How To Choose Paint Colors

By Jeanne Thompson

If you've seen any home makeovers in magazines or on TV you know that paint colors can dramatically transform a room. Painting is one of the least expensive ways to redecorate a room but many people feel intimidated when choosing colors. In the past most people stayed with safe interior shades such as beige, off white, light blue and light green. Today the range of colors and paints makes it easier to become more adventurous.

Before you choose a paint color, think about how the room is used and how you respond to different colors emotionally. Look at home decorating magazines and clip out color schemes and rooms that appeal to you. Keep in mind that paint can enhance a room's features or it can be used to hide flaws. Yellow, orange and red are classified as warm colors while blues, greens and purples are labeled cool. You may want to choose cool colors to create a relaxing ambience in a bedroom. A warm yellow adds warmth to a chilly den or dining room. Decorators often use light colors such as cream and white to make smaller rooms appear larger. Dark colors such as navy or red can evoke a cozier mood in a very large room.

Don't forget to take your floor covering into consideration when choosing paint colors. A very dark wood floor or a dark colored carpet will have an effect on how wall colors look. Upholstery texture and patterns may also influence your choice of paint colors. Decide if you want the room to have a warm, casual ambience or a more formal feeling.

Visit a local paint, hardware or home improvement store and collect a variety of brochures and paint samples. Pay attention to displays showing textured walls and paints with special effects. Consider how various paint combinations would look in different rooms. Take the paint chips home and look at them in natural and artificial light.

When you particularly love one color such as blue-green, try using neighboring colors on the color wheel as accents to create an analogous color scheme. Interior designers often advise their clients to take a look at their wardrobes before selecting a new color for the bedroom or living room. If you have a lot of blues and greens in your closet, chances are you'll be happy with some variation of those colors on your walls. You may want to coordinate paint colors using hues from a favorite rug or painting.

Monochromatic colors are the easiest to work with when decorating. Basically you choose one color and use varying shades of it throughout the room to create a sense of casual coordination.

For example a medium yellow room could have slightly darker molding, a lighter ceiling and yellow print wallpaper on one wall. Complimentary colors can be a little tricky. When choosing colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel such as blue and orange or green and red, it is best to use them as accents or accessories to avoid garish contrasts.

Color can also be used to create the illusion of a different sized room. A square room looks very different when one wall is painted a different color. Try enhancing interesting architectural features such as a window seat or beams by painting them a coordinating or contrasting color from the walls. You can make a very narrow room seem wider by painting the shorter walls a darker color than the longer walls.

The color you choose for the ceiling is very important. A lighter color is a better choice for a low ceiling in a small room. A dark color is the best solution when you have a cavernous room with a ceiling that seems too high.

Hallways and foyers will seem warmer to guests if you choose a warm color like yellow or peach. Red and green are popular choices for dining rooms and kitchens, while pale blue and lavender are considered romantic choices for bedrooms. Bathrooms allow you to be a little more dramatic. For example a black and white color scheme in a bathroom can be quite sophisticated but in a small bedroom the same look could be overwhelming.

Consider using a technique such as sheen striping to create vertical stripes of the same color but in different sheens or textures. It's a sophisticated decorating trick that not only creates visual interest but also helps create the illusion of height in rooms with low ceilings.