

I love all the gray rooms and accessories that are in home design today. With the busy lifestyles of working parents and children juggling countless activities, I hear repeatedly during consultations with homeowners that they want their home to be a retreat - a relaxing haven separate from the hustle and bustle of their schedules. I almost always point these clients to tones of grays.

After reading the definition of gray from the dictionary though, I'm a little perplexed as to how the color became the chosen neutral of designers and homeowners alike. The Dictionary By Fairlex defines gray as "a. Dull or dark; a gray, rainy afternoon. b. Lacking in cheer; gloomy: a gray mood."

From this description, gray communicates a void of movement, emotions, warmth or any identifying characteristics. So why do I find homes using gray as a background color serene, soothing and elegant? I think this very lack of emotions is what makes gray so calming! Because gray isn't expressing much of anything, it remains simply restful, quiet, and tranquil. It not only allows different colors to pop while also cooling their intensity, but it gives the ability to layer textures and patterns without looking overwrought.

Think of the walls of your home, as a sophisticated, all gray outfit. While it may be drab and dreary on its own, the ensemble comes to life when layered with jewelry, scarves, shoes or a jacket. The same basic backdrop can create entirely different tones and styles from dressy to urban, contemporary to romantic.

A gray dress can go from business casual to a nighttime statement ensemble, just as a home's ambiance can change from room to room depending on the textures and accents of color. To subtly elicit the mood you would like your room to have, try mixing gray with yellows, teals, blues, greens, pinks, lavenders or my favorite "Blaygeen" color.

For a clean, fresh open space, I recommend staying in the light gray palette. The Four Seasons in Florence uses this sophisticated color for their lounge that caters to the business sect. Alternatively, going darker in tone will create a moodier or cozier feel.

For instance, charcoal gray is a wonderful choice if you wish to impart the strength and mystery of black without its negative connotations. Gray truly goes with any color, don't be afraid to do something unusual and give your trim the gray undertone while incorporating some color on your walls or cabinetry.

Since there are as many shades of gray as there are of white, picking the right color can be difficult. To start, look at the other fabrics, rugs, furniture and surfaces in the space. Do they have a warm undertone (yellow-based) or a cool undertone (blue-based)? To ensure a cohesive design, pick the shades of gray with the same undertone.

Some of my go-to colors for warmer grays are Sea Pearl, Revere Pewter, Collingwood Gray and San Antonio Gray from Benjamin Moore and Collonade Gray, Worldly Gray, Repose Gray, Dorian Gray and Dovetail from Sherwin Williams. For cooler grays, I like Gray Owl from Benjamin Moore Blackened from Farrow & Ball and Passive From Sherwin Williams.

Are you ready to bring some gray into your home? It's the perfect color if you want:

- to foster an environment where compromise is encouraged.
- to engender a neutral, non-invasive feeling.
- to reduce the intensity of another color, while still including it.
- to create an isolated getaway.

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