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**COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE**

**Extension Division**

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**CIRCULAR NO. 237**

**WALLS**

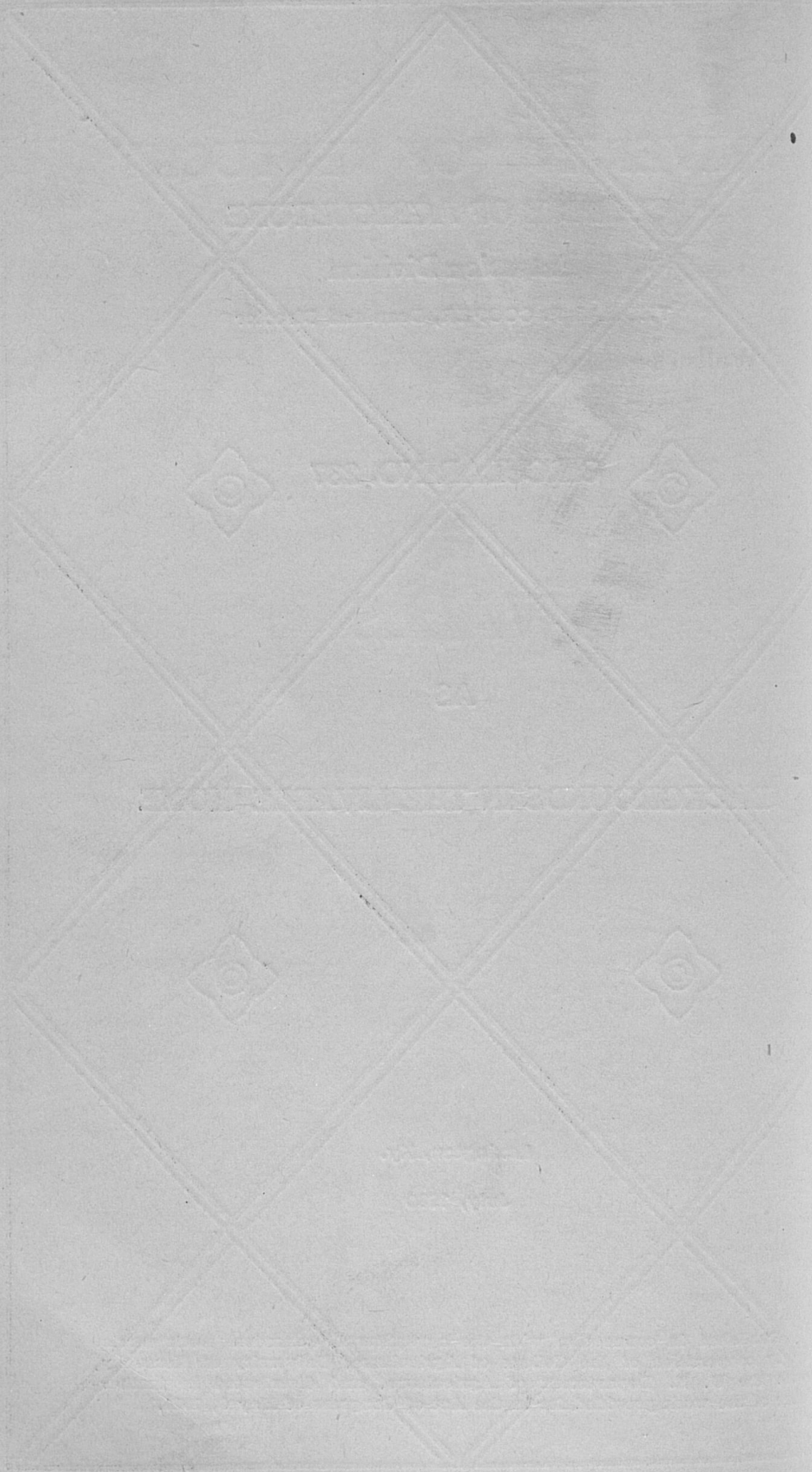
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**BACKGROUNDS IN THE LIVABLE HOME**

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## CIRCULAR NO. 237

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### Walls as Backgrounds in The Livable Home

By IDA C. HAGMAN

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The treatment of walls is important because they form a large part of the background of a room. They are the setting against which we see the furnishings and occupants. Their color, design, and texture play an important part in determining the atmosphere of the room.

