



the **Art of Interior Design**  
selecting elements for distinctive styles

suzanne woloszynska

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**Suzanne Woloszynska**



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# Introduction

The complex, exhilarating, and satisfying world of interior design is like a vast, colourful map illustrating a whole universe waiting to be explored. Whether you are starting out on a completely new decorating odyssey, without any previous experience, or you are seeking inspiration to revitalize the existing decoration of your home, *Style for Living* provides the signposts, symbols, and languages you will need to guide you on the journey.

A foundation of know-how goes a long way to helping you make the right decorative choices. This book aims to equip you with that information by providing an insight into the history of decoration, the way colour works, how materials can be mixed and placed to best advantage, and what finishing touches you can utilize to bring the whole room together, therefore giving you a sound, overall background in decorating ideas.

Decorating is an emotive art, touched by historical precedent, fashion and global culture, technological advances, and constant media bombardment. There is also a place for individual input, the unique personality and innovation that is part of the decorating game. You will find many suggestions in this book to help you avoid major mishaps, but never be afraid to experiment or make changes to the original idea as you go along. To channel what we see, hear, read, or need into a cohesive, satisfying scheme may not seem easy, but it will always be fun, informative, and ultimately rewarding. Indeed, the whole concept of design has never been so accessible or as widely discussed and exhibited as it is today.

Before you begin decoration there are the fundamental decisions to be made about structural alterations, electrics, plumbing, and heating, and possible changes to architectural fixtures. Once these have been made, with the help of accredited professionals and with planning permission where necessary, you can get to the fun decorating part. The framework of a room is composed of vertical and horizontal surfaces related to the architectural elements such as the windows, doors, and fireplace. The decorative scheme is born through colour, pattern, texture, and lighting chosen for function, suitability, budget, and, above all, personal preferences. Naturally, if you are setting out with an empty new home, you will approach the decorative planning with a different perspective than if you are adapting what is already in place.

The starting point may well be different for each individual, but the stimulus for the project will probably come from a single spark of inspiration. Keep your mind and eyes open to idea sources at all times, because they can appear from anywhere. You might love the colours in a fragment of antique embroidery, an oil painting, or an Indian sari, or even

**Opposite** Before you begin to decorate your home, look carefully at the room and think about exactly what you are trying to achieve. Choose a style that will complement rather than compete with the existing features. Here, the historical elements of the house have been complemented by using carefully chosen furniture and decorative pieces.



**Above** Look around you for design elements and bits and pieces that you find pleasing. Cutting attractive pictures from magazines will help you to discover where your decorative preferences lie. Here, a “storyboard” of materials, fabrics, and accessories in jewel-bright colours has been assembled for inspiration. This eclectic array of items already suggests a coherent design idea.

the textures in a vegetable market. Keep a note of your likes and dislikes as you collect colour and fabric references, swatches, paint cards and tester pots, hard surface samples, and trimmings. Look for decent-sized samples, especially if the repeat is large. Magazines, in-store catalogues, postcards, and photographs all add to the raft of inspiration, but do bear in mind that the colours in magazine photographs are often distorted by lighting and printing. Gather items for inspiration, such as seashells, feathers, polished pebbles, leaves, a straw basket, a tapestry cushion, a patinated jug – anything to stimulate the senses and help you focus on key theme and texture combinations.

Make your first choice of favourite colours and materials for the major components of wall surface, window treatment, and furnishing fabrics, attaching

them to a large board in various combinations. Relate each element to its site and application. Look at colour and pattern combinations in their relative proportions. Cut samples to comparative size where possible. Move the samples around, visualizing the effect when different colours and patterns are put together in various combinations. If you prefer a painted finish paper, paint big pieces of lining paper with a number of possible colours and tape them, one at a time, to the wall, scrutinizing each in various lights, from bright sunshine and electric lighting to candle-glow.

