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by Catherine Smith

choosing & using a colour consultant



With thousands of shades to choose from in paint—let alone all the other materials that make up your house—you can easily become paralysed by choice when it comes to picking the ideal scheme.

Perhaps the safe palette you've seen in every showhome turns out to feel 'not me'. Or perhaps you turn into a kid in a candy store and go wild with an allsorts assembly of colours, which then looks too disjointed. Whichever applies, help is at hand. Colour consultants can pin down your preferences for an overall result that suits your house, budget and lifestyle.

Firstly, decide how much help you need. Some colour experts focus just on colour and paints, while others will work through a whole scheme, including fabrics and flooring, right down to the accessories on the shelf.

Some architects will also develop colour schemes for you (and yes, they will branch out beyond designer whites), while suppliers may offer consultancy services too.





Choose well

A flick through the classifieds will not give you much sense of whether a particular designer will suit you. Personal recommendations are a better way to go. Ask around friends or colleagues who have had work done.

If you like something you see—at a showhome, in a store, at your hairdresser's or in a café—ask the owner who did it. And when you look through local magazines, make a note of designers whose work (or own home) appeals.

Before you call the consultant, ask your contact not just about how happy they were with the finished job, but also about how they worked together, how well they felt listened to, and whether they would work with the person again.

Smart brief

Consultants don't work well in a vacuum. The clearer you are about your brief, the better they can meet your needs. Start a scrapbook of ideas that appeal to you—magazine clippings, favourite pieces of china, a shell, a leaf, a garment you love. Be explicit about your budget.

Do you want to prepare a whole house scheme, but will be undertaking it in stages as money allows? Do you want to look just at a particular room, or do you want help with an exterior look? Be clear about what cannot be changed (existing flooring or furniture, for example), about your likes and dislikes and about your timeframe.

Working style

When you call your consultant for the first time, ask about how they operate. How do they charge? Some do an initial introduction or an in-store consultation for free, then charge to come to your house; some charge a one-off fee; others an open-ended hourly rate; others a percentage on materials or tradespeople. Will they present more than one idea for you to choose from? How much back and forth do they expect? How long does this generally take?



Roll your sleeves up

After briefing, a consultant will come back to you with a scheme or two. This may include swatches of paints, flooring, cabinets and other materials, with pieces in approximate proportion to the way they will be used in your home—big pieces of flooring, for example, with tiny chips for an accent pillow. This is partnership time. Be very clear about what you like and don't like, and listen to how this might be resolved.

Your consultant has seen what works and doesn't work, but they should also be taking your thoughts on board.

Happy customers

Be sure all the people who will have to live in the space feel included. Your partner or children may prefer not to discuss every paint chip, but might like to have a final OK.

A good consultant is skilled at hearing everyone and finding a satisfactory middle ground.

by Catherine Smith

balancing act



Google "feng shui" and be prepared to be swamped with an array of definitions, practitioners and schools.

Practiced for more than 4500 years by the Chinese, the feng shui system harnesses the energies of wind and water, the universal life forces, to create an environment full of good energy. Originally used to find the most favourable burial sites for ancient emperors, today it is used to create harmonious environments to enhance all areas of life.

Today, Western feng shui practitioners use elements of those schools in a blend called Intuitive.

Those drawn to feng shui have often instinctively followed the essential Oriental principals of good balance, harmony and energy in creating interior colour schemes, placing furniture and choosing accessories.

Instead of focussing purely on the physical aspects of an area, feng shui concentrates on the feeling we create in a room.

Old masters may have studied for 30 or more years to master their craft, adhering to one of the key schools: the Form School (working with the features of a site, such as mountains or water), the Compass Method (using a geomancer's multi-ring compass or Luo Pan), or a theoretical combination of I Ching, Confucianism and Taoism.

Interior designer, now feng shui practitioner and teacher, Betty Bayley puts it simply. "Instead of focussing purely on the physical aspects of an area, feng shui concentrates on the feeling we create in a room. The result is an amazing space, where people comment on the wonderful energy it gives them".

Feng shui's emphasis on simplicity, lack of clutter and seasonal appropriateness is easy to adapt. Clean, open surfaces—including inside cupboards and under beds—keep the energy flowing freely in homes. So, a good de-clutter and some fresh accessories—autumn flowers and fruits, for example—may be the best feng shui redecoration you can create.

