smaller pieces of furniture, accents and accessories.

If you are making only a few changes, check your color inventory to see if there is a dominating color in the room. If so, does it tie the room together? If not, work toward emphasizing a color you already have.

If you are using different values of a blue-green in walls, drapery fabric and some larger pieces of furniture, then this color will cover about two-thirds of the room areas.

There are advantages to emphasizing one color. If the room is small, it will look more spacious when walls, woodwork, curtains,

floor and largest pieces of furniture are all of one color family. Curtains that match the wall will help unify a room that is broken up by many windows or doors.

Background colors usually are most pleasing when kept soft or grayed. Smaller amounts of other colors can be brighter. Accents may be sharp and vibrant. Most of us cannot live happily for long with large quantities of bright color.

TESTING YOUR COLOR SCHEME

The effect that colors give in any room depends primarily upon the proportions that are used. Colors look very different together when their proportions, or ratios, are changed. That's why a collection of color chips and swatches will not help you visualize how the room will look when completed.

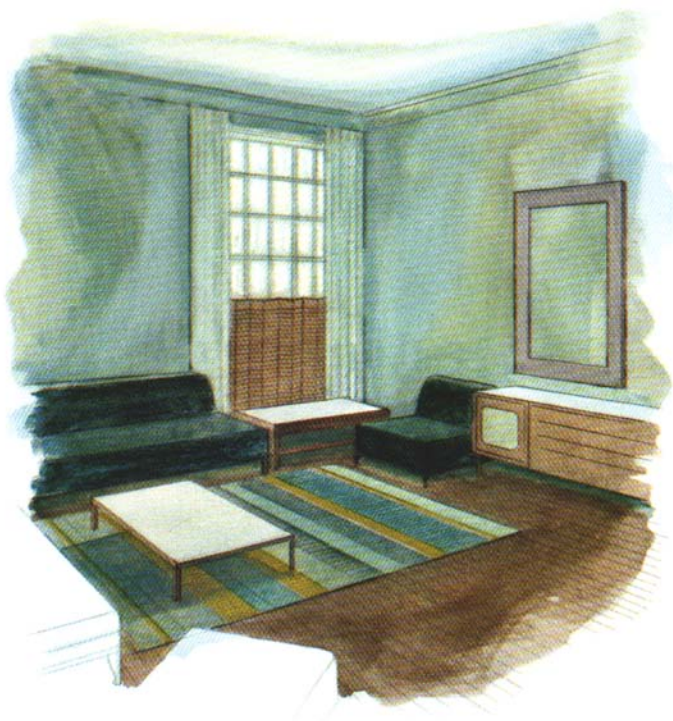
Work out final details of your scheme with samples that are as close as possible to the proportions of color you will use in your room. (See page 16.)

The larger the area any color covers, the stronger and darker it will seem. This is especially true of walls. Choose your wall color slightly lighter and grayer than you want it to appear. To make sure it is right, paint a large cardboard sample – the larger the better. Try it out in your room with the things you plan to use.

If your wall color choice is blue, for instance, you will have a fairly good idea whether or not you will like it over such a large area.

Try out all paint, rug and fabric samples in your home before making a final choice. Size of room, lighting and other colors make things look quite different than they do in the store.

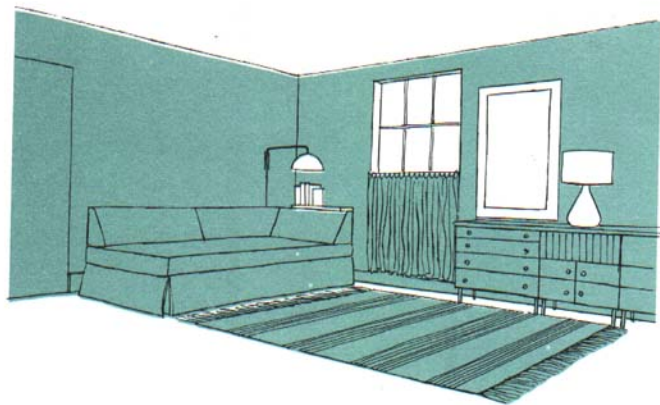
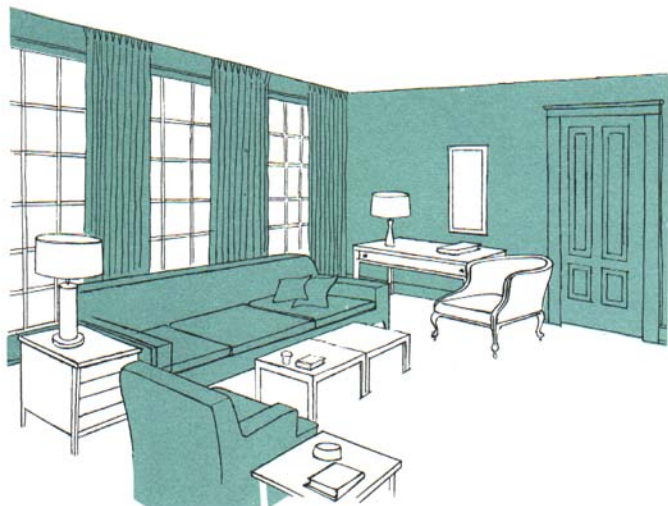
Make your final color plan with colors in the same proportion that will be used in the room.



