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Do color tests before painting

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My daughter was about 3 when she dubbed our first-floor bedroom/den the "Green Room." She's 8 now, but the name has stuck.

Color can define a room. Color can be an asset or a liability. Choose wisely and you're likely to smile every time you walk in a room. The wrong color choice can have the opposite effect. Just ask my friend, who was horrified to discover the lovely shade of pink she had chosen looked like Pepto-Bismol once it was on her wall.

"One of the most important decisions you can make in terms of your home is the colors of the walls, because that's part of your architectural envelope from which you're going to build everything else," said Raimonda Pierce, and interior designer with Design Principle International in Chicago. "Investing the time and the money to get your colors right, to get that backdrop right, is worth it. That sets the stage for everything else you do."

Some of you are thinking about painting in the spring, and you are hunting for the perfect colors for your home. Here are some things Pierce says you should consider.

Think about the value of the color. No, we're not talking about what paint is on sale, although that is something to consider. She is referring to range, as in from light to dark. "You want the value of the color to be in the same range, because as your eye moves from one wall to the other and the colors intersect and change, you don't want this to be a jarring thing."

Once you get your color palette, get sample cans of the colors to try out on the walls. "Color changes, depending on the light source in your particular space," she said. For example, if you have a lot of natural light in a room or if the room is dimly lit, it will affect the color. Halogen, incandescent or fluorescent lights also impact how the color looks on the wall.

Spend the money, usually about \$2.50 or \$3, on the paint samples. Paint about a 3-foot section on the wall. (If it's a dark color, you may need to use more coats.) "You don't want to just go off those little squares. You really want to experience what the color is going to look like. That's a time-saving test," Pierce says. Once it dries, look at it at night, during the day and when it's cloudy, too.

A lot of the newer homes have a big, open floor plan where the kitchen, dining area and den all blend seamlessly. There may be a wall that juts out to separate the spaces. Look at where it makes sense to change the color, and then paint a small section of it to see how the colors work.

Homeowners can paint, staple or hammer nails anywhere, but renters often don't have that freedom. I found a Web site that focuses on home decor for renters: www.rentaldecorating.com. A section on "the basics" covers topics such as help for the first-time renter, dorm decorating and decorating by room.

Have a question for Designing Woman Lolita Cusic? Send it to John O'Brien at jobrien@southtownstar.com or in care of the SouthtownStar, 6901 W. 159th St., Tinley Park, IL 60477.

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