However, she points out that many of us, in the pursuit of fashion or saleability, or trying to impress, also lose touch with what we know instinctively to be the good feeling of a colour in our homes. Small children still have that strong sense, and will become agitated or not go into a room that jars that natural sense.

In its simplest form, feng shui balances the five key elements of fire, earth, metal, water and wood, mimicking nature in their use and balance. Certain colours and shapes also represent these elements.

Working with colour in feng shui has reinforced to Betty the power of particular shades in altering mood and feeling. Here are some common responses to colours:

Red—is a yang, high-energy colour, so not to be over-used. It is too stimulating for children's bedrooms (where they go to calm and slow down) but terrific for a dining room to stimulate conversation, appetite and good times.

Yellow—has power and intelligence, but too much can be irritating, especially for kids (yellowed lime greens, for example).

Green—is for hope and new energy, as well as being good for digestion, so great for a kitchen or dining room.

Blue—is cool, calming and ideal for a bedroom or healing space.

Pink—yes, love, happiness and joy. It doesn't have to be hot, hussy pink—find a soft shade that really pleases you.

Purple—is a highly spiritual colour, but can be too stimulating for some people (being a combination of strong blue and strong red).

Whites—to Westerners are cleansing and pure. Use a white keyed to the colour or elements you favour.

Black—because it absorbs light (and chi energy), handle black with care, using it in reflective glossy lacquer, and opening windows and curtains to let in energy.

However, calming pale lilacs and lavenders have the same effect as soft blues or soft pinks.

Betty finds that the environment we inhabit heavily influences our attraction to certain colours. People living close to the earth are attracted to the muted soil colours. People living in upper floor apartments or with dominant water views favour watery and sky blues to give them a sense of connection with what they see outside.

Betty happily uses patterns in her feng shui colour schemes, but warns that mixing patterns and shapes requires some skill to ensure the proportion and repetition of colours, textures and shapes works.

Mimic nature, where the darkest colours are on the ground (the forest floor), the mid colours around us at eye level (the walls) and the lightest colours in the sky (the ceiling), she advises. Use the strongest, brightest hits of colour in small doses that change out with the seasons—as you see with seasonal flowers, leaves or blossoms.

Listen to your intuitive reaction when you are in coloured spaces, and don't be fooled into thinking whites, beiges and neutrals are the only sophisticated or fashionable choices.



fire

Since primitive times, humans have been drawn to the warmth, security and power of fire. As well as in the fireplace, fire is represented by candles, living beings and pointy peak shapes. Colours: reds and purples (from lavender to burgundy).

earth

In a home, this is represented by materials from the earth, such as pottery, tile, crystals, soil in a pot plant, and by square, flat shapes. Colours: browns, terracottas and yellows.

metal

In western homes, elements such as taps, handles, or furniture legs represent metals, as do golds and greys, and round or domed shapes. Colours: whites, greys and beiges.

water

As well as water in vases or fish bowls, water is represented by asymmetrical, wavy or flowing shapes, glass and mirrors. Unlike here, water in ancient China was more likely to be dark, slow-moving rivers, so water elements are darker or richer than you may expect. Colours: navy blues, blacks and royal blues.

wood

As well as items made from wood, this element is represented by tall, thin forms—as in a tree trunk—and all those materials made from wood or plants, such as linen, rattan, cotton, bamboo and other natural fibres. Colours: greens or paler blues.



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hanging wallpaper

Depending on the type of paper you're hanging, you'll need: paint roller or brushes, scissors and a sharp-bladed knife, ruler, wallpaper trough, smoothing brush, adhesive, sealer or wall size depending on your wall surface, plumb line, ladder, bucket, drop cloth.

Step 1

Ensure wall surface is clean, dusted, dry and sound.

For traditional nonpasted and pre-pasted papers, apply the appropriate size to the wall according to the manufacturer's directions, so that the paper is easy to position and will stick properly.

Step 2

Make a plumb line by cutting a length of string approximately two thirds the height of the wall and tying a small weight to the bottom so that it will hang straight when attached to the wall.

