



NOT ALL BLACK AND WHITE

NEUTRALS A GOOD BASE, BUT SOME COLOR NECESSARY

BY CATHERINE GAUGH

The last few real estate agents we talked to looked at the colorful walls in our house and suggested a sale might be easier if we painted them a neutral color. I asked Beppie Mostert of Living Design Interiors of Carlsbad what was meant by neutrals.

"Most people will just say, 'What is a neutral?'" Mostert said, "In fact, on Monday, a client asked me, 'Aren't neutrals boring?' And I said, 'They don't have to be.'"

Q: What are neutrals, as opposed to colors, in interior design?

A: Neutrals are generally white, off-white, beige, brown and black. Think of them as pure colors, without intensity or hue. Primary colors are red, yellow and blue; combining primary colors

make the secondary colors of green, violet and orange. More colors are made combining a primary and a secondary, modified by tone and hue. A color wheel might have 12 colors; the color fan decks from paint companies could have 12 million colors.

Q: No wonder it's difficult for people to choose colors for their homes. But are there differences in neutrals as well?

A: Sherwin-Williams has a whole range of whites. White can have a trace of color, like blue or pink. Violet is not a neutral, but if the intensity is really low, it can be almost neutral. It's tricky.

Q: I've heard neutrals described as subtle, sophisticated and calming. But is there such a thing as over-neutralizing?

A: Neutrals serve a purpose, but you don't want a home without any color or contrast at all.

In Carlsbad, there is a house



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A neutral palette can serve as a wonderful canvas for touches of color throughout an interior space. A solid neutral for walls brings out the colors and textures in furnishings, artwork and accent pieces.



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A neutral color on the walls allows architectural features and furnishings to take center stage in this bedroom.

that is entirely white, inside and out. That was dictated by the architect. Everything is white: flooring, walls, ceilings and even the furnishings, all in different shades of white. Without touches of color, the furniture blends into the background wall.

One client wanted a completely neutral kitchen: white tile flooring, white countertops and dove gray cabinets. That would be over-neutralized. We suggested bringing black accents in; black plumbing fixtures and cabinet pulls. Black is a neutral, but it has a lot of depth, and the accents had a striking effect.

On the other hand, you don't want to have what I call the Christmas tree effect, which has a lot of different colors in every room. A good, solid neutral on the wall brings out the luxury and color of the furnishings. You can use primary colors in artwork, accent pillows or in a sofa throw.

Q: How do you approach clients about choosing colors and neutrals?

A: I always ask if I can look in their clothes closet. People are always surprised by that. But see-

ing the inside of the closet, you can see what colors they favor, the colors they want to wear and surround themselves with. Then we go room to room, looking at the furnishings.

Q: What do you do about clients that profess not to have favorite colors?

A: I would ask them what color they hate. Say, that color is orange. A lot of shades of orange are beautiful. I would ask them if they like the color of copper. That comes from orange. That gets the conversation going. Then when they pick a few colors they like, I order samples — the one they picked out, plus two shades lighter and two shades darker, so they can see the compatible alternatives.

Q: Are there any colors you do not like to use?

A: It's more where you use the colors and for what purpose. There is a lot of psychology in it. For example, McDonald's logo is red and yellow. The red is a fast color and is used a lot for fast food. That red tells you to come in quickly, get your food and get out. They don't want you to linger.

Now, Starbucks's logo is a quiet green. That invites you to come in and stay awhile.

I would never use a vivid red in the dining room, but a green is inviting and relaxing. I would put red in a playroom, but not a bedroom. The exception would be for certain shades of red: pink, a soft burgundy or a merlot.

Q: What about lighting and how it guides color choices?

A: One client worked with me to choose the colors for his La Jolla condo, which has a window with an ocean view. After the walls were painted, he called me to say he didn't like it. I didn't, either. We thought we got the wrong color. I checked with the paint company, but it was exactly the formula we wanted. The problem was that there was a lot of late afternoon sunlight coming through the window that reflected the terra cotta roof next door and threw a lot of glare on the walls. We fixed it by bringing down the tone of the paint and adding window treatments. Late afternoon sun can be very harsh.

Q: Do some clients ask you about the trendy colors? Paint

and design companies all seem to announce colors of the year. Is that color marketing a pain for interior designers?

A: It's not a pain. In fact, it is interesting to attend the presentations to learn the inspiration and integration of various color palettes. The colors are never the same. The Sherwin-Williams color of the year for 2021 is a dark Urbane Bronze. Benjamin Moore chose Aegean Teal as its color. Pantone came out with a combination: Ultimate Gray and Illuminating, a sunny yellow. I could follow the trends, but which one?

Q: Do you see the color of the year choices reflective of the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: Definitely, yes. Take Pantone's gray and yellow for 2021. Gray represents sorrow, and yellow represents hope and life. Benjamin Moore's explanation for choosing teal is that it brings balance and harmony into the home. The Sherwin-Williams bronze is very calm, yet sophisticated.

I think we all crave a little calm right now.

Catherine Gaugh is a freelance writer.