colour your room

where do I start?

Embarking on a decorating project can be rather daunting, where does one start? Colour sets the mood and style of a room and gives it personality. It affects the impact the room has on people and the way they feel and behave within it. So here are some practical steps to work through so that you get the best results and take some of the stress out of the decisions you will need to make. A very good starting point is to make a list of the things you are keeping in the room, and the things you are changing.

what parts of the room are to be changed

Perhaps you are repainting the walls and ceilings, and changing the window treatments. In this case you will need to select colours that will work with existing floorcoverings and furniture.

what parts of the room will remain

Perhaps you are changing the walls and cabinetry in the kitchen but wish to retain the bench top and floor tiles so will need to select colours and textures that will work with these items.

Usually the most expensive surfaces are retained when decorating such as the benchtop in the kitchen, the carpet in a living room or the tiles in the bathroom. It is important to keep this in mind when selecting these long-service items as well, as very often they will survive two or three redecorating projects.
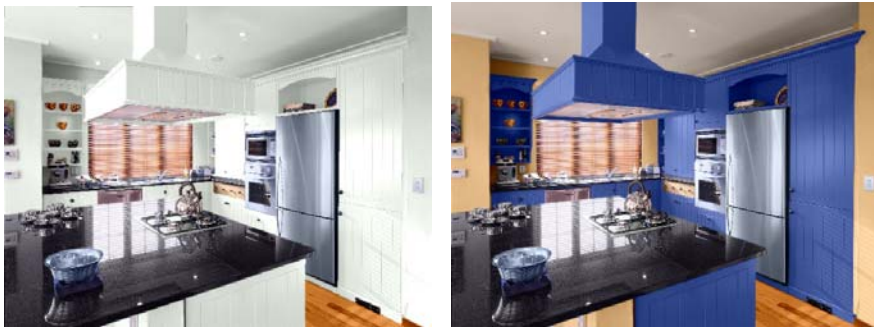
A stone kitchen bench with blue, beige and white flecks in it may allow you to give a kitchen several looks with the same benchtop. Cabinetry and walls colours could be stark white with stainless steel appliances which looks clean and sharp and may suit a professional working couple.   This may not be so practical for a young family or active teenagers as fingermarks tend to show up on lighter reflective surfaces.

However an active family may treat the surfaces with a more practical approach for easy maintenance and have beige walls, timber look cabinetry and blue accessories.

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Or another homeowner may like to pull out the blue for cabinetry to introduce a stronger colour theme, and put beige on the walls.

Many floorcoverings give years and years of service and are less frequently changed than other surfaces within a room. Here a light coloured carpet is given two entirely different looks by the selection of interior colours within the space. To help you work out colour combinations use your Resene Colour Wheel.

The room on the left is a based on a complementary scheme of red and green, bright and vibrant and ideal for a busy family or television lounge used mainly in the evenings.

The room on the right is much more subtle and although still using red and green it is more muted and has a restful feel with a lighter wall colour and a darker textile colour on the sofa.

things to think about
- When will the space be used – day time or night time, natural or artificial light source.
- Frequency of use – a kitchen or bathroom is used daily while a formal lounge may be used weekly.
- People using the room – do they have any disabilities or special needs, e.g. elderly or children.
- Practical requirements – ease of maintenance, durability of products, colour choices.
- Tasks to be undertaken in room – study, exercising, television, resting, crafts; active or passive.
- Adjoining spaces and colours - open plan rooms, flooring or other materials, view or outlook.
- Architectural elements of the building – what to highlight, what to mask.
- Colour inspirations from a textile, ornament or art, a cushion or rug.
- Collect product samples and lay out in rough scale to their application to the space.
- What colours do you love – work them back into your theme.

time of use

If a room is to be used mainly during the evening, such as a bedroom or television lounge, it is important to look at the proposed colours under artificial light conditions at night time. Artificial lighting can change the look of a colour and while two or three colours may work under natural light conditions they may clash at night.

Dimmer switches give you control over lighting, and diffused lighting is lovely to create mood in bedrooms and sitting rooms. Equally as important though is good task lighting for reading and working as required. Darker and more intimate colours can be used in night rooms.

Rooms used during the day are usually designed to make the best use of natural light with large windows, glazed doors and skylights. Therefore the colours will be more true.

While slightly exaggerated, the illustrations of the rooms above show a cooler feel under artificial light, and the room bathed in warm and natural sunlight during the day. Each has a very different feel.

frequency of use

Choose peaceful, easy to live with colour on walls and neutral flooring in areas that are used daily, and elegant pale colours in less frequently used rooms where they won't get too dirty, or stronger bold colours that you may become tired of if you were living with them every day.

