

Decoration for Surfaces Walls and Ceilings

Unit 9

Unit 9

Walls and Ceilings

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this unit the candidate will be able to :

- ✓ understand importance of retaining and enhancing architectural features in a design scheme,
- ✓ explore special ceiling treatments,
- ✓ Describe how to choose wall papers and paints.

Walls and ceilings are the large planes of a room. Because of their dominating proportions, they must be considered with care. Each must be thought about, not individually, but in relation to the whole room. Together these surfaces form the canvas on which to introduce other colours, patterns and textures.

The decision you take about these surfaces relates back to your initial decision about the room: how you want to use it, the quality and amount of space and light, the style and colours you choose. Another key factor is the budget: whereas painted walls and ceilings are relatively inexpensive to alter, a floor is a costly item to change.

In simple terms the main decision to be made about surfaces is whether to draw attention to them or to use them as a backdrop. This, in turn, will show how decorative they should be. The amount of colour or pattern you introduce onto them will have a direct influence on the complexity of the decorative scheme. If in doubt, keep surfaces as neutral and plain as possible: then there will be plenty of scope for introducing layers of decoration later through the use of furniture, textiles, lighting and accessories.

Doors, windows, skirting boards, cornices and fixtures such as radiators must be considered along with these large expanses. Although they are proportionally smaller, they play a vital role in defining the perimeters of the room.

Walls

When choosing wall covering, decide whether you want the walls to recede into the background or whether they should have more impact in the scheme. This will guide you towards neutral and plain colours on the one hand or patterns and stronger colours on the other hand. It is also important to consider what will go against the wall. If you have paintings, objects, and imposing pieces of furniture, they must sit comfortably with the wall colour. For example, rich wooden antiques, decorative collections and traditional oil and water colour paintings look effective against deep, strong colours. Think of forest green and vermillion red; these are found in some art galleries. You will also need to decide how to light such pieces and which type of lights to be installed before decorating.

Pieces with more textural beauty, such as shells or a collection of fossils, can be placed against a pale, slightly distressed surface to bring out their aesthetic qualities.

If what is going on, or against the wall is not the issue, then the decorative treatment comes back to personal choice: paint or paper, colour or neutral, smooth or textured.



Finding Your Own Theme

A practice called “theming” is another way of co-ordinating a room’s décor. In this case the style of a room is produced by using wall coverings with a dominant motif or a theme, enhanced with an accentuating border, and then choosing related accessories. Usually the theme reflects the owner’s interest. Though the choice of styles or themes is endless, some popular styles include Asian or international, Victorian, country, eclectic, etc.

Architectural Features

Architectural features can either be a prominent part of the decorative scheme or play a very little role. If you have chosen the second option, use white or off white to paint door frames and skirting boards. If you do not want to hide these features they can be used to add colour and contrast to an interior. Painting doors and windows the same colour as the skirting board helps to unify a scheme. To define these features while ensuring they harmonize with the walls paint them two shades darker than the wall colour. Give architectural features as much thought as the rest of the scheme.

Decorative Options

For decoration the first thing is to decide between paint, plain plaster, paper, fabric, mirrors or panelling for the walls and ceilings. The second thing is to know the extent of all these options.

Spatial Effects

Already mentioned in connection with colour, what you choose to decorate the walls and ceilings with can make a significant difference, not just to a room's character, but also to its seeming proportions and style. In fact the clever use of pattern, texture and architectural details, as well as colour, can make it look smaller or longer, wider or narrower, cooler or warmer, lighter or darker and also disguise any problem areas.

The actual space can also be altered through structural changes such as adding walls or taking them away. In the same way ceilings can be lowered physically or can be raised without too much expense, sometimes.

Decorative Ceilings

Decorative ceilings in old houses are still a great source of pleasure and wonder. Beams, mouldings, pictorial scenes, designs and paint finishes have been the different treatments for ceilings for centuries. The eighteenth century architect and designer Robert Adam used designs on the ceilings that were taken from a room's woven carpets. Yet since the late 1920's ceilings have been more or less ignored. The ceiling is now a smooth surface usually painted in white. Rooms can be made altogether more interesting and more distinguished by giving the ceilings a special treatment. Possibilities include mouldings or cornices, giving them a special paint treatment, using fabric to create a tented effect or pasting up a skirting ceiling paper.

