

Tips for using color in your home

As an increasing number of homeowners remodel, revamp, and spruce up their homes, color remains a key ingredient for creating moods, feelings of openness and coziness, and a way of conveying expression and personality.

Home color trends constantly change, and remodeling experts say that color plays a larger role today than ever. Homeowners want excitement in their homes, and a color change can sometimes inspire a full remodeling project, according to the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. But you need to think long-term when choosing colors.

"It is a basic economic trend: colors in the home improvement industry need to have longevity, compatibility and be aesthetically pleasing," said Kevin McNulty, executive vice president of NARI. "Unlike fashion, your color choices for the home don't change from season to season. They must endure, yet still make a statement about who you are as an individual."

So, in order for colors to blend in with the other items in the room, the home industry has responded with colors that they say are fresher, more optimistic, and take on a softer and more soothing tone.

For example, yellows are becoming popular for their warmth and comfort.

The Color Marketing Group, a not-for-profit association of 1,600 color designers who forecast colors for all industries, including home and architectural, says colors this year are lighter, softer, and more complex.

"The technology revolution continues to accelerate the pace at which color evolves in the marketplace," said Color Marketing Group President Hall Dillon. "While blue will maintain its enviable position as the most important color of the decade, orange is foreseen to be the hue of optimism and happiness in 2002."

Meanwhile, another company that specializes in color forecasting, Pantone Inc., echoes what CMG is seeing. Specifically, if you'll be shopping for home furnishings into 2003, you'll see a lot of calming and comforting colors.

"The overall forecast for 2003 is one of more muted, traditional and classical shades," said Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of Pantone Color Institute, a company that specializes in color communication and technology for a range of industries.

She said that people are turning to their homes as havens, spending more time there and looking at their home as a source of comfort.

"In terms of color, that means shades that are traditional and classic, not flashy or trendy," she said.

That doesn't mean there isn't some vibrancy, she said. More daring colors will be popular, but against a backdrop of more classical, conservative colors.

But if forecasts and trends are more than you need to know, you can't go wrong by following basic color principles.

For instance, Lowe's offers the following tips when deciding on color:

- Think about the natural lighting in the room - a north-facing room receives less direct sunlight than a south-facing room. A west-facing room receives strong, warm light in the evening, and an east-facing room receives strong, bright light in the morning, casting a white glow.
- Plan ahead. Make a sample board of color swatches you like. Mix and match and think about how those colors will look in the natural light of the room.
- Try to be consistent with color throughout your home. Open the doors to all the rooms and determine how much you can see from the adjacent room. Plan your colors accordingly.
- Go with the colors you like best, but try to keep it to four core colors and two patterns maximum, but use as many accent colors as you'd like.
- If you're selecting color around a favorite pattern from a piece of furniture or art, match your colors to the pattern. Colors that are dramatically different in the pattern can be accented with light or dark tones of the same color. Or use a main color with several tones to create a feeling of energy.
- When choosing paint for a wall, paint a two-foot by two-foot test section and let it dry - paint usually dries one to two shades darker. Examine the test section during different times of day when the lighting is varied.

In addition, you can use color to create illusions. For example, you can make a ceiling appear lower by painting it darker than the wall, or make it seem higher by painting it a lighter color. Dark neutrals or warm colors will scale down a large room, and light, pale colors will make a room appear larger.

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