Step 4

Pasting:

Traditional non-pasted papers: Apply the recommended paste to two thirds of the drop, fold the top of the strip down so that paste rests against paste.

Paste the rest of the paper and fold the same way again. Roll loosely and leave to rest for the amount of time specified in the instructions on the roll.

Pre-pasted papers:

Roll the drop loosely from the bottom with the pattern on the inside and place in the trough-full of water for 15 seconds.

Paste-the-wall papers:

Apply the recommended paste to the wall with a brush or roller, according to the instructions on the roll.

Step 3

If using non-pasted and pre-pasted papers, measure the length of the wallpaper drops, from the skirting to the ceiling, allowing 5cm top and bottom for trimming. Follow the directions on the roll if allowing for a pattern match.

Paste-the-wall papers don't require trimming to length.



Step 5

Hanging:

Start at and work away from the main source of natural light, aiming to finish in an inconspicuous corner. Measure from a corner to the width of the paper, less 15mm.

Secure the plumb line to the highest point of the wall, and hang the wallpaper along its line, working back into the corner, so that the extra 15mm wraps around onto the next wall. Step up to the ceiling with the paper. Press it against the wall, leaving 5mm for trimming along the ceiling. Moving down, position the paper against the plumb line and smooth it over fully to remove any air bubbles.

Sponge with clean water to remove any extra paste.

living with the animals

You have made your home safe and comfortable for the family. What about your pets?



When you host family, friends, or neighbours for lunch or dinner, you want to make sure they enjoy a safe and comfortable environment. The same concern should extend to your pets. Putting in a bit of effort can help them feel protected and happy around the house, but exactly what needs doing depends on the pet you choose.



Let's start with a few tips relating to safety for man's best friend. Tracy Dunn, customer services manager for the Auckland SPCA Animal Village, says that one of the worst dangers for puppies is chewing on electrical cords.

Wherever possible, fasten down or tuck away any long, fun-to-play-with stretches of flex. Replace frayed cords and, if you do actually see your dog chewing a cord, stop him, discourage the behaviour, and offer a toy as an alternative.

Other chewing dangers for curious canines include poisons, especially rat or snail bait, and small items that can cause damage if swallowed. Tracy suggests that dog owners keep indigestible temptations, such as golf balls or fishing sinkers, out of reach of their pups.

Apply the same principle to your favourite ornaments, batteries, or anything else small that could be swallowed. Even that yellow, fuzzy dog fave, the tennis ball, can be a danger if Fido is left alone with it.

"Dogs can tear tennis balls to pieces, and swallow the netting that covers the outside and the rubber inside," Tracy says. To prevent your dog from eating what he shouldn't, have a crawl around your home at pet level. Move anything potentially dangerous, or particularly valuable to you, out of the dog's reach. You'll also need to keep rubbish in a lidded bin or other pet-proof container. Chicken, pork and chop bones in the rubbish are a particular danger, as they break into small fragments that can be fatal if swallowed.

"Get to the vet or an after-hours vet clinic immediately," Tracy advises." This is especially crucial if poison is ingested, as treatment needs to be administered within a very specific time frame."

Keep the lid down on the toilet, too, especially if you use a clip-on automatic cleaner. And what if, despite best efforts, your dog does swallow something he shouldn't?

If a puppy's mouth is not getting him in danger, the next likely culprit is his energy level. An energetic puppy and a flight of stairs can be a particularly bad combination.

"A puppy's bone structure is not fully developed, especially with large-breed dogs," Tracy explains. "They need to be stopped from running up and down stairs at speed. They can miss steps quite easily, and fall and break legs or damage joints when they're little."

You may need to consider child-gates for the stairs, or discourage your puppy from running up and down if he must use the stairs.

For cats, many of the same concerns apply. They, too, get themselves into trouble by swallowing dangerous or indigestible items left lying around the home. They may be particularly skilled at slicing open bin bags and finding bones or other hazards, so keep rubbish out of claw-reach. Also, be aware that cats are particularly likely to do themselves a mischief by swallowing fish hooks that taste or smell of fish, so these need to be washed thoroughly and packed away.

If your pet preference is for feathered friends, safety considerations are quite different. The first thing to consider may be danger from other pets. "Cats have to learn to tolerate and accept a bird, and dogs, too," says Pam Howlett of SPCA Birdwing. Before letting your bird loose in a room, Pam advises considering which things a bird might accidentally knock over. "If you're going to have your bird out loose, you need to keep it and your possessions safe," she says.

