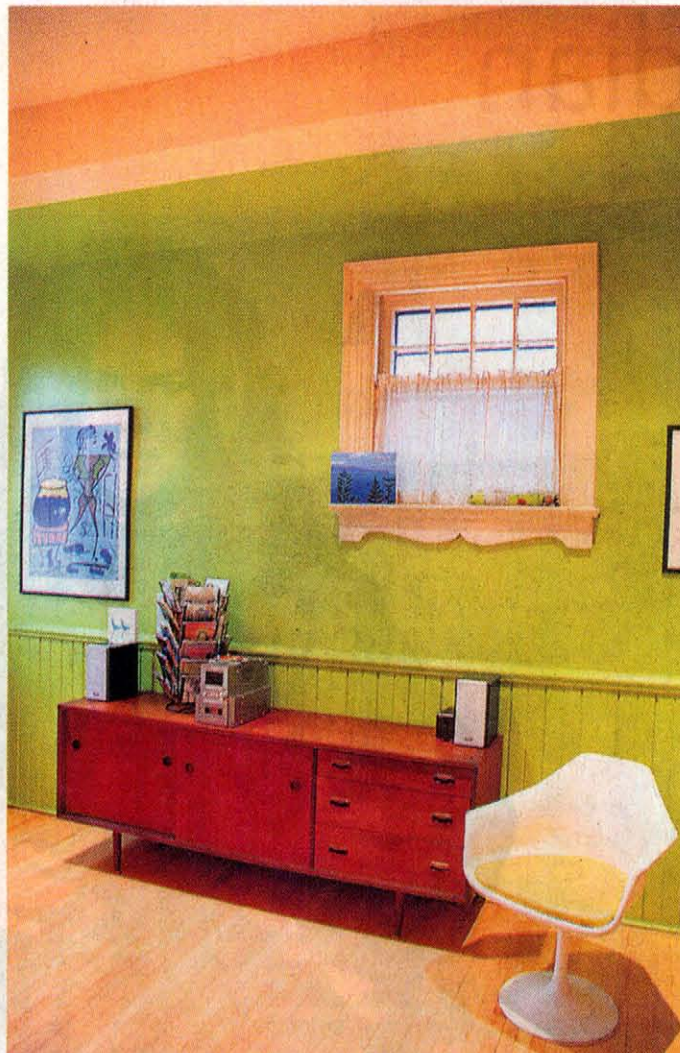


TONE ON TONE



Ditch, darken or add tone to white trim. Grey, tans and taupes will still read as white against a dark wall, but they won't read as bleached or as plastic edging.

# Why are we wedded to white?

White trim looked lovely in the 18th century, when walls were pale and woodwork was fancy. Now, not so much



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It happens almost every time I help someone with colour: They fixate on the wall colour choices. (For me that is the easy part.) I fixate on the trim. They want a one-white-fits-all and, although I am willing to find one white that fits most, it takes some convincing before they let go of the harsh effect of white-white for the soft elegance of trim that is toned, tinted and blended.

Yes, white looked lovely when British architect Robert Adams and his talented brothers popularized it in the mid-18th century. As with the china of their contemporary, Josiah Wedgwood, the white was used on elaborate neo-classical details – swags, urns and other classical motifs. It was used to highlight elements on pastel walls. White with light colour looks right.

As colours became richer and deeper throughout the Georgian and later Regency period of the early 19th century, so did the trim. Often it was painted the same colour as the walls. Windows, doors, fireplaces – you name it – everything but the ceiling and floor was the same red, green or blue of the walls. If the walls were pale colour, a darker ver-

sion of the shade was used on the trim.

In the Victorian era, the best wood trim was slathered with a dark stain. Trims made of cheap wood were painted to look like fine wood or faux-marble. If the trim was painted a colour it was usually the darkest colour found in the wallpaper, which was ubiquitous at the time.

White came back into fashion by the end of the 19th century because of a modern obsession with cleanliness that translated into a demand for glossy white paint on trim. By the early 1900s, Edwardian colour schemes again favoured pastels, so the white trim looked good once more.

Modernist architecture made the 20th century the white-wall century, and trim was a no-brainer: the same white as the walls or occasionally a neutral like dark grey.

Today we seem to be fixated on crisp white for the trim no matter what colour we use on the walls. Even the most paltry bits of baseboard or moulding must be tarted up in eye-catching white as if they were decorative features. Halls with a dozen doors and almost no wall space become an ocean of trim white surrounded by small patches of useless wall colour.

Living room furniture is grouped around big, boxy white fireplace mantels. The notion that the trim should instead be co-ordinated with the wall colours seems like foreign and frivolous idea. But let me ask you this: Would you be

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happy if every piece of art or every photograph in your house were framed in bright white? No. Light pieces, yes. Graphic works that should pop, yes. But on everything else it would look cheap or distracting. Rooms are the same.

Our eye goes automatically to the lightest and brightest thing. Why should this be trim? Against colour, it grabs the eye and takes it on a bumpy ride outlining walls, crashing around room perimeters, separating the walls from the floor, interrupting every vista and joining up with doors to make big clunking visual statements. White trim tries to make us think that the wall colour is darker than it is and that colour is oh so tiring! Colour gets the blame, but the busy and bossy effect of white trim is at fault.

Keep the colour. Ditch, darken or add tone to the white. Grey, tans and taupes will still read as white against a dark wall, but they won't read as bleached or as plastic edging.

The effect of reducing the contrast between trim and wall is like taking a slow, deep breath. Suddenly there is visual flow, elegance and a relaxed calm that only good colour uninterrupted can bring.

Now, if you have a Palladian home with pale walls and gorgeous embellishments that can be highlighted as art, then we can talk about white trim.

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### Trim tips

- » Varying the brightness of the trim colour to suit the wall colour (i.e. light with light, darker with darker) keeps the tonal balance.
- » Use dark whites (i.e. grey, putty or sandy tones) as you darken the wall colour. The effect will be white but without the glare.
- » In halls with lots of doors, paint everything one colour.
- » In white and off-white areas use the same white on walls and trim. If you want to use white to set off a colour, co-ordinate it by mixing a bit of the wall colour into the white or buying a white in the same family, for example, a yellowed white with yellow based colours.
- » Adjust the level of trim brightness even within a room. Fireplaces and baseboards can be darker than the main trim colour. Window trim can be lighter to maximize the light and to blend with sheers and shutters.

- » On exteriors the same rules apply. White is fine with light colours but with brick and stone, deepen it to putty to look more natural and less busy. Dark charcoal is an alternative.
- Do use white trim:**
  - » If your walls are white, pastel, mid to light blues or black (if you like the graphic kick of the high contrast).
  - » If what you are painting white is worthy of all the attention it will get.
  - » If you like punchy, crisp colour effects.
- Don't use white trim in a coloured room:**
  - » If the walls are short.
  - » If you want flow.
  - » If you think your art collection is more interesting than your baseboards.