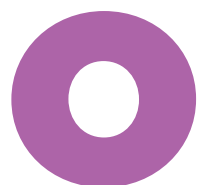


HOW TO  
**CHOOSE,**  
USE AND  
LIVE WITH  
**COLOR**

# **COLOR** RULES

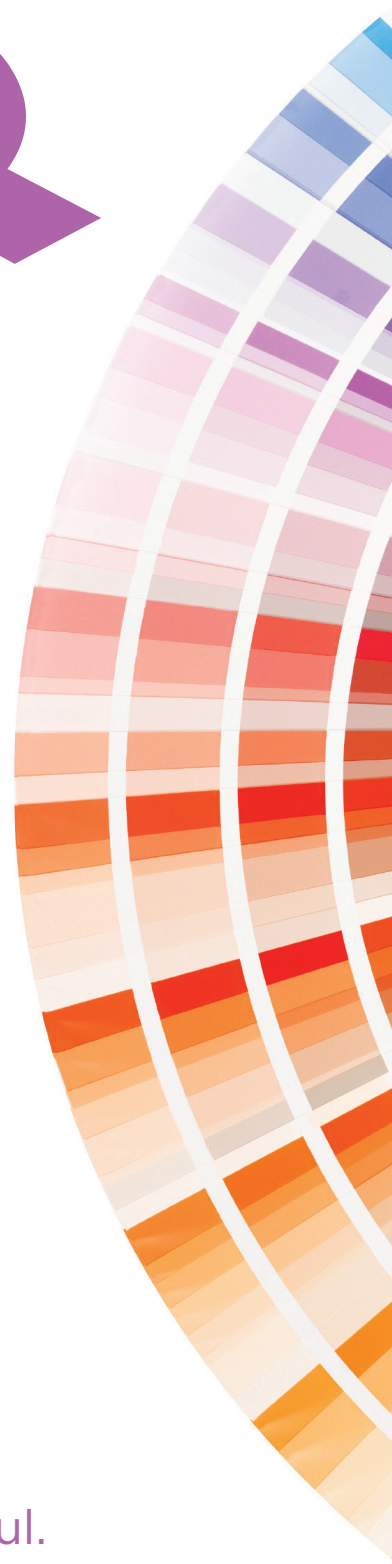
By Lorraine Alexander



n any given day, we find ourselves surrounded by the most incredible colors. Most often, we don't give it much thought.

The best design pros know that color is a powerful tool that impacts a room more than any other design element. Color definitely communicates a mood – and is a language of sorts. Combine the right colors and you can easily create cottage-style or modern sophistication. A slightly different hue of the same color can make a room feel vibrant or relaxed. Splashes of color can add just the right touch of fun or transform an unattractive room instantly into a room that is warm and welcoming.

Color is the universal art that feeds the soul.









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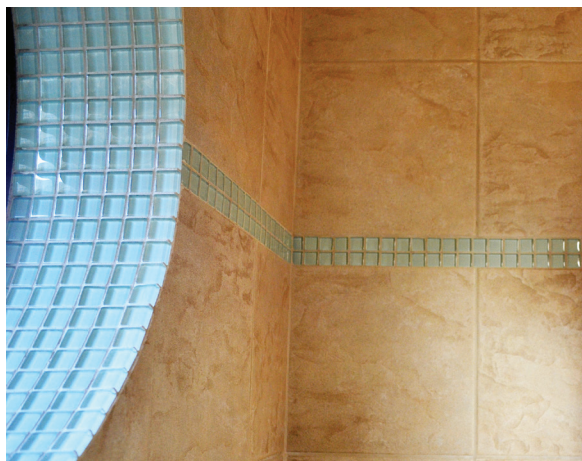
### Learn to speak the language

Science has proven that color can produce a positive (or negative) emotional response in humans. The physiological study of color and its usefulness is used throughout the world in marketing, advertising and sales. Now color is used in hospital design, as it has been recognized for its healing benefits. Certain colors have been proven to instantly uplift our mood, or to calm us. Some examples: Soft hues of greyed blue can contribute to a meditative environment; soft greens are tranquil yet uplifting; oranges can stimulate creativity; and yellows create a sunny mood while reds set the stage for passion. Being aware of these effects and benefits can help you make better choices in your home.

In essence, color is light. You will see color differently depending on the amount of natural light and the type of exposure a room has. Northern light has blue rays and western light is a warmer, golden light. Even the lens of your eye can interpret color differently, depending on your age. In a nutshell, the same color will not look the same in all homes, or in all rooms, or to all people.

