



Maintaining the Home

Furnishing Your First Home: Color and Design

Maintaining the Home: Furnishing Your First Home: Color and Design

Color is a very important decorating tool. It is the first thing you notice about a room and its furnishings. Color has the power to change the shape and size of furnishings as well as the shape and size of the room itself. This key to your decorating plan is exciting and fun to work with, but frightening, too.

To have a beautiful home, you do not have to worry about trends. Color trends will come and go. The people who live in a home make it beautiful by choosing colors that reflect their likes and personalities. The trick is to blend those colors you like into a pleasing combination.

To help you, let's start with the basics. What is a color scheme and where can you get ideas for your color scheme?

What is a color scheme?

A color scheme is a planned, pleasing combination of colors for a room or a house. A pleasing color scheme is limited in the number of colors used, but has enough colors to give interest.

Where can you get ideas for a color scheme?

Present furnishings

Suppose you plan to keep all the furniture in a room, but you want a new window treatment. If there are one or two printed fabrics in the room, select a plain fabric that brings out one of the colors in the prints. If everything in the room—the floors, the sofa and the chairs—has no pattern, then you might choose a printed fabric with the

colors from the sofa, chair and floor.

Nature

Look around you in the flower gardens, the woods, the fields and the streams. Nature has the best combinations of colors you will ever find.

Accessories

A picture or a vase with nice colors may give you an idea for a color combination.

Personal preferences

If you like certain colors together, you might want to use them in a room. Find a printed fabric with colors you like. Use the printed fabric as a guide to choose other colors for the room. Pick out the colors from the printed fabric for the sofa, chairs, draperies, etc.

Color wheel

Colors that are next to each other or colors that are directly across from each other on the color wheel can be the basis for a color scheme.

When selecting a color scheme, consider the following:

- You and your family's color likes or dislikes.
- Your possessions. The furniture you plan to buy and the furniture and accessories you now own both limit and suggest possible color schemes.
- The size and shape of the room. If the room is less than 12 feet by 15 feet, light colors will make the room look larger. Paint woodwork

around doors, windows, floors and ceilings the same color as the wall. When woodwork is painted in a contrasting color or left natural, it emphasizes the windows and doorways and makes a room look smaller. In a small room, draperies and upholstery should blend with the walls and have little pattern. Large patterns in a small room will make the room seem smaller. A print with a small design on a large amount of open background or one with a small, all-over design are more suitable for rooms less than 12 feet by 15 feet. Colors in the printed fabric should be light and harmonize with all other colors in the room, not contrast with them.

- The size and shape of the furniture. Is the furniture heavy and massive in size or is it small? An overstuffed sofa might look better in a room if it is covered in a fabric that matches or is similar to the walls behind it.
- Relationship of a room to adjoining areas. Is the door between the rooms kept open? If so, the color scheme in the two rooms should be the same or very similar. Coordinating colors between rooms makes the house seem larger. To achieve color coordination:
 - o Use the same color on the walls or the same flooring color in adjoining rooms.
 - o Use the same color scheme in several rooms but vary your choice for the most important color. This means that you can repeat one color throughout the house but emphasize a different color in each room. A small house feels more spacious when the background is all the same color and light in value (pastel or neutral).
 - o Keep rugs and draperies in adjoining rooms alike.

Decorating Guidelines for Using Color

The following guidelines will help you put colors together effectively and mix patterns to add

interest without creating a cluttered, confused look.

- Limit the number of colors in a room from two to four.
- Use colors in distinctly different quantities. One color should always dominate a scheme.
- Repeat colors more than once in a room.
- Balance color in a room by repeating colors throughout the room itself, not just in one section of the room.
- Camouflage architectural defects, such as changes in wall materials or a mantel that is too small for the fireplace, with neutral paint colors that blend with neutral walls, ceilings and floors.
- Emphasize desirable architectural details like fireplaces or windows with strong color contrasts.
- Use subtle color schemes or color schemes without strong contrast to make small rooms appear more spacious.
- Connect adjoining rooms with color.
- Give a room a more spacious feel by using furniture that is the same color as the walls; the furniture will seem to disappear.
- Use bright colors when you want the room to be stimulating and dramatic or if you want to make a large room feel cozy.
- Decide whether your color scheme will emphasize the background or the furnishings. Play one up and the other down. Every aspect of the room can't be screaming and yelling for your attention.
- Draw attention to furnishings and accessories by using the same light, subtle color on the background walls and floors.
- Use a dramatic color scheme on walls or floor if the furnishings are sparse and uninteresting.

- Draw attention to beautiful floor coverings or wall coverings by using neutral or subtle colors on furnishings.
- Use a range of subtle colors like brown, beige, gray, taupe and white to create a neutral color scheme in a room. You can also select one basic neutral color like beige and use it everywhere, varying its intensity and value. Neutral color schemes are excellent choices for smaller spaces and contemporary rooms. Even period furnishings look good in neutral colors. To avoid the pitfall of a bland color scheme when using neutrals, balance light, medium and dark color values of colors around the room.

Using patterns and textures

Pattern and texture are absolutely essential ingredients when using neutral color schemes or “one-color” schemes in a room. Pattern size should be compatible with the size of furniture and the room. Large rooms and large furniture can use large patterns.