A kitchen or bathroom generally has the highest use within the home and therefore for ease of maintenance need to have fairly practical colours and surfaces. In bathrooms white is generally considered hygienic, however can be quite harsh on the skin tone when looking in the mirror and sometimes feel cold, therefore a touch of timber helps to balance a white bathroom. Neutral, soft shades and pale hues work well as they do not show marks quite as quickly as white in these high-maintenance areas.

On the other hand a guest bedroom or formal lounge may only be used weekly or monthly, and a less practical approach can be taken for these spaces. This is where you may choose lighter colours for floor rugs and upholstery, and high-maintenance textiles for window treatments and cushions.

Quite the opposite to what one would choose for a rumpus room or family living room, where darker coloured upholstery and textiles are usually selected so that marks and wear and tear are concealed.   And a slightly darker shade would be suitable for walls and floors.

In nature we usually have a dark colour at our feet, mid colours at eye level and lighter colours above. The same rule usually applies when decorating a room - earthy coloured flooring, lighter shades on the walls and often a white or very light coloured ceiling. And of course we do not normally come in contact with a ceiling so wear and abrasion are not an issue on this surface.

people using the room

This is really important for a number of reasons, including practicality. If for instance you are designing a dining/living room for a young family with a pet dog and cat, the surfaces need to be durable, easy to clean and not show up animal fur or footprints.

Think about the floor colour for a start, a darker earthy-coloured carpet would probably be a good choice (as long as the dog and cat are not dropping white fur) and the walls may be painted a mid-tone to hide toddler fingermarks and abrasion by passing bodies and toys, while the tabletop would be best in a laminate or durable timber, not glass or something that needs lots of maintenance.

Elderly people, or those with sight impairment, need stronger colours to differentiate spaces for their safety, such as a contrast between carpet and floor tile colours so they can see when the floor surface changes to avoid slipping, or a very different colour on the benchtop to the stovetop so they do not place something flammable on a hot surface.

Get the opinions from all people using the space before making final decisions - some may want a colourful and stimulating scheme while others may prefer something more restful, so you may need to strike a balance with colourful accents and accessories in a neutral coloured room scheme.

bright and energetic or soft and tranquil

tasks to be undertaken

Write down a list of all the activities that take place in the room - you will be quite amazed at how many tasks other than food preparation and cooking take place in the kitchen - from reading the newspaper to children doing their homework at the bench, talking on the phone or discussing family matters while making breakfast.

A family dining room will need to withstand fairly hard wear and tear, from knocks to food spills, and for this reason a sensible colour scheme will prevail. However a formal dining room may stand alone and can accommodate a special treatment, such as burgundy walls, as people are not in the space for long and only for one purpose - formal dining. This wall colour would look elegant, support a good appetite and enhance cutlery and glassware on the table.

A hallway or an entrance lobby is a transit space where people are not enclosed for long periods, so can also be painted in stronger colours to add excitement or link another adjoining room, or warm and inviting colours to welcome visitors into the home.

A home office/study may be used day and night most days of the week so a more neutral colour theme will not overwhelm the space or compete with the activities to be undertaken within it. A busy room with lots of items in it generally needs to have a fairly monochromatic backdrop to the knickknacks and equipment, and uncluttered surroundings are usually less distracting when work is to be done.

Sleeping - sometimes parents tend to decorate children's bedrooms in bright and colourful themes, which doesn't always help to induce peaceful sleep! Keep these for feature areas of the room (out of the line of sight when children are in bed) complemented with restful colours and then splash out in the playroom with as many bright colours as you dare. In adult bedrooms the colour palette can be dark and moody, or soft and tranquil, but ensure you have good task lighting for reading in bed.

adjoining issues

With open plan living spaces it is important to think about the flow on effect of any colour themes that you are working with. For example, for a kitchen/dining/living space the flooring needs to flow through the space, and wall colours need to work together if they are different and defining each space, or be the same colour for a sense of unity so that rooms belong together. Often the ceiling, doors, architraves and window reveals that best painted in the same colour to give a sense of continuity in open plan arrangements.

