

# Using Color in Kitchens & Baths

by Patrick J. Galvin

Henry Ford once said (allegedly) of his Model T: "You can have any color you want, as long as it's black."

Kitchens and baths suffer a similar fate in many builder homes. That's why white leads perennially as the color for both appliances and fixtures.

The good thing about white is that it's safe. It goes with everything and, for that reason, it possibly is the best choice for the builder.

In model homes, however, colors can add excitement. They can stimulate a buying urge in shoppers even when the colors are not the shopper's favorites, as long as there are one or two alternate choices. (The alternate choices should be in color groups, not individual colors, or you risk a walk on the wild side.)

Unfortunately, color is at the same time both widely used and little understood. But there are some general guidelines for choosing colors that seem "comfortable" with each other. First, we should be familiar with the terms.

1. **Hue** is the name of the color.
2. The lightness or darkness of a hue is its **value**.
  - a. Adding black gives it a *shade*.
  - b. Adding white gives it a *tint*.
  - c. Adding gray gives it a *tone*.
3. A color's purity or strength is called its **intensity**.

4. **Warm tones** are the hues in the color wheel ranging from yellow through orange to red. **Cool tones** range from violet through blue to green.

The three primary colors of light are red, blue, and yellow. Pigments, however, have different primary colors. In pigments the primaries are magenta, cyan, and yellow.

Complementary colors are those that are directly opposite each other on a color wheel. To mix complementary hues is to neutralize. That is, if you physically mixed the complementary colors yellow and violet, you would get a neutral gray. But if you put complementaries next to each other, you get extreme contrast. Analogous hues are those next to each other.

Certain groupings of colors have stood the test of time. These groupings can be mixed in the kitchen among cabinets, appliances, floors, countertops and walls, and in the bathroom among floors, walls, fixtures, and countertops.

One such group is called a triad. A triad is any group of three colors that are equidistant on the color wheel. For example, this includes the three primaries—red, yellow, and blue. Since these are strong hues, though, mixing them can be difficult.

Another grouping is complementaries. This might, for example, include blue-green and red-orange, or yellow and violet.

A popular grouping we see in many bathrooms is monochromatic—one color plus shades and tints. It is used a lot in bathrooms with blue

fixtures and lighter or darker blue tile or cultured marble. In kitchens—and elsewhere in the house—it is popular now in shades and tints of gray.

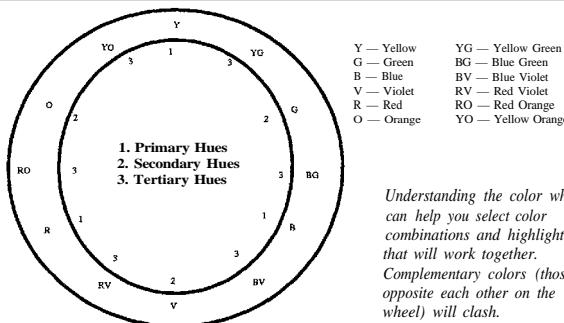
An analogous grouping contains any three consecutive colors on the color wheel. This might include, for example, yellow, yellow-green, and green.

Double complementary groupings are two colors adjacent on the color wheel, plus their complementaries. An example would be yellow and yellow-orange, which are side by side, and their complementaries, violet and blue-violet.

A split complementary grouping is a color plus the colors on each side

in mind when choosing a color scheme:

- Usually, the fewer colors the better, and keep door and window trim the same color as the walls.
- Color intensifies in a north room or in a small room, so it is safer to use tints.
- North light is cold, so it generally is best to use colors from the warm side of the color wheel.
- Avoid a strong color on the ceiling. It makes the ceiling "come down" and can be oppressive.
- It generally is better to keep darker colors lower than the countertop in a kitchen or bathroom—or any room.



*Understanding the color wheel can help you select color combinations and highlights that will work together. Complementary colors (those opposite each other on the wheel) will clash.*

of its complement: violet plus yellow-orange and yellow-green, for instance.

While any of these groupings will work all around the color wheel without clashing, this does not mean they should be used in equal mass. Very often a color scheme requires only a touch of a relieving color. It could be a bright red faucet, or merely a red trivet on the cooktop.

To use these color schemes, try this procedure:

1. Establish the dominating color.
2. Decide where it will go.
3. Using the color wheel, establish the other colors according to the type of grouping you will use.
4. Decide where they will go.

In model homes, keep alternate choices simple by staying with the same types of groupings, but moving around the color wheel. Two alternates selected in this way will please anybody.

There are a few other things to remember in kitchen and bathroom.

For one, appliance and cabinet colors never will match exactly. Sometimes even countertop laminate colors will not match each other exactly, because light reflection from them is affected by the direction in which they went in the press when manufactured.

In the bathroom, an exception to this matching problem is in the fixtures by Eljer and American Standard that are matched as perfectly as possible by American Olean tile. This match has to be specified. Otherwise, don't try for perfect matches. Go to tints and shades, or to complementaries.

Here are some other points to keep

- If there is a lot of natural light in the kitchen, you will be safe with darker colors. But when the kitchen depends on artificial light, lighter colors are better. Dark colors absorb too much light.

• All colors, even black and white, look different under incandescent lights, fluorescent lights, and daylight. So be sure colors are selected under the same conditions in which they will be used.

• Warm colors increase the apparent size of objects in a room, but when they are used as wall colors they decrease the apparent size of the room itself. High intensities have the same effects.

These color guidelines are quite general in a field filled with specifics, but they can be followed throughout the model home. And if you want a first-class, ready-made color scheme, go look at a truly expensive vase, dish or drape. Fine products such as those are not color-keyed by cheap labor. ■

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