

# WHERE TO USE BLUE (Part 1)

Contributed by Kittikhom  
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Because of the feeling of space it creates, blue used decoratively can have a calming, relaxing effect, which is why it is often used for waiting rooms in hospitals and clinics. These properties also make it an ideal color for bedrooms, where relaxation is all-important, and it is also a popular choice in bathrooms, which tend to be smaller and more cramped than most of us would like.

Blue is a popular color, indeed the majority of people will choose it as their favorite, probably because it is not intrusive; most shades of blue are very easy to live with. Although they have a reputation for making rooms look rather chilly, it is mainly the lighter permutations that have this effect. And these have distinct advantages in some cases: while pale ice blues used on walls might not be the best choice for a cold, north-facing room (south-facing in the Southern hemisphere), they are wonderful for pushing back the boundaries of a small room. And if you have really set your heart on it, you can still use a cool, pale blue as the main color for a cold room if you add a warmer accent color such as peach or mauve. This could take the form of a border, a window treatment or selected accessories such as cushions, bedspread or chair covers. There are really no rigid rules in décor &ndash; just guidelines to help you make the correct decisions and adjustments.

Where blue walls will make a room seem larger, so a blue ceiling encourages a sense of calm and peace. You can even paint it with stars if you really want to feel the room has no boundaries. The deeper blues are less space-creating and to some extent less cold in appearance, but even an electric blue or a very dark navy used dramatically will retain that quality of cool detachment that characterizes blue. The color's nature allows it to be toned down to an almost neutral-tinged grey, which is a good shade to complement darker, more positive blues. Pastel blues can sometimes look a little too sickly when paired with these; with their nursery associations, the pasted shades tend to encourage a less sophisticated scheme.

## HOW TO USE BLUES

Paint and plains (unpatterned fabrics and wallpaper) are the most popular ways of using blues in the home, with satin or matt-finish paint or good texture such as velver or jacquard to soften the effect &ndash; gloss surfaces in pale or mid-blue seem to harden them in a way that seems rather uncomfortable for everyday living. Although there are patterned papers and fabrics in the blue spectrum, stripes and modern geometrics seem more successful than traditional floral designs, and you will find the choice of these more limited than in other colors. Here there is also an analogy with nature, for while blue does appear frequently in the garden or meadow, it is seldom the predominant color.

## ACCENTS AND COMPLEMENTS

Blue looks particularly fresh and clean when used with white, to highlight woodwork, selected walls and special architectural features such as fireplaces, cornicing and mouldings. Depending on the shade of blue used, this smart combination can either look super-chic or have all the traditional appeal of finest Wedgwood or blue and white china. No wonder it is a popular option for kitchens, even if it seems a rather chilly choice in some locations. Often a room can be given a blue and white theme by no more than a wall or dresser shelf of the actual china. In a predominantly wood kitchen, this will also relieve the sometimes over-powering effect of a predominance of natural timber, which in turn provides a warm counter-balance to the cool blue and white. Alternatively, blinds or curtains can be made up in blue and white fabric, itself inspired by old china designs.

A strong blue scheme will often need a little accent shade to add a touch of warmth and variety, and one of the most successful treatments is to combine it with some natural surface such as timber, cork, Hessian, raw cotton or linen. The grain and texture of these materials, combined with their subtle honey or creamy buff coloring, provide the perfect foil for the blue, bringing it down to earth and giving a friendly, homely touch.

Alternatively, there are other colors which can look particularly good if used with the right shade of blue. Yellow, for example, is an excellent companion for both the pastel and brighter shades - pale blue and creamy or lemon yellow looks both sophisticated and relaxing in either modern or traditional interiors. A contrasting and warming touch of color can be supplied by using the softest pink/peach/apricot shades - nothing too vibrant or it will begin to dominate. For a closer blend, go towards green or the lavenders and mauves for variety.

To add a touch of sparkle - blue with silver highlights is smart but "hard-edged". This is a point to watch in bathrooms with chrome or nickel-plated fittings and a preponderance of rather hard shiny surfaces such as tiles, baths and basins. Like white, silver adds a crispness and can also be useful for creating a more modern or high-tech atmosphere. Gold (or brass) has completely the opposite effect, warming and enriching, transforming the deeper blues particularly into something more sumptuous.