Some modern interiors which are constructed and furnished in definite styles require characteristic wall treatments. Spanish and Italian styles with sturdy, decorative furniture and rich upholstery require rough plaster backgrounds or the heavier type of paper corresponding to leather, plaster or fabric. The graceful shapes and delicate carvings of furniture of the style of Sheraton, Heppelwhite, or Chippendale are best displayed against light, paneled, painted or papered walls. The charm of the early Colonial furniture is brought out by the small-figured papers in dot, star, lattice, or chintz effect, or reproductions of old pictorial scenes. In most American homes there is no predominant style of architecture or furniture. This fact permits a wider choice in the selection of wall coverings.

#### COLOR IN RELATION TO WALLS

The appreciation of harmonious colors in our surroundings adds much to the enjoyment of life. All colors are beautiful in themselves but often inappropriate uses or combinations of them make them appear ugly. Colors have a strong effect upon the emotions. They can arouse feelings of joy and gladness or gloom and sadness. When used in the backgrounds of a room



Fig. 1. Plain walls display the furniture, pictures and accessories to the best advantage. Colorful patterns in the drapery relieve the monotony of plain walls and rug.

they may create an atmosphere of cheerfulness, gaiety, excitement, quietness, dignity, or depression.

To add sunshine and brightness to a dark room, choose the sunniest of colors, a soft, light yellow. It is one of the best colors to reflect light, makes the most of the existing light in the dark room, and gives the room warmth, brightness and gaiety.



Cream, buff, and ivory, also, are warm, light colors which can make even the darkest, gloomiest room bright and cheerful. In addition, when decorating a dark, gloomy room, use brilliant colors for accent notes in cushions, pottery, flowers and other small decorative objects. Bright orange and red are exciting colors and, when used in small quantities, are excellent to add life to a room. Sharply contrasting colors brighten each other and give animation to the decorative scheme of the room that is too dull.

The cool hues, in which blue predominates, are more subduing and less exciting than the warm hues, red, orange, and yellow. The coolness of the color is dependent upon the amount of blue that is present. Too much blue, in medium and darker values, is depressing. In extremely light rooms use colors which have a feeling of coolness, light gray, soft gray, green, etc. The brighter the room the more blue may appear in the color.

For the room with an average amount of light, warm, subdued hues, dull cream, putty, and warm gray, are usually more satisfactory than the cool ones. The cool hues may predominate in the other furnishings. The amount to be used depends upon the brightness of the room.

Light colors, because of their power to reflect light, give a fine sense of airiness and space to a room and make it seem larger, whereas dark colors absorb light and seem to draw the walls together.

**CHART SHOWING APPROXIMATE LIGHT REFLECTING POWER OF COLORS**

Color	Percentage of Light it Reflects
Cream .....	62-80
Buff .....	49-66
Ivory .....	73-78
Light green .....	48-75
Dark green .....	11-26
Light blue .....	34-61
Pink .....	36-61
Dark red .....	13-30
Yellow .....	61-75

Color	Percentage of Light it Reflects
Dark tan .....	30-46
Natural wood brown .....	17-29
Light wood varnished .....	42-49
Gray .....	17-63

