

How to choose colors

- 1** Looking at colors in stores and bringing home color strips is less than optimal. Manufacturers make swatch books of their color catalog called “fan decks,” and distribute them to dealers and professionals. The layout in the books is often different from the layout in store racks and can make choosing easier. Consider borrowing or even buying one; they aren’t expensive.
- 2** Resist the temptation to rationalize. When looking at colors, center your awareness in your gut. Allow yourself to be attracted to a color or two. If you experience conflicting feelings such as desire and negative emotion, fearlessly analyze the negativity. For example, are you attracted to a bold green but afraid of what friends would think if you deployed it? If so, imagine that you have overcome the fear and look at the color again, picturing it in your space. How do you feel about it now?
- 3** Choosing colors from strips involves projection. The easiest way to assess effect is to look at the next deeper color on the strip. This helps correlate your kinesthetic and visual sensibilities, so it is a good simulation of how you’ll feel when the color is in place. When selecting your color scheme, remember that colors interact. Overlap your chips side by side and hold them out at arm’s length in the room where you will use them. Cover up most of the border color with your field color and mask extraneous colors on your strips. Remember to have fun.
- 4** Observe your prospective colors under different lighting conditions on the surfaces where you intend to use them. They can be pinned or taped to walls, trim, ceilings, siding, and architectural woodwork. “Sleep” on your choices for at least one night, no matter how certain you feel about them. Look at them again the next day, and over the course of a few days. In the process, utilize sunny days, direct sunlight, heavily overcast days, incandescent lighting during evening, and any other factors which may affect perception. Note your feelings throughout. Then, allow a few days to pass and reconsider. This step will probably result in a modification of one or more of the colors in your scheme. If you are an indecisive person or the project is very important or very large, buy quarts of the colors and paint sample patches.
- 5** When choosing exterior colors, stand back, squint your eyes, and look at the big picture. Is a green pond or a blue river part of it? Does a red maple provide a splash of maroon? Do pines create an emerald backdrop and splash amber needles onto the foreground? Do neighboring houses provide a contextual palette?
- 6** Decide ahead of time that you will rest on your choices even if your initial reaction provokes uncertainty or something worse. Let a little time pass and throw a party to celebrate your victory or your uncertainty!

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