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Live with

COLOR!

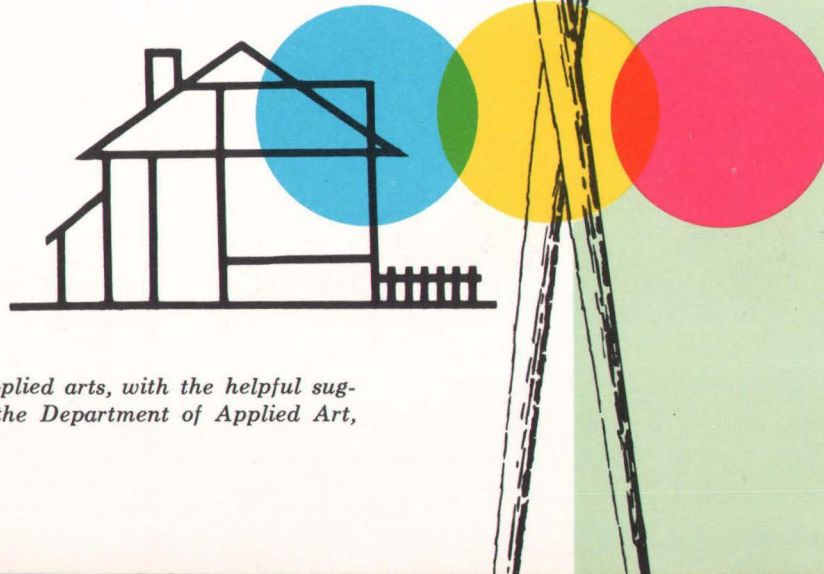
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE • OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

EXTENSION BULLETIN 817 • SEPTEMBER, 1966

Live with COLOR

Look first to nature if you would seek the beauty secret of the use of color. Nature paints her large backgrounds of earth and sky and wooded growth in the softness of muted tones. She blends the gold and scarlet sunset against the broad, dusky areas of evening landscape, and sets her brilliant bits of vivid color in bird or flower against the larger scenery of soft green and brown, and the variable coloring of the sky.

The world of color is understandable. How to put pleasing, satisfying colors together is a home art which anyone can learn. But let us start first where you will wish to start—in your home.



Prepared by June C. Brown, extension specialist in applied arts, with the helpful suggestions of Marjorie Garfield, professor and head of the Department of Applied Art, Iowa State University.

WHAT DO YOU WANT COLOR TO DO?

Probably you would not put the question this way. You would be more specific. "We wish to paint or repaper the walls in the living room. What color should we use?" Or "We plan to buy a new davenport. How can we be sure that the color will go with what we have in other furnishings?"

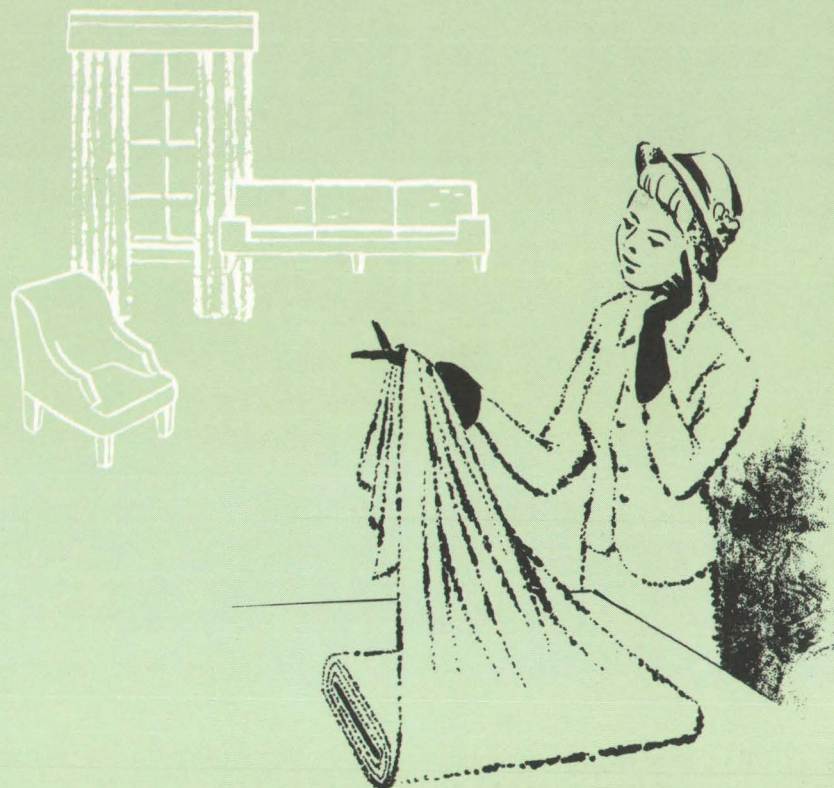
We all tend to think in terms of specific items. Few families have the opportunity to start with everything new. We buy new things or change the color of the walls when the need arises or we can spend the money. This means the new colors must blend with those already in the room.

First, look over the entire room. What total effect do you wish the room to give—gay and informal? Quiet and dignified? Larger, more roomy and lighter than it is now? Smaller, warmer in appearance than it is now? You see, the sum total of the colors in a room adds up to a general impression. You feel happy or depressed in a room, depending on the colors at work there. Maybe you feel restless. Had you thought that too much variety of color might be competing for attention?

What you are really saying when you ask about the *right* color for walls or davenport or rug is that:

1. You want all the colors in the room to form a pleasing color scheme which you and the family will like.
2. You want the color scheme to reflect your good taste, and you don't want to put money into a possible "mistake."
3. You have some general ideas about how colors go together, but you'd like some simple suggestions or guides (not rules) to follow to help you achieve a good result even if you are not a color expert.

