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A SOURCE INTERLINK MEDIA PUBLICATION

DESIGNING With Color

by Hope Simkowitz

Hope Simkowitz is an interior decorator in Waccabuc, New York, with a client base in New York City and Westchester County. Her work has been featured in *Better Homes and Gardens* (June 2012, "The Entertaining Issue") and in *Westchester Home Magazine* (Winter 2011).



EVERY decorating project is a different canvas with a different aesthetic, depending on the client's style and taste (e.g., traditional or modern), the client's age, the physical space being decorated, and the preexisting conditions to work around (rugs, furnishings, and so on). Use of color for any project will be dictated by these factors. What I bring to every project is experience and an innate understanding of color and composition.

Generally speaking, I prefer neutrals for background colors. I find them easier to live with, and they create a nice backdrop for other colors. When using colors other than creams and beiges for background, I like soft shadings—pale blues, pale yellows—a hint of color, usually the first or second choice from the top on a paint chip strip. This way, the color still reads as a "neutral" component.

I like to add most of the color in a room through accents—pillows, throws, accessories, or a surprise item such as an ottoman or footstool. A pop of one or two—not more—dominant accent colors can reveal the personality of a room. I like to keep these colors in similar depths of tone, not a contrast of one dark, one pale. This also allows the homeowners to make easy adjustments over the years as their tastes change, without breaking the bank.

Colors in open living spaces should flow from one space to the next, connecting adjacent areas. If an adjacent space has a different color palette, I like to thread some of the accent color from room to room. A patterned bathroom or hallway can provide a linking point where one color is picked up and a new one begins.

People don't always realize how important it is to choose the correct white. There are so many shades of white available—some are pinkish, others are yellowish, bluish, grayish, and so on. Some whites are very bright and stark, reflecting the light in a harsh way. I prefer whites that are toned down a bit.

My two favorite whites are Benjamin Moore's White Dove and Simply White. I use White Dove for multiple purposes—such as walls, cabinets, doors, and trim—and Simply White for ceilings, doors, and trim. Actually, I always paint ceilings Simply White. A white ceiling achieves a sense of height in any room and distinguishes the ceiling from the walls.

Kids' rooms are the exception to all my rules! Here is where I love using bright colors, with their high energy and cheerful quality.

You see here a pair of rooms that illustrate my color philosophy. In both spaces, the background is neutral, but each has a different effect, based on the blue that was selected. Neither of these rooms would work if the blues were reversed.

In the living room, I've used color only as an accent. The sofa, walls, window treatment, and flooring are all neutral beiges and grays. I chose the color aqua to give the room "pop" and to suggest youthful energy for this young family. The decor we replaced was primarily darker colors and heavier fabrics; by switching to a lighter palette and lighter fabrics, we've created a happier, more open space.

In the master bedroom, the client requested blue, and we both agreed that the room should feel relaxing and luxurious. The mood was already established by the wall-to-wall carpet, a pale blue and ivory pattern that blends with the soft neutrals on the wall covering, headboard, and club chairs. Window treatments and the interiors of the built-ins (not pictured) pick up the

blue again and contrast with white elements. Previously existing wallpaper and pale, greenish blue cabinetry had made the room feel closed in, but light neutrals opened it up and gave it a fresh, crisp feel. Blues repeat on the ottomans, and luxurious fabrics of varying textures—cut velvet and linen damask—keep the room interesting.