Start adding to the design board the secondary ingredients, such as trimmings, cushion fabrics, flooring material, and the vital, subtle decorative accessories. Personal adjustments draw together, highlight, and set off the design. For example, you might paint a thin contrast line below the cornice, move a colourful picture to reset the focal point of the room, or add another table lamp to soften the shadows in a dark corner. Perhaps the sofa needs a luxurious throw for texture contrast, or a pile of gem-coloured silk cushions. Inevitably, these decorative exclamation marks will present themselves as the overall picture comes together.

The greatest design influences have often lain in what is practical, cheap, and accessible. The terracotta soil of Tuscany, for example, is fundamental to the picturesque identity of the area. The Japanese traditionally use local timber, bark, straw, and rice-paper so homes can be easily rebuilt after an earthquake or typhoon, and because of their philosophy to live in harmony with nature. The bamboo plant of Indonesia provides not only a basic building material, but also the source for furniture, flooring, mats, baskets, storage boxes



and other items. Spiritual symbolism also influences many aspects of design detail. Examples are the Islamic motifs that appear in architectural adornment and carpet design, the Shaker use of colour as a reflection of Heaven, and the application of the Zen ideology that creates an aura of tranquil contemplation.

When you choose a decorative style for your home you are participating in a great tradition of interior design that has developed over hundreds of years. The evolution of decorative style has been woven into a rich tapestry of invention, creation, and embellishment, whose progression is shaped by the historical, social, and cultural influences of

**Above** It is undoubtedly the little things that matter. In this elegant room the correct choice of finishing touches is essential. The sumptuous soft furnishings make the room comfortable and luxurious, and the subtle lighting brings the scheme together in a truly welcoming environment.

**Right** Whether consciously or not, we are all influenced by the decorative styles of the past, but we are free to interpret ideas in any way we want. This charming sitting room is obviously influenced by traditional floral styles, which complement the high ceilings and tall, elegant windows in the original architecture.



the period. The effects of global trade, for example, led to the intermittent introduction of new dyes. More sophisticated glass production methods allowed larger windows and glazed doors to be produced, therefore affording better natural light and creating scope for more elaborate curtain design. When candlelight and firelight were superseded by brighter, safer and eventually cleaner lighting methods, people viewed and used their houses in new ways, and consequently adopted different colours, furnishings, and materials. The expansion of industrialization and colonialism and more accessible foreign travel and trading, produced an abundance of innovative products. It also brought about a greater interest in

other cultures, and an influx of social influences that had a huge effect on the breadth of design and style potential available to an increasingly affluent and acquisitive society.

The *Choosing a Style* section presents a range of historical and cultural styles and will help to give you the confidence to mix these ingredients within a contemporary setting for an integrated look. Do not feel obliged to follow a style too closely – let it evolve and include elements from a variety of eras and sources. A period flavour is not difficult to conjure using key colours, materials, and styling, and there are many historic document designs available. Setting the scene with colour or textural direction can suffice to create a sense of time and place.

When it comes to colour, people have instinctive likes and dislikes. Colour is fundamental to the direction of any interior scheme, so thinking about why you like a particular colour and how it works in association with others will help you to realize its full potential and side-step common errors. It is impossible to adequately describe in words such a subtle visual theme as colour, but you will come across some descriptive terms while putting together your design, in particular hue, intensity, and tone. Hue describes a colour in pure form in the colour spectrum – red, blue, or green, for example. Intensity relates to the brightness or denseness of a hue – the maximum being strong and bright, while its opposite is knocked-back or dulled. Tone defines the gradation from light to dark and from cool to warm. Shades are the darker tones of the hue, and tints are the lighter tones.

The translation of colour depends on the setting, the size of the room, the association with other colours, and lighting. The second section, *Choosing a Colour Scheme*, looks at a number of possible colour combinations for the various rooms in the house. Different perspectives, materials, and surfaces react to light in unique ways. On a vertical, matt surface, you will see a different hue than with a satin finish on a horizontal surface, for example. Obviously, daylight and candlelight create different moods and therefore a room mostly used at night, or a small, intimate room, will favour dark colours that look seductive and comforting when softly lit. Different qualities of natural light also have a profound optical influence. Strong colours in the clear sunlight of the Mediterranean look clean and bright, whereas the same hues in grey Northern light can appear harsh. Likewise, neutral, muted

shades hold their colour better in temperate climates than in sunny ones.

