

Colors
for
Living

Living Rooms



ROCKPORT

Melinda Levine

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 6

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

COLOR AND LIVING 8

THE MOOD OF A ROOM

THE SHAPE OF COLOR

PATTERN AND TEXTURE

LIGHT AND COLOR

A SHORT HISTORY OF COLOR

THE COLOR SCHEME

THE SCIENCE OF COLOR

BEFORE YOU START

CRISP NEUTRALS 22

CLASSIC WHITE, BEIGE, BLACK, AND GRAY

Bright White, Linen White, Fawn, Cashmere, Metal Black, Linen Tan

ROMANTIC PASTELS 38

SOFT, DREAMY TINTS

Pink Rose, Custard Yellow, Mandarin Ice, Soft Plum, Pale Ocean, Blue Sea

WARM EARTH TONES 54

THE TERRA-COTTA RANGE AND NATURALS

Terra-cotta, Warm White, Brown Scarlet, Soft Amber, Natural Wood, Black Stone

A FIERY PALETTE 68

RED HUES ABLAZE

Grenadine Orange, Flame Red, Chinese Red, Glaze Red, Maple Red, Soft Berry

EXOTIC RHYTHMS 78

NATURALS AND BRIGHTS TOGETHER

Soft Red, Night Shade, Leather Green, Stucco Gray, Deep Flax, Gold Pumpkin

SKY AND GRASS 88

BLUE, GREEN, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

Cornflower, Flag Blue, Deep Iris, Teal, Pine Needle Green, Agate Green

UNEXPECTED COMBINATIONS 108

SOARING SURPRISES

Bright Gold, Blue Periwinkle, Creamy Orange, Icy Blue Green, Clear Purple, Dark Rose

COLOR SWATCHES 116

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 127

DIRECTORY 128

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BY MELINDA LEVINE

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHERS: RUSSELL ABRAHAM AND KENNETH RICE



Dedication

*To the colorful Ken and Mo:
Thanks for your abounding patience with a
project that kept getting bigger.*

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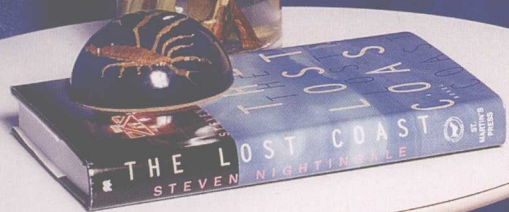


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COLOR SWATCHES 116

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 127

DIRECTORY 128



INTRODUCTION



The success of your living room depends on the strength of its parts—color, architecture, furnishings, surface treatments—and how they complement one another. A well-coordinated combination of disparate elements—shape of space, proportions, lighting, forms, textures, function, and color—will virtually guarantee good design and a living room made for living. This book is dedicated to the single most important and influential of these elements: color.

In any living room, there are three basic areas of color: the walls and floors, the upholstery and window coverings, and the accents: art, pillows, and accessories. If one of these color areas is out of balance, it will upset the design and ambience of the entire room. Even the same two colors can create strikingly different effects when used in different proportions. For example, the calm atmosphere of a room that is predominantly gray green and has chief accents in turquoise would take on an entirely different mood if the color ratio were reversed: a turquoise room with flashes of gray green.

There are no hard-and-fast rules about color. Although certain colors are rarely seen together in living rooms, almost any color will work in combination with any other color if hue, tone, and tint are balanced. And today, color choices are more varied than ever. Bold, adventurous colors are right at home in the living room; so are pale, weathered naturals—

and every color in between. Wall treatments are rich and layered; color is no longer just painted on but, rather, is built up. The resulting finish is a rich, deep, and complex patina, often revealing—as parchment or marble would—a range of shades within.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Although most of the rooms illustrated in this book were designed by professionals, you, too, can design the living room of your dreams. Use this book as a source for ideas that work. Select the color schemes that you like—a palette accompanies each photograph—and start your plan there. Color is the first building block. Once that is in place, other design decisions become less intimidating, even enjoyable!

The color samples in the back of the book represent the individual palettes arranged in color-wheel, or rainbow, order. Browse through these, and when you find a color that you like, turn to the page listed for an example of a palette using that color.

Before you choose your colors, consider the mood you want for your room: tranquil, restful, joyous, romantic, or energetic. In the first chapter, read about mood and color—nothing will affect mood as much as color will—then visit the interiors that follow, and begin to think about your color choices. It is that easy. What are you waiting for?