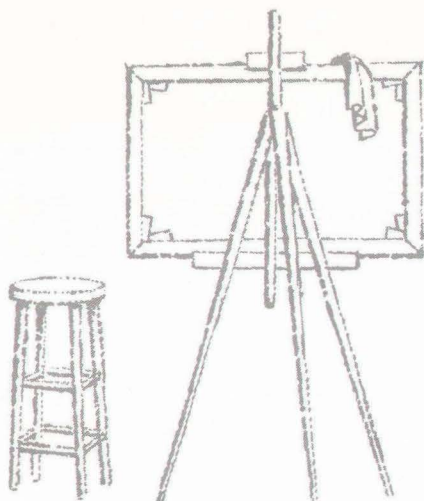
This booklet suggests that you study the room in question in a step-by-step process. It goes on to give you some practical ideas or alternatives to consider. It helps you take a closer look at background areas and foreground furnishings. In doing so it introduces color terms and then encourages you to study the fascinating world of color so you can apply it wisely in your home. (See pages 8 through 15.)



COLOR IS PERSONAL

Above all, color is a very personal thing. The colors in your home should give you and your family deep satisfaction. If you plan color schemes with this thought in mind, the colors will be good year after year regardless of color trends. So choose in terms of your own living, not in terms of fads in color—for fads will come and go.

Some families choose colors which are quite daring. This satisfies a need in their lives. For most families, however, the answer is in colors which they know they will like for many a year—with an occasional change here and there. So plan your color scheme carefully, base it on your personal preference and plan it for long-time use.



Before you buy one new thing, analyze your whole situation, colorwise: the colors you like . . . the colors you don't like . . . and the appearance of the total room. If you really don't care for the colors in the room, just buying a new

STEP 1

Which colors in the room do you wish to retain? Are the best colors in your furniture, the curtains and draperies, the floor covering, or perhaps the accessories? You may need to think of which item of furnishing you will need to use for the longest period of time and use it as the basis for your color plan.

Perhaps there is one main item you must consider because you cannot change it—the floor covering, for example? Then it becomes the start of your plan.

Maybe the colors you prefer appear in more than one place. You like the way they look together. These then become the start of your color plan.

STEP 2

Analyze these colors. Determine to which family (hue) on the color circle each color belongs (page 10). List these family hues.

WORKING OUT YOUR OWN COLOR PLAN

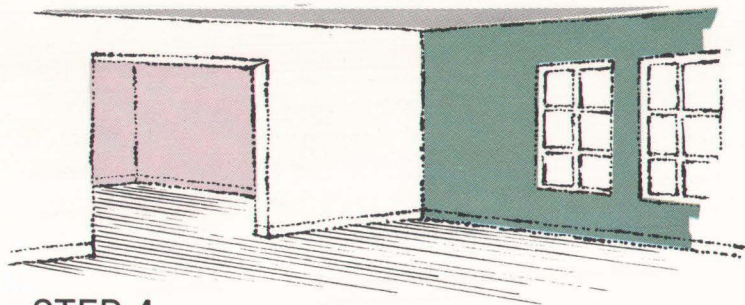


STEP 3

Now refer to the color combinations discussed on pages 13 through 15. Which type of plan do you seem to have—neutral with an accent color, one-hue, neighboring or contrasting? Whatever you buy new should be in a color that fits into your color plan. It is well to carry out the same color plan for rooms which closely relate to each other.

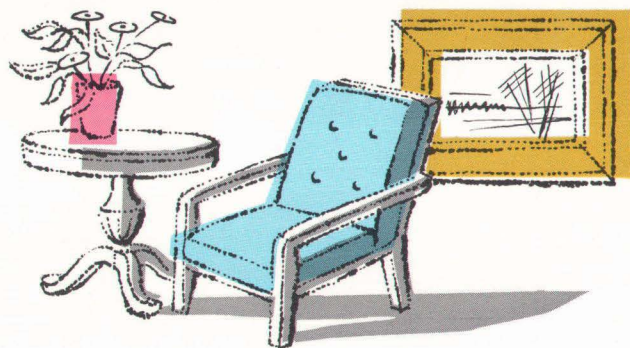
davenport or new curtains won't make you satisfied. Perhaps you could give a beauty treatment to your room with a new color plan which would cost less than new furnishings.

On the other hand, if you do like your room as it is now, and you do want a new davenport, your problem is clearer. It's just a question of knowing the present color plan and what colors and textures work with it.



STEP 4

Study the background areas . . . the walls, floor, ceiling, windows. These are the largest areas in a room, the setting for other furnishings. It is important that colors for these large areas should not compete for attention with objects in front of them (furniture, accessories). See "Background Areas First," page 6.



STEP 5

Study the foreground objects (furniture, accessories). Which colors did you decide you like best? Do they look nice against the total background area? If not, you have a decision to make:

1. Either you change the walls (perhaps woodwork) to harmonize with the present colors you like in the foreground furnishings;
2. Or you change the foreground colors (slip-cover the furniture or refinish it) to look well with the background.

Practical pointers:

Usually it is easier to change the color of the walls and woodwork, or to slip-cover some pieces of furniture (if you don't really like their color), than it is to change the floor covering.

It may be less expensive, and more effective, to change the color of the walls and woodwork, and to slip-cover your old davenport and chair, than to put money into a new davenport and chair.

A new floor covering costs money. If you need a new floor covering, decide whether (1) you like the colors of the other furnishings well enough to make the rug blend with them, or whether (2) your new rug should be the start of a new color plan.

If you plan to paint the walls and woodwork and at the same time purchase or make new curtains or draperies, purchase the window fabric first; then select the paint to harmonize. It is easier to match paint to fabric than vice versa.