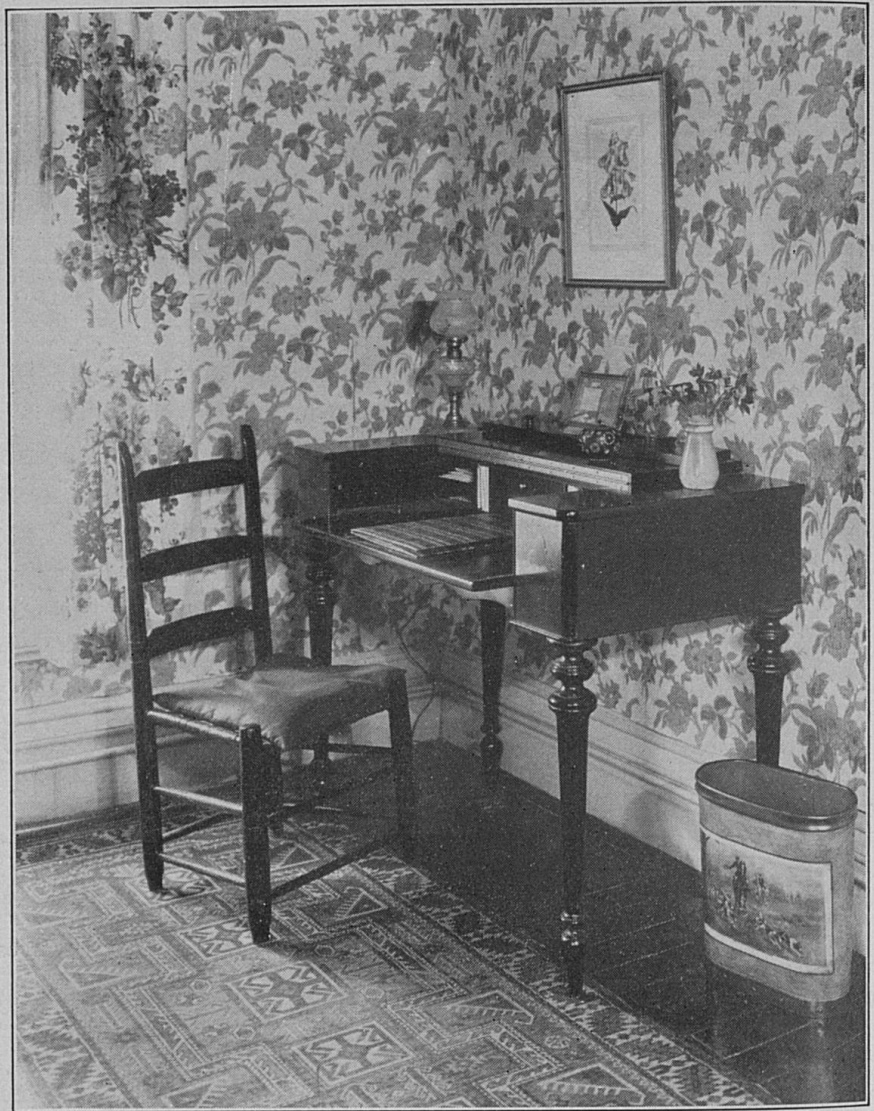


Fig. 2. Definite patterns in wall paper, rug, upholstery and drapery produce a restless, confusing effect. The accessories do not show well against the figured background.



Intensely bright colors attract attention more sharply than do the duller tones. They seem to advance. Bright reds, oranges and yellows are more advancing than bright blues, greens and violets. If the walls of a room were brightly colored all over, they would seem closer and consequently the room would appear smaller. To make a room seem larger, the duller, softer shades should be used on the wall surface. Bright colors are far too stimulating to be used in large quantities in a room which is in daily use and for long periods of time. Light, dull colors have a more tranquil effect than do bright ones and therefore give greater satisfaction as wall finishes.

#### DESIGN IN RELATION TO WALLS

Striking effects are difficult to live with for long periods and should never be used for background surfaces of frequently used rooms. Subtle effects—combinations of closely related values of different hues—produce a restfulness which is pleasing. One does not tire of them so quickly as of striking color combinations, and does not feel the desire to change wall finishes so frequently as when striking effects are used. Striking effects are produced by:

Great contrasts of light and dark values—example, black pattern on white ground.

Great contrasts of warm and cool hues—example, orange and blue flowers on cream ground.

Combination of large areas of bright colors.

Combinations of all of the above.

Plain walls display good furniture to the best advantage (See Fig. 1). Furniture that is ugly or eccentric in design is emphasized and thrown into displeasing relief by plain walls. It is less conspicuous against an indefinite pattern in medium values. Formal designs in unobtrusive effects are appropriate for the general rooms. Less formal designs may be used in bedrooms not connecting with the general rooms. Realistic designs of birds, flowers, and landscapes are to be avoided. Softly



Fig. 3. One soon tires of such over-decorated walls. However, they are less objectionable when there are no pictures, or definite pattern in the rug, upholstery, or drapery material.

blended patterns with indistinct edges usually form better backgrounds than do those with distinct outlines.

If a figured paper is used, select a pattern which is in scale with the size of the room. A large pattern is inappropriate in the small room whereas the small pattern is lost in the large room. Open patterns on light backgrounds with much of the





Fig. 4. When the rug furnishes the decoration, plain or nearly plain walls and drapery produce a more harmonious effect.

background exposed, are especially good for the small room (See Fig. 5-A). The design worked out in darker tones against the light ground color makes the background seem lighter and further away. If prominent designs are used in other furnishings, choose a paper in soft colors, in a subtle, all-over or mottled design or use plain paper with an interesting texture. Soft,