Mixing Patterns

When combining patterns, establish a common denominator. The common denominator may be the color, the pattern or the theme of the pattern. Color is the easiest common denominator to establish. Some possible combinations might be:

- Different patterns in the same color scheme. If different patterns in the same color scheme are used, it’s safe to go on adding patterns almost indefinitely, especially when the patterns themselves are simple.
- Same pattern in different color combinations. Reversing color combinations or using different color combinations of the same pattern are interesting ways to mix patterns. Two or three different color combinations are enough in a room.
- Same pattern, different sizes, in same color

combination. Same pattern in several different sizes. This works especially well with dots, stripes or checks.

- Different patterns with a related theme. Two different prints with a related theme make an interesting combination if colors also have something in common. The prints should be either approximately the same size or very different in size, with one print quite large and the other print small.

Mixing patterns made easier:

- Be sure there is contrast and compatibility. The patterns must be different enough in design, yet have a compatible color in common.
- In developing a color scheme, select the dominant print and then choose a quieter, more passive print in the same or similar colors. Finally, tie the room together with a solid color or two that appears in both prints.
- Use no more than one bold pattern in a room. Select an active print and one or two passive prints for a successful mix. Use solid colors in the room for relief.
- Choose a soothing solid color related to the prints in the room for background areas. The large proportion of solid color areas will balance the smaller areas of various prints.
- Do not combine two floral prints that are similar in size in the same room. A small floral print can be combined with a large floral print if the two have similar colors.
- If the room is small, combine prints that are color related and use solid colors for the background area. Solid colors on the walls and floor and low contrast in color of prints will make the room look larger.
- Stripes work almost as a solid. They can mix with florals, geometrics and plaids, but do not use all the patterns together.

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- Avoid clustering all of your patterns in the same area. Clustering would give one area too much weight and create an unbalanced effect. Distribute the patterns around the room.
- If the pattern on the floor is a busy one, everything else in the room should be plain or textured. Oriental rugs are an exception to this guideline. They work well with other patterns, so you can use them anywhere with anything as long as the colors are related.
- If the pattern on the floor is a medium impact pattern, you can use a smaller-scaled pattern of similar colors on some furniture.

This material was adapted from publications produced by North Carolina State University Extension. NCSU Cooperative Extension publications can be found on the Web at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/housing/repair.html>.

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

Interior Maintenance

Preventive Home Maintenance Checkup
Make a Basic Toolkit for Simple Home Repairs
Selection and Use of Home Cleaning Products
Discovering the Secrets of Successful Storage

Heating

Furnace Care
Fireplace and Chimney Care

Cooling

Evaporative Cooler
Air Conditioner
Ceiling Fans

Plumbing

Fixing Plugged Sink Drains
How to Unclog a Toilet
Repairing Dripping Faucets

Electrical

How to Set or Reset a Circuit Breaker
How to Replace a Fuse

Appliances

How to Buy an Energy Efficient Home Appliance
Choosing a Water Heater

Maintenance:

Dishwasher Care and Dishwasher Cleaning
Dryer Care and Dryer Cleaning
Freezer Care and Freezer Cleaning
Garbage Disposal Care and Cleaning
Range and Oven Care and Range Cleaning
Refrigerator Care and Refrigerator Cleaning
Small Electrical Appliance Care and Cleaning
Washer Care and Cleaning

Flooring

Buying new carpet
Carpet Care and Cleaning
Wood Floors Care and Cleaning
Ceramic Tile Floors Care and Cleaning
Vinyl Floor Coverings Care and Cleaning

Walls

Selecting and Applying Paint
Wallpaper Selection and Cleaning
Repairing Walls

Furniture

Furnishing Your New Home: Color and Design
Selecting Fabric For Home Furnishings

Exterior Maintenance

Home Exterior

Foundations, Basements and Yards
Exterior Walls, Windows, and Doors

Roof

A Guide To Roofs
Roof Maintenance

Landscaping and Lawn Care

Principles of Xeriscape
Watering Your Lawn

Home Safety

Child-Proofing Your Home
Is Your Home Safe From Fire Hazards?
Smoke Alarms Save Lives
Carbon Monoxide Alarms
Are Your Children Safe From Poisons?
Protecting Yourself Against Burglary

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Conservation

Weatherize Your Home
Easy Tips to Save Money and the Planet
How to Stop Air Leaks Around Windows
Energy-Efficient Heating and Cooling
Indoor Water Conservation Tips
Outdoor Water Conservation Tips

Environment Issues

Green Building
Reduce-Reuse-Recycle: Alternatives for Waste Management
Create a home recycling center
Healthy Indoor Air for New Mexico Homes
Dealing with Mold
Household Hazardous Waste
Hazardous Household Substances: Alternatives That Are Relatively Free of Toxic Effects
Radon

Pest Control

Cockroaches and Their Control
Southwest Insects

Accessible Living

Update your home for a lifetime of living
Vision Loss & Hearing Loss
Hand Dexterity, Strength and Range of Motion
Cognitive Difficulties
Mobility Impairments, Balance and Coordination

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