Birds also need shelter from the hot sun, and they should never be kept in a draft, as they can catch a chill. Like dogs, birds may swallow dangerous objects, such as staples, pins or hair clips. Another ingestible danger for birds includes pot plants, some of which can be poisonous. This also applies to cats and dogs, so check with your garden centre or search online for a list of plants that are dangerous to pets at www.vetservice.co.nz.

For a bird on the wing, mirrors and windows can spell trouble. You can help them see these as obstacles, not opportunities, by putting up decals, closing the blinds, or removing mirrors. It's also important to check that windows and doors are closed, before you set your bird loose in the house.

"So often, people lose a pet if someone has inadvertently left a door or window open," Pam says. Owners themselves can be a serious threat to a bird's safety. "Birds can come up behind you very quietly. Be aware of where they are, because you could turn around and stand on them."

Pam says many owners have lost their pets in this way. A bird's stealth can also be trouble around closing or sliding doors; be sure you don't accidentally close a door on your unsuspecting pet.

Bearing all that in mind, keeping your pet safe seems complex enough, but possible. However, just like a person, your pet could be perfectly safe and totally miserable. Providing for its comfort and stimulation at home is a basic kindness.

Let's begin with sleeping quarters. For cats, it really doesn't matter what you do.

"Cats are very self-reliant," Tracy Dunn says. "You can buy all the beds in world, but your cat will still curl up in paper bag. It's a good idea, though, to make sure they can easily come and go, and this is as simple as installing a cat door."

Dogs, however, need the security of a well-defined place of their own. "Especially for puppies, we recommend a specific bed for the dog, in a specific place in the house. You should teach your dog to go there when told, and that space should be off limits to children," Tracy says.

This helps a dog to understand its place in the family, and also gives it room to retreat from noisy kids or other stresses.

Birds require the same consideration. Pam Howlett recommends putting a bird's cage against a wall on one side.

"It's best not to have people able to walk on all sides of the cage," she says. "That leaves the bird feeling it has nowhere to go if it gets a sudden fright."

Your pet also needs exercise and activities, especially if you're at work all day.

"What you do with your dog when you're not there is hugely important to its well-being," Tracy says.

Fail to deliver and there's a good chance your pup will find something to do on his own, shredding your slippers or something equally un-amusing, especially if it is less than six months old.

A good walk in the morning and at night will help burn off excess energy and lessen the likelihood of separation anxiety in puppies.

Tracy also advises that dog toys designed to hold food inside, which the dog must work to get at, can keep dogs of any age busy and out of trouble.

If your dog spends the day outside, provide a tyre hung from a tree, a pet safe bone, or other toys in the yard. Favourite toys for cats include anything hanging on a string, especially on elastic. Birds also appreciate plenty of toys and perches on different levels inside their cages.

Lastly, make sure your home is a place where you spend quality time with your pet.

"There's nothing that replaces human interaction," Tracy says. "It's important that when you do come home, you interact with your animal and make it part of the entire family."

and then there are the humans...

Sharing the family home with the family animals is a balancing act. People are responsible for looking after their pets' needs, but they need to look after their own as well. Here are a few tips on making your pet's home safe and comfortable for people.

Children—Sometimes, offspring and pets don't mix as well as we might like. Pets may lose patience with a child; in the worst case, scratching or biting. To help keep conflict to a minimum, make sure pets have a quiet place to retreat to in the home. Teaching children a few basic rules about respecting your pet will also help keep them both safe.

In general, it's great for children to learn to live with pets, but very young children and infants must always be supervised with any animal. Cats have been known to climb into a baby's cot—a nice, warm spot—and may suffocate an infant powerless to move the weight.

To keep your baby safe, close the nursery door.

Barking dogs—This can sometimes be a problem when moving a dog from a rural environment to the city.

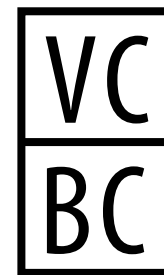
"A dog that may have spent most of its life being allowed to bark or run on a large property won't understand why it's now being reprimanded for barking," says Tracy Dunn of the Auckland SPCA.

