

Secrets From a Pro

Remember going back to school, when you were a kid? If you were lucky, along with the loose-leaf paper, the pencils and the protractor, you got the big box of Crayola crayons. You know — the deluxe selection, the mac-daddy. Just beneath that cardboard flip-top lid lay a world of infinite possibility — a place beyond yellow, red and blue. At your fingertips were exotic hues of orchid, periwinkle, cornflower, bittersweet and plum. You couldn't wait to dive in. It was simply glorious.

But as we move into adulthood, many of us lose our youthful exuberance for color. "Color scares the bejabbers out of people," says Sandy LeRoy, color and home styling consultant for Sterling Property Services in Flat Rock. "They're terrified of making a mistake. But I believe that there's no such thing as an ugly color — it's just a matter of context and purpose."

SPIN THE WHEEL

The color wheel, anchored by the holy trinity of blue, red and yellow, surrounded by their combined spectrum, is a good place to begin to understand how colors relate to each other. Among the basic concepts to be grasped here are those of complementary colors, which are opposite each other on the wheel, and analogous colors, which sit beside each other.

Still, Sandy realizes that color theory can be daunting to the novice. "I find it best to simplify the approach," she

says "I tend to put colors into the blue family, which is cool, or the yellow family, which is warm. That may be an oversimplification, but it's practical."

KNOW THE LAW

The law of simultaneous contrast of color, that is. When you have two colors side by side, their like components cancel each other out, so the contrasting elements become more pronounced. Simply put, this means that contrasting colors, which possess no common elements will present a very vibrant dynamic against each other, and the subtle differences between analogous colors will become more pronounced.

A MATTER OF VALUE

Light Reflectance Value (LRV) is a numerical value from 0% (absolute black) to 100% (a pure reflective

white). Similar to a gray scale, the LRV indicates how much light is absorbed by a color and, hence how bright or dark it is. Many paint samples will list an LRV number.

"LRV is an important tool, even for the lay person, because it provides a scientific basis for understanding the relationship between two colors. It's great for areas with an open concept, where you may want to use several colors, but don't want your eye to be jerked all around the space. If you choose colors with an LRV within 7 or so points of each other, they can be different hues, but there won't be a lot of contrast."

LET THERE BE LIGHT.

"Natural ambient lighting will vary depending on the source's orientation," explains Sandy. "Eastern exposure will add a greenish tint, southern tends to be yellow/white which



BY KATE REYNOLDS

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can brighten the colors in a room — or wash them out, western can be more orange, while northern light is rather gray, which neutralizes and cools everything.”

Introduced light is also a factor and your light bulbs play a key role in color perception. An incandescent light bulb will bring out yellow tones while fluorescent lamps will generally cool colors. However, most bulbs are available in a range of colors — just choose the effect you would like before you choose your light bulbs.

Consequently, color samples will appear quite different in the paint department than they do in your living room. Colors should always be viewed in context — in the space where they are going to be used — so that you can observe how they will react to the changing illumination.

SIZE MATTERS

“When you’re looking at a tiny paint chip or a square of fabric, you have to keep in mind that it’s all about proportion,” Sandy points out. “A red wall is going to have a much different impact than a bit of red trim on a cushion.”

ADVANCE AND RETREAT

The rule of thumb is that warm colors advance and cool colors recede, which is useful when you want to highlight interesting architecture or visually correct flaws such as a low ceiling. Receding colors work well for homes without great architectural features. Light, advancing colors will showcase a home’s finer points.

CONSIDER THE PURPOSE

Although cool, pale shades pull back and can make a space appear larger, painting a small room in these colors isn’t always the best solution. You need to consider the purpose of the room.

“If the room in question is, for example, a TV room, you want that space to feel warm and cozy. You wouldn’t paint it a light, bright color. You want create a little jewel box with warm, dark colors: red, brown, deep purple, orange or gold, so that you could go in there, snuggle up and feel enveloped.”

In a baby’s room, you’re going to want to stimulate that child at times, but you’re also going to want to soothe at others. “That would call for muted colors, rather than light/bright or primary hues. If you have a more neutral, mid-range color with an LRV of 50 or above as your base, you can make the more exciting colors your condiments and change them all the time.”

CREATE A PALETTE

Get inspiration from the things around you. “Find something that resonates with you on a deep level,” says Sandy. “This can be a blouse that you like, a carpet, a painting or a stone from your yard that you think is absolutely beautiful.”

Identify two or three main colors in your inspiration piece, go to the paint store and get yourself sample strips that contain those colors, as well as their chromatic variations, so that you can vary the colors and they’ll work beautifully together since they’re based on a successful aesthetic combination.

Use these samples as a guide for introducing elements into your space — always take them with you when shopping for furnishings and accessories.

“You may think you remember the color exactly, but unfortunately, even the trained eye isn’t that accurate,” Sandy assures.

BE CONSISTENT

Often, homeowners will alter their color choices substantially from room to room — light, tropical blues in one and golden earth tones in the next. “The most common mistake I see is lack of an overall plan for a home,” Sandy notes. “Color decisions are made piecemeal, and the results do not relate. It can be very disconcerting.”

By applying the “inspiration palette” you can vary the actual hues and tones throughout your home while still maintaining the basic color scheme, creating continuity and comfortable transitions between living spaces.

THE X FACTOR

The simple truth about color is that it’s a moving target. The overall effect of your choices is cumulative — a consequence of ambient light, reflected color from floors, ceilings and walls, the texture of the surfaces, as well as the interaction of the tones, shades and patterns of all the individual items contained within a space.

“Even somebody who works with color all the time gets fooled routinely, because you think you know how it’s going to look, but there’s no way to say for certain what it’s going to be until you’ve got it. Then it all comes together into a unique and dynamic result.”

The best advice? Be adventurous. Learn from the experts, but trust your instincts. Don’t take it all too seriously. Like that big box of Crayolas — it’s all about having fun. ■

An alumnus of the Day-Studio Workshop and Gale Laurence Studio, Sandy LeRoy has worked with color for two decades. An artisan painter, Sandy’s color consulting expertise has been influential in homes both on the west coast and here in Western North Carolina. For more information, contact Sterling Property Services at 828-685-0560.