When you select paint, be sure that you choose it considerably lighter than the small sample you have in mind. Paint will look six to ten degrees darker on a large area such as a wall. Also, remember that the amount of light in the room and the reflection of other furnishings can change the appearance of wall color.

BACKGROUND AREAS FIRST

These include the ceiling, walls, woodwork, floors and curtains and draperies. You may have structural problems to consider, such as too many doors or windows cutting up the wall space. You may wish the room to look larger or smaller in size.

CEILINGS: Have the ceiling lightest in color. Light hues help ceilings look higher. They reflect light and help to brighten the room.

Dark colors make ceilings appear lower. In some old homes with very high ceilings, this is helpful. Dark ceilings, however, absorb light and will darken the room, perhaps necessitating extra artificial light. If you have a modern home with low ceilings, you will be wise to keep the ceiling light in color.

WALLS: Size, shape, room exposure and use of room will influence your choice of wall treatment. Whether you choose wallpaper or paint, consider these facts: Light-colored walls reflect more light, make a room appear larger. They are a wise choice for small rooms. Neutral wall tones stay in the background.

Darker tones or more intense colors on walls make a room seem smaller than it is. Use a darker, neutral color to hide structural problems. Save accent colors for accessories.

If you choose an all-over patterned paper, limit the amount of pattern in the furnishings. Too much pattern is as confusing as too much color.

You can make a small room appear larger by having plain, light-colored walls, matching woodwork and window fabric, and plain rugs.

If the room has too many doors and windows, paint walls and woodwork alike. Use no pattern on walls. However, if you already have fine old wallpaper, minimize the presence of many windows and doors by painting the woodwork the color of the background of the paper.

You can make a long, narrow room look wider and shorter

by using a plain, light color on the long walls and a darker tone of this same color on the end walls. Using wood paneling or wallpaper on one wall gives your room a different structural appearance. It will also give the effect of shortening the room.

Sometimes a room looks too square. One way to make it look longer is to treat three walls alike and finish the fourth one in a harmonizing soft color or with wood paneling. If you decide to do this, give the darker wall the benefit of additional light by making it the wall opposite the windows.

WOODWORK: Color which contrasts with wall tone will accent wood trim. Blend the wood trim with the wall color to minimize badly placed windows and doors.

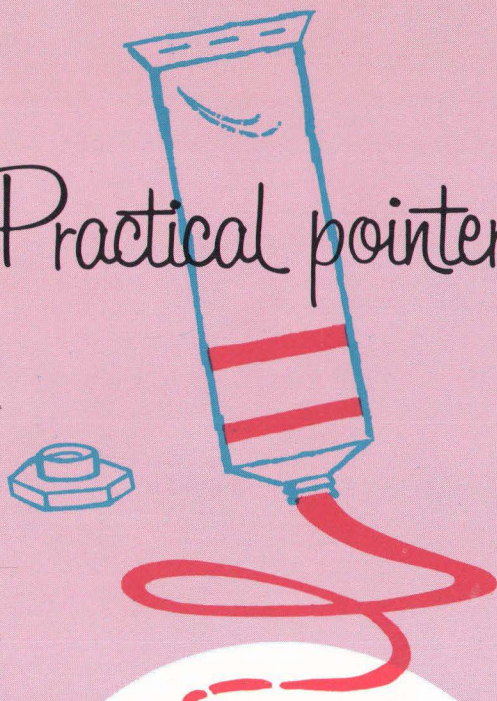
FLOOR COVERINGS: A bold-pattern floor covering will draw attention to the floor. A light-toned, plain-color floor covering will accentuate furnishings and accessories and reflect light.

CURTAINS AND DRAPERIES: Modern-day decorators consider these as part of the background. Window treatment in the living room or bedrooms may have color if you wish, but if the color is too bright or the pattern is too noticeable, the window may demand too much attention. Unless you wish to feature the window (and its view) as the main point of interest in your room, you will be wise to make window curtains and draperies play a quiet role. Like other background areas, they should stay in the background. Fortunately, today's lovely textured or sheer window fabrics in neutral or soft colors are excellent for the purpose. Use livelier colors and patterns in areas such as kitchen, recreation room, bathroom, and possibly the dining room.

PLANNING THE FOREGROUND

Now that the background is quietly working for you, put in the main furnishings which harmonize with the background—your furniture. Use colors you like, but choose grayed tones. (See "Know Its Intensity," page 11.) Use the more intense colors in accessories.

Practical pointers:



Use color and pattern to express the mood of a particular room. Example: The living room is the place where the family rests, entertains, reads and talks. Most people enjoy a quiet-colored, restful room. If there are books, plants and other accessories in the room, they will provide enough pattern.

Guide to follow: The more often the room is used, the quieter should be the general effect, with well-chosen accent notes to please the eye. This is usually true for the living area and bedrooms. The less often the room is used, or the fewer furnishings it has, the more color and pattern it may have. This would apply in general to the bathroom, recreation room, dining room, workroom, hallways and entrances.

A home is a single connected unit, not a skeleton of individual rooms. In planning color, use colors which will look well together throughout the house.

The light in the room, whether natural or artificial, also affects the appearance of the color. Before deciding on colors for the room, look at them under ordinary lighting conditions . . . when the sun shines, on a gray day or when the lights are on. See if the color still looks attractive.