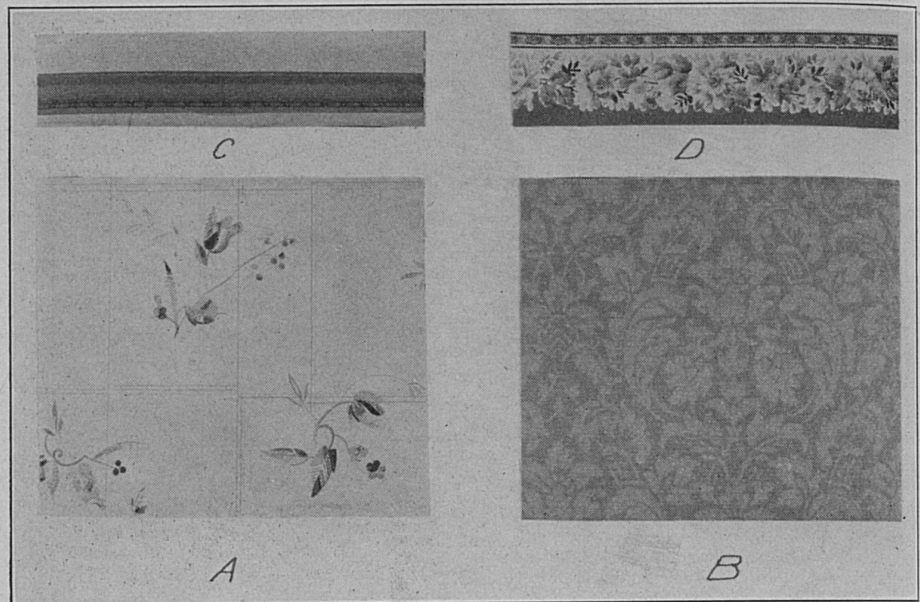


Fig 5. A. Open patterns on light backgrounds with much of the background exposed are especially good for the small room. This pattern in pastel colors is suitable for a bedroom.

B. A well-covered paper with rather large, formal pattern in darker values will apparently decrease the size of the very large room.

C. A narrow band of paper repeating the color of the walls but slightly darker is in better taste than elaborate, highly decorated or cut out borders as in D.



Fig. 6. A. Subtle effect—combination of closely related values of different hues—produces a restfulness which is pleasing.

B. Striking effects are difficult to live with for long periods and should never be used as background surface of frequently used rooms.





Fig. 7. A. Conventionalized designs in unobtrusive effects are appropriate for the general rooms.

B. Realistic designs of birds and flowers are to be avoided as they show too much perspective and do not present a flat appearance as befits wall coverings.

two-toned grays, creams, and tans serve as good backgrounds for figured furnishings. The wall may supply the decorations if there are no pictures, no definite pattern in the rugs, upholstery, or drapery material. However, care must be exercised in the selection as one soon tires of over-decorated walls (See Fig. 3). Quiet, unobtrusive surfaces fit into the general plan of the room and pass unnoticed. They are always in better taste than the self-assertive ones.

Bold, geometric patterns should not be used in the very small room nor in rooms badly cut up by a great many doors and windows, as they emphasize the narrowness of small wall spaces. "Spotty," "quarrelsome," "busy" designs produce a restless effect.

Wall paper should appear to lie flat against the wall and not appear to be raised or show perspective. Occasional metallic glints are often unsatisfactory because they play queer tricks with light and shadow.

Plain, light-cream ceilings are preferable to moire or indistinct patterns.

A narrow band of paper or a picture molding, repeating the colors of the walls, is in better taste than elaborate, highly



A



B



C

Fig. 8. A. "Busy." B. Spotty. C. Crawling, effects are tiring because they attract the attention by their apparent movement.



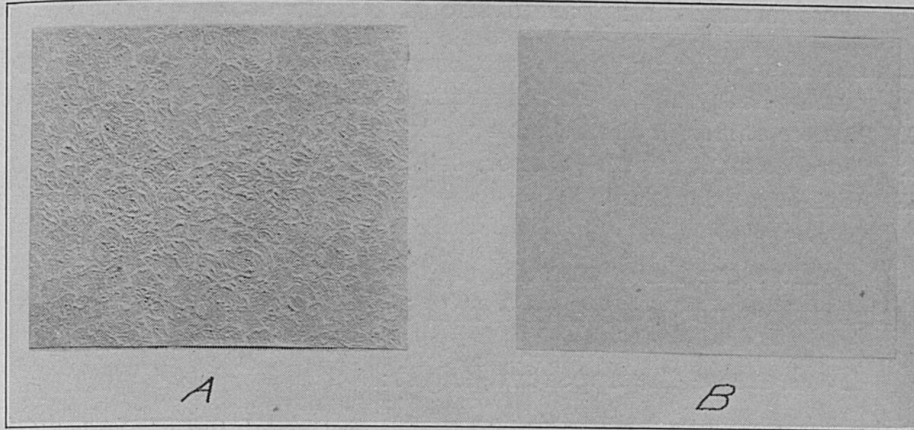


Fig. 9. A. The interesting texture of this paper allows a pleasing play of light and shadow and makes a fine background for sturdy furniture.  
B. Soft, two-toned grays, creams, and tans serve as excellent backgrounds for the furnishings in many rooms.

decorated, or cut out borders. The less conspicuous the joining of ceiling to side walls, the better.

