



DECORATING > DECORATING WITH COLOR

# Meet Our 2023 Color Stars: 10 Designers Expertly Decorating with Color

These interior designers are pros at confidently decorating with color, and their tips can help you do the same.

By [Eleni N. Gage](#) and [Monika Biegler Eyers](#) | Published on April 13, 2023





PHOTO: ANNIE SCHLECHTER

It's a red-letter day: We're announcing our first-ever list of interior designers whose work represents the gold standard when it comes to transforming a space with color. Whether they go bold or expertly layer neutrals, these virtuosos tell us how they turn ordinary rooms into exceptional spaces, plus share their [favorite paint picks](#). Color us inspired.



*color blocking*  
**DANIELLE  
FENNOY**  
~~~~~

PHOTO: INTERIOR: WILL ELLIS. PORTRAIT: DAVID A LAND/OTTO ARCHIVE

## Danielle Fennoy

Danielle Fennoy, founder of Brooklyn-based [Revamp Interior Design](#), champions [bright blocks of color](#) to create discrete experiences within a single space. "I always start with a floor plan or furniture plan and then mentally walk through the space. Color on the walls helps draw the eye," she says.

"In this dining room, it was this weird middle space, but I want you to stop and feel that moment. So it became a focal point with the confetti wallpaper. Then all the colors for the space were pulled from that wallpaper."

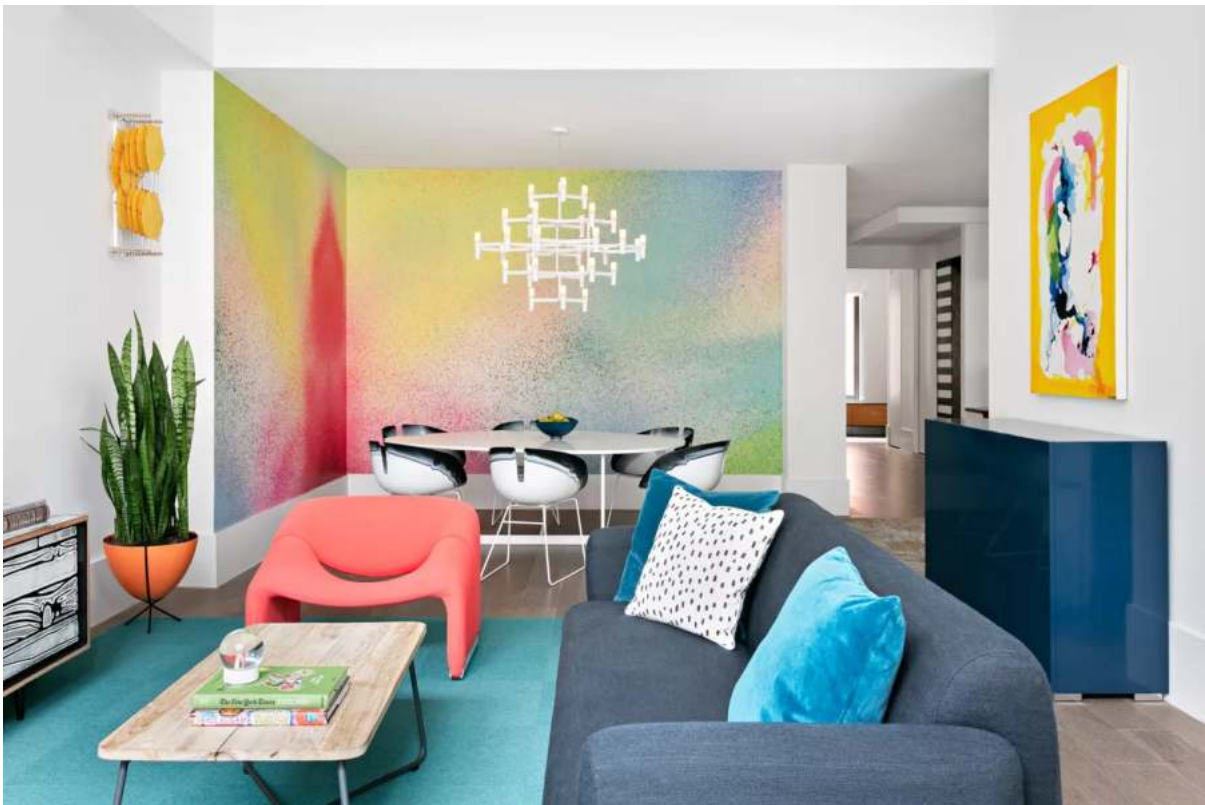


PHOTO: WILL ELLIS

Key to color blocking is how you distribute colors in the room. "I like to bring play into the mix. Figure out what the hierarchy is, where you want the eye to go. Say, 'OK, this is going to be my bold statement, and everything else is going to be subtle,' or 'We're going to envelop an entire room,'" says Fennoy.



I love to do really small spaces like a powder room in bold, bright colors. You can have this fun, wacky, transformative moment and then you're out. It's not risky; it's just paint!

And don't forget to look up! Fennoy says one unexpected place to bring color is the ceiling. "We look up a lot more than we think we do. In



my son's room the walls are white, and we went with an orangey ceiling, and I just love it."

Also, consider colors that pair well together. "I love pink and lime green or plum and lime green. I think that dusty deep blue and neon pink are amazing. I like a deep, moody color and a zing!"

## Danielle's Favorite Paint Colors

"Farrow & Ball's [Brinjal](#) is a divine, regal, rich, inviting deep plum. I also love their [Inchyra Blue](#). It's a deep, dusty gray blue you can pair with any pop of color. It would look great with a citron green, a hot pink or a neon pink. So you can do this very subdued, moody blue and make it come alive with something unexpected and vibrant. I'm also a fan of [Simply White](#) by Benjamin Moore, which is a little warmer without being yellow or beige. It can go more traditional or more modern."



*coastal cool*  
**MARK D.**  
**SIKES**  
~~~~~