Texture is as important as color in today's decorating trends. More and more interesting weaves are being produced that give our fabrics interesting

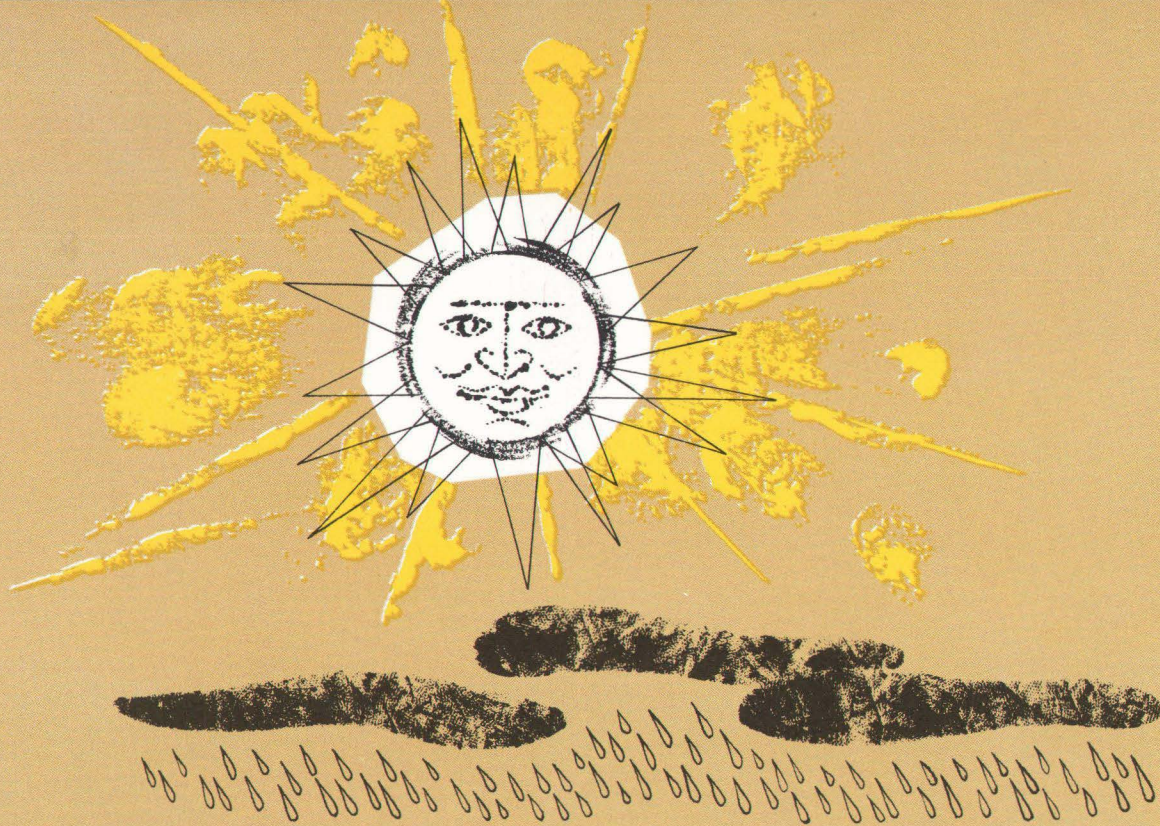
textures. We see wall surfaces of such textures and materials as brick, grasses and pebbly wallpapers.

Walls or materials that are flat and glossy with little or no texture, like shiny drapery fabric, enameled wood and high-gloss walls, reflect colors. This reflection increases the color effect. On the other hand, walls or materials with a rough surface soften colors, decrease reflection and apparent size.

Fabrics identical in color, but unlike in texture, sometimes appear different in color because of the softening effect of textures. A brighter color could be used better for a rough plastered wall than for a smooth plastered wall. The texture of the rough walls would tend to neutralize the brighter color.

Arrange colors so there is a feeling of "flowing." When colors are skillfully repeated in several places in a room, the eye travels rhythmically. A true decorator strives to "flow" the color combinations throughout the four sides of a room. Rhythm is that imaginary line which carries your eye easily from one place to another by repeating the color at least three times.

Color plans that are pleasing give the impression that they belong together. If you have used carefully the color plan you chose and carried it out according to the suggestions given, you will have achieved a harmony of color which others will enjoy.



GETTING TO KNOW COLOR

As the sun's rays glance through raindrops, we see the rainbow. Its range of colors blends almost mysteriously from one hue to another, but in an orderly fashion . . . from red to orange to yellow, then to the greens, blues, violets and back to the reds.

On the color wheel shown here you will find 12 colors arranged in the same sequence as in the rainbow, forming a circle. The outer ring of the circle shows the same colors in lightened form, called *tints*. The inside ring shows them darkened to form *shades*.

Each of the 12 colors on our color wheel is given a name. You will notice that red, yellow and blue, sometimes called the *primary colors*, are equally spaced around the circle. Halfway between them are orange, green and violet, sometimes called *secondary colors*. The secondary colors can be obtained by mixing the primaries in various combinations—red and yellow to make orange, red and blue to make violet, and blue and yellow to make green.

