

USING TEXTURE & PAINT FINISHES

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Good interior design is concerned with more than just color: the prettiest or subtlest scheme can fall flat if there is no contrast of textures. Imagine, for instance, a room in which everything – walls, woodwork, furniture – was painted in matt paint in shades of one color. It would look monotonous and completely impersonal. All the decorative elements that go into making an attractive room should encompass a variety of shapes and textures as well as shades, and this is particularly important where a scheme uses only a limited color range. Very occasionally, a room is deliberately designed around a single surface style to create a certain effect. Everything sleek and shiny, for example, to give a clinical futuristic feel, or at the opposite extreme, a wealth of carpets, rugs and fabrics used to convey an exotic, oriental atmosphere. But this is rare and, generally speaking, it is to be avoided if you want a well balanced, relaxing interior.

A pleasing mix of different textures might range from the hard gloss of ceramic tile to soft velvets and the rough feel of coir matting. It is not difficult to achieve this kind of variety, even within the confines of a limited color them, since even paint, paper and fabric can offer a wide range of textures, both shiny and matt. It is a good idea to bear texture in mind when selecting different materials for their color and tone, and to keep an eye open for good contrasts. A predominance of one type of texture over another can significantly alter the mood of a scheme. Rough or thick surfaces such as carpet, brick and timber have a definitely warm appeal; while the hard smooth, shiny ones – ceramic tiles, gloss paint and polished metal – are distinctly cool, to the eye as well as to the touch.

When planning this kind of surface interest, it is important to realize that it will be directly affected by light levels in the room. Too bright and direct a light tends to flatten out texture, as it casts very little shadow, and the surface loses all definition. A more shadowy and indirect lighting scheme will tend to emphasize even subtle textures, so make this consideration part of the overall plan.

PAINT FINISHES

Paints and stains

Household paints are either oil-based or water-based. The former, offering a choice of gloss, eggshell (a soft satin) or matt finish, are particularly suited to wood or metal surfaces, while the water-based ones (emulsion paints), are ideal for plaster or paper, and are available with satin or silk finish. Gloss paint has a hard and extremely shiny finish and tends to attract condensation, so is best avoided in bathrooms and kitchen. Eggshell, satin and silk emulsion produces a much softer sheen, and those with added vinyl are extremely tough and hard wearing. Matt paint tends to absorb light rather than bounce it back so it has a very flat appearance.

Standard proprietary ranges offer a good choice of colors straight off the shelf, and these are updated every year to follow current fashion trends. They include primaries and pastels, as well as various white paints with just a touch of color for those still reluctant to commit themselves to a stronger shade. Most paint manufacturers also offer the option of individually mixed shades, which extends the range into hundreds of closely graded permutations. If you still can't find the color and finish you'd really like, you can mix your own using artists' pigments.

There are also paints specially marketed for a particular purpose. These include self-texturing paint for adding a little relief to walls and ceilings, which can be given a highly decorative finish using combs and patterned rollers; and concrete and liquid linoleum floor paints, tough enough to withstand a certain amount of foot traffic. There is also a wide choice of natural and colored wood stains and varnishes (again with the option of a gloss, matt or satin finish) which are excellent for giving timber surfaces a subtle tint without hiding the grain of the wood. The more coats you apply, the deeper the color.

Try using paint creatively to achieve co-ordinated or contrasting effects above and below a dado rail or picture rail. Highlight or blend in woodwork and other architectural details, or soften the effect over walls and furniture by using one of several simple broken paint techniques. Sponging, stippling and rag rolling can be applied in two or three co-ordinated shades, or simply used where a subtle, slightly textured look is required. Stenciling is a quick and easy painting technique that can be applied to borders, door panels and furniture, and there is a wide range of ready made stencils on the market. Or you could try your hand at fake marbling on skirting boards, windowsills and fireplaces.