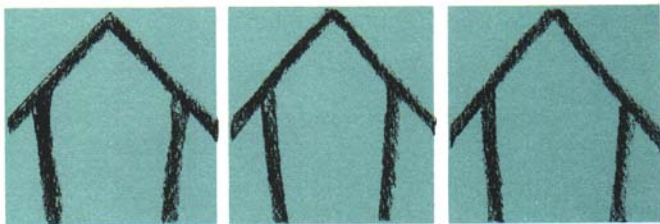
Make one color most important in your plan. Begin by planning the background areas—walls, floor, window treatments. Then work the largest pieces of furniture into the scheme. Small amounts of a second color, and accents, will then seem to fall easily into place. Use colors to give unity and order to a room.



When you feel sure that the background area of a room and the largest pieces of furniture hold together in color, then choose your colors for the smaller pieces of furniture, accents, and accessories. Choose carefully. Avoid equal amounts of the same color. Three colors, wisely used, can do the trick.



You may use one value of a color on two-thirds of a room area (upper) or on an even larger proportion (lower). A small room may seem spacious if one color family is used on the walls, woodwork, floor, and the largest pieces of furniture. Curtains to match walls can also make a room seem larger.



Know Your Colors

Only a few color terms are used in this bulletin. You may want to know the others, or may need them when reading other material on color.

TERMS FOR COLOR

How would you describe a given color? If you say merely, "It is blue," you have said very little. You can be more specific, using terms that denote the inherent qualities of a color. These terms are:

Hue – The name of the color, such as blue or blue-green.

Value – the degrees of lightness or darkness (we call dark values "shades" and light values "tints").

Intensity – the degree of brightness or dullness (we can call a high intensity color a "bright" color and low intensity colors "grayed" or "soft.")

There is still another term – *neutral* – used in describing colors. Neutral means "no color" or one that appears to be colorless by itself. Most neutrals are really colors that have been grayed so much that we can hardly tell from what color they began. The slight cast of color in most of them becomes apparent when they are combined with other neutrals and colors.

Beige may be slightly pink, or honey-colored. There are pink-grays, blue-grays, green-grays, brown-grays and many more. So,

we see that just any neutral won't suit any scheme. Be sure your neutrals and colors go well together.

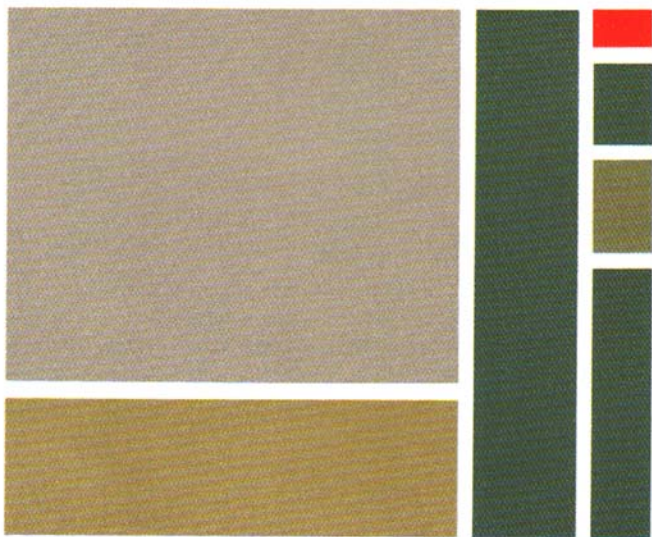
TERMS FOR COLOR SCHEMES

Color schemes are either related or contrasting.

