Color is one of the most vital ingredients in decorating because it is the important, single element that binds furnishings into a cohesive whole. It acts as a unifying factor since it has the ability to blend seemingly unrelated objects together. Color makes the first and most lasting impression when you walk into a room. I think of it as the catalyst that brings a room to life, because it introduces warmth, vitality and real beauty into any interior. Color fads may come and go, but a well thought out color plan for your home will always look right.

**Introduction**

While the complete science of color is a learned and complicated one, a little knowledge of what it is and what it will do can make your home lovelier to look at and to live in.

Color is the most visible element in any decorative scheme. It covers every surface, and it is the most valuable tool which the room designer handles. It is a tool we use to create beauty but we cannot do this by merely combining colors at random.

Almost everyone is born with color sense, but it needs to be developed. Many who have a gift for using color well do not know why their ideas are good, and cannot share this gift with others. Even if we get good results accidentally, we can be more skillful if we know which colors go together and in what amounts to use them. Color should be an integrated part of the room design, never an after-thought.

**Basic Facts About Color**

There are 2 essential points to keep in mind. First, learn to visualize the appearance of basic colors with their possible variations of tints and shades. Second, realize that a hue seen by itself is not as obvious as 2 or more within range of the eye. Remember the color you like needs good companions to make it beautiful. When you select a brown dish for scrambled eggs or a green plate for sliced tomatoes you make these foods seem to be very special ones.

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Home Furnishings

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Some colors are restful, some exciting, others fatiguing. Because of differences in individuals' tastes, it is difficult to establish standards in color selection.

Time of year governs use of color, as well as the room or space in which it is used, and the individual preferences of the persons who live with it.

Nature also contributes an example of color combinations that can be applied to interior decoration. For example, nature paints her large backgrounds of earth and sky in the softness of muted tones. She blends the gold and scarlet sunset against the broad dusty areas of evening landscape, and sets her brilliant bits of vivid color in birds or flowers against the large scenery of soft green.

All colors have 3 principal characteristics. These are:

HUE - is just another word for color. We say, for example, that any red, whether brilliant, dull, light, or dark is a red hue.

VALUE - refers to the lightness or darkness of a color; that is how close it is to white at one end of the scale or black at the other end. Light colors that approach black are called shades; those approaching white are called tints. An example of a tint is the result of adding white to red; this value may be called rose or pink, depending on the proportion of white to red.

INTENSITY - refers to the degree of brightness or dullness of a color. A color may be of high intensity, such as vivid red-orange like an Oriental poppy. It may be of lower intensity, such as a dull red-orange like brick or terra cotta. Any color becomes dull or grayed when either black or its complementary color is added to it. Thus, if a little green is added to a brilliant red, the red becomes less intense. Or if black is added to red, it again becomes a muted shade.

It is very important to remember that colors of full intensity, such as brilliant orange, pure red, vivid blue, are exciting and fatigue the eye.

The primary colors are red, blue, and yellow. All other colors are made from them. The secondary colors-- purple, green, and orange--are made this way:

Equal parts of red and blue make purple.
Equal parts of blue and yellow make green.
Equal parts of yellow and red make orange.

The colors are arranged in a simple color wheel, with a definite place for each. Colors opposite each other on the color wheel are called complementary colors. When complementary colors are combined in a variety of tints, shades, and degrees of intensity, the effect is usually vigorous and lively. For example, orange walls, more intense red-orange upholstery, beige casement curtains, and tawny beige floor covering with bright leaf green accents in small areas is a lively color scheme.
A RELATED COLOR SCHEME is one composed of colors located side by side or close to one another on the wheel. Related color schemes are usually more subtle and restful than complementary color schemes.

Example: In modern hall, pale or grayed orange floor covering with a brownish cast, and intense red orange accents could be used.

A ONE-HUE COLOR SCHEME is made up of tints and shades of a single color.

Black, white, and gray are considered neutral colors. They may be used with other colors to keep a color scheme from being monotonous. Small amounts of black may be used quite successfully, but can be morbid and dismal in effect if too much is used.

Now, let's break our colors down into warm and cool hues. Generally speaking, blue and green are cool, while red-orange and yellow are warm. But, if you will look carefully at the yellows on the color wheel, you'll find that green-yellow tends to look a bit cooler than red-purple.

Warm, dark and intense colors seem to come toward us. Cool, light, and dull colors tend to move away from us. (One cannot judge a color by itself. Colors affect each other - color changes occur when colors are brought together.)

