

# COLOR ME CONFUSED

by Linda Anderson

COLOR

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## Choosing the Right Paint Color for Every Room

**W**hen it comes to interior paint colors, the choices are almost endless. Like a deer in the headlights, you stand before row after row of paint chips. Cornish blue, seawash green, ballerina pink, buttercup yellow and sand dollar tan. It would be enough to make you toss your paintbrush in the air and scream, "White!" – if only there weren't rows of different whites to choose from. Selecting a paint color can be overwhelming. But what about the practical aspects of color? According to the experts, there are some do's and don'ts when it comes to selecting the right color for the right place.

### ▼ LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Like the Realtors' adage, location matters when it comes to selecting paint color. Rooms facing south generally receive more natural light and are able to withstand deeper, more saturated tones. "Use mid- to dark-toned colors," advises Lee Snijders, host of HGTV's *Design on a Dime*. "Prime the wall with KILZ® Premium (a general purpose, water-based primer) and then use a flat or satin paint so that the walls absorb color to give the room more depth."

On the other hand, a room on the north side of the house may cry out for lightness. "Remember, color is a reflection of light,"

says Josette Buisson, artistic director with Pittsburgh Paints. "If you use white, you assume it will always look the same. But in a north-facing room with few lights, it will look grayish." She recommends adding cream to any white to warm the room.

"Use light- to mid-tones in a north room and use satin or semi-gloss paint that will help reflect light around the room," Snijders adds.

Jessica Gordon, color specialist and owner of Interior Artistry in Seattle, sometimes dramatizes a north-facing room by accenting a focal window, painting the surrounding wall a darker shade. "If you have a window



LEFT: These bright trendy colors are sure to lift a young lady's spirits.

framed by a dark color, you'll look through it. The color will draw your eye to the window. I choose a shade with a heavy pigment, but not overbearing," she says.

### ▼ COLOR DEFINES LIVING SPACES

Defining living areas in today's open floor plans can be quite a challenge. Do you paint each area a different color? Or opt for one color fits all? "The law is that everything has to have a link and a flow," Buisson comments. "There's a main color and then lighter shades." She advocates the 60:30:10 rule. Use 60 percent of one color, 30 percent of another and 10 percent of an accent color.

Gordon suggests choosing one color for the most public spaces and altering the shades in adjacent areas. "Keep the hallways and stairs one shade," she says. "And only totally change color if you have good cut-off points like a soffit or a door between the living and dining rooms."

Buisson likes to pick up the accent color (the 10 percent) and repeat it in an adjacent area. "If the living room has an accent color and you can see the kitchen from there, you might paint the entire kitchen in that color."

### ▼ COLOR REFLECTS FUNCTION

Believe it or not, color can enhance the function of a room. "We have research that shows a blind person entering a red room will feel warmer there than in a white room – even if it's the same temperature," Buisson says. "People feel the color in a room." She

points to the fact that many restaurants are painted warm tones, such as spicy reds and toasty yellows. "Red stimulates conversation and appetite," she notes. "Blue in a dining room decreases the appetite." She adds that if you want to elevate concentration in an office or a corner where the kids do homework, choose yellow.

Some experts recommend painting family rooms deep cozy shades, such as cocoa or loden green. Kitchens are perfect spots for yellows, reds and even some greens. "Where there's traffic, I like to keep it light and breezy," Gordon says. Snijders likes to use the color of food in kitchens, such as butter yellow or deep merlot.

Since master baths are meant to be relaxing, private retreats, Gordon suggests they be painted cool, water-related colors such as blue, silver or green. However, she opts for drama in a downstairs powder room. "I did a bath with a red wall and darkened the ceiling to a dark chocolate. With white fixtures, it was stunning," she says.

### ▼ CEILINGS – WHITE, LIGHT OR DARK?

"A ceiling is part of your horizon," says Buisson. She recommends painting it a lighter shade of the wall color rather than stark white, especially in the kitchen. "It looks disconnected to have a strip of color above the cabinets and then a white ceiling." For a really high ceiling – where you feel lost in the room – she recommends using a color

slightly darker than the wall color.

