

Finding a happy colour medium

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O'Brien says people get stuck in habits and often revert to beige because they are too overwhelmed by all the choices. But she says homeowners do seem to be getting braver about their colour selections.

"I've come to the conclusion that all those pale neutrals that were so common in the '90s — and believe me, I had them too — were colours that gave us intellectual satisfaction, but not the emotional fulfillment we want now."

In choosing a colour scheme, O'Brien says the first selection is always the hardest. "But it flows from there," she says. "You can have several different colours, but each must flow with the next."

She says colour has taken on increasing importance since the late 1990s, because of the cooing trend. People have become more aware of how their environment makes them feel.

Paint colour provides a dramatic change to a room and the mood of the people who live in it, without a huge cost. She charges \$150 an hour and says most jobs can be completed in about two hours.

O'Brien says lofts provide a greater challenge because of the absence of walls. She usually suggests painting the entry hall, stairwell and possibly one main area with a central, neutral colour.

For Younes and Needham, that central colour is a warm almond. From there, O'Brien suggested several contrasting, but complementary hues. She chose terra cotta for the wall with the windows, salmon for the kitchen, gray-green for the bathroom, dark green for the wall above the fireplace and a blue, at Matt's request, for his room.

The window frames were painted black, which echoes the black iron railing on the mezzanine's circular staircase and the new black Corian kitchen countertop.

"Wendy and I have widely divergent tastes and when Sylvia put these colours together, it amazed us because the colours weren't ones we would have thought about," says Needham. "But in retrospect, it seems natural. It's awesome."

Younes loves it, too. "It's really striking," she says. "Sylvia picked up the dark green from a photograph that hangs over the fireplace and the terra cotta from a rose in my Chinese screen. When you look out the windows now and see the bricks of the surrounding buildings, you feel more integrated into the community because the terra cotta blends with the bricks. And I was surprised she could find a colour that could complement Rick's red motorcycle and his red guitar."

"It was shocking that it took such a short time. The painting was done in just a couple of days. My son walked in after being away and said it's like living in a whole new house. It's warm but uplifting," says Younes.

For information on O'Brien's services, call 416-995-9111 or e-mail sylviaobrien@colourtheory.net

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Opt for colours that make you feel good

Here are paint colour tips offered by Sylvia O'Brien, creative director of the Toronto firm Colour Theory:

- ★ Don't base your choice on tiny chips or paint store lighting. See if larger chips are available and move them around your home at different times of the day to see how they look and react to different lighting conditions. A vivid colour on a small chip may be too intense when painted on a wall.

- ★ Select colours that make you



LUCAS OLENIUK / TORONTO STAR

Sylvia O'Brien chose a warm almond colour for the central area around the stairway leading to the mezzanine in the downtown Toronto condo of Wendy Younes and Rick Needham.

feel good. How a colour makes you feel depends on your personal association with it.

- ★ Pick colours that work well together to create overall harmony.

- ★ Choose colours that relate to your existing furnishings and accessories, as they will strengthen the look of co-ordination.

- ★ One central colour, usually a neutral, works best for the entranceway, stairwell and perhaps one main area of the

house. Use contrasting colours for each area of the home or for accent walls.

- ★ To create an accent wall, walk into the room and note which wall you see first. It's usually the one with the fireplace or artwork. That's the wall to emphasize with colour.

- ★ Never paint a bedroom yellow. Its energizing qualities don't make for restfulness. For offices, deep blue aids in concentration and focus.

TRACY HANES