PHOTO: INTERIOR AND PORTRAIT: AMY NEUNSINGER

## Mark D. Sikes

Los Angeles designer [Mark D. Sikes](#) makes waves with his ocean-inspired color palettes and love of stripes. “A blue-and-white palette is crisp, timeless, and tailored. Everyone—regardless of age or gender—is comfortable with blue and white,” he says.

When [looking at blues](#), decide on which tone you want to use. “Blues come in a big range: those with green undertones, some purple, some red. I try to stick to the same undertone in a palette,” he says.



PHOTO: AMY NEUNSINGER





---

I love a bold color on everything in a room—walls, trim, doors, and ceiling. It always turns out great and can be surprisingly calming and serene.

---

Next, think about flowing this watery hue through the entire house. "Pick one color of blue and have it in every room, mixed with other things, to lend a common thread to the house. Mix up the rooms so some have light walls and blue on furnishings and some have blue walls. Do the same with fabrics, balancing solids and prints throughout."

## **Mark's Favorite Paint Colors**

Farrow & Ball's [Skylight](#), [Borrowed Light](#), and [Blue Ground](#). "They are all beautiful, have just enough gray in them that they feel like they've been there forever, and each has depth so they work with most lighting." At the darker end of the spectrum, Mark likes Sherwin-Williams' [In the Navy](#).