Another adjoining aspect may be the outlook into the garden or view from the windows. If it is a pleasing view you may not wish to compete with it and would choose neutral colours to frame the view and encourage the eye toward it. If however it is not such an attractive view you may wish to use colour to distract the eye from the windows - keep window treatments similar to the wall and divert the attention to a focal point within the room, such as the fireplace, which could be a strong contrasting colour to the rest of the room.
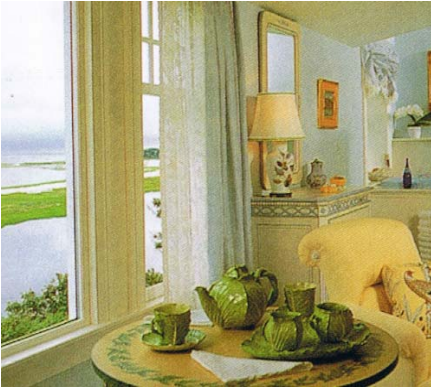
Greens and blues from the view have been brought into this room colour scheme, and the view is not obstructed by busy window treatments that may compete with it.

architectural elements

If you are considering a new scheme for a room, take a good look at the space and list its good and bad points, then decide which ones you want to attract attention to, and if there are any parts you want to conceal.

At the same time you will need to be sympathetic to the style or period of the building as this often determines colours for you - refer to the Resene Heritage colour chart if you have a heritage home.

A feature of a room may be a fireplace and surround, so in this case you may wish to pick out the moulding, frame and fireplace itself in contrasting colours to the wall in order to highlight its beauty.

A problem area can just as easily be camouflaged. For example, a cupboard door in a hallway may be better blended into the wall by painting the door and its architraves/frame the same colour as the wall.

recessed shelving, fireplace and doors have been highlighted with colour in the examples below

colour inspirations

Some people are quite emotive when it comes to colour selections - extroverts tend to feel happier in rooms containing strong, bright colours because they need stimulating environments. Introverts are generally more at home with subdued and earthy colours.

It is worth looking at the Resene Colour Personality Test (www.resene.com.au/colourpersonality.htm) and also having some understanding about the Psychology of Colour to help interpret your likes and dislikes of particular colour.

While some of us instinctively know which colours will go together and how to balance tones, many of us need the help of the Resene Colour Wheel to guide us with colour relationships. Very often there is something within the existing environment which will give us colour inspiration. Colour inspiration may come from a patterned textile or rug, an ornament or piece of art, or simply a shell or pebble which when looked at very closely is made up of a palette of colours – nature always does this well!

Another great place to look for inspiration is magazines – collect pictures of rooms that you like and you will soon find a particular colour is dominating. But make sure that the room you are decorating is suitable for this application as you do not want to make a cold bathroom feel cooler by introducing a blue-green theme because you have seen and liked it in the latest bathroom tap advertisement.

Nothing personalises a room or provokes a response like colour – it gives you the chance to stamp your interior with your unique personality and make a place where you feel at home.

use a textile, piece of art or something from nature for colour inspiration

other considerations

When working with neutral beige or grey, put blue or green for example alongside it to see if they draw out the colour or kill it, as this will help you find the base colour. If it draws out the colour it has the same base, if it does not draw out the colour the base is probably the complementary (opposite on the colour wheel) to the blue or green. This will also help you to plan your colour scheme using a colour wheel by understanding the base of the neutral you are working with.

The colour you choose for the walls is more powerful that the colour of the floor or ceiling because the walls wrap around and enclose the room. The wall colour is often a graduation of the colours between the floor and ceiling.

Floor colour can work in tandem with the wall colour – either complementing or strengthening its effect. Usually we feel more comfortable if we are grounded with a slightly darker floor colour than the walls. Earthy tones work well for carpets and floor tiles. Ceilings can float independently from other structures, and are usually the lightest colour in the scheme.

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Resene
the paint the professionals use

Collect samples of the products you are considering for the room, such as floorcoverings, paint colours, upholstery fabric, benchtop, tiles, window treatments, bedspreads.

Think about the colours that you are drawn towards when shopping for clothes or home accessories – what do you feel passionate about?

checklist

After exploring the above points it is time to put your colour scheme together.

Define the mood and goal of your project – feel of room, practicality of surface treatments, style of room.

Choose the colours you feel best express the mood – hot/cold, light/dark, warm/cool, pale/bright.

Choose the colours you feel best convey the style of the room – modern, traditional, casual or formal.

Play with the possibilities using sample swatches. Arrange the product samples in the way they would appear in the room – floorcoverings at bottom, wall colours in middle, ceiling at top, and also in rough scale as to their dominance of the room. For example, accent colours in cushions would be much smaller sized samples than wall colour. Check samples in the same light conditions that the room will be most frequently used.

Select the long-service products first (flooring, bench tops) then use the Resene Colour Wheel to put the rest of your scheme together – monochromatic, complementary, related colours, triadic.

Refine these colour options down to the best possible colour scheme and go with it!