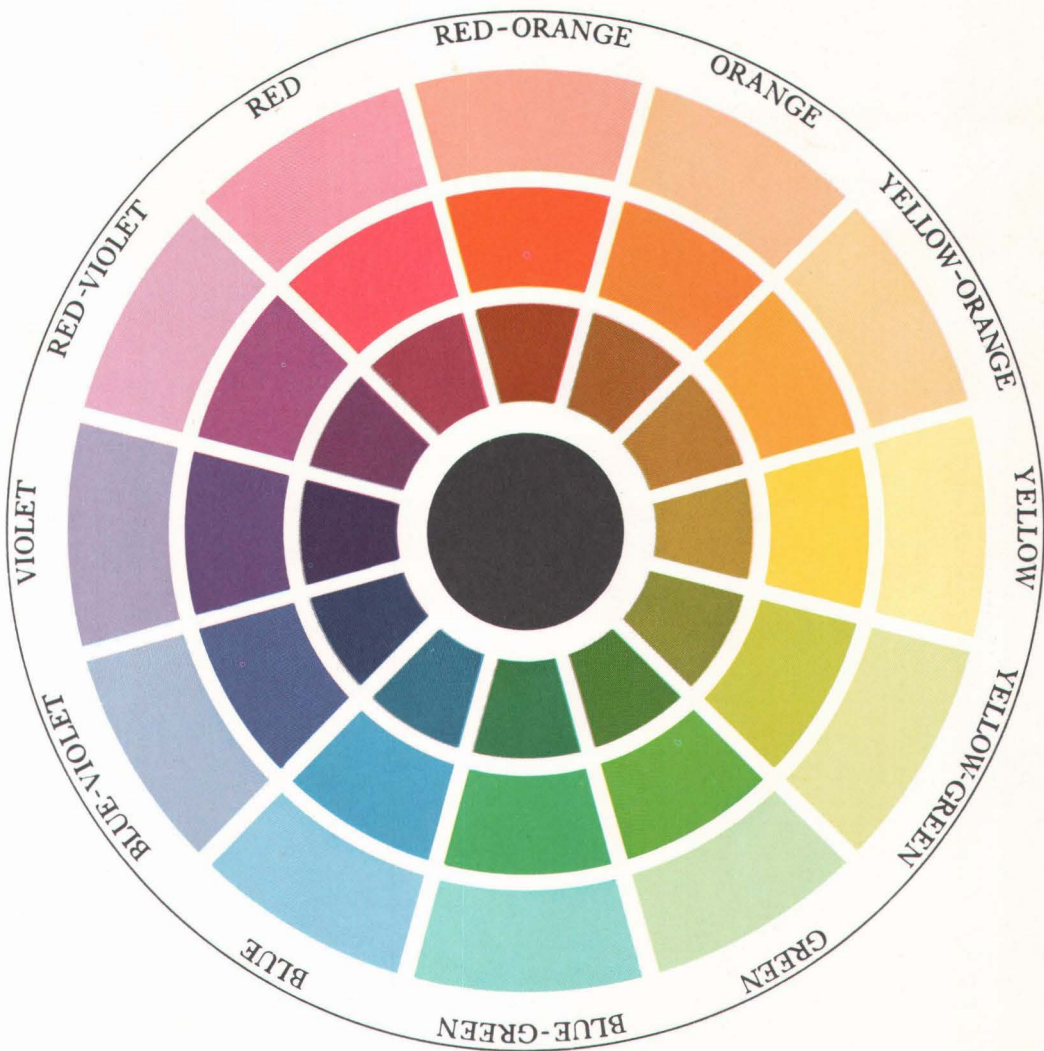
By further mixing of these six basic colors, we can obtain *intermediate colors*, represented on our color circle by yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange and yellow-orange.

There are hundreds of further intermediate steps possible by further mixing, but these 12 colors are sufficient to establish a complete circle and to serve as a reference guide.

NEUTRALS

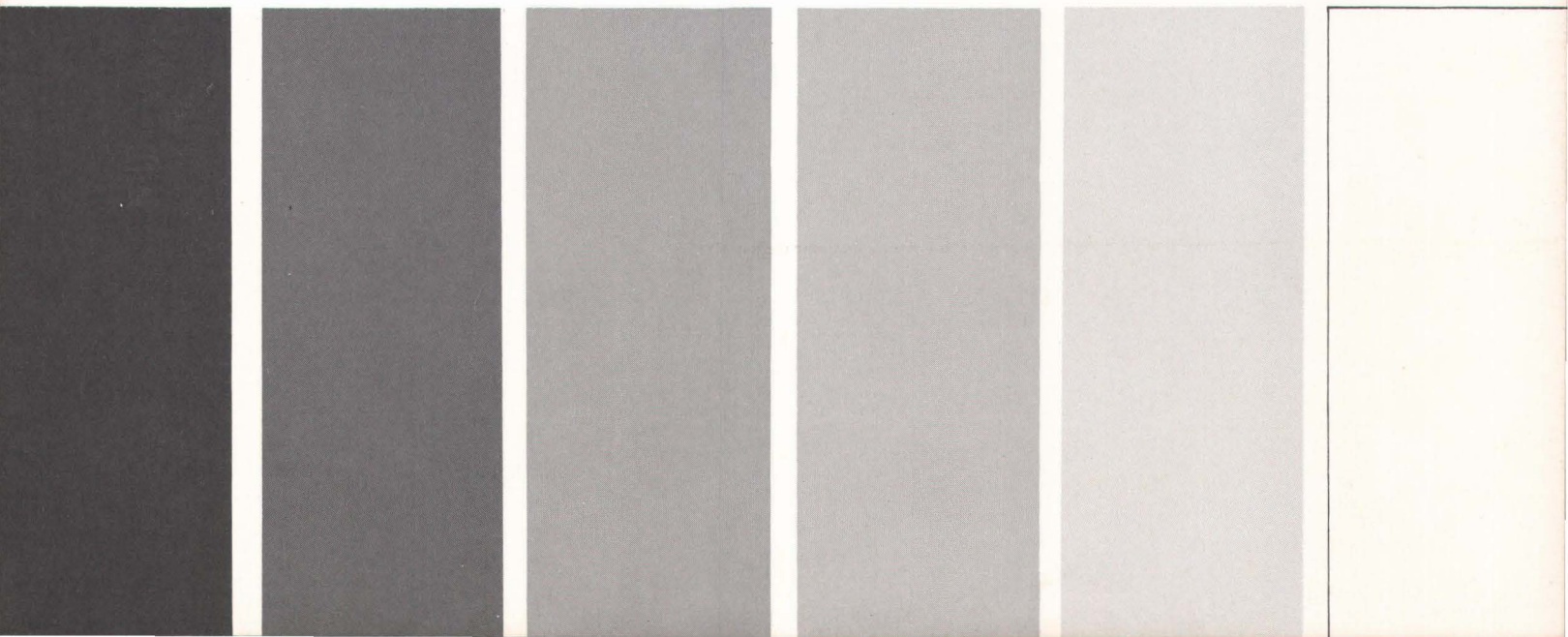
In addition to the 12 colors on our color wheel, there are the *neutrals*—black, white and gray. Grays can be obtained by mixing black and white in various amounts, according to how light or dark a gray is desired. A series of neutrals arranged in even steps from white to black is called a *gray scale*.