#### TEXTURE IN RELATION TO WALLS

Texture influences the effect of color and design. A rough-textured surface allows a pleasing play of light and shadow and gives depth and an appearance of vibration to the colors applied to it. A flat, dull finish has a mellow quality which is infinitely more pleasing than a harsh, glossy finish.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING ARCHITECTURAL DEFECTS IN A ROOM

To increase the apparent size of a room use:

1. Light, grayish tints for background.
2. Dull colors rather than bright ones.
3. Scenic effects which give a feeling of distance.
4. Plain hair stripes or patterns not too closely covering the ground, eliminating all superfluous detail and all sharp contrasts of hue and value.
5. Limit colors to tones of two or three hues.

To decrease the apparent size of a room use :

1. A rather large and more pronounced pattern in two tones sufficiently heavy and in keeping with the rest of the room.
2. Darker values, if the room is well lighted.
3. More colorful effects—darker, brighter tones of warm colors.
4. Well-covered papers.

To increase the apparent height of a room, use narrow, two-toned stripes not more than a half inch wide.

To decrease the apparent height :

1. Drop the ceiling 12 to 18 inches. Cover the joining of the ceiling and wall with simple picture molding or an inconspicuous binder.
2. Have the ceiling tone darker than usual.

For the sloping roof have the ceiling and walls alike, either in plain effect or inconspicuous pattern with no up and down.

#### APPROPRIATENESS OF WALL FINISHES TO THE USE OF THE ROOM

*The hall* creates the first impression of the home and should provide an atmosphere of good cheer and welcome. Its coloring should be warm and cheerful but dignified and restrained. Figured paper is useful in a hall which opens into several rooms because it may be an excellent medium of color transition.

*The living room*, the meeting place of the family and friends, should have an atmosphere of "Do come in, I'm glad to see you," should be restful, reposeful and free from any hint of garishness. Use subdued paints in softly blended effects or papers in neutral colors and indistinct patterns as they make an excellent background for pictures, furniture and decorative objects.

*The dining room* should give an atmosphere of dignity and simplicity, geniality and cheerfulness. More color and pattern may be used than in the living room. The breakfast room should be bright and cheerful to start the day right.

*The bedroom* should be airy and restful, planned to suit the particular tastes of the occupant. Dainty effects are permissible,



as are lighter, gayer colors, more informal and realistic designs. In sleeping rooms serving as sitting rooms, have color schemes in lower, more neutral tones.

*The kitchen* must be sanitary and cheerful. Paint, washable paper, oil cloth, sanitas or light weight linoleum, make good wall coverings.

Connecting rooms may be treated exactly alike or one may use types of patterns to suit the particular rooms, uniting them by harmonious coloring and definite bonds of common colors such as the same background tones.

#### TYPES OF FINISHES FOR WALLS AND CEILINGS

*Oil paint* is sanitary, permanent, suitable for any room in the house, reflects light, provides charming color effects, lends itself to mottling, stippling and blending. Dull finishes give a more pleasing texture than do the glossy ones. However, the semi-gloss is better for the kitchen for a smoother finish is more easily cleaned. Use paints from a reliable manufacturer and follow directions on the container.

*Calcimine* has a low initial cost, will adhere to many kinds of surfaces, may be stippled, is made in soft, interesting colors, but needs frequent renewals, rubs off easily and must be removed before applying any finish.

*Wall paper* provides a wide range of pleasing colors, designs and textures, and has a softening effect. It absorbs more light than paint.

*Oilcloth and sanitas* have a comparatively high first cost, but if well pasted to the surface are permanent. They have a waterproof finish, are easily cleaned, and may be refinished.

Appropriate and pleasing backgrounds are the result of study and careful planning and never of chance. Before purchasing wall paper, it is well to experiment with the effect of it in the room in which it is to be hung. Pin generous samples of paper in position in various places in the room. If patterned paper is under consideration, get the effect of two or three strips placed beside each other. Study the effect of the various samples

under different lighting conditions. Consider the relation of the color, design and texture to:

1. The style of the house.
2. The style and kind of furniture, rugs, curtains, and woodwork in the room.
3. The use of the room.
4. The size of the room.
5. The number and placing of openings.
6. The amount of light in the room.
7. The treatment of adjoining rooms.
8. The personality and preferences of the occupants.