Related schemes (*analogous, monochromatic*) generally give the most restful effect as long as the colors are not too intense.

Contrasting schemes (*complementary, triadic*) are more stimulating and become very exciting if bright colors are used. This information will be of little value to you in carrying out a scheme unless you are extremely conscious of effect. Most of us are not so professionally concerned, nor need we be. We choose colors we like and work from there. What counts is how the colors are used.

Monochromatic refers to several values of the same color such



A color inventory of your room will show the ratio of each color to the total room area. Color proportions are important to the success of your color scheme.

as dark blue, medium blue, and light blue. Neutral schemes can also be monochromatic.

Analogous schemes are made up of colors that are close neighbors on the color wheel. They all have one color in common, and so they are often called *related* colors. Green, blue-green and blue all contain blue. Yellow orange, yellow green and green all contain some yellow. (Notice that the blue-green group is a bit more closely related than the other.) See wheel on page 24.

Complementary colors are complete *opposites* on the color wheel. Red and green, yellow and violet, and yellow-orange and blue-violet are complements to each other.

Triadic schemes are made of three colors that are *equally distant* from each other on the color wheel. Red, yellow and blue, or red-orange, yellow-green and blue-violet are examples of triadic schemes.

WARM AND COOL COLORS

There is no definite point which divides the warm colors from the cool colors. However, the more yellow a color contains the warmer it will be; the more blue there is in a color, the cooler it will be.

COMBINING COLORS

The amounts of colors you use determine more than anything else how good these colors will look together. This is another good reason for planning colors in the proportions in which they will be used in the room. You can more easily see if a bright red chair will be too bright for the soft green walls, rug and sofa. Ask yourself if this one color overpowers the others. Does it "kill" these colors? Would a slightly duller red be better, or a warmer red?

Bright colors used in equal proportions with grayed colors will make the grayed ones look dull and dingy, or heavy. Often only a tiny spot of bright color will balance a whole room of soft ones. For this reason, the brightest colors are most usable as accents. There are, of course, many degrees of brightness and dullness. You can always find a fabric or a paint that will look bright next

to your other things, but it should not be so bright that it will kill or deaden them.

No matter how light or dark a color is, it can be bright. Nothing can make used furnishings seem shabby faster than putting them in a room that has just had a fresh coat of some clear, clean-looking pastel paint. Check this carefully. You may need to gray the paint. (See "Mixing Paint").

Colors that have the same feeling or character usually go well together. A clear pastel green simply does not have the same feeling as a heavy deep yellow – or gold. The gold needs to be used against a stronger, grayer green. The clear light green, being delicate and airy, needs other clear colors that are not heavy in feeling.

When combining colors, don't forget that every scheme needs some value contrast to be interesting.

MIXING PAINT

Paint comes in such a wide range of colors that we seldom need anything we cannot buy. Very little about mixing will be discussed here. But practice in mixing is recommended, if you want to learn as much about color as possible. Use poster paints about the consistency of heavy cream. These will give the same effect as a flat wall paint. Try to match a fabric color, or mix a wall color that will go well with a multicolored print. This is not as easy as it sounds. Any color or neutral you want can be mixed from three colors – red, yellow and blue. Yellow and blue make green; red and yellow make orange; etc. Add white to lighten colors. You can darken a gray or too bright paint by using small amounts of raw umber or burnt umber. Never use black; it will "muddy" the color.

These tinting colors come in small cans or tubes. You may need to experiment to see which is best for the color paint you are using. A bit of yellow ochre may also be needed to warm a color slightly after it has been grayed.

Colors can also be grayed by using their complements. A little green will soften a very bright red. Blue-green will soften red-orange. Check the color wheel for complements of other colors.



Solving Problems with Colors

CEILINGS – COLOR AND STRUCTURE

Choosing a ceiling color is often a matter of personal opinion. For most ceilings, use white or an off-white that looks good with the wall color. White lightens the room during the day and is best for reflecting light from lamps. It also makes low ceilings seem higher.

Painting the ceilings the same color as the wall is often the easiest. This color will look several tones darker on the ceiling than it does on the wall, however. For an exact match, you will need to lighten the paint before doing the ceiling.