*A limited palette—white, black,
and soaring red—creates a
distinctive space.*

COLOR AND LIVING



Color is a magician. It can instantly transform a living room from a plain beige box to a glowing green-blue jewel, from a nondescript white room to a sunny yellow and violet sanctuary, from an everyday gray cube to a distinctive space of white, black, and soaring red. Color can alter the appearance of space—it can push away walls or bring them forward. Color can make a small room seem larger; a dark room, lighter. Color can impart a range of moods, from cool and aloof to warm and intimate. A flick of a paint-laden brush, the placement of a vivid carpet, or a toss of some brilliant silk pillows, can instantly change the atmosphere of a room, like magic.

Color can emphasize architectural features or cover them up. Here, the deep teal accentuates the geometry of the fireplace mantel.



Photo: Russell Abraham
Design: Cody Associates

THE MOOD OF A ROOM

Color is powerful, but, ultimately, our subjective response to a certain color is what determines its real impact. Color can make us feel excited, happy, nervous, soothed, or sad. Some people feel closed in by a living room with maroon or navy walls and overwhelmed by so much color intensity. But to others, those deeply colored walls seem friendly and comforting. Most people find off-white, beige, and pale green restful and pleasant. Yet some find that a room with these colors is too calm, even boring, unless it is perked up by brilliant accents.

Certain colors can influence mood somewhat predictably. Red is an exciting color; red walls, carpets, or prominent accessories are often used in restaurants to stimulate diners' appetites. Yellow is cheerful; like a sunny day, it makes us feel good. Blue, the color of the ocean and sky, is tranquil, but too much can be depressing. Green is refreshing, like a summer walk in a forest. We make babies' rooms feel soft and soothing with pastels of pink, blue, green, and yellow. Few parents would risk using hot pink, wild zebra stripes, or red with electric blue trim for the nursery walls. But in a living room, bold color schemes can work. Deciding on the mood you want to convey is the first step in the decorating process.

THE SHAPE OF COLOR

Color can change the apparent shape of space, emphasize or cover up architecture, complement proportions, and enhance or reduce the energy of a room. Dark colors make a wall recede, and light colors bring it forward. Wall and ceiling color can accentuate beautiful architectural details such as lintels, scroll friezes, bas-reliefs, exposed beams, and wainscoting. Contrasting colors can dramatically emphasize carved moldings or trim. Color can also downplay the faults of a room: lumpy walls, boring cubelike shapes, low ceilings, less-than-seamless renovations. Nothing compensates for the imperfections of a wall as well as a rich, deep coat of paint.

Conventional wisdom says that if you have a tiny room, you have to paint it white or a very pale tint to make it appear larger. Yet light wall tints should be used with care. They certainly make a room look more spacious and airy, but the result can be monotonous unless darker shades and contrasting colors are worked into the scheme. But, if we decide to fly in the face of convention and paint that tiny, boring white cube a brilliant aquamarine, suddenly we have a glowing jewel of a space. Although the actual square footage of the room did not grow one inch, the color choice has creatively compensated for the deficiency of the room.

Subtly contrasting colors bring out the detailed patterns of the ceiling in this room.



Photo: Kenneth Rice
Design: Marks & Marks Design

PATTERN AND TEXTURE

You can add color to a room by the walls, furnishings, floor and window treatments, and accessories, using solid colors or patterns. In interior design, mixing patterns has moved in and out of favor over the centuries, and today it has become fashionable again. Contemporary living rooms, even those with traditional decor, use contrasting patterns in abundance. It is a busy, eclectic look, but one that is also warm and inviting. The secret to the success of matching patterns is that they must be related in some way. For example, each pattern in the motif shares a color—perhaps a theme of coral running through all the prints—or a similar repeating shape.

In more exotic-looking living rooms, especially those featuring ethnic elements and folk art, there is a compelling mix of bold and subtle pattern, texture, and color: handwoven and knotted kilims; African mudcloth pillows, drapes, or upholstery; deeply etched and patterned brass tables from India; Mexican or African masks; vibrant batiked Indonesian cloths; brightly painted and detailed Oaxacan wood animals; and

Japanese ikat pillows and throws. The possibilities of pattern and color combinations are as broad as the globe itself.