All the same there are so many new materials and methods, and updated revivals of old techniques, that there are a range of possibilities to choose from. Like walls, ceilings also require attention when decorating a room. Architectural features such as cornices or a ceiling rose can be either emphasized or moderated. Similarly, a beamed ceiling can become a focal point for the room or its impact can be reduced by painting beams and plaster in matching white or cream.

Think, too, about the effect of light fittings. A chandelier will draw the eye upwards, while tiny spotlights set into the ceiling have less visual impact. Special features such as ceiling fans not only provide ventilation but also create interesting shadows, which in turn make the ceiling a focus of interest.

The ceiling's colour has a marked effect on the proportion of the room. A ceiling that is darker than the walls will appear lower, while a paler ceiling will appear higher.

If there is no cornice, consider how to make a neat break between the walls and ceiling.

Ceilings in bedrooms tend to be noticed more than in other rooms, which provide an opportunity to make them more decorative. Children may also appreciate some decoration on their bedroom ceilings.



Tips for Special Ceiling Treatments

If Ceilings Are a Reasonable Height

1. Paint the top stringing of the cornice (the part that edges out onto the ceilings) in a contrasting colour, or cover it with gold or silver leaf.
2. Add mouldings such as a cornice or a ceiling rose, if they do not exist already.

If Ceilings are Too Low

1. Install curtain pelmets just below the ceiling (rather than just above the tops of the windows) to make windows seem taller, and so in turn exaggerate the ceiling.
2. Make tall, narrow panels of walls using mouldings, paint or paper, again to draw the eye upwards.
3. Use shimmer paint on the ceiling.
4. Vertically striped paper or painted stripes lead the eye up to give the illusion of more height.
5. Plan a lighting scheme for the room very carefully. Install cool florescent lights.
6. Choose fabric for curtains carefully i.e. stretch voile or double thickness cheesecloth which can reflect light to light up the ceiling.

If the Ceilings are too High

1. Paint the ceiling a darker shade than the walls.
2. Install some recessed lighting, which will draw attention towards the walls instead of the ceilings.
3. Divide walls into three portions to break up the height.

Paints

Paint Varieties

Paint basically consists of pigment dispersed in some sort of binder, along with a solvent which makes the paint more workable and which evaporates when the paint dries. Some paints also contain resins or silica to provide particular characteristics, such as quick drying or anti-mildew qualities.

Most paints are either water or oil based. The main advantages of water based paints over the oil based variety are that water based paints dry more quickly, leaving no smell, and can be washed off hands and out of clothes.

Non- Drip Paints

Both water and oil based paints come in non-drip versions which do not need thinning or stirring, and therefore can be applied straightaway from the tin to the wall or ceiling. These are especially very useful for ceilings.

Acrylic Paints

Cover well and dry quickly, with less smell than oil based paints.

Epoxy Enamels

These give a hard gloss finish which resists dirt and can be used on ceramic tiles, metal, fibre glass and porcelain. They are therefore ideal for painting over tiled walls in a kitchen or bathroom where the look is in need of a change.

Textured Enamels

These are useful for painting wood panelling as well as wood furniture.

Distemper or White Wash

This consists of a chalk, known as whiting; it dissolves in water and animal glue and has added pigments. It has long been used inside old houses because it lets the wall 'breathe', allowing moisture from damp walls to pass through it.

Colourwashes

A colour wash is applied with a sponge or a decorator's brush over a base coat of matt emulsion or over existing paint or walls or woodwork to achieve an attractive finish.

Wallpapers

Wallpapers can very quickly set the mood in a room. They cheer up a dull room, change the feeling, style and apparent proportions, and give a unique unity. They are extremely useful on uneven surfaces.

Choosing Wallpapers

Lining Paper

If the ceilings and walls are really uneven, lining papers can help achieve a good finish. The heavier the lining the better it will hide defects. These should be hung horizontally and stuck precisely edge to edge so that a neat finish is achieved when the actual wallpaper is applied.

Textured Papers

These are heavy wall papers with embossed patterns and are used particularly for covering irregular surfaces. These can be painted over and are usually used for dados in hallways because of their durability.