CEILINGS – HIGH OR LOW

Before going to the trouble of lowering a high ceiling, consider its assets. High ceilings can make a room seem wonderfully spacious and airy. They are a luxury seldom found in new homes. Because they are scarce, they offer you a unique mark of individuality. If you don't like the appearance, however, paint the ceiling the same color as the wall. Since it will appear darker than the wall, it will seem lower. If your walls are quite light, you may darken the paint before using it on the ceiling.

If the ceiling is very high, place a molding about a foot or 18 inches down on the wall. Paint the area above it and the ceiling off-white, and the area below the molding the wall color you have

chosen. The contrast in color value will make the ceiling seem to begin at the molding. If your walls are very pale or white, the area above the molding may need to be darkened so that there will be a definite value contrast between ceiling and wall color.

CONCEALING DEFECTS

Matching or closely blended colors will conceal many flaws in architecture and furniture design. A massive red brick fireplace or misplaced radiator can fade into the background if painted the color of the wall. Wood trim of doors and windows is seldom worth calling attention to at the expense of more important things in a room. Why not paint it to match the wall? (Not all trims need to match. If you feel you would be washing spots off doors too often, leave the most used doors and trims a natural wood color, and give the others a color to match the wall.)

Furniture of poor design or bulky appearance becomes much less noticeable if covered in a fabric that nearly matches the walls. Any large piece such as a sofa will always appear larger if it contrasts very much with the wall either in color or in color value. Wood pieces may be improved by completely removing old varnish and sanding smooth. Refinish with wood seal or paint.

EMPHASIZING SOMETHING LOVELY

Use contrasting colors or values where you wish to emphasize something lovely. If your fireplace is a point of beauty, make it stand out with white paint or a lighter value of the wall color. Wood, brick and stone may be attractive left alone if they fit in with the furniture, fabrics and colors you wish to use.

A small, prized chair could be covered in a bright accent color. Gold leaf or dark walnut antique picture frames show up sharply against a nearly white wall. However, using sharp contrasts haphazardly can create a spotty effect.

USING NEUTRALS

Adding a light beige, warm light gray, or off-white somewhere in the room often gives more sparkle to a tired scheme than would a bright color. A room sometimes needs relief from color (dull or

bright) rather than more color. Every scheme can benefit from use of a light neutral.

Light neutrals can always be used on walls, floor and furniture. If soil is a problem, consider using off-white for lamp shades and accessories, or on cushions or covers for small chairs. Or try a print fabric with an off-white background. A colored background may only add to the flatness of the scheme.

Neutrals are especially useful if you like constant change. Varied values of beige used on walls, draperies, floor and perhaps on one major piece of furniture will allow a choice of nearly any color for the smaller pieces and accents. A change of accessories plus a slip cover or two for some of the chairs can shift the color emphasis overnight.

WOOD

Wood is not completely neutral. It has a definite color which you need to consider in choosing other colors for a scheme. Natural oak and birch are really a very dull yellow. Mahogany has a reddish cast whether natural or stained dark. Try matching your furniture to paint chips to get a true idea of what color the wood is. Then check your color scheme with the paint chips to see how well they look together.

Should wood furniture be mixed or matched in color? As with wall and fabric colors so with furniture: you will have a more organized, restful feeling if one type of wood, light or dark, dominates in your room. Complete matching is always safe, but a little mixing can add much more interest. If you feel there are too many different woods in the room, try painting some of the odd pieces the color of the wall. By preparing the wood carefully and using a washable dull gloss paint, you will not have the problem of chipping or stained painted surfaces. Table tops can be lacquered or covered with glass.

WALLS

Is it wise to paint one wall a different color? Usually not, unless there is some specific reason for doing so. If the room is very long and narrow, painting the end walls to contrast with the two side

walls will make the room seem less long. Better yet, paint them darker values of the side walls since rooms of many colors tend to be restless.

Wherever there is a contrast in color there will be a center of interest. A fireplace wall can contrast successfully, or you may wish to emphasize the main furniture grouping by painting the wall behind the sofa to contrast with the others. Be sure there is something interesting to look at, not just doors.

Be careful of color contrasts where living room, dining room and halls open on to each other. Choose one color and stick to it throughout, changing the values. For instance, the green used in the living room might be made lighter for use in a dark hall. One wall in a dining alcove might be papered with a green and white print for emphasis with other colors in the paper used for accents. In bedrooms, choose wall colors that will allow using green for accents.

