

WALLCOVERINGS

Contributed by Kittikhom
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These provide perhaps the greatest range of textures, from real silks and shiny vinyl's to thick velvets and imitation ceramic tiles. They can be used not only to cover walls but also employed to great effect to decorate door panels or furniture, both fitted and free-standing. There is such a vast range of patterns and colors to choose from those decisions can be difficult. Some designs are modern, but many are based on, or reproductions of, designs of the past, featuring classical floral, stripes, spots and so on. There are even papers which imitate the special paint effects such as ragging and stippling.

The cheapest paper is woodchip, popular for adding a little rough texture and covering unsightly cracks and bumps in less than perfect walls. This is sold only in and off-white color, and is painted in the color of your choice after hanging. There is also a range of actual relief papers (anaglyptic), better quality than woodchip, and offering a choice of different raised patterns; these are also designed to be painted over. Or for a real three-dimensional effect, experiment with thick embossed papers imitating timber paneling, dado rails and other classical designs.

For rooms subject to rough treatment or frequent steam and splashes, vinyl papers, which can be wiped over and cleaned, are ideal. The range of modern and traditional designs is enormous, which means that any room in the house, even the kitchen or bathroom, can be treated to an attractive wall treatment, and even co-ordinated with curtains, blinds and other furnishings. Some ranges are 'blown', giving them a three-dimensional look, as in the imitation brick and tile effects. A great many other finishes have also been developed. Some are soft to the touch and not at all what you might expect from a vinyl, while others are glossy or have raised designs.

The specialty papers at the top end of the market are expensive, but look superb and offer an interesting choice of textural materials such as silk, grass and velvet, as well as hand-blocked designs. Use them sparingly or design them as panels and borders to help stretch the budget. Shiny metallic papers, rough Hessian and soft cork are also available by the roll as wall coverings, and can be useful for providing a certain look or change of texture.

Many wallpaper ranges offer co-ordinated borders and friezes. These can be used at skirting, dado or picture-rail level, or you could create optical illusions by continuing them across cupboard doors to make a small room look larger. Try mixing effects above and below dado level, and experiment with large and small print designs. A large design will make a room or feature look smaller, while small, all-over prints, which have the reverse effect, are useful for awkward spaces. You can even use wallpaper to create matching wastepaper baskets, cover curtain tracks, pelmets, or even picture frames if you like the totally co-ordinated look – wallpaper need not be restricted to walls.

Other materials for effect

Ceramic tiles are available in a vast choice of styles and designs for kitchen and bathroom walls, including complete mural pictures, borders and hand-painted effects, so the scope for clever effects is boundless. However, they do give a hard, cold look, even if you use warm shades and old-fashioned or hand-made tiles, so if you want to maintain a reasonably cozy, comfortable feel, avoid large areas, and restrict them to splash backs, windowsills or narrow borders. And use plenty of soft shapes and warm textures elsewhere in the room.

Timber paneling is another excellent cover-up for walls, providing texture and interest for both large and small rooms. It can be linked to cupboards and fitted furniture, then painted, stained or plain varnished according to the color and texture effects you require. Laminated ply board paneling is also available for interiors in sheet form, usually in imitation of wood or marble, but these are smooth shiny and completely lacking in texture, so should only be used where a sleek, modern feel is required.

To add a little sparkle, shine and light reflection, don't forget ceramic, metal and mirrored accessories, which can be used to great effect when strategically positioned around the room wherever you need a little extra interest.