Another way to obtain gray by mixing is to combine two colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel, such as blue and orange. If mixed in the proper proportions (which may not be half and half—you will have to experiment), these two opposite colors will give you a completely neutral gray.



A COLOR WHEEL

A GRAY SCALE



Know Each Color for Itself

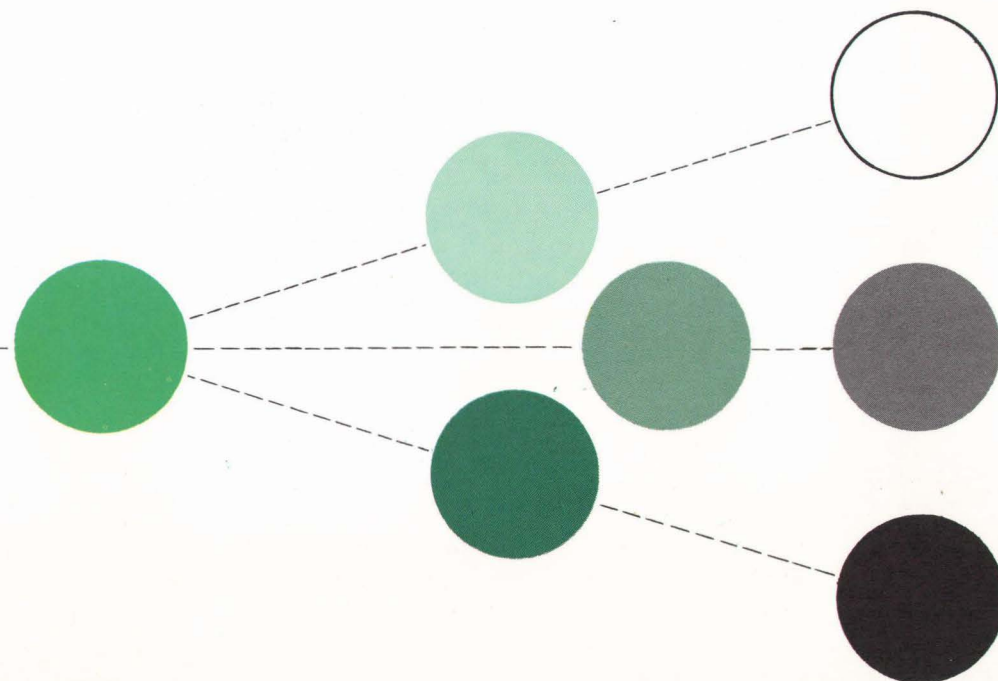
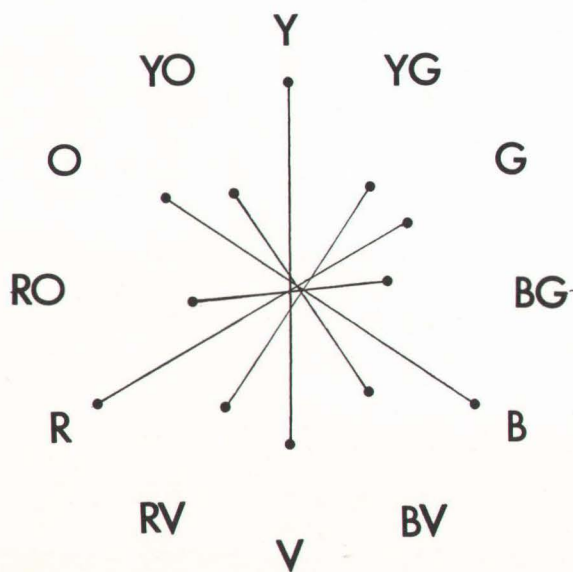
Your eye tells you three things about each color: *what* color—that is, its hue or name; its lightness or darkness—that is, its value (or tints and shades); and its brightness or dullness (intensity or lack of it). No color can be accurately described without reference to all three of these color qualities. All three qualities should be considered in planning any color scheme.

KNOW ITS HUE (family name)

Think of a color—turquoise for example. This brings a mental picture of blue-green color. Blue-green is on the color circle. The family name for any color on the color circle is *hue*. Thus, turquoise is the color, but blue-green is its family name or *hue*.

Consider the red family or hue. You know many members of this family by their common names—scarlet, crimson, cardinal, vermilion, ruby, rose, pink, magenta, cerise and others. Some tend to the red-violet hue and some tend toward the red-orange, but they are all in the total red color range. If you will think, not of the specific color name, but its hue (red, red-violet or red-orange), you will have it properly identified on the color circle.

You will find trade or current names for colors of rugs or upholstery, such as Adobe or Desert Sand—but



until you think of hue or family, you will not be able to locate the color on the color circle.

KNOW ITS VALUE (tints and shades)

In addition to its family name (hue), each color has its own value. Take the red hue of the color circle. It can vary from almost black (deep maroon) to almost white (very light pink or off-white with a pinkish cast) and still be red.

When you add white to a color, you change its value; you make the color lighter. Thus very light pink is a *light value* or *tint* of red. When you add black to a color, you change it to a darker value. Deep maroon is a *dark value* or *shade* of red. Think of the many tints and shades possible with each hue.