Buisson notes stark white is a very strong statement. "It may draw too much attention," she says. "You have to have a reason to use it."

Ceiling color can make a room unique. Snijders once painted a living room ceiling and one wall a chocolate color that nearly matched the carpeting, and then painted the other three walls cream. "This created an illusion that the wall and ceiling were encasing you like a clamshell," he recalls. "I took the square out of the square to create a different, modern feel. Dare to be different whenever you can."

### ▼ COORDINATING WITH HARDWOOD FLOORING

Just as you'd consider the color of carpet when choosing paint color, it's important to think about hardwood flooring as well. "You have to look at the root of the color. If you have a red wood, you have to match it," Buisson recommends. She says most wood flooring has yellow tones, so she advises leaning toward warmer colors. For darker woods, such as dark cherry, cooler tones are the answer. "There is also a bleached oak currently popular that has a lot of pink in it. When you put something yellow beside it, it clashes," she observes. "Wood doesn't always go with everything."

Low-sheen paint is another good idea in kitchens with cherry cabinets. "You don't want to compete with them," Gordon explains. "Choose a color that has the strength to stand up to that cherry – something with a boldness of its own."

### ▼ DEALING WITH "PROBLEM" AREAS

If you have a hexagon-shaped dining room, consider yourself lucky according to Gordon. "The architecture is playful, so you can be playful in color choices. Odd-shaped dining rooms are perfect for dramatic use of color. Wall color should help set off the colors of the food," she says. A deep chocolate burgundy, golden honey yellow or dark burnt sienna, accented with cream woodwork and an off-white ceiling, can accentuate the unique room shape and make a statement to those entering.

Lee Snijders shares this tip for making a small space look larger – use different shades of the same color. For example, paint opposite walls a shade lighter or darker than the adjacent walls to give the room a sense of depth.

When painting over a dark wall, Lee

suggests tinting primer with a color a few shades lighter than your new topcoat color. This will help ensure a perfect finish and ultimately help you save money because you'll need less topcoat to take your walls from one color to the next.

Buisson says color choice in hallways comes down to what feeling you want to create. "A dark color will bring the walls closer," she cautions, "but that may be what you are seeking, as if you're emerging from a tunnel that opens to a large room." To create that feel, use a light color at the end.

"More often, people want the space to look bigger, so a lighter color is preferred," Buisson adds. Snijders suggests contrasting the lighter walls in the hall by using a mid to dark color at the end of the hallway and placing a piece of artwork there. "It will draw you down the hallway to explore," he says.

### ▼ TRIMMING THE ROOM

According to Buisson, painted woodwork should coordinate with wall colors. "If you use a fresh, clean blue on the walls, go with pure, white woodwork," she recommends. "If you have a warm wall color, choose a warmer white." While it's usually best to use the same trim color throughout the home for a coordinated look, there can be exceptions, such as in an upstairs living area. "Kids like their own space that's different from the rest of the home," Buisson says. "It really depends on individual taste and the layout of the house."

Ornate molding or trim, such as a ceiling crown molding, may warrant a stark contrast color in order to draw attention to it. "If you want a light room with a little drama," Gordon says, "a darker trim can make that happen. We did a bath with light blue walls and charcoal trim. It was a great way to accent the walls."



### ▼ REMOVING THE GUESSWORK

Despite the vast variety of colors available, selecting the right paint color needn't be difficult and overwhelming. Experts advise buying small amounts of colors to "test" in various spots in the room. "Paint chips are computer generated and not the color you look at," Gordon explains. "Apply paint in several areas where light varies, such as a corner by a window and across the room. You'll see how different the color looks in different areas." With a bit of trial and error with your samples, you'll end up with the right color – and avoid having to repaint an entire room once you realize you can't live with the new color. ■



TOP: The color used in this great room is warm but light enough to keep the space feeling bright and airy.

CENTER: Cool blue walls visually expand a small room.

LOWER LEFT: Deep red walls work well in this brightly lit corner and coordinate with the warm, rich wood flooring.

LOWER RIGHT: Using the same hue of green on the walls of the family room and staircase unites these spaces.

