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## **Choosing Interior Colors**

Have you recently moved into a house that is completely painted inside in “Realtor off-white,” and now you would like to personalize your space? Are you tired of living with neutral colors and are ready to jazz up your environment? Painting is the quickest and most economical way to alter the perception of space and temperature in a room. A quick glance at the catalogues from Pottery Barn, Pier One and Crate and Barrel stores and you will see that using color on the walls is very popular. Once you have decided to be adventuresome, how do you begin to select the colors to work with? Here are some guidelines that will give you the confidence to have fun with color.

First, select a color scheme for your home. Choose three colors to work with and remember that white, beige, brown gray and black are neutrals. They don't count as one of the three colors! Sixty percent of the house should be in the dominant color. This is usually in the wall paint color, the carpet or the wallpaper. Select a secondary color for thirty percent of the surface area. Add an accent color for the remaining ten percent, and you will have the basis for a color scheme you can add to or change over the years. Cool colors, such as blues, greens and purples, tend to visually expand a space, lower the perceived temperature of a room and have a calming effect on most people. Cool colors are great for bedrooms and other rooms of the house where you would like to impart a feeling of serenity. Colors at the other end of the spectrum (yellows, reds, oranges and pinks) are called warm colors. Rooms decorated in these hues stimulate activity and conversation, raise the perceived temperature and visually shrink space. They are great for playrooms and eating areas. If your house has tall ceilings, painting an accent wall in terra cotta or another warm hue will give the room a more inviting atmosphere.

How do you select the three colors that comprise your color scheme? You can start with colors that you enjoy being around. A glance at your wardrobe may give you some clues. Perhaps you have a favorite piece of artwork from which to draw color inspiration. The color of the existing wallpaper, drapes or upholstered furniture is often the basis of the color scheme. After you have selected the three colors you want to use on your home (e.g., 60% navy blue, 30% emerald green, and 10% lilac), you can vary how much you see of each color in each room. The living room might have navy sofas and valances so that blue dominates in that room, but the dining room might have a green area rug and green valances with the navy only being used as a trim color on the window covering and the table runner. Using these colors throughout the house is not limiting your creativity because you can use tints and shades of each of the three colors as you move from room to room.



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For example, a soft cloud blue in the bedroom with a lilac and green wallpaper border is compatible with the navy, green and lilac color scheme in the rest of the house.

If you are hesitant about painting all the walls a color, select that wall you see when you first walk into the room, and treat it as an “accent” wall. Painting or wallpapering just one wall can highlight art, sculpture or architectural features and create a sense of drama in a room. Stenciling is another alternative to painting an entire room. Children’s rooms and bathrooms can be quickly changed to a new décor by stenciling a simple design 30 inches above the floor or around the top of the walls about 12 inches below the ceiling.

Consider the amount of ambient light in the room when you select the intensity of the paint color. Rooms that are bright and washed with sunlight are best suited for deeper paint colors because pastel colors will look dull and washed out in bright light. In rooms with low light levels, keep the ceiling painted white and use warm colors such as yellows, apricots and pinks on the walls and floor coverings. Adding can or track lights to wash the walls with light in the evening will greatly enhance the effect of the paint.

If you are painting over woodwork that is in poor condition, warm colors will not show irregularities in the surface as much as cool colors do. If you have new or newly refinished hardwood floors or a wood grained entertainment center, colors in the green and blue spectrum will best highlight the fine wood grain.

Wall paint finishes run the gamut from practical to decorative. Eggshell or satin finishes impart a low luster, increasing the effects of ambient light in a space. These finishes are more durable and easier to clean than walls painted with a flat finish. Talented faux painters can add texture and interest to a wall with various techniques that make the wall resemble wood, plaster, stone or even marble.

If you are uneasy about painting an entire room based on a one-inch color swatch, buy a quart of paint and paint several three foot square patches on various walls to see how the color changes with the light level at different times of day. After you have painted the whole room, wait until the furniture, window and floor coverings are back in place before deciding whether you like the outcome. A color that may seem too strong in an empty room will probably be perfect once the room is reassembled. Finally, if you think you have selected the wrong color, don’t despair. A gallon of paint only costs \$30, and you can always paint over the area and try again. After all it’s only paint!

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