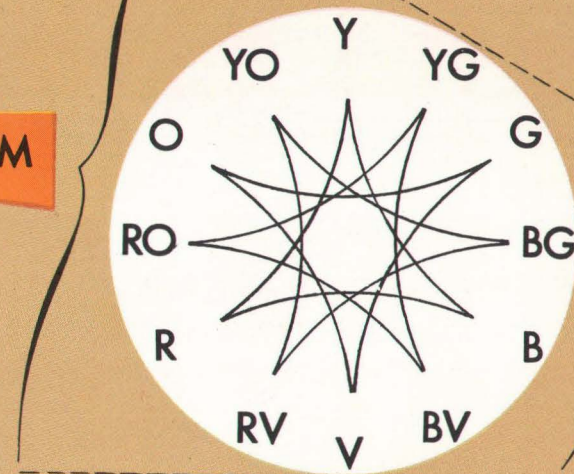
KNOW ITS INTENSITY (bright or dull)

It's possible to have many shades and tints of any hue. Think of the true red hue on the color circle, or the true yellow hue. Either is just as pure and intense and strong as it can be. It jumps right out at you.

Now the moment you change this true hue (1) by adding true gray, or (2) by adding complementary color from the opposite side of the color circle, you make it duller. You have changed the purity of the color. It can still be the same tint, but duller. Or it can still be the same shade, but duller. You have merely made it less strong, less intense.

As you add more true gray or more contrasting color to any hue, the resulting color becomes more neutral. These low-intensity colors are subdued and soothing. They are some of the most useful colors for home decorating. High-intensity colors are bright and stimulating. They should be used for accent.

WARM



COOL

Warm and Cool Colors

Some colors appear warm; others appear cool. Reds and yellows are considered warm colors; blues are usually cool. Look at the color circle. Hues from red-violet through yellow-green appear warm; hues from blue-green through violet appear cool.

A green may look warmer if it has more yellow in it, or cooler if blue is predominant.

Warm colors on walls tend to make a room appear smaller (especially in their middle or darker values and intensities; however, in lighter values they have the appearance of sunlight or light and can make the room seem quite large). Cool colors on walls make a room look larger; the colors seem to retreat, giving a feeling of space. (However, if the cool color is quite dark in value, as a dark blue, it could close in and make the room appear smaller.)

Now suppose you take a neutral—gray or tan, for example. If you add a warm color to it, the new color you have is a warm neutral. Or you could add a cool color to get a cool neutral.

MAKING COLOR WORK FOR YOU

Use dull or grayed or low-*intensity* colors for large areas (wallpaper, wall paint, woodwork, floor covering). They stay in the background.

Limit pure and intense hues to small areas (accessories). They shout. Keep them under control or they will get on your nerves.

Practical pointers:

When all colors in a room have the same degree of lightness (light value) or darkness (dark value), they give a quiet effect although they can lead to monotony because there is no contrast for relief.

When colors in a room have sharp contrasts between light and dark values (tints and shades), they draw attention to each other and fail to give a subtle effect.



USE TINTS

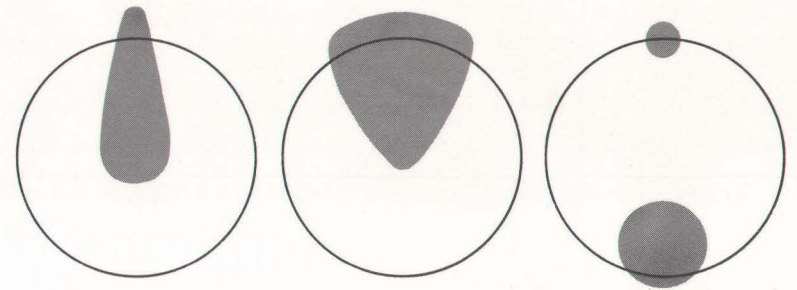
- . . . to make a small room appear larger.
- . . . to make a dark room appear lighter.
- . . . to make the ceiling of a room appear higher.

Tints (light values) reflect light. They make art objects and furnishings seen against them look larger.

USE SHADES

- . . . to make a large room appear smaller.
- . . . to make a light room appear darker.
- . . . to make the ceiling of a room appear lower.

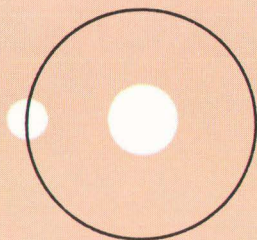
Shades (dark values) absorb light. They seem to reduce the size of any art objects and furnishings.



USING COLORS TOGETHER

You can take almost any combination of colors and make them look right together when you use tints and shades and bright and dull tones in the right amounts. A good rule to remember is: Use neighboring colors on the color circle to harmonize; use opposite colors to contrast or complement. There are other color arrangements or harmonies possible, but they are more difficult. In every color scheme the predominating large color areas should be grayed. Pure colors (not grayed, but intense) can be used successfully as accent colors.

Some examples of successful color combinations are described on the following pages.



NEUTRALS WITH ONE-COLOR ACCENT

This plan is simple, quite modern in effect and rather sophisticated in appearance.

How Developed

The plan uses white, lighter and darker values of gray, black and one accent color such as coral.

Larger areas use neutral tones.

Smaller areas, particularly some of the accessories, use the coral accent color.

Avoid too much pattern—for example, in draperies, upholstered furniture and rug.

Example

Off-white or light gray walls and woodwork.

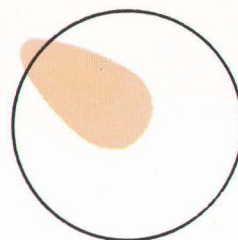
Textured rug of tweed effect using combination of black, white, gray fibers.