It's a tricky business selecting color, and the options are endless. The selection process of finding the perfect shade is challenging, even to seasoned designers.

photo by: Sarah Bradbury



Here are some general considerations:

- Color is categorized as warm or cool. Examples of warm colors include yellows, oranges and reds; cool color tones include greens, blues and purples.
- Warm colors advance, creating a cozier feeling to the room, while cool colors recede, creating an airy, open feeling.
- Light colors reflect light, and dark colors absorb light. Think about the function of the room and how much light will be needed for utility purposes.
- Color has a base or undertone that will affect the mood of the room. That undertone will either complement or fight with the existing decor. An example of this would be a room with a natural maple floor, which naturally yellows with age. If

you choose to use a rose undertone, it will clash, whereas using a pale gray with a green undertone would complement the maple floor.

- Consider that even whites have a tint or undertone. Some whites are brighter with little or no base, and some have brown or greys in the base. Little or no tint (in white) will provide the most contrast when used with other colors.

Know that our perception of color is greatly affected by other elements in the room, such as lighting, furnishings, drapes and cabinets. The best advice is to consider both the existing elements and any new material you plan to introduce. Remember that each material you choose is a 'color selection.' Choose the right combination – and your room will come alive.

#### Finding your perfect color

Begin by finding the first stone to throw into the pond; everything else will ripple from that.

On your quest to find the perfect color, look for a color that makes you feel good. Personally

speaking, when I'm looking for color, I turn to nature for inspiration. Give yourself time, as selecting color is a process. I suggest testing your selection in your home to make sure the shade works with existing elements. If you find it clashes, move on to another selection.

Once you have identified your perfect color, you're ready to proceed. Now, look for your color in a fabulous piece of art or an area carpet – find something you love and work your way out from there by adding neutrals. Repeat your perfect color throughout your design, and keep in mind the shades can vary just a bit. In fact, this variation will give your design the best outcome. The most seasoned design professionals often use this method of color variation.

#### Making your small space seem larger

Designers actually do have lots of tricks up their sleeves. These few simple tricks are small miracles in the making.

## THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

**1. MAKING THE PALATE TOO COMPLEX.** In home color palates, just as in gardens, novices often get overly enthused and overuse color. The best designers know that in the end, less is more. Keep your palate simple. Even if you love color, a complex palate isn't necessarily better.

**2. HASTY COLOR SELECTIONS.** Selecting the perfect color is a process. I always provide large paint samples for clients, and they are asked to live with them for at least a few days. The client is instructed to look at the swatches at different times of day – and to move them to different walls. The swatches appear slightly different on each wall. Try this and you will be amazed at how the color changes. In the end, you'll know which color is right for you.

**3. LOCKING THE DESIGN IN WITH THE WRONG MATERIAL SELECTION.** All

materials (like colors) have a hue or undertone, usually, yellow, red or green – or a combination of these. Like it or not, once you make that final selection of that new floor material, you have cast the first stone; and now, it's officially part of your palate. It will heavily influence what you can use from here on out.

**4. OVERLOOKING THE INTENT OF THE ROOM.** Consider how the room is used. Remember, deeper colors absorb light, lighter colors reflect light. Use lighter colors in rooms that need good light.

**5. SHYING AWAY FROM CONTRAST.** Many new colorists and designers make the mistake of trying to select colors and furnishings that are too similar. I call this common mistake 'HOMEogenizing.' Even if your palate is neutral, you can easily add bits of contrast with small amounts of black or chocolate. An example of

this would be to add dark, thin picture frames. These small touches of contrast go a long way.

**6. IGNORING THE PALATE OF THE ENTIRE HOUSE.** Selecting a color for one room without consideration to the overall color palate of the home is a huge mistake. Ever walk into a home, only to see that one single bright red room? Color should beautifully unfold and draw you through the home as you enter with subtle surprises and pops of color along the way.

**7. OVERLOOKING THE HOME'S BEST FEATURES.** Take inventory of your home's best features. Consider what's unique. Maybe it's an element of architecture, the view, or something else like beautiful tile or exceptional wood floors. Then select a palate that compliments and highlights the best features.

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photo by Sarah Bradbury

## THE NEW COLOR FOR 2014: **RADIANT ORCHID**



Deep, rich, and complex, layered with hues of plum and blush pink, Radiant Orchid emerges as “Color of the Year” for 2014.

