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This family room was designed for versatility and entertainment. A large-screen TV is viewed from anywhere in the room, and an oversize ottoman, covered in faux ostrich, is a great spot for snacks, craft projects, and putting one's feet up. Philippe Starck Ghost Chairs surround the eating table, and an Ingo Maurer lamp is hung above, inviting family members to contribute notes and artwork, which are easily attached to thin wires by clips. Family photos and original art by Patricia Larsen finish off the space.

Pops of Color

A Savvy Vancouver Designer Injects Bursts of Bright Hues into Neutral Rooms, Building Maximum Flexibility in a Year-Round Palette

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If you've ever walked into a room and noticed that the people somehow look more beautiful than in another space, it may not be your imagination. In fact, it probably has much to do with the color of the walls.

Vancouver, British Columbia-based interior designer Patricia Gray believes that if they are neutral, walls create a wonderful backdrop for the life in the room, as well as the objects and furniture that decorate it. "Then, people can wear all their colors and look marvelous in the space," she says.

Gray refined her eye for color over a thirty-year career, with impressive continuing education at the Parsons School of Design in Paris; the University of Ferrara, in Italy; Harvard University; and the University of California at Berkeley. But it goes back even further, she muses. "I began designing in my crib," she laughs. "I have memories of rearranging my toys by color."

With an innate talent for creating fresh, vibrant residential interiors, she strives first and foremost for harmony in a space, which begins with the walls. "I have a basic color palette that includes cream, soft taupe, chocolate brown, and slate as the base of the room's





Gray's Tips for Making Color Work in Your Interior

1 Don't be afraid of color. Have fun and use colors you love in the accessories, which don't cost a lot to change out. If possible, change them seasonally to keep your interiors fresh.

2 White is a wonderful color for kitchens. Just as simple white plates are a beautiful way to display food, everything looks delicious against white counters, cabinets, and walls.

3 Before you commit to a color, try many. Buy sample pots and large poster boards and paint the boards. Move them around the room so you can see how the colors change in different light depending on the time of day.

4 Two perfect blues: Heaven on Earth and Under the Big Top, both by Benjamin Moore.

5 Choose original artwork you love and then look to that artwork to create layers of color. Pull different shades and vary them in throw pillows, accessories like blown glass, flowers, and fruit.

6 Keep accent colors in a single family for a unified, sophisticated result. Editing is a part of the process. With too many objects in a room, you don't appreciate any one thing.

interior," she says. "Then, I add colors that pop—and it can be any color you like, because all colors go well against these neutrals."

She does have a few rules. Accent colors should be in one family and limited to accessories and artwork—which can be changed more easily and even seasonally—instead of the big-ticket items such as upholstered furniture that one is likely to have for several decades if it is of good quality.

When a busy Vancouver-area couple with two young daughters came to Gray to bring these ideas into their quiet residential home, they were looking for a multitasking interior, with elegant public spaces for entertaining clients and a comfortable family living space that was both practical for children and a luxurious private retreat for adults.

Working with the idea that a room's foundation is like a little black dress, Gray looked to five-star luxury hotels for inspiration in the public area, using sumptuous fabrics including velvet and taffeta, reflective pieces such as the custom laser-cut mirror above the hearth, and a hand-blown Murano glass chandelier mounted to a gold-leaf ceiling. These carefully edited accessories play against soothing taupe walls and creamy neutral furnishings that can be easily moved about. The result is a "dressy" space that has flexibility for all sorts of parties and entertaining.

In the family room and master bedroom, Gray chose artwork first, which became the basis for each room's overall look. She pulled colors from the pieces, which were mounted on neutral walls to emphasize their vibrancy, and then brought in lamps; cushions; throws; and natural, seasonal touches such as a decorative bowl of lemons to tie the room together.

The master suite was designed as a soothing escape for the lady of the house and demonstrates Gray's theory that soft blue, in "the shade of a summer sky," can ground a room with a restful and relaxing ambience, especially when complemented by dark wood and white velvet draperies. "Blue is a very serene color; everyone looks good in blue," Gray says.

"This interior is based upon simplicity, . . . like the perfectly cut little black dress that is comfortable and a natural extension of yourself," says Gray. "The same is true of a beautiful room. If the foundation is good, you can vary flowers and accessories to suit the season and your mood—just as you do with jewelry to complement your little black dress." ■



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Accents of citron and ultramarine blue pop against a neutral backdrop of beige, taupe, and brown in the family room. A soothing shade of warm taupe on the walls is the perfect backdrop for art and accessories in the den. Cushions pull shades of brown from art by David Edwards. The master bedroom, painted a delicate shade of pure summer sky, imbues the room with a relaxing atmosphere. A vintage Louis chair received an update with silver paint, white leather upholstery, and nail heads. Art is by Karen Lorena Parker.