MANSION GLOBAL

How to Make Shades of Grey and Beige Pop

Think accent colors, layering and more

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Designed by Babcock Peffer, this grey-beige living room feels anything but boring with textured furniture and accents as well as mustard-hued throws.

FRANCINE FLEISHER

Each week Mansion Global tackles a topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week we look at how to make grey and beige anything-but-boring.

In the design world, shades of grey and beige are the ultimate neutrals. But they often come with a reputation for looking sterile.

However, there are many ways to use these colors and still create a space with personality.

"Choosing the perfect neutral hue for a space's all-over wall color is a tried-and-true approach to decorating," said Erika Woelfel, vice president of color and creative services at Behr Paint. "But contrary to what some color lovers believe, neutrals like grey and beige don't have to be boring. They can actually be quite complex and provide a perfect backdrop for other colorful accents and design elements.

To work with these shades to their best advantage, follow these tips from the pros.

Keep Things Interesting

"Each shade of grey or beige comes with different undertones—brown, beige, pink, blue, yellow—which can completely change the feel of a room. While neutrals will always be a popular choice for walls, the emergence of certain undertones in popular shades changes. In 2019, expect to see updated, warm neutrals on the rise in interiors, replacing the cold, sterile feel of some greys and whites. For the best of both worlds, try a just-right greige like Behr's Elephant Skin.

"Contrast is the key to adding visual interest to a neutral space. If your living room walls are charcoal grey, lighten the mood with contrasting hues and textures through different design elements. Try adding a leather couch, furniture with natural wood tones, a colorful or bright white accent wall, patterned pillows or a chic boho rug. These design touches will add dimension and keep the room from feeling too uniform.

"Light, barely-there shades of grey and beige can open up a room and make it feel expansive. On the other hand, deep greys and browns create a moody vibe with a cocooning effect. It's essential to take the time to sample several options across the light-to-dark spectrum on the wall itself before taking the plunge.

"With neutral walls, the accent color options are endless—but be sure to choose colors with shared undertones. Pull in hues from other room elements, like your favorite piece of art, a colorful backsplash or rug to create a cohesive look.

Even the darkest of greys has dimension with burgundy-hued furniture and artwork and accessories with gold accents.
Behr Paint Company

— **Erika Woelfel, vice president of color and creative services at Behr Paint**

Add Accents

"The easiest way to stop grey and beige from looking too neutral is by adding artwork and accessories that bring in other colors and textures. With neutral palettes, it is very important to layer the materials and colors through texture or patterns, otherwise spaces can feel flat and bland.

"Using dark and light iterations of these shades creates drama by way of a deeper contrast. When a room has high ceilings and plenty of natural light, grey/beige works well, as the volume and light already exist. If a room has limited natural light and proportions, however, then you need to play with contrasts, such as dark versus light, to create a warm atmosphere.

"Creating groups of accent colors that work well together for each area or space is important to avoid any clashing."

Neutral walls and flooring are punctuated by a primary color pop by way of art and accessories in this Chelsea penthouse designed by Elnaz Namaki and Hugo van Bilderbeek of HvB Development.
Elnaz Namaki Studio and HvB Development

—**Elnaz Namaki of London-based Elnaz Namaki Studio**

Vary Tones

"Grey and beige create a calm and minimal environment. However, with the right amount of color saturation, they can provide a lot of warmth and richness.

Different shades of grey and beige deliver a modern and sophisticated aesthetic, and yet depending on the coolness or warmth of the tones, the visual impact shifts. A key component to designing a room using neutral tones is mixing up fabric textures and materials.

"If the major pieces in a room are neutral, they will stand the test of time because color can always be added via accent pieces, art and accessories.

—**Cristina Peffer of Babcock Peffer in Southampton, New York**

Focus on Light and Texture
"Grey and beige can create a very sophisticated and elegant foundation for a home. They serve as a backdrop for beautiful collections, such as furniture and artwork, further elevating them.

"There is so much you can do to vary grey or beige. The play on textures, sheens, and patterns can have an enormous impact. To me, it is how materials move and reflect light that make a space dynamic.

"I find that lighter shades of grey and beige tend to keep a room feeling larger and more expansive while darker shades tend to embrace inhabitants and make a space feel more cozy.

"To me, light and the movement of light around a space is key. Make sure that whatever shade of grey (there are more than 50) or beige you choose for your walls reflects light or creates a glow."

Done in mostly neutral tones, a New York City living room designed by Phillip Thomas becomes a showstopper by way of a plush rug, statement light fixture and bursts of color and pattern through accents.
Michael Mundy

—Phillip Thomas, founder and principal of Phillip Thomas Inc. in New York