Too bold a pattern on the walls limits the number of patterns you can successfully use within a room. Regardless of the style or amount of ornamentation, there should be an area in the room where your eye can rest. Use a solid color on an expanse of wall or carpet, or let the drapes or upholstery punctuate the room with solid blocks of color. If you are shy about combining bold patterns, save them for window or floor treatments, upholstery, and accents, rather than for walls.

Texture is another, subtler way to bring pattern and color to a room. Rattan furniture, upholstery with a deep, distinctive weave, fibrous wall coverings, embossed or coarsely woven drapes, and coir or cable-weave floor coverings all contribute a quiet rhythm of pattern and textured color. And this texture can be enhanced by light. Light plays upon textured surfaces and creates highlights and shadows; raised areas reflect light, and recessed areas trap shadows.

For a combination of patterns to be successful, as in this living room, there must be a consistent link between the colors or designs of the patterns. Here, rose or green tones appear in all the fabrics.



Light plays a key role in the color scheme of your living room. Here, well-placed lights bathe the room in a soft glow.

Photo: Kenneth Rice
Design: Jan Moyer Design, ASID



LIGHT AND COLOR

No single factor affects the color of your living room more than light. Light makes a reflective surface look lighter; glossy walls appear much lighter and brighter than matte walls of the same hue. Although dark colors recede and light colors move forward, a dark wall can be made to move forward—visually, that is—with the proper lighting directed on it.

Test colors under different lighting conditions. It is always best to select your colors under the same lighting you will use at home. A color looks paler in a sun-drenched room than it looks at night, of course. No amount of incandescent

lighting can make up for the absence of sun. Daylight flatters most colors. Incandescent lighting highlights yellow and red, but dulls blue and violet. Uncorrected fluorescent lighting has a decidedly blue cast. Color-corrected fluorescent lighting, which now is the standard, emits light that is almost identical to that of an incandescent lamp.

The exposure of the living room windows also affects color. Northern light is cool, with hints of green. Southern light is warm and pink. Western light is red orange. Eastern light, harsh with a yellowish hue, bleaches out the appearance of the colors it touches.

A SHORT HISTORY OF COLOR

Before the nineteenth century, when synthetic dyes were developed, there were limited choices of paint and fabric colors for living rooms. Paint pigments were natural and came from the earth. Fabric dyes were made primarily from plants and vegetables. The resulting palette, though serviceable, was muted: gray, red, green, brown, chalk white, terra-cotta, tan, and umber. The few brilliant, pure colors available were costly and derived from precious sources: gold, cobalt, ruby, and lapis lazuli.

In the nineteenth century, the drama of the decorative palette began to heighten. Brilliant synthetic dyes were produced and, as a result, a wider and more affordable range of colors transformed walls and furnishings. These new colors, such as bright pink, yellow, and magenta, seemed almost garish compared with the sturdy and somber earth- and vegetable-based colors.

In the 1920s, a brilliant white paint was developed that became the standard of sophistication and architectural purity. Stark white walls were a way to highlight the architecture of a room and make details stand out. Since the 1920s, a modernist aesthetic in the living room has meant white walls.

In the decades since the 1920s, many color preferences,

such as the pale tints—safe and timid—of the 1950s, have emerged and declined. In the past decade, high color, especially on walls, has begun to challenge neutrals and tints.

Today, color is intense, vibrant, strong, and brilliant—more saturated than in previous decades. A raucous, eclectic blending of patterns, plaids, and wild colors has become a common sight in contemporary living rooms. The bright chrome green of the 1990s makes the pale green tint of the 1950s seem anemic.

Wall color is more expressive than ever. No one simply paints color on the wall anymore—surfaces are rag-rolled, stippled, glazed, combed, stenciled, and highlighted with trompe l'oeil motifs. These treatments are often complex, and the result is a many layered, rich patina of color and texture.

We are now more experimental about color combinations. Neutral doesn't have to mean the old standby gray, beige, white, or black. The classic neutrals are being challenged by the new neutrals. Today, a neutral is any color that blends well with the prevailing colors in a room. Maroon can be a neutral in a room of pink, blue, gray, and purple; deep olive can work as the neutral in a room of blue, black, and yellow.



Photo: Kenneth Rice
Design: First Impressions

*Think of the wall as a blank canvas;
here, soft color is built up, complex,
and expressive.*