Profoundly symbolic, orchid represents creativity, innovation, inspiration and, in ancient cultures, royalty and wealth. During the Victorian era, orchids symbolized a shift to luxury. Even today, orchids continue to represent a rare and delicate beauty that causes pause and admiration. It's not surprising that this unique and somewhat magical color, with its sweet yet veiled intensity, has achieved this highly regarded status.

### **RADIANT RULES**

Follow these rules and you'll be sure to create a bedazzled mood worthy of Radiant Orchid.

- 1.) Define your foundation in neutrals. Use colors borrowed from nature: murky mocha, warm putty and stone.
- 2.) Simple palates can be lush when the mainstay neutrals are layered and textures are used.
- 3.) Use Radiant Orchid with restraint and repetition.
- 4.) Just as you would layer your neutrals, layer the shade of orchid just a bit to add interest.
- 5.) Want a bit more sparkle? Add touches of metal, which will highlight and balance the room. I call this finishing touch “the jewelry of the room.”

- Keep it simple. Keep the palate simple, and use mostly neutrals. You can add a strong color or deep neutral as a focal point – but keep this to a minimum. Simplicity will make your room seem larger.
- Paint the ceiling bright white. Use stark white ceiling paint with absolutely no tint, the whitest white you can find. This provides a striking contrast with even the slightest wall tint, making the walls appear deeper while the bright white ceiling reflects good light.
- Select neutral wall color. Cool colors recede. A neutral palate with a cool undertone will make your space appear larger.



### **Neutrals - hotter than ever**

It's not hard to see the marketplace is rapidly changing and that neutral palates are hot. Neutrals can be over-the-top scrumptious in a room design, if they are carefully layered with good use of texture.

Dark chocolate, mauve, mocha, warm greys, putty, stone – one can easily imagine these colors of nature and understand how seamlessly they work together. Use of warms and cools can work extremely well. Think of rocks on a river's shore. The colors vary from warm to cool, working beautifully together like notes from a symphony.

### Tips for using neutrals

Layer your neutrals by combining warmer and cooler hues of a similar color (mix cool and warm greys, as one example). At the same time, vary the intensity (lighter and deeper beige can make for a more interesting palate). Add a pop of color for drama's sake (like tangerine with dusty greyed mauve). Use various textures to add interest – and use fabrics that feel good to touch.

### Who dictates the 'Color of the Year' and why?

Since the year 2000, the Pantone Color Institute has designated a "Color of the Year" to express in color what is taking place in the global zeitgeist. A team of experts, led on a quest by director Leatrice Eiseman, study worldwide influences including countless creative sectors. In the final selection, Color of the Year is chosen for its global appeal. It is a reflection of what fulfills a need, rather than what's hot or fashionable. It encapsulates the mood, lifestyle and certainly the attitude of the global consumer.

So if you're ready to embrace Radiant Orchid in your home, here is some great design advice for beginners. Use it in areas that can easily be updated without expense. Suggestions include decorative

pillows, lamps, accessories, small area rugs or seat covers. Avoid more permanent choices, like accent tile, drapes, large upholstered items or full rooms of this color. Tread lightly using this bold color, and in the end your room will look amazing.

Although color trends are an integral part of our culture and they truly do impact and inspire new design strategies, I advise clients to never use a color simply because it's the latest trend. First ask: Is it a good fit for your personality, your home, your office? In this case, trust your instincts. H+L



Bio: **Lorraine Alexander** is an accomplished and recognized interior design professional with more than 20 years' experience in the field of design. Color is the hallmark of her work. Known for her unique approach to holistic, healthy design practices, she is certified in Green Building with Sonoma State University. Committed to education, she chairs the SRJC Interior Design Program Advisory Committee and serves the U.S. Green Building Council's Pacific Region as Chair.

## COLOR WORKSHOPS IN MAY

### Session 1 – May 10:

Color theory workshop including "Everything You Need to Know About Color." This workshop is suitable for both beginners and trade professionals.

### Session 2 – May 17:

This fun hands-on interactive follow-up session will focus on "Building a Custom Color Palate." Attendees will learn to coordinate a palate, including paint colors and materials selections. You must attend session one to join session two.

For more details or to be notified for registration, contact [info@lorrainealexander.com](mailto:info@lorrainealexander.com) or 707-836-9060 or go to [www.LorraineAlexander.com](http://www.LorraineAlexander.com)

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