WALLPAPER

A bold wallpaper on one wall is an eye-catcher. Like the contrasting painted wall, it needs a spot where you want emphasis. It can take the place of a fireplace, picture window, or group of pictures to help create a center of interest. Used on all the walls, it practically furnishes a room. It demands that everything used with it be plain. When using paper on only one wall, paint the other three walls the same color as the background of the paper or the dominating color in the design to tie the scheme together.

Many of the background papers – the subtle tone-on-tone designs, grass cloth, brick, etc. – give the feeling of rough texture from a distance and fit in with either traditional or contemporary furniture. They add interest to a room and still allow the use of patterned fabric and pictures.

Before buying any wallpaper, try out a sample at home both during the day and at night. Find out how it will look when repeated. Some patterns seem attractive in one strip, but become overly busy and spotty when several strips are placed together. If necessary, buy a large sample to try. A small piece, just like a paint chip, never gives the same effect as a large one. Always look

at the effect a wallpaper gives from a distance as this is the way you will see it in a room.

PATTERNS

One dominant pattern in a room is enough. If a second pattern is used, keep it small and inconspicuous. If patterns compete with each other, neither can be very effective. The best way to show off a lovely design in fabric, wallpaper or rug is to surround it by plain things.

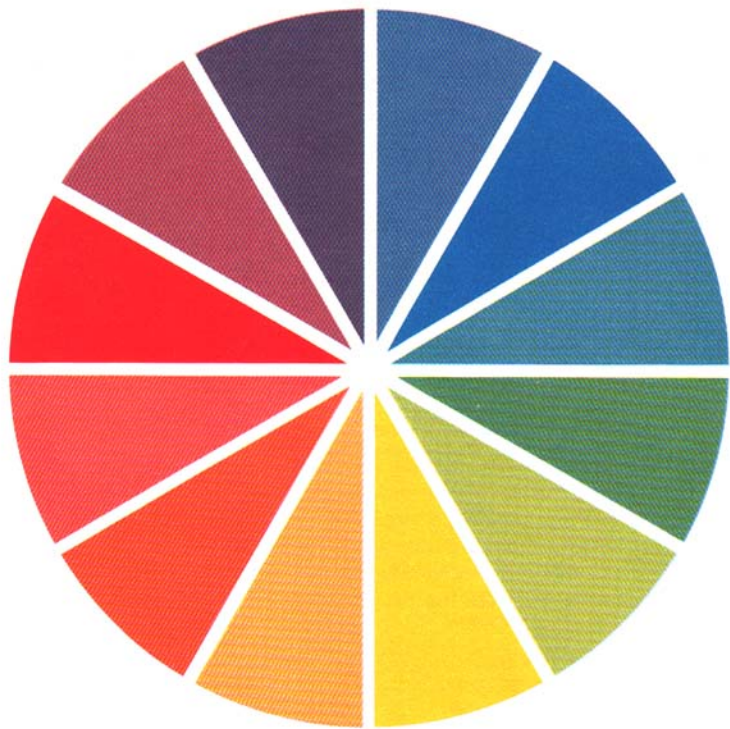
Textures can also compete with each other, especially tweeds that are combinations of several colors. If you want to use two tweeds together, look at them from a distance to make sure they go well together.

ROOM EXPOSURE

All of us have heard the rule, "Use cool colors in south rooms and warm colors in north rooms." Cool colors often make north rooms seem chilly and uninviting. As sunlight will make any colors seem warmer than they are, a south or west room done in browns, yellows and reds may appear uncomfortably hot.

But you don't need to stick tightly to this rule. Blue, for instance, can be used very successfully in a north room if it is warmed a bit and combined with some warm colors. Use a blue that has a slight greenish cast. For a neutral, try creamy or pinkish white or a honey beige – never a cool gray. Add to it a print, stripe or plaid that contains blue plus some warm color such as a reddish orange or warm pink.

Yellows and warm reds can best be used in south rooms if kept grayed. Accents of blue-green plus as much off-white (or other appropriate light neutral) as you can use, will give a cooling effect.



Good decorating is not based upon unbreakable rules. But it can not succeed if you allow the whims and opinions of others to take over completely. Do what YOU like, and with a good plan. Keep your long range plan in mind, and may your decorating be fun!