Various materials and paints work differently with light and colour, too. Oily, transparent paints intensify colour, as do lightweight, sheer fabrics, while matt paint and materials are non-reflective and look softer. Optical perception of colour plays tricks, too. A red wall will advance and make a

**Below** Global influences, as well as historical ones, can be the precursor to a complete room theme. The colours, fabrics, motifs, and details used in this small room are obviously inspired by travel, whether real or through the pages of a guidebook.



room look smaller, while blue recedes and can promote a sense of spaciousness. Yellow yells for attention and is softer and easier when used as a broken effect, such as a colourwash. Choose from warm and cool colours to create the room's atmosphere; greys, blues, and violets are usually cool colours, while orange-yellow, orange, and red are warm. Green tones cover a broad band in the colour wheel and are generally restful and easy to intermix, as in nature. A scheme that uses one colour in various guises, plus a neutral or white, is called monochromatic and is an easily created, effective look. A flash of colour is a professional decorator's trick that will inject a single point of contrast unrelated to the foundation theme.

**Below** Colour can transform the look of a room like no other element. It is relatively inexpensive to ring the changes by introducing a different hue. The bright ice-cream colours of the chair and woodwork could easily be replaced by muted alternatives for a more relaxed, tranquil look.



The way colours are juxtaposed will affect their impact dramatically. Primary colours used together need to appear in different proportions or they will fight for dominance, creating an uncomfortable effect. Colours of the same tonal range or intensity however, can be used together in harmony. Be aware though, that some colours, for example blues, are tricky when there are only two, but if you add a third or fourth they will all tie together, especially when they are partnered with white.

As well as colour, there are also the basic elements of the room to consider when planning your scheme. As walls are the largest surfaces, their treatment is key. Paint is cheap, quick, and versatile and comes in a vast range of colours and finishes, from transparent glazes to chalky, matt textures. Wallpaper provides powerful style identity and can change the geometry of a room. Trailing florals, trellis, scrolling patterns, and all-over designs are all adept at softening difficult architectural lines.

Whether to add architectural details such as picture and dado rails, friezes, and cornices causes much consternation and some mistakes. Check the historical style and room proportions warrant it, and make sure additions are correctly positioned and of appropriate moulding. Today, these details are often used to form a boundary between decorative treatments within the room.

Window treatments reflect the room's style and spirit. Instead of skimping on expensive fabric, use a cheaper material in the right quantity combined with smart detail and, if feasible, contrast lining. Ticking, checks, thin stripes, or a tiny diaper pattern look smart and help to unify the exterior view. Fabric can also be used on the walls, either loosely hung in an informal way or battened and





finished with braid or gimp. The result is a softly-textured effect that dampens sound. Flooring helps to visually underline and anchor the decorative composition. It is always worth buying the best quality carpet you can afford, where used, relevant to its placement. Rugs are an attractive option and provide a good visual link between areas.

The final section, *Choosing Finishing Touches*, looks at the accessories and details that complete the decorative scheme, from lighting and soft furnishings to vases, frames, mirrors, and collections. The right details can help you to transform a room with a minimum of fuss, and accessories can often provide an inexpensive means of suggesting a particular decorative style. Information is given on choosing and sourcing all

sorts of accessories and how to display them to the best practical and decorative effect.

All three chapters feature detailed text, with colour photographs to illustrate the ideas. The first two chapters include material swatches chosen to suit the type of scheme being discussed. None of the information is intended to be followed exactly, instead, I hope that you will consider the concepts as a means to creating your own style. When designing today's domestic interior we can choose from a melting pot of decorative idioms to evolve a look that suits our environment, fulfils our aesthetic needs, and reflects our lifestyle. What suits one person will not please another, but everybody has within them the spark of inspiration that will produce a characterful and satisfying interior style.

**Above** The perfect place to unwind at the end of the day. You may decide to choose restful, muted colours to evoke a relaxed ambience in the bedroom. When choosing colours, think about all the functions of the room and pick a scheme that embodies the predominant mood.