

HOME & GARDEN

Confused about color? You're not alone

By **LINDA LOMBARDI**
 Current Correspondent

says. "there are 10 reasons working against you, as the consumer, getting the color right." To start, the colors on the cards are often ink, not the actual paint, so they're not totally accurate. What's more, looking at a small

chip on a card is problematic. It's very difficult to look at a small square and understand what the color will look like in a room, and looking at the color in the context of the other colors on the card changes your perception. The difficulties are so predictable that Smith often says to her clients, "Show

Choosing colors is an everyday task, but for some choices the stakes are higher: A clashing shirt and pants lasts one day, but mismatched hues in a kitchen remodel will haunt you for years. If you're overwhelmed before you even stop by that huge display of color chips at the paint store, Kate Smith of Color for Your Home has some reassuring words. "I'll show you what color to really buy."

Fortunately, certified color consultants
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"It's not you," she says. "It is challenging. There are so many things you don't know that will trip you up."

Just in considering those paint cards, she like the designers who took the workshop offered by Color for Your Home at the Washington Design Center last week can help you avoid an expensive mistake. Smith and partner Kiki Titterud passed on their expertise in an all-day class that started out with a review of the basics of color theory. You might think that you

learned everything you needed to know about color in kindergarten, but workshop participants had no trouble spending half an hour talking about the color brown. Neutral colors like brown and beige might seem easy — beige goes with everything, right? On the contrary, these are hard even for professionals. "This is the biggest mistake designers make — with the neutrals," said Titterud.

The secret is that there are many different browns and beiges, and making the right choice depends on your color scheme. If you remember back to your finger-painting days, you know that when you mix very different colors together, the result is brown. But combinations of different complementary color pairs — say, blue and orange versus green and red — give you very different browns that will coordinate with different color schemes. Adding white, you get beiges with different undertones as well, and a beige with a blue undertone, for example, is the wrong choice for a red color scheme.

Interior designers have always needed to take a certain number of credits of continuing professional education as part of their licensing requirements, but courses in color are a new trend. Titterud says there's only one other organization accredited to give a color certificate, and it hasn't offered its first class yet. Color for Your Home, which will be featured in the annual color issue of House Beautiful in September, has been offering its workshops since January and has certified more than 50 consultants.

For most designers, basic color theory is something they learned in school, although participants said the refresher lessons that start the day are useful — those courses were 10 and 20 years ago for most of them. But the workshop goes well beyond that, talking about psychology of color, cultural differences, special needs like clients



who are colorblind, and how to work with a client. Titterud says the designers who take the workshop make color decisions every day, but mostly intuitively.

"They have the knack, but they don't know why they choose different colors," she says, and the workshops give them better tools to explain their recommendations and communicate with clients.

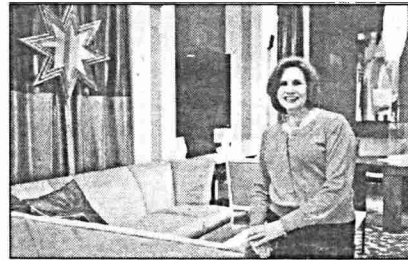
Titterud says sometimes all a client needs is "validation that they're on the right track," but even those who start with an idea or preference often need help turning it into reality.

Other times a consultant can open designers' eyes to ideas that they'd never have thought to use on their own: "Sometimes you'll show a client a color and they'll say they hate it, but you'll combine it with something else and they love it."

Kate Smith will present color workshops for non-professionals in September at Calico Corners stores in Northern Virginia; for updates see her Web site, sensationalcolor.com.

Kate Smith of Color for Your Home recommends these tips for choosing colors:

- **Classic combos:** Tried and true color pairings like blue/yellow, hunter green/navy and olive/warm red have timeless appeal, and they are easy to work with.
- **Artful Inspiration:** Choosing a wall color that is lighter or darker in value than a treasured painting or print and using accent colors pulled from the colors of the art create an instant focal point.
- **Play favorites:** Combine your favorite color with white or off-white and two harmonizing colors, or use your favorite color as an accent with neutrals and your room will instantly reflect your personality.
- **Dream rooms:** Keep a file of pictures of rooms you like and then look at them to see what colors or kinds of colors (bright, muted, pale, et cetera) they have in common, since this can reveal what you might love in your own home.
- **Fabric focus:** Carry the colors from patterned fabric on your sofa or draperies throughout the room and don't obsess about matching. Rather, go with colors that work together when you step back and look at the room as a whole.



Bill Petros/The Current
Kate Smith teaches classes on color.