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INTERIOR DESIGNER

Ask Alex

Get your decor dilemmas solved by our resident interiors expert and colour enthusiast

I want to repaint our bedroom, which is currently a pale clay colour that looks yellowish in some light. I want white and every time I read *Your Home and Garden* I see so many shades of white, I just get confused. I want a soft warm white, not a bright white and no under-colour of grey or yellow. Is there such a colour?

Maureen Lee, Auckland

The short answer is yes, there is such a white. The long answer will hopefully get you on the path to finding it. Whites are tricky but New Zealanders love them so you ask an excellent question. Whites reflect light, they lighten and brighten and they offer a perfect canvas for showcasing colour and texture. White isn't just white, as you kindly point out. There are many shades of white but you have already narrowed down your search by telling me that you want a soft warm white. You will need to consider the light in the room and other accent colours you want to add to the room. Your next step is to get sample pots of whites that have the tone you like. Paint a sample on a large piece of paper. Move this around the room and see how it changes in different light. Don't forget to try it at different times of the day and night as artificial light can influence how

it appears. Many people choose a white based on seeing it in someone else's home, but be wary of this as their space can be different to your own. For you I would look at Dulux 'Okarito' or Dulux 'Double Mount Aspiring' and start from there.

I'm keen to see ideas on what to do with old furniture in a new house. This is our dining table and chairs. They were my husband's grandfather's! We don't want to get rid of them when we rebuild our earthquake-damaged house but I'm not sure how to incorporate old furniture items into a new build.

Genevieve Leech, Christchurch

Yes, I think you're right Genevieve. Just because you're building doesn't mean that you need to scrap all of your existing furniture. There is also an ethical and environmental advantage to repurposing or reusing furniture. My favourite thing to do is to give pieces like this a new lease on life. It can be as simple as sanding it back or spraying it in a high-gloss paint to show off its beautiful form, or modernising it with new upholstery or a table top. In your case, there's a couple of options. If you love the wood and the table is in good condition you could sand it back but modernise it by covering the top in a laminated fabric (Bolt of Cloth sells a good range). A more sophisticated and edgy approach is to measure up a piece of stone (like Corian, marble or a substitute-look product) to sit atop the table. With both these options the chairs can be re-upholstered with a complementary fabric or leather/vinyl. Start with a budget first, but don't let this stop you from being creative.



Hi Alex, I love your style and your use of bright colors. I have tried my best with this display in our kitchen, but I still don't think it looks right. Do you have any advice to improve it?

Megan Lowish, Arrowtown

Hello Megan and welcome to styling 101. I love that you have listened to your inner designer and have acknowledged that there is something wrong. It's easily fixed and it is a simple matter of re-arranging and trying new combinations until it feels right.

Colour I like that you have a common colour theme sorted. Colour is an excellent way to tie in a display (or vignette). Groups of objects can be quite random in texture and size but using colour is an excellent way to link them together. Remember that colours are not created equal. A yellow can have different undertones and won't necessarily match just because it's 'yellow' – the same applies with other colours. Pair up colours that complement each other, not clash.

Ignore what you don't want to see I have to address the elephant in the room... that big white microwave! If there's something that is more functional than pretty I try and ignore it and 'wow' the eye to other places, like below or above.

Play around with scale and composition You don't always have to fill the space with a similar-shaped object. Be random and unexpected. Play with scale and place a tiny interesting object in a large area or squeeze something bigger in a small space. Your space doesn't 'feel right' because the gaps are filled with similar-sized objects that are too same-same and symmetrical. By mixing up symmetry and scale you can make it more playful to the eye.

Mix texture and pattern I like the fact you've teamed up two patterns with the tea towel and the oven mitt. It's such a winning combination!

Be unexpected Just because you're in a kitchen you don't have to use kitchen items to decorate. I try to mix it up and add kids' art, meaningful mementos and favourite pieces. Have fun and remember to design for your eyes only!

