

The top 3 Decorating Mistakes Homeowners make and how to Avoid Them. Bonus: Maria's favourite go-to wall colours including commentary on exactly what you need to consider before you commit to one.

1. *Decide what is the most important?*

Decide first, which element in the room should be the most important; the floors, the walls or the furniture. If you are in a kitchen or bathroom, decide if the most important piece is the flooring, countertop or backsplash.

Recently I met with my accountant and when I told him I had a blog and a website he immediately went on-line to look at my site. He got to a powder room image and stopped; he told me that they had recently renovated their powder room and didn't realize their mistake until everything was installed . . .



In this example, instead of a busy granite countertop this should have been a solid crushed quartz, Sile stone or Caesar stone, keeping the backsplash tile the most important feature here.

The mistake was that all the finishes in the space screamed ‘look at me, look at me’. They chose the most fabulous granite, bling bling tile (sparkly mosaic) and expensive, busy tile and all of it together was too much. It’s like wearing the most fabulous dress with over the top shoes and jewelry to match. Unless that is a planned look you are going for (great design is in the eye of the beholder after all) it’s important to remember this advice when shopping for your home. Pick the one piece that will be the starting off point or most important focal point in the room. Keep everything else secondary to keep the look classy and understated. After all the ‘wow factor’ can then come in with the wall Colour and accessories.

Most people look at each decorating decision from a single-minded perspective. Making each decision individually instead of considering the entire finished room as a whole. For example, a client of mine was looking at buying a gas fireplace. The brochure showed low to high-end finishes and styles and the wife was considering the higher end fireplace with the stainless steel finish (with each decision you wonder about quality, you want it to last, let’s spend the money now that we are doing this—all these conversations go on when making selections). I took one look at the hearth, which was black and said, ‘Why don’t you get the black one to match the hearth?’ The husband said “Great, that’s \$500 cheaper”.

And by the way, that more than paid my consulting fee in that moment . . . if you are spending money on materials and finishes—anyway—a professional will usually save you their fee many times over because this is what they do all day and all night.



Here in this living room by Nate Berkus, the floor by the use of the graphic area rug is the most important element in the room. However the dark brown chair and toss cushions balance the heaviness of the rug and give it balance.

One of my designer friends always says “Every room needs some bling, it makes everything else look expensive” In other words, spend the money on the designer coffee table if that’s what you love, it will upgrade the look of everything else in the room.

2. Layered Colour turns a house into a home.

If you pick an accent Colour, like red pillows for example, you need to have gradations of the Colour in the room (repeated at least 3 times) for it to work. In other words, a smaller red and a bigger red is necessary for the room to come together.



The graphic rug in this room IS the most important element and is way too contemporary for the very traditional pieces in this room. Also it’s visually too heavy to work well with the pale blue furniture. The red that has been repeated in this room is all too small and in my opinion throws off the balance of this room.

3. Moving Forward in Design

Every time you buy something new or consider renovating an area of your home ask yourself this question, should I ignore this or do I need to move forward here?

For example, if you are renovating your kitchen/great room, or painting the exterior of your home and that's the first place you are starting in the upgrading of your home; you want to be Moving Forward in the decorating and Colour choices you will make (assuming that everything else is dated and will follow eventually).

If you need a new area rug in your living room knowing that your floral sofas will eventually be replaced, you want to be current, but still chose something that works with your existing furniture.

Introducing a chocolate brown ottoman into a dated living room (with nothing existing in brown) will simply highlight the fact that the ottoman looks like 'today' and the rest of your furniture, like 'yesterday'. Therefore if your living room furniture is not being replaced any time soon, introducing a new piece of furniture, whether it's an ottoman, a chair, or anything else, would work better in colours matching your existing décor.

Upgrading a dated kitchen with the trendiest looks of today, eg. Installing chocolate brown countertops and subway tile to your 80's unpainted oak kitchen or your white-on-white 90's kitchen without addressing the Colour of the cabinets, will simply make your kitchen look even more dated as discussed in the above examples. If you are not prepared to paint the cabinets a creamier white, then 'moving forward' with the current trendy Colour in your finishes will not be a good idea!

Buying new furniture or starting to renovate areas of your home always opens a can of worms because everything new that you introduce starts to make everything else looks old, however using this guideline will help you in making the right decisions for a tastefully renovated home.

My favourite go-to wall colours including my tips on what you should consider before choosing any of them:

The Colour of Linen

If you are painting a contemporary house for example, a client will ask for a Colour that just warms up the walls and replaces white. My favourite is the look of Linen, which is CC-110 or 1037 Muslin. However, this Colour has a slight red undertone, that is not a problem unless you have red hardwood floors, cherry or mahogany for example. If you do, the Colour can go slightly pink on the walls. That's when I would recommend using HC-81 Manchester Tan for the same effect, because it has a slight green undertone (in comparison). And make sure you use this Colour in a room with a fair amount of light. It will do nothing for you in a dark room. (see my blog posting; 'A light Colour will never come to Life in a Dark Room', for more information).

The Perfect Taupe

I truly do love CC-490 or 983 Smokey Taupe. It is a great Colour for people that DO NOT like yellow and prefer grayer tones but still want something warm on the walls. It also looks great with brown furniture. This Colour may look gray on the chip but if you compare it to a much colder blue gray, you will see how warm it actually is (see my post 'Colour is Context'). It seems to work in a variety of spaces, looks great in bathrooms with tile that seems to have some gray in it without being too cold.

Warm Neutrals I would use in my entire Home:

I like HC-35 Powell Buff or HC-26 Monroe Bisque. They are both great colours that create a lovely warm backdrop in any house that doesn't already have a pink undertone in the finishes. (See my post, 'What everyone should know about Beige').

With all the dark chocolate brown flooring and furniture that is current right now, I would consider either HC-45 Shaker Beige or CC-120 or 1039 Stone house as a primary wall colour. (See my post 'the Secrets to selling your house in 2009 for a house done entirely in Shaker Beige').

OC-1 Natural Wicker is a Colour that gives you the look of cream without being too yellow, great for cabinets with very dark or chocolate brown granite countertops or in the entire house. A tip on brown; do NOT paint your cabinets a stark white with brown finishes, it will create too much contrast. Better to keep them a rich cream, like OC-95 Navajo White or CC-50 White Down.

See my post on 'The Best Trim Colours—NOT Cloud White' for more information on the best way to select whites for your home.

The Best Reds

CC-64 Bonaparte or 2080-10 Raspberry Truffle are great 'true' reds more to the blue side but without being too 'clean' and 'bright' to begin with. Red can be tricky because of how strong and bright they are.

CC-124 Louisiana Hot Sauce or 2006-10 Merlot Red or 2172-10 Copper Clay are some good orangy reds that are beautiful as well.

I always recommend testing paint colours because the light in your house will be different from your friends house (where you may have loved the Colour!!) See my post; 'Should you pay for a room to be re-painted if you chose the Colour' in the sidebar of my blog for more guidelines on testing paint colours for accurate results.