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Designer Ideas

Atlanta designer Gretchen Edwards used subtle colors to transform her 1970s-built colonial into an elegant, timeless space. Here's her advice on how to tackle hues. TEXT BY TRAVIS NEIGHBOR WARD. PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREN RUBINSTEIN. FLORAL DESIGN BY MARKANDSCOTT DESIGN.



Identify your goals. Before you rush out to buy anything new, including paint, Gretchen says to take a good look at the space. When will you use it most and for what purpose? Do you want to join or separate it from the rest of the house? In her home, the goal was to create a sophisticated, yet soothing, environment geared towards entertaining and intimate family gatherings. "I also wanted a smooth transition from the dining room to the living room, so they had to connect visually." (They're separated only by the foyer and staircase.) Her solution involved creating a palette of neutrals and cool colors because it's "easy on the eye," and adding rugs, fabrics and window treatments that complement each other.



Consider the unexpected. The norm is to hang wall covering above the chair rail and paint below it. In Gretchen's dining room (shown above) she reversed the order: Below the rail is PierceMartin's Madagascar Cloth; above is Benjamin Moore's Wythe Blue, which she diluted in half. "I wanted to do something unique," she says. "In a traditional dining room, the wallpaper is often floral, so you want to see the upper section more. My wall covering is a texture, so it's fine that it's below—and this way it's more of a conversation piece." To get just the right color, she spent three times more money on the custom-made chandelier shades from Edgar Reeves than on the fixture itself, which she found at the Scott Antique Market. "They complete the picture and give such a warm, amber glow," she says. A do-it-yourself alternative: Buy colorful trim and attach it to a simple linen shade using a hot glue gun. **See Resources >>**

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Choose a starting point—then pull colors and patterns from it. It can be anything, from a favorite piece of art to a fabric. In both the dining room and living room (shown right) Gretchen began with Oushak rugs, known for their soft colors and almost tea-stained, washed-out look. "I'm so in love with Oushaks," she says. "All of the colors here came out of the colors in them." That includes the silk throw, hand-painted by Charleston artist Paige Hawthorn Smith and adorned with tassels. "Trim is another way to show off a small amount of pattern and color," Gretchen says. **See Resources**



Don't let elements fight each other. "The size and scale of fabrics have to work well together." So, buy a yard before committing to the drapery.



Maximize details. Gretchen's silk pillow from Chelsea Textiles includes colorful insect motifs embroidered with glass beads. "I love texture and these add a fun, whimsical touch."



Add some shine. Especially in a subtle palette, elements like mother of pearl and burnished gilding can add soft, but distinct, touches of light and color. H