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DECORATING WITH PRIMARY COLORS

HOW TO MAKE BOLD HUES WORK AT HOME

Primary colors have a from-the-crayon-box quality that appeals to the kid within. Bright bold blue, red, and yellow often seem best left for rainbows or pop art. But when used strategically, and with the right hues, they can liven up your home in the best possible way.

“Pure, saturated, and brilliant, these eye-catching hues have an undeniably bold impact on a space,” says Quinn Larson, color marketing manager at Behr Paint. Not to mention, they’re having a moment right now. “True blues are extremely popular, and we’re also seeing saturated yellow, dubbed Gen-Z Yellow, become a sunny staple. Red is also on the rise, but has started trending toward warmer versions.”

“Primary color is the exclamation point in a room, the catalyst for everything that follows, and acts as a place to focus the eye,” says Eric Cohler of Eric Cohler Design in New York. “I find it especially effective in an otherwise monochromatic interior.”

To create rooms with true hues, master these tips from the pros.

GO FOR ALTERNATIVE SHADES

If you’re sheepish about primary colors, try toned-down versions. Virginia-based interior designer Natalie Reddell suggests a grayish blue or navy, which reads more neutral, while yellow can be softened to a pretty gold. Try a red with orange and brown undertones, which has a rusty vibe, or a moody maroon.

ACCENT YOUR SPACE

Cohler suggests limiting primary colors in the planning stages and adding more color as the room unfolds: “Think layering rather than saturating,” he says.

“A pop of red or yellow on pillows, artwork or a lamp has a big impact,” Reddell says.

Have some neutrals or soft colors serve as a backdrop in the space. “A painted piece of furniture, like a coffee table or side table, is a fantastic way to add a touch of saturated color to a room,” Larson says.

If you’re working in a space with mostly cool colors, Reddell suggests adding a little tension with small amounts of a warm color, like red or yellow, for contrast. “Every cool space needs a little warmth for balance and visual depth,” she says.

“It’s important, however, to repeat your accent color at least once in the space to keep the interior cohesive,” Reddell says.

THINK OF THEM AS THE “NEW” NEUTRALS

It might seem counterintuitive, but blue, for example, can be a backdrop for other colors. “Blue takes on a different personality depending on the colors with which it is paired,” Reddell says. “Like denim jeans, it goes with everything.”

“Green can be a neutral because it reflects what we see in nature,” she says. “And, like colorful flowers in a garden, other colors work well with green. An overdyed green rug, for example, goes with everything—like grass—and it grounds a room.”

GO BOLD

“An energetic red works well all over in a living or family room where time is spent entertaining family and friends,” Larson says. “A bright yellow evokes positivity and plays well in a music room or a kitchen, while blue creates a calming effect and is a great choice for a bathroom or bedroom.”

Use toned-down or achromatic hues like black, white, and gray to provide a resting place for your eyes.

And don’t forget the fifth wall. “Applying a strong color to the ceiling can be very dramatic and allow for more neutral walls,” Reddell says. Just remember that to create balance, you want to ground the room with a rug. ▣

Primary colors can be incorporated in a bold way, or more subtly.