To help a dog work through issues with excessive barking, seek help from a canine behaviourist.

Allergies—If at all possible, and depending on the allergy, it's best to avoid the situation of a pet and an allergic person sharing a home. The pet can't do anything to reduce the allergic reaction, and the person with the allergy may suffer discomfort or even debilitating effects. It is almost impossible to keep an area of the house sterile when a cat, for example, is in residence, but vacuuming and dusting, and keeping pets off the bed, may help ease aggravation of allergies.



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20 tips for saving energy

1. When you build a new home, save energy by starting as you mean to go on and consider passive solar energy. A home constructed on a correctly oriented concrete pad is an ideal way to trap the warmth of the sun.
2. Invest in double-glazing to retain the sun's heat. To capture as much sun as possible, all windows should be kept clean and trees trimmed so they don't block the sunlight.
3. Plant a deciduous tree to shade your largest westfacing window. In summer, you'll have shade and, in winter, sunlight.
4. If you are renovating an older home, never miss an opportunity to insulate the walls or ceiling properly. Use adhesive draught-stop strips in any gaps in windows or around door frames.
5. While polished wooden floors are an attractive feature in many older houses, they can make for cold and draughty winters. Don't be afraid to hang on to carpet while the weather's freezing. Rugs are also a fantastic option.
6. In winter, close the doors and curtains of rooms that you're heating. Curtains should be drawn just before it gets dark to keep in the heat. Ideally, they should be full-length and lined to make the most of their insulation qualities. They look better this way too.
7. Position heaters away from windows, so they heat rooms more effectively. Use the thermostat and timer on your heaters so they only come on when you need them and automatically switch off when they reach a certain temperature.
8. Block off your fireplace when you're not using it, or heat from other sources will escape straight up the chimney. Use a hot water bottle or put an extra blanket on the bed, instead of using an electric blanket.
9. Insulate your hot water cylinder and adjust the thermostat so that hot water is 55°C at the tap. Fix any dripping taps and have short showers instead of baths. Use cold water when you're filling the jug and rinsing dishes. Switch off your hot water if you're away for more than 2 weeks.
10. Switch off any lights you're not using and take advantage of natural lighting whenever possible. Choose the appropriate strength of bulb for the area. Don't use a 100 watt bulb for a bedside lamp, when a 40 watt one would be sufficient.
11. Clean your lights and lampshades regularly to receive maximum light. Lampshades need to look good, but more importantly, they need to work for you too. Don't be fooled by something pretty if it leaves you squinting for more illumination.



12. In a large open-plan space, have your lighting wired to different circuits, with switches to turn on only the lights you need. You usually don't need to have 15 halogens on at once, if it's just you in the room.
13. Fridges and freezers work most efficiently when they're full, but not overloaded. Defrost your freezer regularly to reduce the ice build-up. Use the most efficient temperature settings—set your freezer at -18°C and your fridge between 2°C and 5°C.
14. Leave space around the back of your fridge or freezer for air to circulate and avoid placing the appliance next to your oven or stove, or in direct sunlight.
15. Avoid opening your oven door too often—each time you do, the temperature drops by up to 15°C. Use your oven to cook several things at once. Keep lids on the pots when you're cooking and make sure they fit well. Put small pots on small elements and large pots on larger elements.
16. When you're not using appliances, unplug them or switch them off at the wall. Even standby mode wastes power. The biggest culprits are microwaves and televisions.
17. Wait until the dishwasher is full before you use it—and use the economy cycle. If your dishwasher can generate its own hot water, then use this function, as it's more efficient than using hot water from your cylinder.
18. Don't overload your washing machine—although it's better to wash full loads than half loads. Adjust your wash cycle to match the load and try to wash using cold water. Use shorter wash cycles if possible and make sure your clothes are well-spun before putting them in the dryer.
19. Use your clothesline as often as possible. Try to use your clothes dryer only when it's raining, and then make sure you fill it—it's more efficient to dry a full load. Use the low heat setting on your dryer whenever you can. Ventilate the clothes dryer to the outside and clean its lint filter every time you use it.
20. When buying a new appliance, look for an energy-efficient model for longterm savings. You can check out the star rating on most new appliances.



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