Davenport in gray tones which go with the wall color. Fabric could be a woven stripe giving a textured effect, or a simple damask pattern. Keep upholstery fabric plain if much pattern is used elsewhere in the room.

One or two fireside chairs with coral covers, or upholstered with fabrics containing coral thread.

Window fabric with design containing white, gray, black and coral, or white and coral design, or semi-sheer fabric with coral thread in it.

Plain color pillows in coral, black and/or gray. Lampshades in off-white with lamp base of appropriate color—possibly coral or black.



ONE-HUE COLOR PLAN

How Developed

The plan is built around tints and shades of one hue only.

Example: orange

Larger areas use the dulled and more neutral tone because these colors remain in the background.

Purer colors are more intense. Use them only in small quantity.

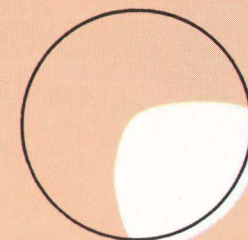
Example

Light tan or beige for walls and woodwork. (Tan is a very light and dulled tint of orange.)

Medium to darker browns in furniture and floor covering. (Brown is a dulled shade of orange.)

Sheer but textured curtains in rust (medium to darker value dulled orange).

Accent notes are in purer orange tones . . . pillows, books, flowers. Keep lampshades off-white.



NEIGHBORING COLOR PLAN

How Developed

The plan uses hues which lie next to each other on the color circle. *Example:* violet, blue and blue-green.

Two colors which seem a little too far apart on the color circle can be made to harmonize by introducing a third color found between them.

Because the color of furniture usually is neutral, the main color plan will predominate.

Example

Very light tint of blue-green on walls and woodwork.

Floor covering of dark and dull-toned blue-green color.

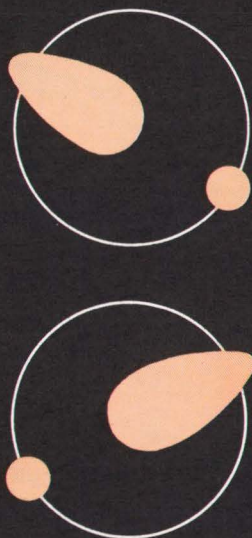
Davenport of textured fabric of blue, blue-green and violet. Occasional chair upholstered in violet color of medium value.

Curtains or draperies might be neutral such as creamy white, or semi-sheer textured of exact color of walls, or shades and tints of one or more colors predominating in room—as in a striped fabric.

For accessories use purer, clearer tones of violet, or blue or blue-green—as in pillows, bowls or vases. Keep lampshades off-white but choose lamp bases to fit with color scheme. Choose pictures which have some of the same color tones predominating.

HARMONY THROUGH SIMILARITY

HARMONY THROUGH CONTRAST



CONTRASTING COLOR PLAN

This is an effective way to use opposite or complementary colors together but is harder for a beginner to plan. The plan uses color which comes from hues opposite each other on the color circle. *Example:* orange and blue.

Such colors vie for attention. They complement each other. The blue makes the orange look more orange. The orange, likewise, emphasizes the blue.

Usually they need a neutral (white, gray) to counteract the competitive color.

In this example, orange—the warm color—predominates.

How Developed

In this color plan, you will note that orange plays the main role but is used in tints and shades depending on where used. Blue is the supporting color.

Not how orange is controlled and subdued as in light peach tones or in brown. True orange is much too “loud” to use in large areas.

Blue, in this case, can be brighter because it occurs in limited areas as in accessories.

Caution: Color tends to intensify itself (look stronger) when it occurs in large areas as on a wall. It may look five to ten times deeper. Be safe: Select such color in lighter tones to get the color you want.

Example

Walls and woodwork could be off-white with a faint peach tone, or even a light peach color.

Floor covering could be a solid, deep brown, or a textured tweed of tints and shades of brown, or a light buff color, depending on preference.

Curtains and draperies could be the same color as the wall, or white, or have a rich blue and brown design on a neutral background.

The colors used in the upholstered furniture will depend on the floor covering color you use. Avoid blue if the rug is a deep brown color. If the rug is light buff, the upholstered furniture could feature brown, blue tones and a touch of orange.

Use brighter blues in accessories (pictures, pillows, flowers, bowls, glassware, candles). Keep lampshades off-white in color.

CONTRASTING COLOR PLAN

This plan also uses colors which come from hues opposite each other on the color circle. *Example:* green and red.

However, in this case, the cool color—green—predominates. The red color plays a supporting role.

How Developed

The plan uses green in tints and shades throughout the room. Red, the more vibrant color, is kept to “surprise notes.”

Never use opposing colors in equal amounts in room decorating. The contrast is too strong. Let neutrals help control the color action.

Caution: When you use red, keep to the same hue, using tints and shades of it. If you choose red-orange, keep to this family.

Example

Walls and woodwork could be neutral, as an off-white or a grayed tint of green.

Floor covering could be textured or tweed effect in a deeper green. Its tone of green would be medium to dark in value and dull in intensity.

Curtains or draperies could be white or off-white.

Davenport could be slip-covered in a patterned fabric of red, green and black against a neutral background, or it could have a textured green upholstery to go with floor covering and wall color.

Occasional chairs might be upholstered or slip-covered in plain or patterned fabric in red.

Red color accents might be in pillows, books, well-chosen pictures.

Keep lampshades in off-white color. The lamp base may provide color accent.

LIVE WITH COLOR



Color fads may come and go, but a well-thought-out color plan for your home will always look right. This can be true if you live in a 50-year-old, two-story frame house or in a modern ranch-style house. You may have to live with the same furniture or within the same walls for many a year, but you do not have to live with tired and worn-out colors. Now that you know how to make the color you like work for you, why hesitate?