Choosing Wallpaper Patterns

1. Dark papers generally make the room look smaller.
2. Vertical stripes make a room taller.
3. Horizontal stripes make the room look wider.
4. In a living room, it is preferable to use a simple design or fairly plain paper. Strong or definite patterns can be distracting and do not make good background for paintings. A border frieze is a good way to finish the paper off here.
5. Mini-prints, small floral, linear prints, small geometrics, stripes, and modern abstract can be used successfully in a bedroom.
6. More open patterns look best in larger spaces.
7. Scenic and geometric designs, floral, large abstracts, papers with borders look best in corridors and on stair cases.

Wallpaper Borders

Borders come in various depths and designs from fanciful ribbons and swags, children's motifs to gardening and sporting themes. The main role of a border is either to define or break up a given space.

Using Borders

The most common way to use a border is to buy one that co-ordinates with or matches the chosen paper. These are used usually around the top of the wall, just below the ceiling or just below the cornice if there is one. Borders can also be used along the skirting boards, around windows or doors, or even vertically down the corners of rooms.

Alternative Wall Coverings

When deciding on wall coverings for the main rooms and bedrooms, usually paint or wallpaper treatments are considered, but there are various alternative wall coverings which can look splendid, which include fabric, mirror and tiles.

Fabric

Fabric has been used to cover walls for centuries, first in India, the Far East, and the Middle East, and then Europe.

Walling

Today upholstered walls are still common, particularly in Europe. The process involves fixing a framework of thin batten to the wall, then lining the walls between with wads of polyester, and finally stretching the fabric over battens. The results are often original and usually luxurious, as well as providing excellent insulation against both cold and noise.

Hanging Fabrics from Rods

Another way of using fabric on walls is to treat it like curtains hanging from just below the ceiling.

Sticking Fabrics on Walls

Some fabrics like tweed, wool, or suede can be stuck to the walls like wallpaper.

Tenting

If the ceiling is in a bad state of repair you can try tenting the ceiling, by covering it with fabric.

Mirroring

1. Floor to ceiling mirrors give a room added length, width and height, as well as extra light.
2. When a mirror is fixed on the wall at right angles to a window, it will seem to double the size of a room and also will reflect extra light by day time.
3. Fixing mirror literally from floor to ceiling doubles the apparent size of the room by creating the illusion of an opening to another room.
4. Fixing mirror in the space between two tall windows will make an enormous difference to light and brightness.
5. In a very dark room lining the recesses at either side of a chimney breast with mirror will make a huge difference. If you place a tall, bushy plant in front of each, with up lights behind, the effect will be very fresh and airy.

Tiling

Tiled walls look fabulous. In ancient buildings in the Far East, Iran, Turkey, Italy and Spain tiles were used in splendid halls and rooms. Completely tiled rooms (floors, walls and ceilings) of the Alhambra in Granada and the Blue Mosque in Istanbul with its 20,000 blue glazed tiles covering the inside walls, are a source of great amusement.

Wood Panelling

There are many different ways to use wood panelling. It is either left plain, or stained with a natural shade or a colour, painted or grained to make it look like more expensive wood.

Doors

When thinking about door treatments, first decide how decorative you want the door to be in the scheme. If the room has a beautiful old door, it can be made into a special feature by adding antique furniture in the room.

The most obvious way of drawing attention to a door is to paint it in contrasting shades to the rest of the room. A very ordinary door can be replaced, customized, or made to blend in with the rest of the room. To make the door blend in, paint it the same colour as the walls, or two shades lighter or darker than the walls.

Consider how solid a door should be; whether it should block out a view of an adjacent space or give a glimpse into it. Glass-panelled doors allow you to borrow light from outside or from the room next door. If you do not want a clear view through, choose plain frosted or etched glass, which has the same effect but is only translucent. For walls that have several solid wood doors like kitchen cupboards or fitted wardrobes, consider exchanging with glass panels.

Cut outs are a fun way of customizing doors, particularly for children's rooms. These can be simple shapes, such as hearts or diamonds, or can take on more complicated shapes such as favourite animals. Stencilling on doors can also give a decorative effect, whether it is a motif echoed from elsewhere in the scheme, or a calligraphic device such as a child's name. Give importance to the handles of the door also. These should be in keeping with the room's style, whether simple or decorative, period or modern.

Suggested Further Reading:

- ✓ *The Complete Home Decorating Idea Book: Thousands of Idea for Windows, Walls, (2007), By Kathleen Stoehr, Charles Randall*
- ✓ *Decorating Texas: Decorative Painting in the Lone Star State from the 1850s (1991) By Buie Harwood*