



Getting into gear and out of neutral

Interior designer Maureen Whitmore with her new Cumbria Life column

Have you seen how many different natural shades there are in a skein of Herdwick wool? The great thing about neutrals is that they are a sound base, soothing to the soul and then allowing you to add brighter colour and texture without costing a fortune.

Unless you can afford to follow every fashion whim, my advice is to buy the best you can afford in natural hues for expensive items such as sofas, inspired by the wonderful soft shades around us in Cumbria. Then add the colour.

Worried about living with the finished project if you put something too strong on the walls? It is only a tin or two of paint so go on, try it.

But don't panic when you get the first brush-strokes on - you really won't be able to tell until the whole room is finished. I have lost count of the number of houses I have visited with about 10 different patches of paint on the walls and the poor homeowner totally confused. That process just boggles the mind.

If you need to see the paint for real before making your choice, stick to just a few match pots in quite different colours rather than shades of the same. Buy a roll of good lining paper and paint a couple of large pieces with the same paint. Tack these up in a dark part of the room (perhaps near a lamp) and also a light part (near a window) then look at the pieces over a few days in different light. Then you can be as certain as possible that you will like the colour in all lights and during the day as well as at night.

I recently completed a house where the same paint colour was used in every room but you'd swear that each one (and even different walls in the same room) was painted in a different shade.

So be brave - you could start the next colour trend.

SPOTTED LOCALLY...

Bring your kitchen to life with a craftsman-made pot full of brightly-coloured tools. Try **Sands** in Penrith or **Fagans** in Cockermouth or that staple of kitchens across the UK, **Lakeland** in Windermere.

Choosing a colourful mount for a favourite picture can enliven a neutral wall. **Gray's Picture Framers** in Carlisle and **Youdell's** in Kendal will both advise. www.youdells.co.uk www.grays-framers.co.uk



Based in Penrith, Maureen has been in the interior design trade for more than 45 years. See her blog at www.maureenwhitemore.co.uk