#### WOODWORK

The standing woodwork should not be conspicuously lighter or darker than the walls. It should usually appear as part of the walls, and in harmony with them. It is especially necessary that the woodwork should be subordinate when the room is small, when a room has many openings, and when the openings are not well placed nor well proportioned.

Woodwork can be given a little more emphasis when the room is large if the windows and doors are well proportioned and well placed.

With papered walls have the trim the predominating color of the background.

If the walls are painted, the trim may repeat the color of the walls or may be a little lighter or darker.

When stained or painted in darker values, select wall finishes darker in value than would ordinarily be selected so that there may not be too strong a contrast between the trim and walls. However, avoid getting the effect too dark.

Waxed and stained woodwork make fitting backgrounds for sturdy oak and walnut furniture.

A satin finish is preferable to a flat or highly polished one.

Gray trim with ivory is unsatisfactory as the colors detract from each other.

The finish of standing woodwork in adjoining rooms should be alike if connected by a wide doorway or arches.



CONDITIONING THE SURFACES OF WALLS AND CEILING FOR FINISHES

For all finishes, the surface should be smooth, clean, dry and free from cracks.

Plastered walls

- a. Newly plastered surfaces of those which have been washed with soda should be sponged with a strong vinegar solution.
- b. Use glue size on newly plastered walls, painted and calcimined walls to be papered, and on wall board.

*To make glue size:* Soak until soft a quarter of a pound of painter's glue in enough cold water to cover it. Pour off the surplus water and pour two or three quarts of boiling water on to the glue. Because of the great differences in glue, these proportions may have to be changed. Test a little of the mixture between the thumb and forefinger for holding qualities or "tack." Apply the glue size with a calcimine or whitewash brush, evenly and thoroly, while hot. Dry. For painted walls to be papered, add 1 pint molasses and 1 pint vinegar to this mixture.

*To remove cold water paint,* wet the wall with warm water using a coarse sponge or calcimine brush. Wash off with a cloth or sponge. Change the water often. Dry thoroly before applying a new finish.

*To remove old wallpaper,* wet the paper in half of the room with warm water, using a whitewash brush. Continue brushing with the wet brush until the paper will scrape off. Test by scraping with the thumb nail. Remove with a broad knife, keeping it two-thirds under the paper. Be careful not to dig into the wall.

*To prepare oil painted surfaces* for a renewal of the finish, wash with warm water and a mild soap. If greasy, wash with warm water to which washing soda has been added in the proportion of half a pound of soda to one pail of water. When almost dry rinse off with clear water. Protect the woodwork and floors.

*To fill holes and cracks*, cut out loose plaster with the edge of a broad knife. Thoroughly wet the edges with warm water. Fill with plaster of Paris moistened to a paste. Mix only a small quantity at a time. To keep the mixture soft add a small quantity of any of the following: glue size, glycerine, baking powder, or borax paste. Go over the cracks two or three times as the mixture shrinks.

*To prepare sealed surfaces for papering*, use any of the following methods:

- a. Paste felt paper to the surface. Allow it to dry thoroughly before papering.
- b. Cover with cheesecloth, muslin or canvas tacked on two inches inside the edge of the cloth. Paste the edges down. Brush strong glue size over the material (1 lb. glue to 2 qts. water).
- c. Cover with sheeting or muslin sewed together to fit each wall and ceiling. Tack along one edge. Stretch taut to the opposite side and tack. Glue size.
- d. Cover with burlap bags stretched and tacked about two inches apart on the edges. Size with the following mixture:  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. glue to each gallon of wall paper paste. Apply hot. Dry 24 hours before papering.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING WALL PAPER PASTE

3 pints flour.

2 quarts cold water mixed with the flour to form a smooth paste.

8 quarts boiling water.

Cook slowly for ten minutes, stirring constantly. Strain. When cold add two tablespoons of powdered alum. Paper is not so apt to crack from fast drying if the papering is done on cool, damp days.



**WALL PAPER CLEANERS**

- a. Stale bread.
- b. Dough made of flour and water with plaster of Paris worked in to stiffen it.
- c. One part sal ammoniac, 4 parts rye flour, water to make dough.
- d. Commercial cleaners.

