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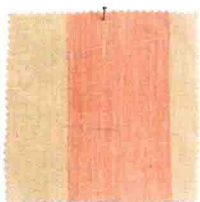
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INTRODUCTION

Why is it that some of us can juggle career and family with aplomb, master the art of French cooking with finesse, and comprehend Proust and his madeleines, yet when it comes to choosing fabrics for our homes, our knees turn to jelly? It's a lot trickier than the decisions we're faced with on a daily basis: Paper or plastic? Regular or decaf? Booth or table?

Perhaps the dilemma lies in the number of fabrics from which to choose. There's cotton, the workhorse of the design world that's appropriate for curtains, upholstery, tablecloths, even lampshades. (No wonder it was a favorite of design legend Billy Baldwin.) Silk is nice for window treatments or pillows, but beware this delicate fabric on high-traffic furniture. Linen is always chic and perfect for cool, breezy rooms, but if you are allergic to wrinkles, it might not be for you. And chenille? Children and pets are no match for this durable fabric, something to remember when



In her Ojai, California home, designer **KATHRYN M. IRELAND** went for a brilliant mix of color and pattern. Color-saturated fabrics pack a bold punch in her guest bedroom: The bed-spread and pillowcases with suns are from her latest collection, *Sun in Pink*. The bolster pillow is made from an antique suzani.

you want your sofas and chairs to wear like armor and stand up to little hand and paw prints.

Another consideration is pattern. Of course, solids are easy to work with, but a room with all solids and no pattern makes for a dull room. (Insert texture in place of pattern and the same rings true, but we'll get to that in a minute). There are stripes, checks, plaids, dots, damasks, florals, geometrics, animal prints, and trees of life. It's enough to make one tongue-tied and bleary-eyed! Let's say you pick a solid for your sofa and a floral print for your draperies (in the same or complimentary color family, mind you). Inevitably, you end up feeling like an old pro. But don't rest on your laurels; you still have some work to do. What about the pillows on your sofa? Are you going to be safe and stick with yet another solid? Or are you going to take a walk on the wild side and go with an animal print? And how about that ottoman coffee table in front of the sofa? A stripe? A plaid?

But let's not stop there. Here's where texture comes into play. Are you feeling sporty? Maybe you want to use a ribbed fabric (think corduroy). Want some sheen? How about a glazed cotton? Need something rustic for your Belgian-inspired home? A nubby linen in a neutral color might



In this den by designer **TOM SCHEERER**, bold concentric circles of a custom braided-wool rug play up the curves of twin bergères à la reine in a blue Hinson linen. Curly Mongolian lamb's wool covers an ottoman, and the striped sofa is in Jane Shelton Staten ticking with pillows in a Raoul Textiles floral, Secret Garden.



Lively patterns and a mix of seating give this dining area an informal look and sense of fun. **PATRICIA HEALING** and **DANIEL BARSANTI**, with the help of their senior designer **CHRIS DESMONE**, covered a generous banquette in Sari Majolica by Raoul Textiles and paired it with shield-back chairs upholstered in far-from-traditional leather.

be just the thing. And this brings us to that other consideration: color. Color is one of the most important components to the fabric conundrum. After all, isn't color the first thing you see when you walk into a room?

So, after that litany of questions and all the decisions you face, it's no wonder that choosing fabrics can be a very daunting task. What are we to do? *House Beautiful* heard those cries of despair and enlisted top designers to share their wisdom with us, the reader, in the "Instant Room" column. In each column, a designer takes us through the decision making process, explaining why certain fabrics and prints work well together. (Who knew that one room could handle a plaid, a floral, and an animal print—and that they look divine together?) Each designer chooses a master fabric, and then lists numerous options of solids and prints that would work with their selection, leaving the ultimate decision up to us. The fabrics that you choose are almost like answers to a multiple choice question—but no answer is incorrect. Sounds like the odds are in our favor!

Because "Instant Room" has proven to be so popular, the editors decided to compile the column's nuggets of wisdom into this handy guide