

Art & Color

The Designer's Perspective

By LINDA H. BASSERT, CWTC, WFCP Associate

Working with a client's preferences in art moves your design project in exciting directions, but it requires flexibility and versatility on the designer's part. Add a client's desire to launch their room or home in new color directions, and active listening becomes essential before selecting colors and other complements. Art captures emotions; color affects emotions. As designers, our challenge is discovering the client's goal before outlining the strategy to reach it, and ensuring that the results deliver the emotions sought by the client.

First: Discover the importance of the art to the client.

The client may want to replace some works in prominent locations, while other artwork, stashed away in closets and basements, are works the client loves but doesn't know where to place. Clients interested in antiquing may desire a well-edited space in which to display their finds, while others with traditional furnishings may be drawn to contemporary paintings and sculpture to brighten their space. Clients who are artists may not know how to display their own creations.

One color-consultation client showed me her photographer husband's portfolio, from which we were to select a grouping for a wall in the great room. In the space, they planned to retain a collection of cobalt-blue glassware, displayed in the window wall surrounding the fireplace. One of the husband's photographs was of the Washington Monument with large, blue fireworks bursting from behind it. The blues were a match! I recommended they enlarge the vertical photograph

to a height of 4 feet, frame it, and have the one fabulous photo on the wall. Because the wall's existing yellow paint brought overwhelming brightness on sunny days, a deep purple wall color, complementary to the blue, was suggested. Now, the couple's guests comment on how much more comfortable the room feels. Also, the husband was elated by discovering that his photos look magnificent in large scale.

Second: Consider placement.

Once you know what artwork is important to the client, placement is key. After evaluating the emotional content of a painting or other work, pairing it with a space that accompanies that emotion is complementary, keeping in mind adequate lighting and effective contrast. Once you know where the art will be placed, determine the colors that are most complementary, always mindful of how well colors flow from room to room. Colors to be considered include those for walls, trim, ceilings, furniture, rugs, window treatments and accessories. The initially placed art will give you direction, but other complementary works of art may need to be used to balance the colors within the room.

Third: Know local resources.

I recently designed a vignette, inspired by the work of John Noffsinger, an amazing wood turner, for the Lorton Workhouse Arts Foundation in the Association of Interior Design Professionals-sponsored program "Merger of Art and Design." I reasoned that any client drawn to his work would prefer environmentally sensitive, natural choices. Since the art gallery did not allow us to paint the walls, I developed a palette of gold and green, complementary to the wood used in Noffsinger's work, with



cork flooring, silk draperies, Conrad bamboo shades, a Willem Smith chair, a silk and cotton velvet pillow, and live plants. Along with other room details, accent colors in a range of reds, from rose to russet, were found in a woodland photograph. At my request, the artist fabricated a slim finial out of ebony, with a keyhole end piece, for use at the tip of the pelmet valance. Noffsinger's selected works had rhythms in burl and other wood grains, which I played with, in the cork flooring and the embroidered silk floral vines masterfully appliquéd onto the silk matka panels by Maria Luisa Torabi of Custom Stitches, a WCAA workroom member.

When treasured works of art inspire the transformation of a space, rooms have clear priorities and are aligned with the client's values and emotions. Visitors feel welcome to ask about the stories within. The colors and rhythms flow from the most important items, resulting in a harmonious whole, and well-satisfied clients. **V**



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