

Baffled by palettes with more than 500 proprietary colors? Buffaloed by choosing a complementary trim shade for a ground color? You're not alone. Here's some expert help.



ON COLOR: *What the Pros Say* BY CATHERINE LUNDIE

Choosing paint color is a daunting task, as anyone who has ever quivered with indecision before a towering display of paint chips can attest. So before you hit the paint store, arm yourself with some advice from professional color experts. We spoke to CJ Hurley and Barbara Pierce, who offer a nationwide color consultation service in Portland, Oregon, and Tracey Raz, an interior designer with Raz+Majette Designs in San Diego.

Q: *What's a good starting point for choosing a color palette?*

A: **BARBARA PIERCE SAYS:** Ask yourself this crucial question: When you come home from work, how do you want your house to feel? Should it be a refuge from the world, a personal playground, or a gathering place? Closely related is a second question: what mood do you want each room to evoke?

Often we find that there is conflict between the way people say they want a room to feel, and the colors

they have selected. They'll say they want a room to feel warm and cozy, but then they point out cold colors. There are several possible reasons for this disconnect: sometimes the homeowner unwittingly has a preconceived idea of what color a room should be; other times they may have become fixated on a favorite color. It's a good idea to pull back from those preconceptions and consider colors that fit the mood you're after.

TRACEY RAZ: My partner, Lydia Majette, and I tend to take a more tangible

approach to color. We usually do a walk-through of the house, gathering clues as to the lifestyle and taste of the client as we go. The hints can be as subtle as the clothes you wear (color and style tell us a lot about a person's personality); a favorite mug you use in the morning for your cup of tea or coffee; bedding; or artwork. There's no reason a homeowner can't do the same thing.

Q: *Are there any rules that could serve as starting points for different rooms? Should certain spaces have restful colors, and others bright and stimulating ones?*

CJ HURLEY: For a child's bedroom, normally we would look at colors that are conducive to sleep; for example, deeper blues and greens. But it's not uncommon in old houses for kids to use their bedrooms as playrooms, too, so we'd try to pick somewhere in the middle range to keep alertness when appropriate.



OPPOSITE: A rich, enfolding red works well in a bungalow living room that gets good light. **ABOVE:** Small room? Carry the color across the ceiling. **BELOW:** Colors from the same Moorish-inspired palette relate from one room to the next in this Brooklyn limestone.



BARBARA PIERCE: We might then address the sleep issue with a restful color on the ceiling.

Q. *What if the size of your room works against the way you use it? For example, how do you create a sense of intimacy in rooms with high ceilings?*



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Buttercup yellow and greenish-blue relate to hues in a period rug.

PAINTING GREEN

Eco-friendly paints are swiftly becoming the norm rather than the exception, even for old-house aficionados. Traditional paint formulas (especially oil-based paints) often contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which are released as the paint dries, affecting indoor air quality. Many paint companies have created lines of “green” paints, including giants like Benjamin Moore and Sherwin-Williams.

According to EPA standards, set any paint labeled low-VOC must have a maximum of 200 grams VOC per liter (most latex paints meet this standard). Paints with less than 5 grams per liter are considered zero-VOC. Also, check to make sure that the paint you choose contains little or no acetone, ammonia, formaldehyde, biocides or fungicides. AFM Safecoat Paints and Mythic Paint are two companies that have eliminated all of these toxic ingredients.

Other choices include all-natural paints. Clay paints like those manufactured by BioShield and American Clay are made from minerals and water. Milk paint is a tried-and-true solution to complaints of toxins and odor. It’s made from clay, water, milk protein, and pigment.

“We find that people are afraid of color, even if they say they’re not. But we can make it work: it’s our job to educate people and make them understand that a bitty swatch is very different from the way a color shows on the wall.” —BARBARA PIERCE

CJ HURLEY: In that case, bring the wall color right across the ceiling, a technique that was used historically.

Q: *What about the opposite problem: a tiny space?*

TRACEY RAZ: Don’t give in and paint it white—a frequent last resort. Embrace the room: if it’s small, a light color is not necessarily going to hide the fact; you risk making it dull and boring. Instead go with a bold color, making a small room such as a study cozy or an entry dramatic.

Q: *How do I coordinate wall color choices with my furnishings?*

TRACEY RAZ: A whole host of factors come into play when you consider the environment of your new paint color, because anything put next to it will have an impact. Existing furniture and artwork have an obvious influence, but that can be a good thing—the starting point to creating a color palette. We will often pick a color with the palette of the artwork or area rug for the main color and use the others as accents, either in smaller paint areas such as a decorative borders or wainscoting, or in fabrics or accessories.

Q: *What about colors between adjoining rooms?*

CJ HURLEY: You’ll want to choose colors that look pleasing next to each other. Trim color is also integral. If your woodwork is painted, you

have more flexibility. You can pick a trim color that complements the wall color and shows off the architecture. Trim color can be changed from space to space, but I recommend consistency in all common rooms in order to avoid choppiness.

Q: *How much should light be taken into consideration?*

TRACEY RAZ: Light has an enormous impact on color. It shifts constantly over a 24-hour period. In addition, each wall in a room receives different light. For that reason, always paint large sample areas, at least 36" x 36", on each wall of a room. Be sure to look at them at different times over the course of the day and evening before you make your decision.

CJ HURLEY: If a room gets plenty of light, it’s easier to go with a deeper color. If you want the room for sleeping, it really doesn’t matter. But if it’s a darker room in general, we’d tend toward a more mid-value shade.

Q: *What if I live in a northern location with lots of cloudy weather? Will that affect my color choices?*

TRACEY RAZ: In climates with gloomier weather we tend to select stronger color to warm up the walls. There is more versatility in warmer climates—you can go white with Spanish Colonial interiors or more colorful with Mexican and Spanish Revival styles.

Q: *If my home is historic, is it a good idea to choose from a historic paint palette?*

CJ HURLEY: Yes, but remember that it takes skill and knowledge to choose the correct colors. A color consultant can be a big help there. We also have access to a whole library of colors that the average consumer does not. Paint companies have to market their colors; they can't necessarily offer to customers every historic color.

TRACEY RAZ: They're a good starting point, but don't feel confined to them. At the end of the day, have fun with paint colors. They're an inexpensive way to make a huge impact. ✦

CJ and BARBARA can be reached at *CJ Hurley Century Arts* (503) 234-4167, cjhurley.com
Contact TRACEY RAZ at *Raz+Majette Designs* (619) 563-3982, razmajette.com

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