*light & airy*  
**LEANNE**  
**FORD**  
~~~~~

PHOTO: INTERIOR: ERIN KELLY. PORTRAIT: NICOLE FRANZEN

## Leanne Ford

In the hands of Pittsburgh designer [Leanne Ford](#), white isn't just a color, it's *the* color. She layers its shades to create impactful spaces. "For traditional spaces, I like a warm, creamy white with tan undertones, and a crisp white for spaces I want to look modern," she says.



PHOTO: ERIN KELLY



Don't be afraid to paint things white—new pieces, heirlooms, hand-me-downs. I say 'no mercy' if paint makes it work in your space.

---

However, texture is key to making white work. “To keep white from feeling sterile, it’s all about texture. You can add box trim on walls or do stucco, and use slipcovers, throws, and layered rugs for warmth.”

For the ceiling, she recommends using the same white you used on the walls. “It feels cohesive.”

## Leanne's Favorite Paint Colors

“Since I started, I’ve used Behr’s [Ultra Pure White](#), out of the can at Home Depot—you don’t even have to mix it. Behr’s [Crisp Linen](#) is an incredibly warm, super simple white. I just did an entire project in my home with Behr’s [Blank Canvas](#), a very simple white. It is exactly what it is: a blank canvas to play with and it doesn’t lean in any direction.”



*fresh historical*  
**SHEILA  
BRIDGES**



# Sheila Bridges

Like her Harlem Toile de Jouy pattern, which reimagines the pastoral French wallpaper in an African American context, celebrated New York City designer Sheila Bridges draws on colors and shapes rooted in history and applies them in contemporary ways.



L: PHOTO: FRANK FRANCES / OTTO ARCHIVE



“When in doubt, always choose a historical paint color,” she says. Inspired by particular eras or architectural styles, these timeless shades have staying power. Then look to nature for surefire ways to pair them. “Most of the color combinations I choose are based in nature—green and yellow or green and lilac. It’s hard to go wrong with Mother Nature.”



Choose a color you love and that you won’t get tired of living with. I have had the same shade of blue in my living room for



more than a decade.

---

Sheila also suggests using accessories to keep your color palette flowing from room to room. "Add elements that create continuity by repeating hues—try pillows or colorful lampshades," she says.

## Sheila's Favorite Paint Colors

"Benjamin Moore's [White Dove](#), which is a great neutral for trim, doors, and more, and Farrow & Ball's [Oval Room Blue](#), a historic soft shade of blue." Speaking of historic rooms, Sheila included Sherwin-Williams' [Monorail Silver](#), a neutral gray, in her design of Vice President Kamala Harris' official residence.



*bold traditional*  
**NICK  
OLSEN**  
~~~~~

PHOTO: INTERIOR AND PORTRAIT: REID ROLLS

## Nick Olsen

Known for turning classic spaces into anything-but-expected showplaces, Upstate New York-based designer [Nick Olsen](#) is beloved for chic, cheery interiors with major color statements. Case in point: this iconic room with its blue-lacquered walls and aubergine sofa. One look and it's clear: He's not afraid of being bold.



PHOTO: REID ROLLS

“Paint is the easiest color choice you can make; it’s reversible, not a lifetime commitment. I think once you live with color, you want it in your home just for your day-to-day cheerfulness,” he says.

His tips for [making strong color livable](#) include thinking about visual guard rails. “I tend to use a lot of black or white to give any bold color a boundary. There needs to be a white ceiling or molding or a natural-fiber carpet or black details to draw a line around the room, enough neutral relief to give your eye a rest.”



---

Unexpected applications feel fresher. I love a camelback sofa, but if everything is a Chippendale antique, it's going to read like a dollhouse. so take that sofa and upholster it in Yves Klein blue.

---

Also, keep bold hues in check. "Colors in a room can't all be the same level of intensity and saturation. There has to be a balance. If you're drawn to a strong color like the acid green, it has to be next to a neutral, a natural, or a subtle pattern. A smaller-scale print can mitigate more intense colors because it's not so bold."

And don't forget about paint finish as well. "I tend toward extremes. I either want the flattest, chalky-flat walls or the shiniest, [glossy paint finish](#) there is. And satin or semigloss on trim."

## Nick's Favorite Paint Colors

"I love Benjamin Moore's [In Your Eyes](#); it's a pale blue green that's great for bathrooms and bedrooms because it's not pastel and it's not too gray. I also love their [Viking Yellow](#), which is intense but just a really happy color. Their [Branchport Brown](#) is a great chocolate brown. And I hated burgundy 10 years ago, but I've come around to liking their [Classic Burgundy](#), because it's a true oxblood, rich, red—I use that a lot on rooms and in furniture. I also love Sherwin-Williams' [Gentle Aquamarine](#); it's a beautiful robin's egg blue that never goes stale, and aquamarine is my birthstone!"