Planning a Color Scheme

The term "color scheme" simply means combining colors that go well together. But every good color scheme must have variety and interest and be pleasing or satisfying.

Even though a complete redecoration or decorating job cannot be done at one time, it is well to make a long-time plan and follow it until it is completed.

Since the average homemaker cannot change everything in a room at one time, build the scheme around the furnishings. Sources of good color schemes might be:

1. A colorful picture which you enjoy and will use in the room.
2. A patterned slipcover or drapery fabric.
3. A good carpet which you have and intend to keep.
4. A small piece of natural material such as a rock, leaf, or piece of bark.

The easiest and surest way to arrive at a successful color scheme and avoid costly mistakes is to work out your ideas with samples. Consider first what atmosphere, or what feeling you want to achieve. Shut your eyes and think in images. Then look for the colors that can recreate those mental pictures for you. Cut each sample in a size proportionate to the area in which it will be used. Once you have worked out the color scheme you want with samples, your shopping will be easier because you will know what to look for. But don't expect the actual material samples to match the paper samples exactly. Colors will be affected by the different textures of the surfaces.
Using the Colors

After selecting your colors, the next problem is how to use them under given conditions. The way this is done determines the final effect. How much of each color shall you use? More important, where shall you place each color with references to light and shadow?

Always let one color be dominant. Use the others in varying amounts, and don't divide a color scheme into equal sections like a pie. Unequal division contributes to better balance. A guide to use is a lot of one color, a medium amount of the second, and a spoonful of the third. You might use a light value of brown (beige) for walls, a middle value for rugs (tan), and a dark value (brown) for furniture. You could then change slipcovers and other accessories from warm to cool colors and the background color would still predominate.

Use some light, some dull, some bright, and some dark colors, but use only small amounts of the bright and dark ones.

Carry your color scheme around the room, across the floor, and up the walls so that the eye takes in the whole room. This may be done with small accents of bright color in accessories. If the room is small - use light, cool blending colors. Dark colors and warm colors make a room seem smaller. Lighten dark rooms with white, yellow or citron. Repeat each color in various parts of the room.

Now be certain that the whole color scheme is tied together somewhere in the room. This may be in a picture, a fabric, the wallpaper or a rug.

Continue a color harmony throughout your home by repeating colors used for one room in the next room. A color used on the wall in one room might be used for the floor covering in the next. It is pleasing to the eye to see a harmonizing color through an open door.

Factors Affecting Color

Texture and Finish - The same colors will look quite different in rough or smooth weaves, dull or shiny finishes. Smooth, tightly woven fabrics or shiny finishes, for example, reflect light and so look brilliant. Shaggy or nubby fabrics cast shadows and the shadows within the weave temper and dull the color of the material.

Color Combinations - Colors do things to each other. A "see for yourself" test is the best way to check. Lay swatches of color together. Large masses of color cast reflections which may change the entire appearance of an area. The trend is to blend, rather than match color.

Pattern - Pattern influences the appearance of colors. Colors that are sharply defined so that they separate easily gain in intensity. Size of pattern also affects color. A big print will look more striking than a small one because colors stand out and demand attention individually rather than functioning as parts of a group. Usually large figures in a small room make the room seem smaller. Two patterns of equal strength fight for attention. When several patterns are used in a small space they make the room seem "busy".
SIZE - The amount of a color affects its appearance. A small chair in a beautiful coral may pick up an entire room and relieve it from drabness. A room with a coral wall and a coral floor covering may be overpowering and hard to live in because there is too much of an intense color.

LIGHT - Color is influenced by light, so lighting must be considered. It is always wise to select colors with the same lighting conditions under which they will be used. For close matching, choose colors in daylight but never in sharp sunlight. North light will make a blue colder, while south light will make a red warmer, so cold-light rooms are best in warm tones and vice versa. Store lighting is different from home lighting and home lighting varies greatly.

SUMMARY

Learn color's vocabulary so you can talk about it with your friends. This is the first step. Experiment with the various color plans so you will gain confidence in selecting colors for your own space. Be able to recognize that change in color is brought about by different kinds of light, that each color is affected by surrounding ones, and that you must experiment before selecting color. Learn where to use certain colors, how much to use, and how they can help or hurt each other. This will help you realize the importance of total planning — that an attractive room is a total package, and not just an assembly of parts.

Exploring color is an exciting experience. Learning to see it in everyday things is rewarding; learning how to use it is a challenge.