

Color consultants and interior designers talk about

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There is a language of color.

The color gray alone can be many different shades: smoke, pebble, dovetail and charcoal with varying degrees of cool or warmth, and understanding how any color works can change the feeling of where you live.

"Color is the creative feature that can tie together many elements in the home,"

says architectural color consultant Keatin Holly, speaking of a recent color project in Tiburon.

When homeowners in the Cypress Hollow neighborhood, who longed to add warmth, interest and contrast to a home with too many rooms with all-white walls, they contacted Holly.

"My clients wanted a color scheme to complement their art pieces and ensure that one room flowed smoothly into the next."

On the kitchen walls Holly chose rich burnt orange as an accent color and balanced this with softer, warm neutrals in the family room. Playing off the natural stone of the fireplace, she emphasized the area around it with a deeper taupe hue, and a soft white paint accentuates the substantial trim and moldings in the rooms.

The owners' collection of sailing paintings with strong primary colors that typify the San Francisco Bay and Mediterranean artwork blends nicely on the finished walls, Holly said, and the high ceilings suffuse the house with plenty of light, which intensifies the saturation of the new paint colors.

"In my practice, I have found that most people are more comfortable with warmer than cooler tones," said Holly, who has worked as a consultant for 16 years. "However, there are people who want to be surrounded by coolness."

When a homeowner needs to update the look and feel of their home, or a property owner wants to rent or sell a property, they might consult a color expert, she said.

"Color is one of the least-expensive changes a property owner can make — painting a wall is relatively inexpensive compared to purchasing new furniture, installing new appliances, windows or flooring, etc.," Holly said.

It's Personal

"Color in and of itself can't be separated out from everything else," said Corinne Wiley, an interior decorator with more than 50 years of experience. "Color changes with the architecture of the house, exposure to light and environment."

"A lot of people are afraid of color," said Wiley, who is also a former Belvedere mayor and city councilmember.

"Many of my clients would prefer to

have a monochromatic décor and not take risks — it takes a lot of confidence to decorate with color."

Wiley said she listens to the client to learn as much as possible about their lifestyle and what their favorite colors are and how they make them feel.

"It is terribly important to know the colors that the clients want to decorate with. The analysis takes psychology because it is deeply personal," Wiley said.

She quoted the famed interior designer

Billy Baldwin, saying, "The rooms that are most successful declare their owner's independence, carry the owner's signature."

"Vivian Vance, the Ethel Mertz television character from the 'I Love Lucy' TV show of the '50s, had a big personality and she wanted a very colorful home," Wiley said. "So, in the '70s, I designed every room of her Belvedere cottage in a different bright color scheme."

Architectural color process

Megan Clark, a Mill Valley-based architectural color and design consultant who grew up in Tiburon, said she is familiar with paint color because she worked several years with her former husband's paint contracting business and has worked as an independent consultant for 10 years.

"Artists and others may understand paint in small quantities," Clark said. "However, paint does not behave the same on a canvas as it does on a room wall or home exterior."

"I can't make all the decisions for a client — because I am not a mind reader — it requires a very collaborative process," said Clark, who joked that she is a "color Sherpa," a guide who helps clients arrive at decisions through consultations at their home or business.

Clark offered some tips and observations:

- Don't fill every wall with artwork — try color instead.
- The colors of your childhood home and cultural background may influence your choices.
- Consider lighting and sun exposure.
- Work with existing kitchen/bath finishes, furnishings, art, flooring or exterior architectural elements and materials.
- Consider lifestyle, passions and hobbies.
- Lively people like bright colors — introspective people prefer subdued colors. Many people gravitate to the mid-range tones.

In exploring color uses, she recommends you buy a large-sized paint chip or a small can of your selected color to experiment on a fair-sized area and then determine if the color interacts well with nature and décor

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— Architectural color consultant Keatin Holly



From the top, architectural color consultant Keatin Holly chose a rich burnt orange for the kitchen and soft neutral paint colors, along with coordinating bright artwork, accessories and furniture to create a sophisticated and warm feeling for this home in the Cypress Hollow neighborhood of Tiburon. She and she worked with the colors of the San Francisco Giant's baseball team to create sports-themed bedroom for a teenage boy.

JOCELYN KNIGHT PHOTOS