*modern americana*  
**HENDRICKS  
CHURCHILL**  
~~~~~

PHOTO: INTERIOR: AMANDA KIRKPATRICK. PORTRAIT: LESLEY UNRUH

## Hendricks Churchill

In the hands of Connecticut design partners [Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill](#), architectural details like [trim in bright colors](#) against pale walls and ceilings put a fresh spin on classic farmhouse style.



PHOTO: AMANDA KIRKPATRICK



Heide suggests approaching color as a curator. "Consider its impact on the shape and mood of a room. Color can be your ally in making up for inadequacies in lighting, size, even architectural details. It's a powerful tool in a designer's box of tricks," she says. "Painting the window sash or even just the slab of a door is great for colorful accents and not as expensive as painting the whole room."



Make sure the colors in one room are either a subtle or complementary transition to the next room so you don't feel jarred, like you've walked from one home into another.

---



PHOTO: JOHN GRUEN

Or try outlining the room in color. “We’re big fans of contrast trim. Color on the trim—even another color just slightly darker than the walls—outlines the room with a decorative, cozy layer without having to add more furnishings. I love an eggshell or semi-flat sheen for this because even if you paint the walls and trim the same color, you can get more depth with different sheens.”

Lastly, gather actual swatches of your fabrics, paint and wallpaper so you can see how they work together before committing. “Never trust designing only on a computer,” says Heide.

## Heide's Favorite Paint Colors

“I’m a big fan of Farrow & Ball’s dark, rich aubergine called [Brinjal](#) as a substitute for black. Instead of white, using a soft light blue like Farrow & Ball’s [Borrowed Light](#) yields uncommon combinations. I also really love grays with soft violet undertones, like Farrow & Ball’s [Dove Tail](#) or [Elephants Breath](#).”



*jewel tones*  
**PETI  
LAU**  
~~~~~

# Peti Lau

Los Angeles-based designer [Peti Lau](#) describes her signature style with a wink as “AristoFreak—an audacious aesthetic with daring richness.” For interiors, that means rooms showcasing the colors of precious gems.





PHOTO: BRITTANY AMBRIDGE/OTTO ARCHIVE



“You can [mix jewel tones](#), but choose whether you’re doing warm or cool tones. Warm can be rusty carnelian orange with dark olive green; the cool side is sapphire and amethyst,” says Peti.



I like to have living spaces brighter and lighter and bedrooms more on the moody side. I put all the colors together to see how they communicate.

Once you've decided on your colors, go all in. “My favorite makeovers take a white wall to a rich, deep, dark blue or turquoise. It’s a massive change, and people are afraid, but then they really wow over it.”

## Peti's Favorite Paint Colors

“Farrow & Ball's [Hague](#) is my favorite rich blue. And for my teals, my turquoise, I love Benjamin Moore's [Teal](#) and also their [Pacific Sea Teal](#), which is a darker green. It just depends on the space and how the light hits it. I’ve used Benjamin Moore's [Vermilion](#), which is a red-orange that really had this beautiful pop, a lot in my work, not so much red lately, but maybe that should come back.”



*vibrant pastels*  
**PATRICK  
MELE**  
~~~~~

PHOTO: INTERIOR: ANNIE SCHLECHTER. PORTRAIT: ELLEN MCDERMOTT

## Patrick Mele

Greenwich, CT-based designer [Patrick Mele's](#) masterful use of juicy hues makes a sophisticated splash. "Citrus tones are best used in rooms that are sunny and bright and have lighter floors so they create more of a calming effect," he says. Try them in garden rooms or breakfast areas.



L: PHOTO: ANNIE SCHLECHTER



R: PHOTO: ANNIE SCHLECHTER

Consider how soft and bold tones play off each other. “I like taking two different tones of one color, like a mustard yellow with a citrine, a navy and a sky blue, acid and forest green, or pink and red. Two hues of one color create a great tension that can be soothing, sophisticated, and really impactful.”



I love combining citrus tones. They’re exuberant, flattering, and mouthwatering.

Similarly, you can also use variations of a single color family to keep a palette flowing throughout a house. The key is to “use light, medium, and dark hues in a balanced way.”

## Patrick's Favorite Paint Colors

Patrick's top picks include Benjamin Moore's [Apples & Pears](#), [Dalila](#), [At Sea](#), and [Summer Peach Tree](#); plus Farrow & Ball's [Citron](#), [Churlish Green](#), and [Arsenic](#).



*soothing neutrals*

**MIKEL  
WELCH**



PHOTO: INTERIOR: JOHN BESSLER. PORTRAIT: BRANTLEY PHOTOGRAPHY

## Mikel Welch

Elegant, timeless, sophisticated—but never dull. That describes both New York City-based designer and television host [Mikel Welch](#) and the interiors he creates using [earthy colors](#).





L: PHOTO: JOHN BESSLER



R: PHOTO: JOHN BESSLER

"With neutrals, you have to have lots of texture; if not, they can go flat and boring. You want a combination of wood, metal, and especially textiles. Bouclé. Rich velvet. Different weaves in the same color. But the biggest thing is the mixing of texture and tone so when you line things up, they tell a story," he says.



A neutral color story is timeless and classic. My rule of thumb is sticking to neutrals that naturally are of the earth and using greenery as the color in my space.

It's also important to figure out where you're going to place neutrals in the room so that it feels balanced. "I tell people to have a plan of action.

Lay everything out, whether you're using PowerPoint or Canva, so you can see it on paper before you go and attack the room."

## Mikel's Favorite Paint Colors

"Farrow & Ball [Mole's Breath](#) is a really rich, saturated, dark, calming brown-gray that pretty much goes with anything, you can even put a pop of color with it. Benjamin Moore's [Alabaster](#) and Sherwin-Williams' [Alabaster](#) are always going to be your friend. They are warm whites, so you don't have to worry about them seeming sterile. Another go-to color is [Abyss](#) by Ressources, a really rich navy blue. I feel like navy is a cousin to neutrals. It's timeless and will work in a coastal home on Nantucket or a totally modern loft. Sherwin-Williams' [Repose Gray](#) and [Tricorn Black](#) are also good neutrals."



PHOTO: INTERIOR: ANNE D. SCHLECHTER. PORTRAIT: PAUL ROBERT FORNEY

## Jessica Ayromloo

California cool? The work of Los Angeles-based designer [Jessica Ayromloo](#) is more California hot—vibrant spaces that bring together unexpected colors in lively combos that are surprisingly harmonious.



PHOTO: ANNIE SCHLECHTER



Case in point: Jessica loves to take traditionally soft pink and turn it on its head. “Pink can change the vibe of a space, making it feel playful and bold but elegant. My favorite combo is pink and green. The pink softens the green, and the green grounds the pink. I also love pink and orange. They are similar in energy, and I like the tension and excitement they create together.”



When picking a paint, look at a few shades up and down from your choice. Try those out in the space to see which works best with your lighting.

---

She also has a few tricks for pairing clashing colors. “If you are using different colors that are all bold, you want these colors evenly distributed in the room. If there is just one bold color, you can add softer ones that recede against it. I like to have at least one color transfer from one room to the next so spaces feel unified,” she says.



PHOTO: ANNIE SCHLECHTER

Using the power of repetition also helps. "If you have a few different places where the clashing color pops in a room, your eye can connect those dots. With repetition, the clash feels intentional and balanced."

## Jessica's Favorite Paint Colors

"Sydney Harbour's [Popcorn](#) for white and their Star Jasmine for pink (it's an archived color but you can special order it); and Benjamin Moore's [Ambiance](#) for yellow."

Was this page helpful?



New to MOO?  
**Get 20% off**



## Better Homes & Gardens

NEWSLETTER



GET A  
**FULL YEAR**

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Follow Us



DECORATING

ROOMS

HOUSEKEEPING

HOLIDAYS

NEWS

HOME IMPROVEMENT

GARDEN

RECIPES

SHOPPING

MAGAZINE



## REAL ESTATE

[About Us](#)

[Diversity & Inclusion  
Pledge](#)

[Editorial Process](#)

[Product Reviews](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[BHG at Walmart](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[BHG Real Estate](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Careers](#)

[Do Not Sell My Personal  
Information](#)

[Contact Us](#)



Better Homes & Gardens is part of the [Dotdash Meredith](#) publishing family.